Nat Nakasa as existential journalist

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ABSTRACT

South African journalist Nat Nakasa's short career in journalism started at *Drum* magazine in Johannesburg in 1958 and ended in New York City when he died of suicide in 1965. Arguably, Nakasa was not the most prolific or well-known journalist of South Africa's *Drum* generation of journalists, which also include, amongst others, Lewis Nkosi, Es'kia Mphahlele and Richard Rive. Nakasa's body of work consists of about 100 pieces, mostly journalism, and one short story. In terms of professional milestones he was an assistant editor at *Drum*, the first black columnist for *Rand Daily Mail*, the founder and editor of *The Classic*, a literary magazine, and a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.

However, Patel (2005: vii) writes that Nakasa's "reportage of events and personality profile of a time gone by opens a window for us to look into the past and thereby enrich our understanding of intensely human episodes he witnessed". Nadine Gordimer (in Roberts 2005) describes Nakasa as a "racial visionary", while referring to his work as "journalism, yes, but journalism of a highly personal kind" (in Patel 2005). Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu (in Mahala 2014) describes Nakasa as "a rainbow man when the rainbow was not allowed".

Nakasa's approach to journalism places him in the realm of Merrill's existential journalism (1977). It also relates directly to what Muhlmann (2008; 2010) describes as decentring journalism, where the journalist takes on the role of the outsider in an effort to disrupt the status quo, or "decentre" it. These orientations to journalism form part of what can be described as unconventional forms of journalism, characterised, amongst others, by the constructivist idea that there is no absolute truth and that journalists inescapably create their own realities (Hanitzsch 2007) that they then share with their audiences. The practice of unconventional forms of journalism represents an ontic act of existentialism, which ascribes to an individualistic, interpretive world-view. From the Western existential perspective, life can only be experienced, described and made sense of from an individual perspective; it is inherently subjective and there is no universal truth "out there".

This study set out to consider how Nakasa's writing, irrespective of his intention in this regard, serves as an example of applied existentialism, i.e. explaining Western existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts) as it manifests in his journalism.

The study revolves around the axis of existentialism as conceptual framework, an interpretive research paradigm and a qualitative research methodology. An adapted deductive/inductive hybrid

theme analysis was employed as method in order to analyse Nakasa's writing. The results of the analysis were used to construct an existential storyline based on a combination of general existential themes as well as themes unique to Nakasa's writing.

From the combined results of the deductive and inductive analyses, seven main themes were constructed, based on Sartre's "restless existence" cycle of facticity, nihilation, projects and transcendence. The themes identified include "mental corrosion", "living outside of the normal human experience", "the fringe", "social experiment", "tiny subversive acts", "towards a common experience" and "the duty of the writer". All seven themes are supported by relevant existential themes and concepts and thus provided the evidence to support this study's claim that Nat Nakasa can be read as an existential journalist.

In terms of contemporary relevance, Nakasa's approach to journalism suggests how existentialism could provide the journalist with a practical approach to writing, especially for journalists working in developing societies. The relevance of this approach lies in the fact that there will always be an interregnum (Gordimer 1982), or circumstances of being "between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined", which might require the journalist to operate outside the boundaries of conventional journalism – thus an existential journalist practicing decentring journalism.

Key words: Nat Nakasa; existentialism; existential journalism; decentring journalism; alternative journalism; *Drum* magazine; change agent; qualitative research; deductive/inductive hybrid theme analysis

ABSTRAK

Die Suid-Afrikaanse joernalis Nat Nakasa se kort loopbaan in die joernalistiek het begin by *Drum*-tydskrif in Johannesburg in 1958 en geëindig in New York City met sy selfdood in 1965. Nakasa was waarskynlik nie die mees produktiewe of bekendste joernalis van Suid-Afrika se *Drum*-generasie van joernaliste nie. Dié groep sluit ook onder andere Lewis Nkosi, Es'kia Mphahlele en Richard Rive in. Nakasa se werk bestaan uit ongeveer 100 artikels, meestal joernalistiek, en een kortverhaal. In terme van professionele mylpale was hy 'n assistentredakteur van *Drum*, die eerste swart rubriekskrywer vir *Rand Daily Mail*, die stigter en redakteur van die letterkundige tydskrif *The Classic* en 'n Nieman-genoot by Harvard Universiteit.

Patel (2005: vii) skryf egter dat Nakasa se "verslag oor gebeure en persoonlikheidsprofiele van 'n vorige era 'n venster oopmaak waardeur ons na die verlede kan kyk en sodoende ons begrip van die intens menslike episodes waarvan hy getuie was, kan verryk". Nadine Gordimer (in Roberts 2005) beskryf Nakasa se siening van ras as "visioenêr" en verwys na sy werk as "joernalistiek, ja, maar joernalistiek van 'n hoogs persoonlike aard" (in Patel 2005). Emeritus-aartsbiskop Desmond Tutu (in Mahala 2014) beskryf Nakasa as "'n reënbogman in 'n tydperk toe die reënboog nie geduld is nie".

Nakasa se benadering tot joernalistiek plaas hom op die terrein van Merrill se eksistensiële joernalistiek (1977). Dit is ook direk verwant aan wat Muhlmann (2008; 2010) beskryf as desentrerende joernalistiek, waar die joernalis die rol van die buitestaander vertolk in 'n poging om die status quo te ontwrig, of te "desentreer". Hierdie joernalistieke oriëntasies vorm deel van wat beskryf kan word as onkonvensionele vorme van joernalistiek. Dit word gekenmerk deur, onder meer, die konstruktivistiese idee dat daar geen absolute waarheid is nie en dat joernaliste noodgedwonge hul eie realiteite skep (Hanitzsch 2007), wat hulle dan met hul gehoor deel. Die praktyk van onkonvensionele vorme van joernalistiek verteenwoordig 'n ontiese aksie van eksistensialisme, wat 'n individualistiese, interpretatiewe wêreldbeskouing voorstaan. Vanuit die Westerse eksistensiële perspektief kan lewe slegs ervaar en beskryf word en sinvol wees vanuit 'n individuele perspektief; dit is inherent subjektief en daar is geen universele waarheid "daar buite" nie.

Hierdie studie het ondersoek ingestel na hoe Nakasa se skryfwerk, ongeag van sy bedoeling in dié verband, kan dien as 'n voorbeeld van toegepaste eksistensialisme, naamlik om Westerse eksistensiële idees, temas en strukture deur beskrywings van *werklike* situasies (ontiese aksies) te verduidelik deur middel van joernalistiek.

Die studie wentel rondom die as van eksistensialisme as konseptuele raamwerk, 'n interpretatiewe navorsingsparadigma en 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodologie. 'n Aangepaste deduktiewe/induktiewe hibriede tematiese analise is as metode aangewend om Nakasa se werk te analiseer. Die resultate van die analise is gebruik om 'n eksistensiële storielyn te skep, gebaseer op 'n kombinasie van algemene eksistensiële temas, asook temas uniek tot Nakasa se skryfwerk.

Uit die gekombineerde resultate van die deduktiewe en induktiewe analises is sewe hooftemas geïdentifiseer, gebaseer op Sartre se "rustelose bestaan"-siklus van feitelikheid, nietigmaking, projekte en transendensie. Die temas sluit in "verstandelike korrosie", "lewe buite die normale menslike ervaring", "die buiterand", "sosiale eksperiment", "klein ondermynende aksies", "'n gedeelde ervaring" en "die plig van die skrywer". Al sewe temas berus op relevante eksistensiële temas en konsepte en dien dus as bewys ter ondersteuning van hierdie studie se aanspraak, naamlik dat Nat Nakasa as eksistensiële joernalis gelees kan word.

In terme van kontemporêre toepassing dien Nakasa se benadering tot joernalistiek as 'n voorstel van hoe eksistensialisme die joernalis kan voorsien van 'n praktiese benadering tot skryf, veral joernaliste wat in ontwikkelende samelewings werk. Die waarde van hierdie benadering lê in die feit dat daar altyd 'n interregnum (Gordimer 1982) iewers sal wees, naamlik omstandighede waar die bestaanswerklikheid "tussen twee identiteite is, een bekend, maar verwerp, die ander onbekend en onbepaald". In hierdie omstandighede kan daar van die joernalis verwag word op om te tree buite die grense van konvensionele joernalistiek – dus 'n eksistensiële joernalis wat desentrerende joernalistiek praktiseer.

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"Existentialism is a doctrine that renders human life possible."

– Jean-Paul Sartre (1946: 24)

FINAL CURTAIN CALL: South African journalist Nat Nakasa was described as a 'volatile improvisator' during writer-actor workshops held at playwright and anti-apartheid activist Athol Fugard's multi-racial theatre company, the Rehearsal Room, in Johannesburg during the late 1950s. On 13 September 2014, Nakasa's remains were reburied in his hometown Chesterville, Durban after he died in exile in New York City in 1965. Poignantly, a newspaper poster (*The Weekly* is a fully black-owned newspaper) announcing the return of his remains appeared beneath the poster of Fugard's 2014 play *The shadow of the hummingbird*, in which Fugard looks back on his own life.

Chapter 1

SITUATING THE STUDY
Research overview

1.1   INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM SETTING

As a final bow to South African journalist Nat Nakasa's life as a "manifestation of contradictions" (Patel 2005: v) the team responsible for exhuming his remains from the Ferncliff Cemetery in New York in 2014 was unable to remove all the soil in which he had been buried for 50 years. "They tried but they were unable to – this is strange but it tells us that he is for South Africa and America – he is loved on both sides of the Atlantic" (Masondo, in Patel, F. 2014). This became a concrete manifestation of Nadine Gordimer's words after hearing about Nakasa's death: "He belonged not between two worlds, but to both. And in him one could see the hope of one world" (Gordimer 1966, in Patel 2005: xxv-xxvi).

Nakasa's "hope for one world", his vision towards a common experience for South Africa, manifested in his journalism, a "journalism of a highly personal kind" (Gordimer, in Patel 2005). Within the socio-political context of apartheid South Africa, Nakasa attempted to find answers to questions about his own as well as his fellow South Africans' identity. This personal, or subjective, approach to journalism and to making sense of the world places Nakasa within the realm of the philosophy of existentialism. Given the commonly accepted view that journalism should be objective, rational and independent, the question arises whether Gordimer's description of "journalism of a highly personal kind" is not a contradiction in terms: Can journalism still be considered journalism if it is highly personal? And is so, what type of journalism would this be? These questions led to the conception of this study, and who better to serve as example than Gordimer's friend and apprentice, Nat Nakasa, the man whom she referred to as creating "journalism of a highly personal kind".

1.2   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to consider how Nat Nakasa's writing, irrespective of his intention in this regard, serves as an example of applied existentialism, i.e. explaining Western existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts) as it manifests in his journalism. This will be done by identifying and analysing the main themes unique to Nakasa's writing by using relevant themes of existentialism as lenses, thus linking Nakasa's journalistic contribution to the wider philosophy of Western existentialism of philosophers and writers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre and Gordimer.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the purpose of the study as set out above, the research is guided by two primary research questions:

- Research question 1: Which evidence is there of the main existentialist themes in Nat Nakasa's journalism?
- Research question 2: Which main themes would emerge through analysing Nat Nakasa's writing as example of existential journalism?

In addition to the primary research questions, the following secondary research questions will be addressed:

- Secondary research question 1: Which existentialist themes are relevant to develop a framework for analysing a body of journalism at the hand of existentialism?
- Secondary research question 2: What are the existential duties of the writer or existential journalist?
- Secondary research question 3: What is the role of the existential journalist in a developing society?

1.4 ISSUES OF RELEVANCE

1.4.1 Relevance of studying historical figures or events

An argument towards the relevance of studying any figure or event from history comes from existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers. In his essay *On my philosophy* (1941) Jaspers wrote about "our appropriating the historical foundation" – those parts of history that each individual "takes" to be the truth for themselves. He warns that "[o]ur own power of generation lies in the rebirth of what has been handed down to us. If we do not wish to slip back, nothing must be forgotten…" (Jaspers 1941: 133). Although primarily addressing a "philosophical history of philosophy", Jaspers was also writing about appropriation as an existentialist theme utilised in striving towards the ultimate existentialist act, namely living an authentic life (discussed in chapter 3).

Jaspers (1941: 136) holds, as one of the characteristics of philosophical history, appropriation and history in general, that "the universal-historical view is a condition for the most decisive consciousness of one's own age":

> What can be experienced today becomes fully tangible only in the face of humanity's experiences – both those which can no longer be relived and those which become a living experience for the first time this very day. Only through being conscious can the contents of

the past, transmuted into possibilities, become the fully real contents of the present. The life

of truth in the realm of the spirit does not remove man from his world, but makes him effective

for serving his historical present.

Barrett (1964: 25) adds that "[t]he past is never given as finished and fixed, we are remaking it at every moment, and nowhere more than in that peculiarly fluent and plastic subject matter: the history of ideas". These ideas we appropriate from the lives of others.

Sartre (1943: 540) writes that once dead, an individual's life changes from a type of being that is for-itself to a type of being that is in-itself. The person who died is no longer able to transcend his or her facticity, or to change their life. What remains is what others think of this person's life. Although death "is the project that ends all projects", the "dead life" now opens "thousands of shimmering, iridescent relative meanings" that can be attached to this person's life by others. To use this study as example: We are analysing and therefore attaching a meaning (one of many possible meanings) to Nakasa's life and writing through "risking a description" (Sartre 1941: 541).

1.4.2 Relevance of studying Nat Nakasa

The second issue of relevance pertains specifically to studying Nat Nakasa as existential journalist. Arguably, there are more prolific, well-known journalists from specifically the so-called *Drum* generation of which Nakasa formed part. Not least amongst these would be Lewis Nkosi, also a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University, who is described as a literary giant and "a worthy son of the soil and a writer of sound repute who has contributed significantly to African and world literature through his novels, plays and essays" (Starck-Adler & January-Bardill 2011). Es'kia Mphahlele, the first of the *Drum* writers to go into exile, was considered to be "a writer, a critic and an academic of international note" (Nicol 1991: 235; 239) and was later appointed as the first black professor at the University of the Witwatersrand (*Mail & Guardian* 2008). Richard Rive went on to complete a PhD at Oxford University and is described as a novelist, short story writer, playwright and essayist reminiscent of Oscar Wilde (Viljoen 2014). Authors Peter Abrahams and Alex la Guma both achieved international success (Nicol 1991: xii).

Taking a step back and including South African authors since 1900, we are presented with, amongst others, acclaimed anti-establishment writers such as Sol Plaatje (*Native life in South Africa*, 1916), Steve Biko (*I write what I like*, 1978), Zakes Mda (*Ways of dying*, 1995), Njabulo Ndebele (*Fools and other stories*, 1983), Dennis Brutus (*Sirens, knuckles and boots*, 1963), D.M. Zwelonke (*Robben Island*, 1973), Bessie Head (*Maru*, 1971) and Achmat Dangor (*Waiting for Leila*, 1981). Including

white authors who wrote against apartheid, Nadine Gordimer (*The lying days*, 1954), André P. Brink (*Kennis van die aand*, 1973), Breyten Breytenbach (*True confessions of an albino terrorist*, 1984), Athol Fugard (*The blood knot*, 1961), Alan Paton (*Cry, the beloved country*, 1948) and J.M. Coetzee (*Dusklands*, 1974) enter the picture. These are merely a few names of acclaimed, prolific anti-apartheid authors, journalists and playwrights, but in mentioning them, it serves to illustrate the point that Nat Nakasa was by no means the most important writer of his or any other era.

In comparison, Nakasa's body of work is quite small – about 100 pieces, mostly journalism and one short story – and he was dead at age 28. In terms of professional milestones he was an assistant editor at *Drum*, the first black columnist for *Rand Daily Mail*, the founder and editor of *The Classic*, a literary magazine, and a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University (Patel 2005: ix). Keaney (2010: 59) posits that, although Nakasa might not measure up to the successes of, for example, Nkosi or Mphahlele, "Nakasa's sharp observations of South African society should place him in the company of Henry Nxumalo, whose provocative investigative journalism transformed *Drum* into much more than a magazine of sports and pin-up girls".

What made Nakasa such an important figure that in-depth analysis of his work would still be relevant and valuable 50 years later?

In his introduction to the 2005 edition of *The world of Nat Nakasa*, Patel (2005: vii) writes that Nakasa's "reportage of events and personality profile of a time gone by opens a window for us to look into the past and thereby enrich our understanding of intensely human episodes he witnessed". Nakasa's was a "creative journalism … the effectiveness [of which] is not only the reporting of events, but the communication of opinions and thoughts, which are essential in the broadening of human horizons and the integration of the being in the body politic" (Patel 2005: x).

This creative, personal and emotional involvement in journalism was described by Merrill (1977) as a characteristic of existential journalism. Merrill (1977: 19) describes the existential journalist as someone who "pushes, straining constantly against the encompassing institutional restrictions which are closing in on him... He takes stands; he chooses; and he is willing to take the consequences of these choices." Rollo May (in Merrill 1977: 3) adds, "[n]o matter how great the forces victimizing the human being, man has the capacity to know that he is being victimized, and thus to influence in some way how he will relate to his fate. There is never lost that kernel of power to take some stand, to make some decision, no matter how minute." Nakasa's "kernel of power" was journalism; his voice representing a viewpoint that brought into sharp relief the uniqueness of every journalist's individual

existence and personality. His writing has all the elements of existential journalism: oriented to participation, to activism, to being personally and emotionally involved in the events of the day (Merrill 1977: 37).

Gordimer manages to capture what put Nakasa apart from his peers, and also validates his contribution decades later:

> The truth is that he was a new kind of man in South Africa – he accepted without question and with easy dignity and natural pride his Africanness, and he took equally for granted that his identity as a man among men, a human among fellow humans, could not be legislated out of existence even by all the apartheid laws in the statute book, or all the racial prejudice in this country … He belonged not between two worlds, but to both. And in him one could see the hope of one world. He has left that hope behind; there will be others to take it up (Gordimer 1966, in Patel 2005: xxv-xxvi).

In a documentary film, *Nat Nakasa: Native of nowhere*, directed by Lauren Groenewald (1999), poet Mongane Wally Serote refers to Nakasa as the original "Rainbow Man", a turn of phrase popularised by Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who called post-apartheid South Africa the "rainbow nation" in reference to a multi-racial society. Mahala (2014) quotes Tutu as "aptly describing [Nakasa] as 'a rainbow man when the rainbow was not allowed'." A former colleague of Nakasa, Joe Thloloe (in Mahala 2014), is quoted as saying, "Nat was ahead of his time, believing in the ideals that we now espouse, a non-racial, non-sexist democratic South Africa in which all are equal before the law". In fact, several authors refer to Nakasa's ideal for non-racialism, or social cohesion, with Gordimer (in Roberts 2005) referring to him as "a racial visionary" (cf. Patel 2005; Gordimer 1966; Serote 1985, in Patel 2005; Thloloe, in Mahala 2014; Roberts 2005).

This ability to envision a different future, or transcendence, is a key feature of the existentialist philosophy. It has been described by Spanish author, intellectual and existentialist José Ortega y Gasset (1932) as a trait of a virtuous man, the direct opposition to Ortega's mass-man who is unable to think for himself. While "the mass, in face of any problem, is satisfied with thinking the first thing he finds in his head", the excellent or virtuous man "only accepts worthy of him what is still far above him and what requires a further effort in order to be reached" (Ortega 1932: 45). This aspect of Nakasa's writing forms a central element for an existential reading of his work, and is analysed in detail in chapter 5. The existential orientation was specifically chosen because of Nakasa's quest to find his place in the world; for example, his last column in *Rand Daily Mail* was titled "A native of nowhere".

Existential journalism is best practised by activists. Merrill (1977: 60) opines that Albert Camus is "perhaps the best" example of an existential journalist, with his cause being the Nazi occupation of France. For Nakasa it was apartheid. And his message (or at least one of them), according to Serote (in Patel 2005: xxx), was this: "... black man, you are being lied to...".

This thesis sets out to get "into the mind" of Nat Nakasa against the backdrop of existentialism, and specifically existential journalism. However, the mere statement of the objective of "getting into the mind" of someone poses an immediate philosophical problem, because, according to the Skepticists, we have no direct access to minds other than our own. Therefore, we cannot even claim that other minds exist, let alone knowing what is going on in that mind. However, Heidegger (1927) proposed a solution to this problem of whether other minds exist, and whether we can get to know these minds or "get into" them. His view that we are "embodied experiencers of a world that we share with others" – that we are *Dasein*, or being there – provides us with an avenue or access point into the mind of others. In Heidegger's evaluation of Van Gogh's painting "Shoes" he states that the painting of the picture of a peasant woman's shoes reveals more than the fact that she exists; it reveals her world (where "world" is not a material structure to be explained by physics, but the entire complex of our relationships to other entities, human or otherwise). In a similar way Nakasa's writing not only serves as evidence of his existence, but of his world. It provides us with a way to get into his journalistic mind.

1.4.3   Relevance of studying unconventional forms of journalism

Löffelholz and Weaver (2008: 10; cf. Littlejohn & Foss 2008: 285) describe journalism as a form of public communication that is of particular relevance to any democratic system. Journalism is studied from a variety of perspectives, including theoretical, societal, cultural and organisational, as well as its processes, producers, practices and paradigms (cf. Löffelholz & Weaver 2008; Zelizer 2004; Sloan 1990).

Existing enquiry into journalism, however, focuses mostly on what can be described as conventional journalism – mainstream, traditional or standard journalism produced by independent media companies. Within this sphere of conventional journalism, most of the research focus has been on journalism as hard news, the journalist as reporter and "those concerns about journalism that have dogged it ever since news and reporting became the core of journalistic activity" (Muhlmann 2008: 2; Zelizer 2004: 6). Zelizer (*ibid*.) refers to Dahlgren's concept of a "metonymic character" when

describing existing journalism scholarship as not having produced a body of material that reflects all of journalism:

> This has created a bias that undermines scholars' capacity to embrace journalism in all its different forms, venues, and practices. In other words, what many of us study accounts for only a small part of the material that is contemporary journalism … [T]he reigning definition of journalism may not be the most inclusive way of defining who counts as a journalist. For as the practices, forms, and technologies for news gathering and news presentation increase in variety, demeanor, and number, the existing body of scholarly material shrinks in relevance (*ibid*.).

Given Nakasa's circumstances and the way in which he practiced journalism as activism, his journalism can be described as unconventional, which merits the positioning of this study's journalistic focus. Unconventional forms of journalism are elaborated upon further in chapter 4.

With the issues of relevance addressed, we now move towards situating the research conceptually, paradigmatically and methodologically.

1.5 SITUATING THE RESEARCH

This section situates the research within a specific context. Aspects that are addressed are the conceptual framework (existentialism), research paradigm (interpretive) and research methodology (qualitative). Schematically, the research context can be visualised as indicated in figure 1:

FIGURE 1: SITUATING THE RESEARCH
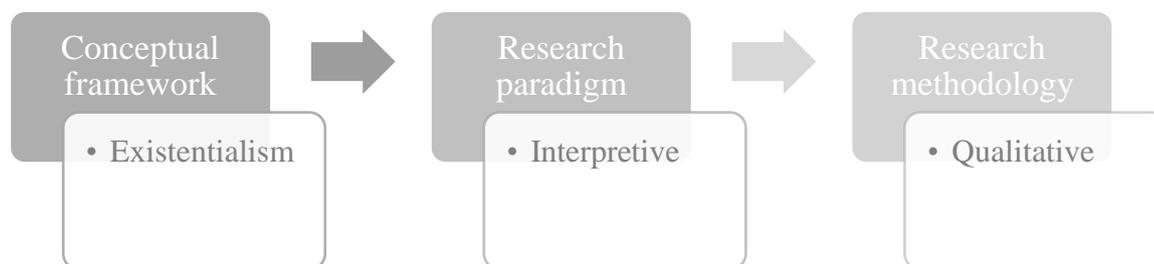
1.5.1 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework indicates the study's ontological standpoint. The conceptual framework is of particular importance in a qualitative study as it "affects almost all aspects … [and] it provides a lens for seeing and making sense of what to do in the design and conduct of the study" (Anfara & Mertz 2015: viii; Marshall & Rossman 2011: 7). The framework is

the structure, the scaffolding, or frame or your study … derived from the orientation or stance that you bring to your study and draws on the concepts, terms, definitions, models, and theories of a particular literature base and disciplinary orientation … [The framework] affects every aspect of the study, from determining how to frame the purpose and problem, to deciding what to look at and for, to resolving how to make sense of the data collected (Merriam 2009, in Anfara & Mertz 2015: 11).

Anfara and Mertz (2015: 231-234) categorise the effects of a conceptual framework into four dimensions, namely that it has the ability to:

- organise and focus a study by assisting the researcher in the process of sorting through the data, and of knowing how the pieces relate and where they fit. In addition, the conceptual framework "frames" every aspect of the study, shaping and directing it in ways consistent with the theory, from the design to the interpretation of the findings, the process as well as the production;

- reveal and conceal meaning and understanding, keeping in mind that theories can allow the researcher to see phenomena in novel ways, but at the same time also blinding the researcher to aspects of the phenomena that are not part of the theory. The choice of a conceptual framework contributes to the delimitations of the study, an aspect that has to be acknowledged;

- situate the research in the scholarly conversation and provide a vernacular, linking the study to a broader body of literature. The framework also provides convenient labels and categories that help in explaining and developing thick descriptions and a coherent analysis; and

- reveal the study's strengths and weaknesses, acknowledging that no framework adequately describes or explains any phenomenon. The researcher should guard against applying the conceptual framework in a manner that will be too reductionistic or deterministic.

Conceptually, this thesis is situated within the philosophy of *existentialism*, which represents an individualistic, interpretive world-view, specifically from a Western perspective. The rationale for this decision will be explained by a reverse reasoning process, starting with the artefacts analysed, namely Nakasa's writing. The circumstances under which Nakasa produced this work – "the realities of a black journalist caught in the intricate web of apartheid" (Patel 1975: ix) – sets him up as an activist, or change agent. Evidence of Nakasa as an anti-apartheid activist, apart from obvious references in his own work, is found in the fact that he was under government surveillance at the time of his leaving South Africa in 1964 as well as the existence of a file on him by the American FBI (Brown 2013a: 122).

These circumstances links Nakasa to French author and journalist Albert Camus, whose cause was the Nazi occupation of France (Merrill 1977: 60). Merrill (*ibid.*) views Camus as "perhaps the best" example of an existential journalist. Barrett (1964: 8) describes Camus' famous (anti-)hero Meursault as not only the archetype of the alienated man – Nakasa's (1964) "native of nowhere" – but also "a prophet of the leather-jacketed Beats". The American Beat Generation, a 1950s avant-garde literary movement, eventually paved the way for the New Journalism of the 1960s and 1970s (Weingarten 2005), and serves as an example of unconventional journalism (Muhlmann 2008; Merrill 1977). South Africa's *Drum* generation of journalists, which includes Nakasa (Nicol 1991: 7), practised this type of "immersion reporting … [a good decade before] … the mainly New York journalists of the 1960s and 1970s" (Madondo, in Venter 2011). Nakasa is therefore tied to Camus not only through similar socio-political circumstances but also via Camus' and Nakasa's embodiment through writing of the literary existential themes of "incurable isolation of the individual, the absurd mechanisms of society that destroy him, and the courage to face death while affirming life" (Barrett 1964: 8).

Merrill's existential journalism is based on the philosophy of existentialism, generally attributed to Søren Kierkegaard in response to the philosophic mode of Hegel (Barrett 1964: 20). German philosophers Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger took up a systematic approach to Kierkegaard's writings after the First World War, but it was during "another postwar climate – the Second World War – [that] existentialism [took on] the dimensions almost of a popular movement, whose high priest became the energetic Jean-Paul Sartre" (Barrett 1964: 21).

As philosophic school, existentialism is firmly rooted in individualism as one of the dominant paradigms of Western intellectual thought, with universalism at the other end of the spectrum (Strauss 2015: 28):

> It is also designated as individualism (atomism) and universalism (holism), where we can describe the former as the attempt to explain society and societal institutions purely in terms of the interaction between communicating individuals, while the latter attempts to surrender all societal actions, entities and communicative processes to one all-encompassing societal totality or whole.

From the existential perspective, life can only be experienced, described and made sense of from an individual perspective; it is inherently subjective and there is no universal truth "out there". This world-view is also described as social constructivism (Butler-Kisber 2010: 5, quoting Creswell 2007), which is "predicated on the idea that lived experience is socially constructed, understood in context,

and influenced by historical and cultural experiences known to individuals". The inherent value of this perspective lies in studying the local and the particular, which has its origin in phenomenology (Marshall & Rossman 2011: 19). Although almost every existentialist philosopher diverged from phenomenology in some manner, existentialism remains indebted to phenomenology. Cox (2009: 20) describes this relationships as follows: "It is the phenomenological theory of consciousness that underpins all the other claims that existentialism makes … [and] is the key to understanding existentialism." Sartre viewed transcendental phenomenology as a methodology of existentialism, or a way in which we can provide evidence of existentialism.

One of the core ideas of existentialism is that the human way of being is being-in-the-world, as posited by Heidegger in *Being and Time* in 1927 (1.III.#15). Or, as Malpas (2008: 6; 39) explains it, we are already situated in the world, in "place", alongside other persons and things. Fox-Muraton (2014: 107-108) refers to this common world as our "shared social space". So, in addition to the importance placed on the individual experience, existentialism also emphasises the fact that this individual experience coincides with other individuals' experiences. The third important element is that, as human beings, our existence precedes our essence (Sartre 1946: 34). We do not have a predetermined, definite nature (or essence) as would, for example, a dog. Having a predetermined nature adds an element of predictability to that entity's behaviour, an example being a dog's inherent urge to chase cats. On the other hand, not having a predetermined nature implies that human behaviour is not predictable, or can never be entirely predictable. There are common behavioural elements and ways to predict human behaviour to some extent, but it is our existential duty to determine our own essence that sets social science research apart from most other research endeavours.

Figure 2 provides an illustration of the conceptual framework of this study and how it flows through the various stages of the research.

FIGURE 2:   CONCEPTUAL THREAD

Philosophical approach
- Existentialism
- Individualism
- Social constructivism
- Phenomenology

Theoretical approach
- Unconventional journalism
- Journalist as change agent

Analysis and findings
- Nakasa as existential journalist and change agent

Contemporary applications
- Role of journalism in a developing society
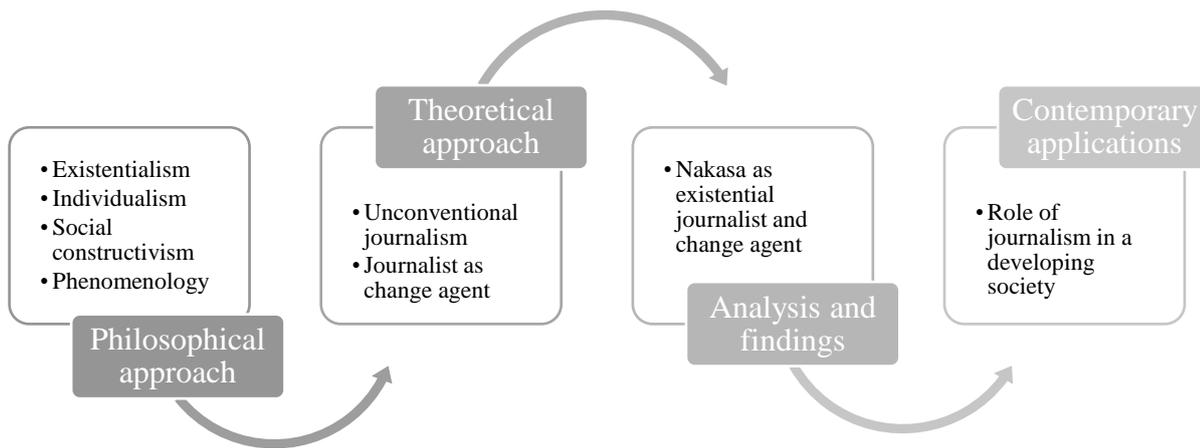
1.5.2   Research paradigm

The research paradigm indicates the epistemological approach of the study, or the "epistemological location" (Grbich 2007, in Yin 2011: 18). The philosophy of existentialism is based on an individualistic world-view as opposed to a rational, universalistic world-view (Wilson & MacLean 2011: 179). Given this study's existential world-view, an *interpretive research paradigm* is employed, which places the study methodologically within the realm of qualitative research as the "logic" or "programme of inquiry" (Packer 2011: 41). The interpretive research paradigm is focused on "the desire to capture the meaning of real-world events from the perspective of a study's participants" (Yin 2011: 11; Wimmer & Dominic 2014: 117). Such an objective unavoidably subsumes a second set of meanings – those of the researcher. These perspectives are identified as *emic* and *etic*, with the emic perspective referring to the research participant's indigenous meanings of real-world events and the etic perspective referring to an external perspective of the same set of real-world events (*ibid.*). In the context of this study, Nakasa's journalism represents the emic perspective while the researcher's analysis represents the etic perspective. Yin (2011: 12) writes that

> the emic and etic perspectives will usually differ – owing to differences in observers' value systems, their predispositions, and their gender, age, and race and ethnicity … The differences in value systems permeate our very thought processes. In turn, these differences will affect the way that qualitative research will be conducted and reported. Operationally, these will show up even (and especially) when describing a set of real-world events. Thus, the apparently straightforward task of making a description becomes an interpretive matter, if only because of an inevitable selection process.

Walsham (2006: 320) writes that "interpretive methods of research start from the position that our knowledge of reality, including the domain of human action, is a social construction by human actors.

Our theories concerning reality are ways of making sense of the world, and shared meanings are a form of intersubjectivity rather than objectivity." Caelli, Ray and Mill (2003: 3) support this notion, explaining that interpretive inquiry "grew out of constructivist philosophy. Within this position, humans construct knowledge out of their somewhat subjective engagement with objects in their world." Here another mention of phenomenology is warranted: Yin (2011: 14) writes that phenomenology emphasises hermeneutic or interpretive analyses that are "strongly devoted to capturing the uniqueness of events" as well as their "political, historical, and sociocultural contexts" in a manner that is "as faithful as possible to the lived experiences".

The issue of subjectivity is particularly relevant to interpretive research. Schutz (1967, in Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006: 81) posits that "safeguarding the subjective point of view is of paramount importance if the world of social reality was not to be replaced by a fictional, nonexistent world constructed by the researcher". Despite the importance of individual points of view, interpretive research is often viewed as less credible than other research paradigms, including positivist and critical (Wimmer & Dominick 2014: 117). In this regard, several authors refer to the fact that no researcher, as a human being, is ever able to be completely objective. "We are all biased by our own background, knowledge and prejudices to see things in certain ways and not others," writes Walsham (2006: 321). Denzin (2009: 15) raises the question as to why the interpretive researcher's effects on the research process should be considered greater, or less, than the effects of a researcher working from within another paradigm. Caelli *et al*. (2003: 8) write that all research approaches "have underlying presuppositions about the nature of knowledge". Gummesson (2003: 482) feels so strongly about this issue that he used for an article addressing the issue the following emphatic title: *All research is interpretive!* However, the debate as to which "side" is more or less credible, or whether there should be "sides" at all, does not negate the fact that scientific research, irrespective of paradigm, should be conducted according to principles that will ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

The interpretive paradigm serves as a logical programme of inquiry given the conceptual framework of this study as well as the discipline on which the study focuses, namely journalism. Interpretive research shares a number of characteristics with journalism, and especially unconventional or alternative forms of journalism. Issues such as subjectivity, bias and pluralism of voice are limitations that have to be addressed in both instances. The limitations of the interpretive paradigm is discussed later in this chapter, while these limitations as they pertain to journalism are analysed in detail in chapter 4.

1.5.3 Research methodology

Flowing from the conceptual framework of existentialism and based on the interpretive research paradigm, the study is methodologically situated within the qualitative approach to research. Qualitative research has developed "respectability" and is ideally suited for inquiry into individual life-world and experiences (Marshall & Rossman 2011: 264; Yin 2011: 6). Marshall and Rossman (*ibid.*) posit that journalism is a "natural" for qualitative inquiry. Whittemore *et al.* (2001: 524) describe qualitative research as seeking "depth over breadth" and attempting "to learn subtle nuances of life experiences as opposed to aggregate evidence".

Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* (2014: 230-232; cf. Wilson & MacLean 2011: 191-192) suggest the following characteristics of qualitative research, namely that it is:

- **Textual:** Irrespective of the data collection process (interviews, notes, observations, documents) qualitative research requires the analysis of texts as something that has been created in order to convey meaning. In the analysis and interpretation of text, the researcher conducts a deep reading of the text.

- **Iterative:** The analysis and interpretation processes are repeated over and over in a continuous cycle in an attempt to isolate and refine the embedded meanings of the text. This process allows the researcher to identify emerging patterns and to attain a deep and thorough understanding of the meaning of these patterns.

- **Hermeneutic:** Qualitative research is interpretive, and follows the hermeneutic cycle, which implies an interpretation from the general to the specific and from the specific to the general. This allows the researcher to consider and describe a bigger and more holistic picture by looking at the interplay between specific details and the broader general context.

- **Subjective:** The goal of qualitative research is to gain an understanding of the subjective experiences of participants, whether through interviews or other artefacts that provide evidence of these experiences. It rests upon the foundation that there can be no absolute right or wrong answer for human behaviour. The qualitative researcher assumes there is no absolute, factual truth independent of human interpretation.

- **Constructed and symbolic**: These characteristics refer to social constructionism and symbolic interactionism. Both the researcher as research instrument and the participant as creator of the text that is analysed interpret phenomena subjectively and express it symbolically. The basic premise is that each individual constructs his or her world based on subjective experience. By viewing reality as constructed and expressed symbolically, the qualitative researcher sets out to deconstruct text.

In addition to the above, Yin (2011: 7-8) proposes the following features of qualitative research, namely:

- studying the meaning of people's lives, under real-world conditions with a focus on the specific instead of a statistical average;
- representing the views and perspectives of the participants in a study;
- covering the contextual conditions within which people live;
- contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behaviour; and
- striving to use multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source alone.

Butler-Kisber (2010: 13-22) addresses a number of issues related to qualitative inquiry. These include, but are not necessarily applicable to all qualitative studies, validity (or trustworthiness), generalisability, access and consent, reflexivity, voice and transparency. These issues are discussed in the rest of this chapter in terms of their relevance to this study.

1.6   THE LIMITATIONS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Whittemore *et al*. (2001: 523) write that "the pursuit of common goodness criteria is both necessary and worthy in qualitative research". In order to ensure these common goodness criteria, the obvious limitations of the qualitative approach to research should be addressed as part of the researcher's responsibility for laying out the merits of a particular study (Caelli *et al*. 2003: 4). Chief among these are questions about achieving acceptable standards of reliability (referring to the stability of the findings) and validity (referring to the truthfulness of the findings) (Whittemore *et al*. 2001: 523), with both these concepts not translating well into the interpretive paradigm (Wimmer & Dominick 2014: 126). Butler-Kisber (2010: 13) argues that reliability does not apply to qualitative inquiry due to the fact that the researcher is the primary research tool.

Most of the criticism against the interpretive paradigm and qualitative research stems from the goals of the approach, including the aims of describing a "whole-world experience" (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*. 2014: 174) and providing a "thick description" of this experience (Caelli *et al*. 2003; Wilson & MacLean 2011: 194). Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*. (2014: 174) summarise the goals of interpretive research as "to explore, understand and describe and not to explain, measure, quantify, predict and generalise".

The main criticism against qualitative research is also what is held as its greatest advantage, namely the interpretive role played by the researcher (Wilson & MacLean 2011: 194). Whittemore *et al*.

(2001: 526) refer to this catch-22 situation as the "tension between rigor and creativity". Wimmer and Dominick (2014: 118) write that the interpretive researcher is an integral part of the process as well as the data and that "without the active participation of the researcher, no data exist". In addition, the researcher "is the instrument". The qualitative or interpretive researcher assumes that it is "difficult – of not impossible – to measure and quantify these experiences and meanings" (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*. 2014: 173). However, this intimate involvement of the researcher might result in what Wimmer and Dominick (2014: 126) refer to as selective perception, where the researcher dismisses data that do not fit a favoured interpretation, and interprets the data as he or she sees fit (Wilson & MacLean 2011: 194).

In order to address these limitations, various safeguards have been suggested in order to ensure rigor in qualitative research. Yin (2011: 19-21), for example, sets three objectives for building trustworthiness and credibility into qualitative research. The first is transparency, which requires the researcher (as primary research tool or instrument) to describe and document the research procedures in such a manner that other people can review and try to understand these procedures. This includes that all data should be available for inspection, with the general idea being that others should be able to scrutinise the study and the evidence used to support the study's findings and conclusions.

The second objective set by Yin (*ibid*.) is that the research should be done methodically, which requires the researcher to follow some orderly set of procedures in an effort to avoid unexplained bias or deliberate distortion, and to allow for cross-checking. Important, also for the current study, is "to demonstrate that the data and interpretations are accurate *from some point of view*" (Yin 2011: 20).

Yin's (*ibid*.) third objective for building trustworthiness and credibility into qualitative research is adherence to an explicit set of evidence, with conclusions being drawn in reference to that specific data.

Although not included in the set of objectives mentioned above, Yin (2011: 41) also emphasises research integrity as a goal of qualitative research:

> In its rawest form, *research integrity* means that you and your word(s) can be trusted as representing truthful positions and statements … that you are striving to produce research that is truthful, including clarifying the point of view being represented. Truthful statements may include caveats or reservations, indicating uncertainties that could not be overcome.

Yin (2011: 42-43; cf. Whittemore *et al*. 2001: 529) suggests disclosure as one way of demonstrating research integrity. The qualitative researcher is required to disclose the conditions that might influence the conduct of a study, including methodological as well as personal conditions that might affect the study. Personal conditions include the researcher's demographic profile as well as any position of advocacy related to the topic being studied, whether formal advocacy or favouring certain views. This reflexivity is described by Butler-Kisber (2010: 19) as a process of accounting for, and interrogating "what perspectives are brought to the work and why we see things the way we do. In qualitative inquiry, no apologies are needed for identity, assumptions, and biases, just a rigorous accounting of them."

In achieving or ensuring trustworthiness, Butler-Kisber (2010: 14) suggests an approach similar to Yin's. Validity (often referred to as trustworthiness in qualitative research) is determined by the study's degree of persuasiveness, authenticity and plausibility (Reissman 1993, in Butler-Kisber 2010: 14; cf. Walsham 2006: 326). In order to ensure qualitative trustworthiness, the study should indicate its persuasiveness by including a coherent and transparent research process and demonstrating an adherence to researcher reflexivity and reflection. Authenticity and plausibility are increased when the voice(s) of the participant(s) are present in the work, when alternative explanations are offered and discrepant instances are analysed (*ibid*.). Yin (2011: 80) refers to these discrepant instances as "rival explanations" and suggests a continual sense of scepticism regarding explanations that could be more plausible that the original interpretation.

Generalisability, or the lack thereof, is another characteristic of qualitative research that is often also held as a limitation, although Whittemore *et al*. (2001: 524) posit that generalisability is not a significant goal in qualitative research. In this regard, Butler-Kisber (2010: 15) suggests the term "particularisability" instead of generalisability, with particularisability referring to "how a certain study resonates with people in other situations so that they are able to find both confirmation and/or new understandings of experiences and phenomena". In addition to providing research integrity, this approach also provides the researcher with a way to describe the contemporary value or research importance of a specific study. Yin (2011: 100) writes that a process of analytic generalisation might be more applicable to qualitative research, or any single-case study: "Instead of trying to generalize to the population … such a study would seek to develop and then discuss how its findings might have implications for an improved understanding of particular concepts". Such an analytic generalisation requires a "carefully constructed argument" that must be presented "soundly and resistant to logical challenge" and such an argument must be "cast in relation to existing research literature". Whittemore *et al*. (2001: 532) refer to the fact that "despite the elusiveness of generalizability in qualitative

research, study findings should fit into contexts outside the study situation". Walsham (2006: 320) adds to this discussion by positing that the goal of qualitative research in terms of generalisability should be "shared meaning". In the context of the current study, these various efforts towards a type of qualitative generalisability, or value beyond the single case, culminates in a discussion of how the findings and interpretations of this study can be appropriated (an existential concept) for contexts other than Nakasa's (see chapter 5).

Another approach to demonstrating rigor comes from Schutz (1973, in Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006: 81) and consists of three essential postulates:

- The postulate of **logical consistency**, which requires the researcher to establish the highest degree of clarity of the conceptual framework and method applied.
- The postulate of **subjective interpretation**, which requires that the model be grounded in the subjective meaning the action had for the "actor".
- The postulate of **adequacy**, which requires that there be consistency between the researcher's constructs and typifications and those found in common-sense experience.

Interpretive research requires a trail of evidence throughout the process in order to demonstrate trustworthiness. Whittemore *et al.* (2001: 531) refer to this evidence trail as a study's "auditability". This evidence includes selected vignettes, quotes or examples that most vividly illuminate the findings and data that illustrate the variety of information collected (Wimmer & Dominick 2014: 153). Evidence of how the researcher formulated the overarching themes must also be provided (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006: 82).

In an additional effort to ensure rigor, this study borrows from psychology in the form of Irving Alexander's identifiers of salience (1990). Alexander proposes a set of rules for identifying salient imagery by focusing on the manner in which information is conveyed. These markers assist the researcher in sorting and consequently reducing that data in a manner that focuses on how the information is conveyed. Topics that are important to an individual will be signalled by the way they are expressed (Alexander 1990: 24). This is similar to Derrida (quoted by Hodder 2002: 266), who is of the opinion that meaning does not reside in a text but in the writing and reading of it. As the text is reread in different contexts it is given new meanings, often contradictory and always socially embedded.

Alexander's identifiers of salience include primacy, frequency, uniqueness, negation, emphasis, omission, error or distortion, isolation and incompletion. However, he cautions that these are not

exhaustive and that the context and aim of a specific study influence which identifiers or markers are used (Alexander 1990: 24).

In reference to evaluating the effectiveness of a qualitative research method, Caelli *et al.* (2003: 4; cf. Whittemore *et al.* 2001: 532) write that "each qualitative approach needs to be evaluated in a manner that is congruent with its epistemological and methodological origins". These authors emphasise that it is the individual researcher's responsibility for laying out the merits of a particular study by providing "enough detail of the study, the approach, and the methods" (*ibid.*). They suggest that, in order to enhance credibility, a qualitative research report must address four key areas, namely 1) the theoretical positioning of the researcher; 2) the congruence between methodology and methods; 3) the strategies to establish rigor; and 4) the analytic lens through which data is examined. In the context of the current study, these four key areas are addressed at various stages throughout the current chapter.

This discussion on rigor in qualitative research is summarised with Whittemore *et al.*'s (2001: 534) checklist to assess the various criteria of validity. These authors make a distinction between primary criteria (credibility, authenticity, criticality, integrity) and secondary criteria (explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, sensitivity). Not all these criteria are applicable to all types of qualitative methods, or in some instances slight variations are required based on the unique characteristics of the specific study:

- **Credibility:** Do the results of the research reflect the experience of participants or the context in a believable way?
- **Authenticity:** Does a representation of the emic perspective exhibit awareness to the subtle differences in the voices of all participants?
- **Criticality:** Does the research process demonstrate evidence of critical appraisal?
- **Integrity:** Does the research reflect recursive and repetitive checks of validity as well as a humble presentation of findings?
- **Explicitness:** Have methodological decisions, interpretations, and investigator biases been addressed?
- **Vividness:** Have thick and faithful descriptions been portrayed with artfulness and clarity?
- **Creativity:** Have imaginative ways of organising, presenting, and analysing data been incorporated?
- **Thoroughness:** Do the findings convincingly address the questions posed through completeness and saturation?

- **Congruence:** Are the process and findings congruent? Do all the themes fit together? Do findings fit into a context outside the study situation?
- **Sensitivity:** Has the investigation been implemented in ways that are sensitive to the nature of human, cultural, and social contexts?

This section has provided the reader with the research context within which this study should be read. Armed with this knowledge, the specific research design utilised for this study will be described next.

1.7   RESEARCH DESIGN

1.7.1   Method

Keeping in mind the axis of *existential* conceptual framework, *interpretive* paradigm and *qualitative* methodological approach around which this study revolves, the specific research method is a *deductive/inductive hybrid theme analysis* (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006).

Theme analysis entails a search of themes that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon, involves the identification of themes through careful reading and re-reading of the data and is a form of pattern recognition within the data (*ibid*.). It is a process of interpretive understanding that places it firmly within the realm of hermeneutics. Theme analysis (also called thematic analysis) based on a particular existing theory or philosophy allows the researcher to analyse themes deductively, while theme analysis also allows the researcher to let the themes emerge from the data, which implies an inductive approach (Wilson & Maclean 2011: 551). The researcher can also look for semantic themes, which are explicit in the data and focus on the surface meaning of what is being written and implies a more realist paradigm, and latent themes, which are underlying and, because of the interpretation required, implies a constructionist paradigm (*ibid*.).

Theme analysis is often confused with content analysis. However, theme analysis goes beyond the level of counting items and instead "looks at patterns, or themes, across whole sets of data" (Wilson & MacLean 2011: 551). In this context a single incident (quote, mention, reference, or "meaningful unit of text" – Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006: 87) is considered as important as an incident that appears numerous times. This ties in with Alexander's indicators of salience mentioned earlier, where uniqueness or lack of emphasis also convey meaning.

Theme analysis relies on deconstruction: the process through which the researcher takes text apart to understand how meaning is constructed. It is assumed that text contains the embedded meanings associated with the phenomena that participants experience subjectively. Deconstruction assumes that

the reader, rather than the author, is central in determining the meaning of a text (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*. 2014: 232). This process of interpretive understanding, or deriving meaning, also forms part of Sartre's existentialism. He writes that answers can be derived from human conduct: "… each type of human conduct, being the conduct of man in the world, can release for us simultaneously man, the world, and the relation which unites them" (Sartre 1943: 78-79). Sartre (*ibid*.) uses his own writing as an example:

> It matters little whether the questioner is myself or the reader who reads my work and who is questioning along with me. But on the other hand, the question is not simply the objective totality of the words printed on this page; it is indifferent to the symbols which express it. In a word, it is a human attitude filled with meaning.

In terms of the execution of a theme analysis, Wilson and MacLean (2011: 552-553, referring to Braun & Clarke 2006) write that there is no specific process for conducting a theme analysis. However, they suggest the following basic process:

- Data collection: Acquiring pre-existing or archival sources.
- Familiarisation with data: Reading and rereading, making notes on initial ideas and thoughts.
- Systematic coding: Identifying any aspect of interest in the text (the actual process is researcher-specific and includes various manual or computer-assisted actions).
- Search for themes: Collating codes and sorting these into different themes and sub-themes.
- Review themes: Establishing a consistent pattern through repeated refining of themes, and considering themes in relation to the entire data-set.
- Define and name themes: Considering themes and how they fit together, thinking carefully about what the themes are about and the "story" they tell.

Fereday and Muir-Cochrane's (2006) method is similar, but accounts for a hybrid approach:

- Stage 1: Developing the code manual for the deductive theme analysis, which requires a priori codes.
- Stage 2: Testing the reliability of the code by developing a method that addresses the unique characteristics of the study in order to determine the applicability of the code to the raw information.
- Stage 3: Summarising the data and identifying initial themes.
- Stage 4: Applying template of codes (stage 1) and identifying additional codes for new themes that emerge (inductive theme analysis).

- Stage 5: Connecting the codes and identifying themes through discovering themes and patterns in the data.

- Stage 6: Corroborating and legitimating coded themes through further clustering of the themes that were previously identified. Corroborating refers to the process of confirming the findings. This is also the interpretive phase during which the themes are connected to an explanatory framework.

A specific criticism against theme analysis is that, due to its flexibility, it is often not tied to any epistemological or theoretical framework (Wilson & MacLean 2011: 553; cf. Whittemore *et al*. 2001: 532). However, this is not the case in the current study, as a clearly identified conceptual framework allows for a visible line to the research paradigm and methodology.

Another criticism against theme analysis is that studies often only report the themes that were identified and nothing more (Whittemore *et al*. 2001: 532; Caelli *et al*. 2003: 9). Caelli *et al*. (*ibid*.) suggest that the researcher takes the further step "to show what meaning lies beyond the themes. It is these meanings that need to be embedded in the theoretical and historical context of the research and the topic researched." Whittemore *et al*. (2001: 532) affirm this position by stating that "thoroughness implies attention to connection between themes and full development of ideas". In the context of this study, the themes identified are used to construct an "existential storyline" that uses the themes as vehicle for possible meaning(s).

As a result of the iterative nature of qualitative research, data collection, analysis and interpretation are enmeshed (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*. 2014: 233). However, effort is made here to describe the various segments as separate parts although they do not necessarily happen in a chronologically and linear manner during the actual process of research (cf. Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006: 83).

This study is an example of non-reactive or unobtrusive research, or a research process in which the researcher is not directly involved with the participants or where no living participants are involved (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*. 2014: 191). Non-reactive research includes analysing texts that already exist, such as articles in newspapers and magazines (Wilson & MacLean 2011: 214). Using this type of data is useful as the researcher will often be commenting on an issue from a particular perspective (*ibid*.), in this instance existentialism and existential journalism. It is important for the researcher to have a keen understanding of the context in which the original material was created as the sociocultural and historical context in which a piece of text was written will often shed light on its

nature (*ibid*.). In terms of Nakasa's writing, this context is discussed in detail in chapter 2, with the existential conceptual framework presented in chapter 3.

The deductive/inductive hybrid theme analysis as adapted for this study consists of three phases:

- Phase 1: Data generation
- Phase 2: Data analysis
- Phase 3: Data interpretation

The steps followed during each phase is set out in table 1 at the end of section 1.6.

1.7.2 Data collection and sampling

"Collecting and examining" is one of the four data collection methods for qualitative research suggested by Yin (2011: 14), with the other three being interviewing, observing and feeling. Collecting and examining pertain to archival sources (Wilson & MacLean 2011: 214), with examining specifically referring to objects (such as documents) that cannot be removed from their current location (for example a museum). Yin (2011: 147) writes that these "collected objects" (as a form of primary evidence) "can produce a variety of verbal, numerical, graphic, or pictorial data". These objects can provide "invaluable data about things not directly observable", including abstract topics, as is the case in this study.

In the current study, the collected objects that form the primary evidence is the collected body of work (newspaper articles, magazine articles, a speech and a short story) of Nat Nakasa as presented in the anthology *The world of Nat Nakasa* (1975; 1985; 2005), edited by Essop Patel and published by Picador Africa. The anthology contains 73 newspaper and magazine articles, one speech and one short story. These 75 objects form the sample for this study. Although it could qualify as a convenience sample, in this instance it is viewed as a purposive sample (Yin 2011; 88) as it contains, with the exception of a couple of articles that can no longer be accessed, Nakasa's entire body of work. The choice of sample was thus deliberate.

Regarding the size of the sample, it should be stated that 75 objects is an unusually large sample size for a qualitative study. However, due to Nakasa's small body of available work and his short career in journalism, the researcher chose to include all these objects in the sample in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

A short note on the publication information of the articles that form part of the sample: In none of the three editions of *The world of Nat Nakasa* is the publication information of the articles indicated. Where possible, the publication information (name and date of publication) of individual articles was obtained through other sources, including Bailey's African History Archive. The publisher of the 2005 edition, Pan Macmillan, was contacted in an effort to obtain more complete information. According to Lara Cohen from Pan Macmillan, who published the 2005 edition of *The world of Nat Nakasa* through its imprint Picador Africa, the anthology was originally published by Ravan Press in 1975. Pan Macmillan took over Ravan Press and Cohen says the Ravan files are not accessible any more (Cohen, email correspondence, 2009). According to McDonald's database of apartheid censorship (The Literature Police n.d.), the first edition (1975) of *The world of Nat Nakasa* was submitted by the South African Police for censorship (report reference P79/2/42) but was classified "not undesirable". However, it appears that the 2005 edition could be considered the most complete, as Patel indicates in the foreword to this edition that "this collection now includes pieces that were not in the first and second editions" (Patel 2005: viii). Although references are made to the 1975 edition, the analysis is based on the 2005 edition.

The pieces that form part of the sample were labelled story 1 to story 75 and appear in a list as Appendix A. The list includes the original publication details where available, as well as the page numbers of the stories as they appear in Patel (2005). Throughout the thesis citations of Nakasa's work will be similar to the other sources consulted for this thesis. However, as part of the interpretation of the results in chapter 5, reference will be made to "story 37", etc. in order to avoid unnecessary repetition and to make reading easier. The label "story" was chosen as this is common journalistic jargon and no literary or other connotations should be attached to the label.

One of the limitations of this study results from the lack of detailed publication information for all the articles. This means that comparisons between Nakasa's earlier and later work is not possible, nor can particular themes be attached to particular periods or particular publications. However, since contemporary access to Nakasa's work is mainly possible through the 2005 edition of *The world of Nat Nakasa*, and since this study seeks to interpret his body of work as a whole, this limitation was deemed not to influence the overall findings and conclusion.

1.7.3   Data analysis

In qualitative data analysis, the researcher "is totally immersed in the data [through] identifying and describing the evident and dormant patterns of meaning emerging from the data" (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al*. 2014: 229; Wimmer & Dominick 2014: 122). Data analysis in qualitative research takes place

throughout the project (Wimmer & Dominick 2014: 122). Typically, the process involves reduction, organisation, interpretation and substantiation (Du Plooy-Cilliers *et al.* 2014: 233), keeping in mind that the process is not linear and one-dimensional.

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are depended on researcher preference in terms of execution. Some researchers prefer to manage the collected objects manually, while others make use of specialised computer software. For this study, the researcher used a combination of manual and electronic methods.

The analysis was in part facilitated through the use of NVivo9 data management software that allows the researcher to import and sort text documents. This software can store data in an orderly way, provide structures and hierarchies of data, perform certain analytical tasks and respond to questions that the researcher puts to the data (Gummesson 2003: 485). Computer software used as part of qualitative research differs markedly from computer-assisted quantitative research. Yin (2011: 180) writes that software used for quantitative research enables the researcher to "provide a set of input data, and the computer arrives at the result". However, software used for qualitative research, such as NVivo9, allows for electronic capturing, database management and a number of other functionalities, but the researcher "have to do all of the analytic thinking". The researcher also has to "develop the entire underlying substantive procedure, such as sorting, coding, combining, and recombining portions of the text" (*ibid.*). Gummesson (2003: 485) agrees: "Software assists, but does not take over interpretation … The approach thus is not tied to an objective or intersubjectively approved procedure, but also rests inside each individual researcher as a professional scholar" (cf. Walsham 2006: 325). Due to the fact that Nakasa's body of work is not available electronically, this researcher used NVivo9 in order to create a searchable electronic database of the articles in the sample.

In addition, the researcher used an "analytical wallpaper" approach (Wimmer & Dominick 2014: 123). This is a manual approach that includes making notes of observations on photocopies of the text documents, creating "theme files" for each text document and organising themes on a thematic map (Wilson & MacLean 2011: 552).

Qualitative analysis is in essence a process of disassembling and reassembling data (Yin 2011: 186; 190). Packer (2011: 59) calls it abstraction and generalisation. During the initial stages of the research the researcher reads and rereads through the data, making notes and identifying broad themes or ideas. This is the beginning of the disassembling or abstraction phase, which intensifies with the systematic coding of the data. As formal coding progresses, themes and concepts start to emerge. This is the start

of the reassembling or generalisation phase, which culminates in the final conclusion, in this case the existential storyline constructed as evidence of the argument put forward that Nat Nakasa could be considered an existential journalist.

Coding was done through a combination of the "analytical wallpaper" approach that allows for a visual overview, and NVivo9 that allows for easier management of a large database. Coding qualitative data enables the researcher to move "methodically to a slightly higher conceptual level" and then onto "an even higher conceptual level" (Yin 2011: 187; 191). This process entails identifying messages by looking at words, expressions and references that represent themes; grouping these messages into themes; writing a structural description of each theme; and labelling each sample article according to a theme(s).

As mentioned earlier, this study employs a deductive/inductive hybrid theme analysis. It is executed on two levels:

- The **first level** is a **deductive theme analysis** with existentialism as framework. Relevant existential concepts and themes are identified and discussed. This provides a general structure against which Nakasa's work is explored for existential themes. Coding for the deductive analysis is done according to the theme descriptions found in chapter 3 as well as the existential duties of the writer identified in chapter 4. The deductive analysis addresses primary research question 1.
- The **second level** is an **inductive theme analysis** that is informed by the deductive theme analysis conducted as part of the first level of the study. The purpose of the inductive theme analysis is to identify themes specific to Nakasa's work that are based on existential themes. Coding for the inductive analysis is done *in vivo*, using words, labels or phrases from the text and building new themes from there. It is important to keep in mind that these themes are identified against an existential framework, and the analysis is not a general analysis of all themes in Nakasa's work. The inductive analysis addresses primary research question 2.

The purpose of the hybrid approach is to ensure rigor in identifying the themes, as the analysis is basically conducted "both ways" with the deductive analysis serving as evidence for the inductive analysis, and vice versa. This action also serves to determine the applicability of the code to the raw data.

The deductive analysis rests on the analytic induction strategy as described by Wimmer and Dominick (2014: 125). As part of this strategy an explanation is generated before the analysis is conducted. In

this case, the explanation, or lens, is existentialism and the a priori themes at the hand of which the analysis is conducted.

The inductive analysis rests on the constant comparative technique (Wimmer & Dominick 2014: 123). This technique is ideally suited for an inductive analysis as incidents are assigned to themes that are identified and elaborated upon as the analysis progresses.

1.7.4 Interpretation and conclusion

Denzin (2009: 150) writes that interpretation – the "action" of the interpretive paradigm – is at the heart of the matter of qualitative research. Executed effectively and ethically, interpretative research is trustworthy and can add value to any issue under investigation. Denzin (*ibid*.) writes that "transparency, that is trust, is increased by clearly discussing the process of interpretation, highlighting the evidence and alternative interpretations that serve as a warrant for each claim, providing contextual commentary on each claim".

However, the interpretive action of qualitative research is often criticised for the subjectivity inherent to this process. This has been addressed earlier in this chapter, but in reference to the coding and interpretation phases of this study, it is important to mention that most of the criticism levelled against the interpretive action is focused on studies that endeavour to recreate the meaning that the original participants intended (the emic perspective) (Packer 2011: 69-70). Packer (2011: 79) refers to this as the paradox of qualitative research: The goal is to understand the subjective meaning of the participant(s), i.e. the meanings that individuals attach to something. However, the researcher is then criticised for doing exactly the same – being an individual that attaches meaning to something. Some efforts to address this issue were discussed earlier in this chapter. The important point to be emphasised here is that the goal of this study is not to try and determine or "recreate" what meaning Nakasa attached to or implied with his work. Rather, the goal is to determine whether existential meaning(s) could be attached to themes in his work – therefore an etic perspective.

Yin (2011: 220-226) writes that generalisation need not be the only conclusion available to a researcher, and suggests five other types of conclusions:
- concluding by calling for new research
- concluding by challenging conventional generalisations and social stereotypes
- concluding with new concepts, theories and discoveries about human social behaviour
- concluding by making substantive propositions
- concluding by generalising to a broader set of situations

The interpreting and concluding phase of this research is therefore focused on creating an existential storyline based on a combination of general existential themes as well as themes unique to Nakasa's writing. This existential storyline is then put forward as evidence for the argument, or thesis, that Nat Nakasa could be considered an existential journalist. The type of conclusion is a combination of a substantive proposition ("Nat Nakasa as existential journalist") and a generalisation towards some type of contemporary application ("the role of journalism in a developing society").

1.7.5 Clarification of terms

This section provides, in alphabetical order, a clarification of terms, abbreviations and operational definitions as used throughout this thesis.

ANC: African National Congers

Existentialism: In this study, references to existentialism refer to the Western philosophical notion as that is the primary focus of the study. Other strands, including an African perspective on existentialism, will be indicated as such.

His / Her: Unless the context demands it, all references to males should be taken to include females, and vice versa. Similarly, references to man/men should be taken to include woman/women, unless the context dictates otherwise.

Journalism: As a result of this study's pertinent focus on different approaches to and different types of journalism, it is important to provide a working definition of what is considered conventional, mainstream journalism as this will make the distinction of what is unconventional journalism easier (this distinction is discussed in detail in chapter 4). For the purpose of this thesis, journalism (in the conventional sense) is the methodological process, governed by ethical principles, of gathering information, interpreting it and telling structured and genre-related stories, both in print, broadcast media and online, for often niche market public consumption.

Media / Press: All references to the words "media" or "press" should be considered interchangeable, unless specifically stated otherwise.

NP: National Party

Public sphere: Journalism is conducted in the public sphere. This thesis relies on Norris' (2010: 6) definition of the democratic public sphere as "that space between the state and the household where free and equal citizens come together to share information, to deliberate upon common concerns and to cooperate and collaborate on solutions to social problems".

RDM: *Rand Daily Mail*

Readers: In reference to journalism, and unless specified otherwise, "readers" is taken to include all types of journalism consumers, including "listeners", "viewers", "online users" and "audience".

RSA: Republic of South Africa

SABC: South African Broadcasting Corporation. In some instances, reference is made to the Afrikaans abbreviation, *SAUK*, or *Suid-Afrikaanse Uitsaaikorporasie*.

Story: In common journalistic parlance, journalists refer to their writing as "stories" irrespective of genre, structure or type. Unless clearly indicated, no literary or other connotations should be attached to the label "story" as used in this thesis.

1.7.6 Delineating the scope of the study

Placing a study within a specific conceptual framework and design will impose certain limitations on the study (Marshall & Rossman 2011: 76). It is thus important to explain the planned, justified scope of the study beyond which generalisation of findings is not intended.

As mentioned above, qualitative studies are not generalisable in the probabilistic sense, but findings may be transferable (*ibid*.). This study focuses an analysis of the writing of Nat Nakasa through an existentialist lens. The first boundary is the fact that a single case is under investigation (Nakasa's writing), with a second boundary being the conceptual framework (existentialism). The specific conceptual framework leads to the establishment of a third boundary, namely the qualitative research design. As mentioned, the purpose of this study is to consider Nakasa's writing as an example of applied existentialism, i.e. explaining existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts) as it manifests in his journalism. The findings are therefore only applicable to Nakasa's writing, and the themes identified are informed by the concepts, terms, definitions, models, and theories of existentialism. Although no claims of generalisability are made, the relevant existentialist themes as identified may provide researchers with a framework for analysing other texts, whether journalistic in origin or not, while a discussion on the role of specifically the existential journalist in a developing society may benefit from the findings. These and other applications are discussed in chapters 5 and 6.

1.7.7 Ethical considerations

One of the main advantages of using archival sources is that there is no possibility that the researcher can influence the data collected (Wilson & MacLean 2011: 215). The data, in this instance the writing produced by Nakasa, exists for another purpose (journalism), which allows the researcher to analyse these without influencing it. Although different meanings may be attached to these, the original content of the text will remain as is. However, due to the endless possibilities for analysing pre-existing texts, only very specific research questions (including those involving an individual, for

example) should be researched using only these sources. The exclusive focus on the writing of Nakasa associates this study with the above-mentioned reasoning.

As mentioned earlier, it is important for the interpretive researcher to disclose any conditions that might influence a study. This awareness of prejudices, viewpoints or assumptions that might interfere with the analysis is referred to as *epoche* (Wimmer & Dominick 2014: 123). These include any conceptual and methodological conditions as well as personal conditions. At the time of writing this thesis, the personal conditions (the etic perspective) that frame this researcher's view are those of a 40-year-old white female South African citizen with a background in journalism. The conceptual conditions were set out earlier in this chapter as part of the conceptual, paradigmatical and methodological aspects of the study.

This section on the research design is summarised in table 1 that sets out the deductive/inductive hybrid theme analysis method that was developed for this study, combining the various analytic processes described above, and incorporating unique traits of this study.

**TABLE 1:   PROCESS FOR DEDUCTIVE/INDUCTIVE
             HYBRID THEME ANALYSIS**

Step	Action(s)	Researcher's notes
Phase 1: Data generation		
1	Data collection and sampling	• Create searchable electronic database using NVivo9 • Purposive sample consisting of 73 articles, 1 speech, 1 short story as part of the anthology *The World of Nat Nakasa* • 2005 edition of anthology used for analysis
2	Familiarisation with data	• Read and reread, make notes on initial ideas and thoughts • Use hard-copy version of articles during this step; create handwritten notes using the "analytical wallpaper" approach
3	Development of code manual for deductive theme analysis	• Create code manual based on in-depth discussion of existentialism and the existential duties of the writer as part of literature overview (chapters 3; 4) • This step addresses secondary research questions 1 and 2
Phase 2: Data analysis		
4	Systematic coding (deductive theme analysis)	• Identify meaningful units of text at the hand of the general structure of existential themes using NVivo9

		• Group similar themes together in order to develop overarching existential themes as these appear in Nakasa's work • This step addresses primary research question 1
5	Systematic coding (inductive theme analysis)	• *In vivo* coding of the text in order to identify unique themes in Nakasa's work that can be linked to the existential themes identified in step 4 • Use NVivo9 for coding • Group similar themes together in order to develop overarching unique themes as these appear in Nakasa's work • This step addresses primary research question 2
6	Comparison of findings of deductive and inductive analyses	• Determine applicability of code to the raw information • In this study, the themes identified by way of the inductive analysis serve as confirmation of the themes identified by way of the deductive analysis, and vice versa
Phase 3: Data interpretation		
7	Combination of themes from deductive and inductive analyses	• Consider themes and how they fit together, think carefully about what the themes are about and the "story" they tell
8	Development of existential storyline of Nakasa's work	• Fit themes into explanatory framework to develop storyline that serve as evidence for the thesis that Nat Nakasa could be considered an existential journalist
9	Contemporary application	• Extrapolate the findings in order to appropriate from Nakasa's discourse something of value for our contemporary context • This step addresses secondary research question 3

1.8 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis has been organised into six chapters. A basic overview of each chapter is provided here to provide the reader with a "mental picture" of the process of argumentation. All technical and organisational information, including notes on relevance, the conceptual framework, the research purpose and research design, are presented as part of chapter 1. The reasoning behind this is to enhance the reading experience by presenting the reader with all the technical and organisational information necessary to interpret the main body of the thesis without distracting from the reading experience, or "taking the reader out of the story". While chapter 1 contains the technical and organisational information, chapter 6 consists of a comprehensive summary of the thesis. Chapters 2-5 encompass the main body, or "story", of the thesis. Chapters 2-5 follow a set structure that begins with an overview of the chapter, followed by an introduction of the specific focus of that chapter. All the chapters are divided into between two and four main sections, followed by a chapter summary.

Chapter 1: Situating the study: Research overview

This chapter provides an overview of the research framework that underpins this thesis, including the research problem, issues of relevance, the conceptual framework, the research paradigm as well as the research methodology. The limitations of the interpretive paradigm and qualitative methodology are discussed and addressed. The section on the research design includes a discussion of the method, data collection and sampling, data analysis, findings, interpretation and conclusion, operational definitions, ethical issues and the delineation of the scope of the study.

Chapter 2: "Between two worlds': The life of Nat Nakasa

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with an overview of the socio-political context within which Nakasa produced his work, and against which this analysis of his work is taking place. This is a key existential element, namely that "any human product requires that we grasp it within the unfolding pattern of history" (Barrett 1964: 10). In this study, the "human product" we are trying to grasp is Nakasa's writing, with this chapter serving the purpose of the "unfolding pattern of history".

The chapter provides an overview of the life and career of Nakasa, with a specific focus on South Africa during the 1950s, when a revolution on cultural and political front seemed possible, and the 1960s, when apartheid dramatically increased in intensity. A short history of *Drum* magazine is included, as well as a discussion on relevant points of *Drum*'s significance. The *Drum* generation and the Johannesburg township of Sophiatown, both as space and place, are discussed, as well as three other relevant influences on Nakasa's world-view, namely his father, Joseph Nakasa, his friend and colleague, Lewis Nkosi, and the influence of South African author and Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer. Brief references are made to other publications for which Nakasa wrote. Details on his life and work during exile in America are provided, as well as a discussion surrounding the circumstances of his death. Throughout these discussions a line that links Nakasa to existentialism is maintained.

Chapter 3: Being-in-the-world: Relevant existential themes and existentialism in contemporary African philosophy

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss relevant themes from existentialism as a Western philosophical notion. This is done through providing a brief background to the development of existentialism, followed by an exploration of relevant themes of existentialism, which forms the primary philosophical framework of this study. This discussion is based primarily on the work of Heidegger and Sartre, viewed as the two foremost existentialist philosophers (cf. Audi 1999; Barrett 1964; Gravil 2007; Kaufmann 1956; Wartenberg 2008, amongst others). Finally, the chapter provides

a discussion of existentialism and contemporary African philosophy. Although the purpose of the study is to link Nakasa's writing to the broader Western existentialism, his facticity as a black, male, South African citizen, and from a more general perspective as an African, validates a brief discussion on existentialism in terms of contemporary African philosophy.

Chapter 4: To name is to change: Existential journalism, the journalist as change agent and the duty of the writer

With the existentialist themes discussed in chapter 3 serving as a general structure against which to explore a writer's work for existentialist themes, chapter 4 drills down further into existentialist writing as it manifests in journalism specifically. The chapter sets out by providing a background of the development of existential journalism as conceived by journalism and philosophy professor John Calhoun Merrill (1974; 1977). Basic journalistic orientations are discussed, including the two super-stances of rational journalism at the one end and existential journalism at the other. Géraldine Muhlmann's (2008; 2010) concepts of unifying and decentring journalism are also discussed. An outline of existential journalism is provided and attention is paid to some of the most contentious issues pertaining to existential journalism (and other types of unconventional journalism), namely subjectivity, individual responsibility and authenticity. The discussion concludes with a section on the existential journalist as agent of change.

The final section of the chapter provides an analysis of "involved writing" as a form of applied existentialism, or existentialism in practice (the ontic act of writing). This is provided through a discussion of the duty of the writer based on essays by Sartre (*What is literature?*, 1948), Gordimer (*A writer's freedom*, 1975; *Living in an Interregnum*, 1982; *The essential gesture*, 1984), Orwell (*Why I write*, 1946) as well as Camus's Nobel Prize in Literature Banquet Speech (1957).

Chapter 5: 'All that is great stands in the storm': Findings and interpretation of results

This chapter presents the results and interpretation of these results within the research framework as set out in chapter 1. The results of both the deductive theme analysis and the inductive theme analysis are presented, followed by the main discussion and interpretation, namely the construction of an existential storyline as evidence for the argument put forward in this thesis: that Nat Nakasa's work, whether intended by him or not, serves as an example of applied existentialism, i.e. explaining existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the value of this study beyond the single-case, i.e. some contemporary applications of the study's findings.

Chapter 6: Summary, conclusion and reflection: Nat Nakasa as existential journalist

This chapter provides a summary of the entire study by providing an overview of the purpose of the study, the primary and secondary research questions as well as the findings and interpretation as it relate to these research questions. The limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for further study are made. The chapter concludes with final words from the researcher.

1.9   CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter 1 served the purpose of situating the study. All technical and organisational information, including notes on relevance, the conceptual framework, the research purpose and research design, were presented as part of the chapter.

The chapter set out the purpose of the study, namely to consider how Nat Nakasa's writing, irrespective of his intention in this regard, serves as an example of applied existentialism, i.e. explaining existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts) as it manifests in his journalism.

This "research action" takes place within the conceptual framework of existentialism, which provides for an interpretive paradigm. In turn, this paradigm situates the research methodologically within the qualitative approach. The various limitations of interpretive paradigm and qualitative methodology were discussed as well as how these were addressed in this study.

The research method entails an adapted deductive/inductive hybrid theme analysis. The sample consists of Nakasa's body of work as presented in the anthology *The world of Nat Nakasa* (1975; 1985; 2005), edited by Essop Patel. Data analysis takes place on two levels, namely a deductive theme analysis which aims to identify existential themes in Nakasa's work, as well as an inductive theme analysis which aims to identify unique themes in Nakasa's work that are supported by the relevant existential themes identified in the deductive analysis.

We now proceed to chapter 2, which provides the reader with an overview of the socio-political context within which Nat Nakasa produced his work, and against which this analysis of his work is taking place.

Chapter 2

'BETWEEN TWO WORLDS'
The life of Nat Nakasa

2.1   IN THIS CHAPTER

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with an overview of the socio-political context within which Nat Nakasa produced his work, and against which this analysis of his work is taking place. This is a key existentialist element, namely that "any human product requires that we grasp it within the unfolding pattern of history" (Barrett 1964: 10). In this study, the "human product" we are trying to grasp is Nakasa's writing, with this chapter serving the purpose of the "unfolding pattern of history".

The chapter provides an overview of the life and career of Nakasa, with a specific focus on South Africa during the 1950s, when a revolution on cultural and political front seemed possible, and the 1960s, when apartheid dramatically increased in intensity. A short history of *Drum* magazine is included, as well as a discussion on relevant points of *Drum*'s significance. The *Drum* generation and the Johannesburg township of Sophiatown, both as space and place, are discussed, as well as three other relevant influences on Nakasa's world-view, namely his father, Joseph Nakasa, his friend and colleague, Lewis Nkosi, and author Nadine Gordimer. Brief references are made to other publications for which Nakasa wrote, including *Ilanga lase Natal*, *Golden City Post* and *Rand Daily Mail*. The chapter also includes a short history of *The Classic*, the literary magazine of which Nakasa was founding editor. Details on his life and work during exile in America are provided, as well as a discussion surrounding the circumstances of his death.

A detailed biography of Nakasa's life falls outside the scope of this study. For the only comprehensive biographical background of Nakasa, see Brown (2013a), whose biography of Nakasa includes information obtained from interviews with, amongst others, Nakasa's sister and only surviving immediate family member, Gladys Maphumulo. Nakasa's work is also discussed in-depth and from viewpoints other than the existential focus of this study, in, for example, Singh (1990), Acott (2008) and Keany (2010), although references to relevant elements from these studies are made in this study. The *Drum* generation of writers is a widely-studied topic. *Drum*'s initial biography was written by *Drum* editor Anthony Sampson (1956), while he also discusses the magazine and its writers in his own autobiography (Sampson 2008). The autobiographies of two other influential *Drum* editors (as pertaining to Nakasa's career) are those of Sylvester Stein (2013) and Tom Hopkinson (1962). Life

during the 1950s and 1960s is also discussed in the autobiographies and numerous articles published by the *Drum* writers. References to these are made throughout this chapter.

The main title of this chapter refers to a comment from Gordimer in reference to Nakasa, namely: "He belonged not between two worlds, but to both. And in him one could see the hope of one world" (Gordimer 1966, in Patel 2005: xxv-xxvi).

2.2   INTRODUCTION

As described in chapter 1, Nakasa's life can be seen as a "manifestation of contradictions" (Patel 2005: v). These dichotomies include his tribal identity, his temporal stance across two histories (living before and immediately after the formal adoption of apartheid as ideology), his "life on the fringe" between black township life, mostly in Sophiatown, and Johannesburg's white suburbs, as well as his ultimate quest for identity, namely "Who am I? Where do I belong in the South African scheme of things? Who are my people?" (Nakasa 1964). The overview in this chapter continues to build on the number of dichotomies that characterise Nakasa's life.

2.3   EARLY YEARS

2.3.1   Family background

Nathaniel Ndazana Nakasa was born on 12 May 1937 as the second of Chamberlain Joseph and Alvina Nakasa's four sons and one daughter. Authors differ on where he was born. Verwey and Sonderling (1996) state that Nakasa was born in Lusikisiki in what is today the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, while others (Brown 2013a; Jahn, Schild & Nordmann 1974; Crwys-Williams 1989) claim his birthplace to be a township outside Durban in what is now KwaZulu-Natal.

Nakasa spent his early childhood in Cato Manor on the fringes of Durban (Brown 2013a). Cato Manor has the distinction of being a similar neighbourhood to Sophiatown, the Johannesburg township where Nakasa spent a lot of time after leaving Durban. Brown (2013a: 8) describes Cato Manor as "one of the few places in the city [Durban] where they [black people] were legally allowed to reside". Hannerz (1994: 185) uses virtually the same words in describing Sophiatown as "one of the few places where they [black people] could own their plots and houses". Both Cato Manor and Sophiatown were characterised by a cultural and racial diversity which is often reflected in Nakasa's writing. Again one of the dichotomies that characterises the life of Nakasa crops up, namely growing up in a neighbourhood where the norm of the day – separation and eventual segregation – was somewhat less evident with middle-class black and Indian people attending mixed-race cinemas, dances and concerts (Brown 2013a). Sophiatown is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Rural poverty (Brown 2013a) was probably the main cause which propelled the newly-wed Joseph and Alvina Nakasa to relocate from Joseph's ancestral home in Lusikisiki to Durban during the 1930s. However, in contrast with the vast majority of black people of the era, the Nakasa family, according to Brown (2013a), could be described as "middle-class Africans" who were able to rent a small house in the suburb of Chesterville. Both Nakasa's parents were educated in Christian missionary schools, something Joseph felt strongly about and which paved the way for young Nat to receive a similar education. In Durban Alvina found a job as a teacher, while Joseph became a typesetter and freelance writer at *Ilanga lase Natal*, a weekly Zulu-language newspaper published in Durban. He also wrote columns for *Indian Views*, an Indian weekly (Brown 2013a).

The Nakasa family included five children, first-born son Kenneth, Nat, Joseph jr, their only daughter Gladys, and their youngest, Moses, born in 1944 (Brown 2013a). Soon after the birth of her youngest child, Alvina developed severe depression and it fell upon seven-year-old Nat to look after Moses. "He was in the room when the boy was born, and … since the mother became ill soon after and was never again able to look after her children, he [Nat] had simply 'taken the baby around with [him] until he could walk'," recounts Gordimer (1966: xix) of Nakasa's childhood. Brown (2013a) posits that Alvina, given the onset of her illness, probably suffered from post-partum depression. Alvina was committed to Sterkfontein Mental Hospital in 1946. Brown (2013a: 17) quotes Nakasa's sister, Gladys, as saying "[When we visited her] she didn't know who we were … She was really very disturbed." Fellow *Drum* writer Can Themba (in Patel 2005: xix) writes that Nakasa spoke very little about his mother. Themba accompanied Nakasa to visit his mother once, and says "… he broke out in bitter, scalding tears … I guessed that it was a gruelling, cruel experience". His mother's mental health became a shadow that followed Nakasa all through his life. The evening before his death on 14 July 1965 he confessed to benefactor John Thompson his fear that he was "doomed to be mentally ill" like his mother (Brown 2013a: 156; Gordimer, in Nicol 1991: 341; Musi, in Nicol 1991: 341).

Nakasa, later described by Gordimer (1966: xvi) as "a clever young newspaperman", started his career in newspapers as a four-year-old selling newspapers in Durban (Gordimer 1966: xviii). Given his father's position, it could be reasoned that young Nat, described by his sister as "serious and careful" (Maphumulo, in Brown 2013a: 4) and called "the tiny one" by neighbourhood children (Zindela, in Brown 2013a: 15), sold copies of *Ilanga lase Natal*. Later his father took him to work over weekends to help set the type for the paper. Brown (2013a: 24-25) posits that this early introduction to newspapers, this "love of stacking words together, of building a good sentence and assembling clean and careful writing, carried far into the younger Nakasa's own life".

2.3.2 School years

Nakasa started attending the Zulu Lutheran High School in Eshowe in 1951 at the age of 14 (Brown 2013b). This Lutheran boarding school would have been the choice of his father, a keen supporter of missionary education, and education in general. "He wanted a youth that could work for themselves, rather than just running around. He wanted them to wake up and do something," Gladys Maphumulo told Brown (2013a: 3). This must have made an impression on Nakasa, whose sister remembers him telling her she "must love school. I must love it and always work hard" (Maphumulo, in Brown 2013a: 15).

At Eshowe, Nakasa met Lewis Nkosi, who was to become his mentor, colleague and life-long friend (Brown 2013a; Nicol 1991: 339). "Of Nat I can speak quite frankly. Outside of his own immediate family I probably knew him better than anyone alive today. We practically grew up together in Durban," writes journalist and author Nkosi (1978: 476) in his review of Essop Patel's 1975 publication *The world of Nat Nakasa*. Nakasa and Nkosi, together with Obed Kunene who also carved out a career in journalism, started the school's first student news magazine (Kunene 1979, in Brown 2013a). Eshowe was also the hometown of the newspaper *Ikwezi le Afrika* from 1928-1932 (Switzer & Adhikari 2000: 101), which had the distinction of publishing contributions from pioneer black South African journalist Pixley ka Izaka Seme (Tomaselli & Louw 1991: 40).

In 1953, apartheid again caught up with Nakasa in the form of the Bantu Education Act 47 of 1953 (Brown 2013a; Nicol 1991). Shepherd (1955: 138) sets out the main features of the Act as follows:

> The aim was to inaugurate a new regime in the education of Africans: (1) by a system of apartheid to place the education of the Bantu under the control of the Native Affairs Department, a step which implied taking it away from the control of the Provincial Councils of the Cape, Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal, which had hitherto been responsible for the primary and secondary education of all races and which will still deal with the education of Europeans, Coloureds (mixed-blood) and Indians; and (2) to take Bantu education out of the hands of the Churches and Missions, which have borne the burden of it since its inception about 140 years ago, and to place it in the hands of the Bantu people themselves, through committees or other tribal authorities working under the Department of Native Affairs.

This Act, brain-child of then Minister of Native Affairs, Dr H.F. Verwoerd, was based on the assumption that the previous education system

led to the production of frustrated Africans, who had been made to feel that they were above their community, so that they wanted to become integrated with the life of the European community by obtaining posts in a European setting and through the elimination of Europeans. When this had not happened, it was said, they became rebellious and tried to make their community dissatisfied because of their misdirected and alien ambition (*ibid*.).

Cronjé (1957: 253) describes the reasoning behind the Bantu Education Act as the result of black people being exposed to "a foreign education system … that alienated [them] from [their] own culture. A foreign education system resulted in the Bantu having to struggle, above all else, with mastering a foreign language, one of the official languages [Afrikaans or English] … and [the foreign education system] resulted in learning being external and artificial". The philosophy of the Bantu Education Act was evidently based on the idea of the "noble savage" of Romanticism (see Cranston 1999; Ellingson 2001; Rousseau 1762; amongst others) which refers to the concept of the "natural man" untouched by the influences of civilisation. The apartheid government eventually expanded this philosophy to all walks of life in South Africa, including what reading material black people were allowed to be exposed to (Cronjé 1957). Nakasa (1964, in Patel 2005: 190) also refers to the entire system of "traditional apartheid" as being aimed at "keeping 'savages' in their place".

Shepherd (1955: 139) writes that the Bantu Education Act was criticised "by African people … because they allege that, judging from ministerial speeches, the purpose of Government is to train the majority of African children for a position in life which has been assigned to them – an inferior status".

Despite these challenges, in 1954 at the age of 17, Nakasa beat the odds and became one of only 2% of black people of the era to complete a Junior Certificate (later Standard 8 and currently Grade 10) (Brown 2013a: 26).

After completing school, Nakasa, as required by the pass laws (at that stage the Abolition of Passes and Coordination of Documents Act 67 of 1952), went to the Bantu Affairs office in Durban to apply for his so-called pass book. Fellow tennis fan Theo Zindela was the clerk who had to take down Nakasa's details. The two hit it off and became firm friends. Together with Lews Nkosi the three formed "a trio of angry young men" (Zindela, in Brown 2013a: 29) who liked to discuss politics and literature. In 1955, Zindela and Nkosi formed the Chesterville Cultural Club intent on "carving out a more 'respectable' culture in the poor neighbourhood where they had grown up" (Brown 20013a: 30). During this time, Nakasa gained employment as a labourer at an engineering firm in Durban.

2.4 STARTING OUT IN JOURNALISM

2.4.1 Cub reporter

Although being an "unofficial" employee of *Ilange lase Natal* since the age of four, Nat Nakasa formally joined the newspaper in 1956 – as the "teaboy" (Zindela, in Brown 2013a: 32). His friends Nkosi and Zindela wrangled this appointment after landing reporting jobs at the paper earlier.

Ilanga lase Natal was founded by journalist John Langalibalele Dube in 1903 (Tomaselli & Louw 1991: 18). The newspaper was "politically involved but carefully nurtured a reputation for 'responsibility' and 'moderation'" (*ibid*.) and published "news and commentary of interest to the mission-educated communities" (Tomaselli & Louw 1991: 41). After having various owners through the years (Tomaselli & Louw 1991) and a name-change to *Ilanga* in 1965, the paper was sold to Mandla-Matla, a company controlled by Inkatha, in April 1987, where after the newspaper became a mouthpiece for the Inkatha Freedom Party and Chief Mangosotho Buthelezi (Tomaselli & Louw 1991; Switzer & Adhikari 2000).

When Nkosi moved to Johannesburg to write for *Drum* magazine and the *Golden City Post* newspaper in 1957 (Nicol 1991: 7), Nakasa was appointed as a reporter at *Ilanga lase Natal* (Brown 2013a). He was following in his father's footsteps in becoming a journalist, in as much as a black person could be a journalist in the late 1950s: "[t]he African journalist in most cases is under-paid, over-worked, is hampered with irritating restrictions, and is not free to speak out loud and bold" (Dhlomo, in Brown 2013a: 32-33).

As junior reporter, Nakasa was responsible for "short pieces – profiles, neighbourhood announcements, legal briefings and other miscellania" (Brown 2013a: 32). It also led to his first run-in with the police as a journalist when he was arrested for photographing police officers demanding the pass books of group of men in Durban in 1957. No charges were laid, and the story made the front page of *Ilanga lase Natal* (Brown 2013a: 34).

2.4.2 The road to *Drum*

Nakasa's road to *Drum* seems to have been preordained. While Nkosi led the way to Johannesburg for the two Durban writers, Nakasa's prowess in English literature prompted one of his school teachers, Rolf Sholto-Douglas, to contact one of his (Sholto-Douglas's) former school friends – Sylvester Stein, then editor of *Drum*. Stein, also a former Durban school boy, writes in *Who killed*

Mr Drum? that Sholto-Douglas described Nakasa as "a real prodigy, a black lad with brilliant exam marks in English … [and] practical experience as a reporter" (Stein 2003: Chapter 14).

Stein was impressed enough to travel to Durban to interview Nakasa. The interview mirrored the unusual circumstances of life in South Africa at the end of the 1950s. Stein describes how he suggested they meet at a "favourite picnic spot" of his – on the beach at the river mouth at Amanzimtoti (*ibid.*) as it was a struggle to find a public space where they were both allowed to be, and be seen together (Brown 2013a: 35). The interview lasted an entire afternoon and included swimming, eating oysters from a rock pool and catching sardines as part of the annual sardine run. Stein did not need much persuasion to offer a position as a staff writer to his "prize recruit":

> It was all too good to be true, almost too good for a formal interview … He and I felt closer to humanity, closer to each other, after the joint hunting rite. [Nat] was personable, not overawed by authority and with the typical *Drum* way about him, able to exchange banter about 'The Situation' and not afraid to laugh at himself … Yes, Nat was a fine fellow, Nat was the man. He was friendly to the ANC, which put him in my best books, he had read the classics, and he knew *Drum*, its contents and its writers … His dislikes too put me on his side – especially his contempt for the *Ilanga* newspaper, white-owned and with fawning editorial style (Stein 2003: Chapter 14).

Shortly after the interview, Nakasa was on his way to Johannesburg to become part of his father's "lost generation, the newly urbanised Africans who straddled two worlds and often seemed unable to find their feet in either" (Brown 2013a: 13). This happened at the hands of *Drum* assistant editor Can Themba (1966, in Patel 2005: xviii) "who only sought to divest him of the naiveté and extraneous moralities with which we knew he would be encumbered". Themba took Nakasa in as lodger, and later wrote about their first meeting in an essay, "The boy with the tennis racket", for *The Classic*, a literary magazine established by Nakasa in 1963:

> The story went out that a razor-sharp journalist from Durban was coming to Johannesburg to work in our main office … He came, I remember, in the morning with a suitcase and a tennis racket – ye gods, a tennis racket! Journalism was still new to most of us and we saw it … decidedly not in the light of tennis, which we classed with draughts. He had a puckish, boyish face, and a name something like Nathaniel Nakasa. We soon made it Nat (Themba 1966, in Patel 2005: xviii).

Journalism was not a recognised profession for black men during this period. Stein (2013: Chapter 14) writes that as editor and therefore Nakasa's employer, his first order of business was obtaining a

permit for Nakasa as he was from another province. "We can't have just anybody shoving in, there's thousands of unemployeds (*sic*) on the Rand, who must first be given the chance to apply for the job," is how Stein recounts the reasoning of the official at the Witwatersrand Native Labour Administration offices (*ibid*.). When Stein expressed his dismay of even considering the possibility of finding a suitable local candidate – "where was one to find an experienced black journalist in a country where the average level of African education was graded as Standard Three, equivalent to what white kids tackled aged nine" – he was told to "play the game". This he did by advertising officially and wording the job requirements in a manner that would enable only Nakasa to qualify (*ibid*.).

Had Nakasa applied for a permit to work in the "essential services", administrative red-tape would probably have been less. In his article *Johannesburg, Johannesburg* Nakasa (in Patel 2005: 4) writes about once faking an Oxford accent and pretending to be a white man looking for accommodation for his employee in one of the hostels where "native bachelors" were supposed to live. The white superintendent informed him that they were "only taking special boys now … employed in the essential services: milk delivery boys, sanitation boys, and so on". "Jolly good," Nakasa replied, "my boy is actually quite special … He is a journalist." To which the superintendent replied that they "have to deal with every case according to its merits".

Stein (2003: Chapter 14) writes that "Nat arrived as the clock was ticking away for us. He was last in and was to be one of the first out, though not of his own accord." Nakasa, with a freshly issued pass book allowing him to work in the non-essential services, was dropped into what Nkosi (1965, in Chapman 2001: 184) referred to as "the fabulous decade".

2.5   'THE FABULOUS DECADE'

By most accounts, the 1950s in South Africa were vibrant years:

> [T]he writers and photographers of *Drum*, and the readers who lapped up their words and images, seemed to behave as if anything was possible. They carried themselves with an absurd confidence, as if that drunken wave of freedom that was already pounding across the north and the west and the east of the continent would soon be lapping against the shores of South Africa… (Matshikiza 2000: ix).

John Matshikiza, son of musician, composer and *Drum* writer Todd Matshikiza, wrote these words as part of the introduction to *The Drum decade: Stories from the 1950s*, edited by Michael Chapman (2001). Matshikiza jr was a young boy during the 1950s, but explains how he vividly remembers this unusual decade so accurately captured on the pages of *Drum*. "In a way it was South Africa's hippie

period, everyone sharing peace pipes and throwing flowers and saying Let's all be brothers" (Hart, in Nicol 1991: 4). Mphahlele (in Nicol 1991: 2) also refers to the optimism of the period: "[I]t was a decade of real idealism in all ways."

Nkosi (1965, in Chapman 2001: 184) writes that it was a time of "infinite hope and possibilities … It was a time when it seemed that the sound of police gunfire and jackboot would ultimately become ineffectual against resolute opposition and defiance" (*ibid*.).

However, underneath the hope and energy of the "fabulous decade" flowed the ever-present and ever-increasing threat of apartheid. Choonoo (1997: 252) sums it up:

> This was one of the most turbulent decades in modern South African history. The 1950s witnessed the passing of key apartheid laws, the ruthless expansion and implementation of pass regulations, the reorganization of the reserves, the first forced removals of Africans from the cities, widespread bannings, detentions and the marathon Treason Trial, the 1952 Defiance Campaign and the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress, the massacre at Sharpeville and the imposition of a State of Emergency in 1960.

It was towards the end of the "fabulous decade" that Nakasa joined *Drum* magazine and became part of this vibrant yet tragic period of South Africa's history.

2.5.1   Starting out at *Drum*

Nakasa and photographer Peter Magubane started to work together on a number of stories soon after Nakasa joined *Drum* (Brown 2013a: 69). Together they undertook a number of trips through Southern Africa, leading to articles that in some instances showed *Drum* readers what the world looked like outside the borders of South Africa (*Granny who ruled a nation* and *The number one bachelor and his bride-to-be* focused on Lesotho), while at the same time highlighting a number of similar struggles of neighbouring countries (*Freedom – to lose all* and *Where business men 'must scrub lavatories'* about life in internment camps in Mozambique and *Chief Hosea Kutako* about apartheid in South-West Africa, at that stage a territory of South Africa).

Nakasa, although one of the youngest *Drum* writers, started covering the Treason Trial soon after joining the magazine. In *Treason Trial halts* (Nakasa 1958), he reported on "the most sensational of things" – the Crown team withdrawing the indictment against the 91 accused. Nakasa's first cover story for *Drum* was published in November 1958 (Brown 2013a: 63). The story, *Do blacks hate*

whites? as well as the follow-up in December 1958, *Do whites hate blacks?*, investigated this highly charged relationship (*City Press* 2014; Patel, A.D. 2014). The former article's findings included

> What do black men hate whites for? The overall answer is white insistence on the retention of all power; and their arrogant, untampered, ill-tempered way of exercising that power. This ranges from high acts of government supporters speaking about blacks in Parliament, from high-handed official behaviour and encounters with the police, down to the secure insolence of petty officials and the casual day-to-day heartlessness of many white people.

Nakasa, in the same article (*ibid*.), then asked "Are there, then, no grounds for optimism?" and concluded

> There have, it is said, been some signs of a change in the attitudes of the more thinking section of the white population. It is the thoughtful section of any mass which in the long run influences the whole. But how long is the run and how much time is left for running?

In his article *Do whites hate blacks?* he writes that "few whites were willing to say outright what they felt. They preferred to take refuge in generalisations about what other people felt or did not feel", and then concludes

> What has *Drum* found out in this investigation? What does *Drum* conclude? Without doubt, the overall answer is not white hatred of blacks. Perhaps not even resentment or dislike. It is plain fear. The very word 'fear' appeared more than 30 times in the statements given by 10 of the people interviewed (*ibid*.).

This relationship was another of the dichotomies that characterised Nakasa's life, and often a bone of contention between his *Drum* colleagues and himself. His liberalist approach, influence by his father's world-view of multiracialism, is described by Ngwane (in Patel, A.D. 2014) as

> this bright young man … not willing to take ownership of his blackness. At the time he was seen as an enigma, but post-1994, within the nation, he was seen as a frontier man. He was ahead of everyone … Some called him a coconut of the time. By virtue of his education he was afforded some liberties even though there were these restricting apartheid laws in place.

Thloloe (in Brown 2013a: 64) explains that "when we left the shebeens in town and went home to Soweto, there he [Nakasa] was walking off to the [white] northern suburbs to spend time with Nadine Gordimer and her friends".

Nakasa (1966, in Patel 2005: 4-5) saw himself instead as an interpreter or a type of intermediary or facilitator that helped black people make sense "of the white man's ways because some of my friend where white" and at the same time "[i]n the suburbs, people plied me with questions about Africans". Nkosi (1978: 479) also alluded to this, referring to black journalists of the era and their "vital role as explainers and suppliers of intelligence to an ignorant White public". Multiracialism as one of the main themes in Nakasa's writing is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

Another almost peculiar characteristic of Nakasa, according to his friends and colleagues, was his "lack of skill" at consuming alcohol. *Drum* writer Juby Mayet, one of the few female black journalists at the time, is quoted in Nicol (1991: 340) as saying "he drank, but not as much as the rest of us. I could drink Nat under the table anytime."

Despite his unusual views on race, his frequent trips to neighbouring countries and his inability to keep up in the shebeen, Nakasa, and most of his contemporaries, spent a lot of time in Sophiatown, which, together with District Six in Cape Town (Currey 2008: 196-197), were one of the few places where hope – and defiance – were still alive and well.

2.5.2   Sophiatown

Much of what made the 1950s such a vibrant, hopeful time took place in or was inspired by Sophiatown. As mentioned earlier, Sophiatown was one of the few areas in South Africa where freehold rights were possible (Gready 1990: 141; Brown 2012: 31; Choonoo 1997: 254-255) and "where Africans shared stores, streets and shebeens with people of Chinese, Indian, mixed and even white origins" (Brown 2012: 36). Cato Manor near Durban, where Nakasa grew up, had a similar distinction.

Sophiatown of the 1950s has become almost mythical, and a legend in its own time. Ansell (2011: 35) describes it as "the last outpost of mixed residence and socialising in Johannesburg". What started as a geographical space soon transcended into a "place" or sense of belonging that is often compared to Harlem in America (Nkosi, in Brown 2012: 36; Choonoo 1997: 255), Soho in London and Nevsky Prospect in St Petersburg in Russia (Gready 1990: 140, 142), Greenwich Village in London and Montmartre in Paris (Visser 1976: 47). Nicol (1991: ix) describes it as having "optimism, a strange unreal sense of hope – a milestone in black resistance of white hegemony". This was "the fringe", a space and place described by Nakasa (in Patel 2005: 9) in his article *Between two worlds* (1961) as "a 'No-Man's Land' where anybody meets anybody, to hell with the price of their false teeth, or anything else … The fact of being born into a tribe, be it Afrikaner or African, does not matter on the

fringe. These people who are neither proud nor ashamed of it, are the emergent group in South Africa."

Brown (2013a: 39-40) describes the inhabitants of this "fringe country" as "educated, uninhibited and relentlessly clever … men and women … [who] chose to challenge apartheid … simply by refusing to let it dictate their daily social and intellectual pursuits":

> Central to the existence of fringe country was the idea that freedom did not exist because of government legislation or political rhetoric; it didn't come from mass strikes or participation in 'the struggle'. Instead, freedom was the thing that happened when two black men sat down in a white coffee bar and convinced the proprietor to serve them – a tiny, subversive act that shifted the paradigm, if only for a moment.

These "tiny, subversive acts" relates to the existentialist concept of "being-in-the-world", or Heidegger's *dasein*, a combination of the German words for "there" (da) and "being" (sein) because in his view humans are more than just another type of being; we are distinctive to the extent that we are in a class of our own: we are aware of our being, or existence, and we can determine what we do with it (Heidegger 1927). Through these subversive, often humorous acts, the *Drum* writers found at least one way to *determine* their existence irrespective of their circumstances. This is similar to Dostoyevsky's (1864) Underground Man in *Notes from Underground*, who threatened to "purposely go mad on order to be rid of reason and gain his point". Almost a century later, Dylan Thomas (1951) in a similar vein urged us "not go gentle into that good night… [but to] rage against the dying of the light". These and other elements of existentialism are discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

An important characteristic of Sophiatown's social structure "was its fluidity" (Gready 1990: 141) – residents were predominantly black working class, but the stark racial lines that were evident elsewhere often became blurred in Sophiatown. Class was also not a distinguishing characteristic – "[o]ne could not choose one's neighbours, and the wealthy Mabuzas, Xumas, and Rathebes lived alongside the poor and wretched" (*ibid*.). Nakasa (in Patel 2005: 161-162) also referred to this almost haphazard social and physical structure in *Who was Dr Xuma*, a profile on the former president of the African National Congress (ANC), who lived in Sophiatown with his American wife, Madie-Hall: "… when … slummy Sophiatown was removed under the Group Areas Act … Xuma's modern house was among the few that were not demolished … A white family moved into it as soon as Dr Xuma left."

The *Drum* writers spent most of their time in Sophiatown (Stein 2013; Sampson 1956; 2008; Choonoo 1997). In fact, Stein (2013: Chapter 9) refers to Sophiatown as their "spiritual home". And shebeens such as Back of the Moon and the Thirty-Nine Steps were their actual homes away from home (Sampson 2008: 26) – Nakasa (in Patel 2005: 16) described them as "hospitable homes, often run by solid housewives and respectable men", including "ample Fatsy", the formidable female proprietor of the Thirty-Nine Steps (Sampson 2008: 26). These shebeens were more than mere illegal liquor shops – "the dialogue became so poetic that I sometimes rushed to the lavatory to jot phrases down before I became too drunk and forgetful", writes Sampson (*ibid.*). *Drum* journalist Can Themba's home in Sophiatown was called the House of Truth and was treated by the rest of the staff and their friends as a type of private shebeen. "Blacks and honorary blacks gathered together to debate a thousand topics ranging from Sartre philosophy to the vintages of hootch," writes Stein (2013: Chapter 11).

Although few white people visited the shebeens, there were exceptions. Nakasa (1961, in Patel 2005: 10-11) wrote about "an Afrikaner policeman [who] came to a session at the Crescent. Still draped in uniform, this cop sat pounding the piano to a background of wild, black and white hand-clapping." More notable exceptions included Gordimer, who "spent many evenings with me in the townships" writes Sampson (2008: 29), who describes Gordimer as "my closest friend in white South Africa". Also well-known throughout Sophiatown was Father Trevor Huddleston, an Anglican bishop. Huddleston admired the courage of the *Drum* writers and "sent me promising recruits" (Sampson, *ibid.*; Nakasa 1961, in Patel 2005: 10).

Most of the *Drum* staff, black and white, regularly "crossed the colour line" (Nakasa 1961, in Patel 2005: 9). They lived between two worlds, "crossing between black and white Johannesburg, the two separate cities" (Sampson 2008: 31) because "we believed the best way to live with the colour bar in Johannesburg was to ignore it" (Nakasa 1961, in Patel 2005: 9). Nakasa mentions this "fringe-living … between two worlds" in a number of his stories (cf. *Johannesburg, Johannesburg*, 1964; *Between two worlds*, 1961; *Quite a place, Fourteenth Street*, in Patel 2005). He describes numerous occasions where he would be at a house party in a white suburb one evening, while drinking in a shebeen in Sophiatown the next.

Crossing the colour line, however, eventually caused most who took part in it to question where they belong: "Where do I belong in the South African scheme of things?" asked Nakasa in *It's difficult to decide my identity* (1964, in Patel 2005: 190). Choonoo (1997: 252) describes the Drum *writers* as the "lost generation of urban African writers … their [writings] reveal not only their protest against

white injustice but also, ironically, their growing alienation as intellectuals who would never find a personal place in any community, black or white".

Sampson (2008: 31) admits to the same struggle

> I was often confused, not surprisingly, about where I really belonged. One evening I would be at a sumptuous barbeque party in a mansion in a northern suburb, making lazy and fatuous conversation … The next night I would be in a box house in Soweto drinking raw brandy by candlelight, listening to far more intelligent and lively talk.

Jim Bailey, owner of *Drum*, also lived as if apartheid didn't exist, but in a more "aloof" manner (cf. Sampson 2008: 31-32). Bailey's son Prospero, in an interview with Philip (2011: 14) said "my father lived in two worlds, and he seemed able to cross from one to the other without a problem". In fact, Sampson (*ibid.*) states that Bailey, while enjoying "excursions to shebeens and discovering low dives … maintained a cool detachment". Sampson (*ibid.*) describes Bailey's approach as that of an observer, "pressing others to play the drinkers' game … but staying sober himself, watching their antics".

Several authors (cf. Choonoo 1997; Nicol 1991; Chapman 2001; Gready 1990) refer to the influence of African-American political and cultural traditions, especially on urban black South Africans. Influential African-American writers such as Langston Hughes was published in *Drum*, and the "almost" Renaissance of the fifties (Visser 1976) in South Africa is likened to the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s in the United States. In fact, Choonoo (1997: 255) traces this influence back to at least the 1880s. Leonard (2009: 182) refers to a letter written by South African pioneer journalist Pixley ka Seme to Alain L. Locke, primary architect of the Harlem Renaissance, in 1907, while both studied at Oxford. The Harlem Renaissance is described as one of the world's most influential cultural movements (Leonard 2009: 182). Its influence stretches across all walks of life, including literature, music, art, film and politics. Although Leonard (2009) argues that the two men's views differed on what an African Renaissance would constitute (Seme arguing for universal values, with Locke viewing values as changing), an obvious line from Harlem to South Africa can be traced, with Seme returning to South Africa in 1910 and becoming an influential figure in the ANC. He was also the founder of the newspaper and ANC mouthpiece *Abantu-Batho* in 1912 (cf. Switzer 1997: 30-31). Leonard (2009: 184) posits that Seme gained an understanding of the power of literature and popular media from Locke.

In Sophiatown of the 1950s the American influence was especially evident in the popularity of "musicians like Duke Ellington, singers like Lena Horne, and boxers like Jack Johnson and Joe Louis" (Choonoo 1997: 255). It permeated not only films, sport and music, but also language and lifestyle. Nakasa, in *Snatching at the good life* (in Patel 2005: 36), writes about the prestige attached to owning an American car:

> [T]he number of large American cars never fails to amaze outsiders. There are streets in which every other house has a car in the yard. Admittedly, some of them don't go, but they are there all the same. The man of the house is able to say, 'You can't miss my place, there's a black Chev in the yard,' even if the poor thing has been on bricks for a decade.

Choonoo (1997: 256) posits that the Americanisation of the urban black culture was accelerated by an influx in American investments in the booming post-war South African economy, with "American consumer goods, movies, jazz records, comics, pulp novels … [that] were cheap and appealed to both the township masses and the African elite. *Drum* and the *Golden City Post* widely advertised such goods, and some of the short stories they printed exploited an American idiom to attract readers." A recurring element in these stories is that of the gangster as portrayed in America films that were popular during this era. Nicol (1991: 61-62) describes a photo taken by *Drum* photographer Bob Gosani (Bailey's African History Archive n.d.):

> In the foreground is a flashy left-hand-drive Cadillac coupé occupied by five men … The gangsters are all wearing Woodrow hats and white shirts. The coupé is one of the few cars they ever bought. It is new, shiny, the chrome trim and white-walled tyres gleaming. It idles in the rutted Sophiatown street, a stark contrast to the shacks of corrugated iron, the boarded-up windows and the litter that are its props … [the man in the passenger seat] lounges in the luxury of the car, his hat tilted back … a half-smoked cigarette in his mouth. His name is Kort Boy. His gang is known as the 'Americans'.

Other gangs included the Russians, the Berliners, the Gestapo, the Vultures, the Spoilers and the Crimson League. Far from merely "acting out" their favourite movies, most of these gangsters were serious criminals. They were also a favourite topic with several articles published in *Drum*. Journalist Arthur Maimane, who sometimes wrote under the by-line Arthur Mogale, eventually had to flee for his life:

> I left South Africa because I knew I would be killed by the gangsters if I lived there any longer. I was fairly safe at the beginning but after I had done one story on one of them they put a contract out for my life and I decided that I had stuck my neck out enough times for *Drum* (Maimane, in Nicol 1991: 115-116).

Violent crime also claimed the life of probably the most well-known and arguably the best of the *Drum* writers – Mr Drum, Henry Nxumalo – on New Year's Eve in 1956. He died from stab wounds but his death was never investigated (Nicol 1991: 13; cf. Stein 2013). However, it was speculated (Nicol 1991: 13) that he was killed by either tsotsis or gangsters, or as a result of an investigation "Mr Drum" was conducting into illegal abortions.

Township South Africa of the 1950s, writes (Nicol 1991: ix), was "… a deadly world … There was misery, suffering, violence and poverty there". Nicol (1991: 42) describes one of the first (of many) *Drum* articles on crime and gangsters in Sophiatown, titled *Inside Johannesburg's underworld* that included a photograph of Victoria Road in Sophiatown: "[t]he caption calls it murder street, 'where no decent African dares walk alone at night'". The article then continues to describe especially Sophiatown as "the new Chicago" (cf. Choonoo 1997: 256) and states that "[c]rimes against Europeans are widely known, and bad enough; but the crimes by Africans against Africans are worse by far, and a staggering indictment of the conditions and circumstances that have brought them about" (*ibid*.). The "conditions and circumstances" referred to here were not only "legal apartheid" as Nicol (1991: 5) calls it but also the psychological impact of living in the "unreal reality" (Gready 1990) of Sophiatown where the hope brought about by possibility was crushed daily by simply going to work elsewhere in Johannesburg. These conditions and circumstances became the perfect breeding ground for tsotsis, writes Nxumalo (1951, in Chapman 2001: 18) in the *Drum* article *The birth of a tsotsi*: "…the amount of crime in a city varies with the well-being or poverty of the mass of its citizens. With the grinding poverty and the sea of squalor that surrounds the 'Golden City' … there is a struggle for existence, and the individual intends to survive".

In *Victims of the knifemen* Nakasa (in Patel 20015: 44) reports on his observations during a weekend at the casualty department of Johannesburg's Baragwanath Hospital:

> Ugly, gaping wounds … bleeding faces torn with axes … back and stomachs slashed with bush knives … broken limbs … scores of mourning wives and children whose daddies were beaten up in the street, made to crawl home bleeding, naked, robbed of their pay packets! That is the week-end output of the Jo'burg beat-up men.

Sampson (2008: 27) describes Sophiatown as

> an impossible place for normal family life, with its people jammed up against each other in hovels, sheds or shacks – even in an old tram. It was a young people's world, where a boy could feel old at ten and be dead by thirty; and Sophiatowners liked to recite the motto 'live

fast, die young and leave a beautiful corpse' – from their favourite movie, *Knock on Any Door*. In other countries Sophiatown would have been condemned as a dangerous slum, to be bulldozed in the name of hygiene and safety. But under an apartheid government it acquired a special magic as the urban melting-pot where blacks were mixed up with other races and connected with a wider world, to create a multiracial culture, language and self-expression.

In the end, the bulldozers did come – although not in the name of hygiene and safety – with the first families removed under the Group Areas Act in February 1955 (Cook 2011: 55). Stein (2013: Chapter 11) describes it as follows:

> The razing of Sophiatown ranks as the second greatest mistake made by the blind and brutal government in all its forty years of violence, second in callousness and ineptitude only to the massacre at Sharpeville … For the inhabitants of the wretched, decaying suburb itself the demolishing of Sophiatown was the ultimate bum's rush, hustling them by bulldozer out of their homes and almost twenty miles across country to 'bantu' ghettoes in the veld.

For a while though, Sophiatown became a revolutionary movement of its own, a place that allowed for "political freedom that gave rise to meetings, marches, boycotts, stayaways and strikes" (Nicol 1991: ix), a "charmed enclave of civilisation" (Stein 2013: Chapter 11). Stein (*ibid*.) opines that it was this civility that "drove the whites to so very wilfully force through this eviction … it [Sophiatown] offended them [the whites], the opportunity that it offered for blacks to comport themselves as human beings". Stein (*ibid*.) goes on to find behind the façade of apartheid "the true reason of suppressing and diminishing the blacks; you will find hard economics, the raw economics of colonialism, which some call greed".

Eventually the forced removal of its residents and the eventual destruction of Sophiatown became the physical manifestation of Visser's (1976: 42) "Renaissance that failed". During its halcyon days, however, life in Sophiatown made it "possible to believe that the state owned a little less of your soul" (Gready 1990: 142). This initial exuberance created a space where a magazine such as *Drum* could thrive, and which saw the coming of age of the *Drum* generation of writers (cf. Gready 1990; Nicol 1991; Chapman 2001).

2.5.3 *Drum* magazine

The first edition of the magazine initially known as *The African Drum* was published in March 1951 (Van der Merwe 2011: 11). Some authors refer to Robert Crisp, journalist and cricketer as founder (Nicol 1991: 25) with Jim Bailey, son of Randlord Sir Abe Bailey buying the magazine from Crisp

in 1951, while other authors (Van der Merwe 2011: 11) list Crisp and Bailey as co-founders with Bailey initially just as minority investor (Sampson 2008: 20). According to Chapman (2001: 186), *The African Drum* was the result of a three-man consortium, including Crisp and Bailey, as well as Cape Town lawyer Robin Stratford (Nicol 1991: 25; Sampson 2008: 19-20).

Crisp was the first editor of *The African Drum*, and his approach had "an educative, even a moralizing air" (Chapman 2001: 186). Van der Merwe (2011: 11) states that the initial publication subscribed to the "colonial notion of the African as 'noble savage' … and [t]opics covered … were … mildly patronising fare". Sampson (2008: 20) writes that Crisp "conceived [*African Drum*] as a noble expression of the black soul, filled with folktales, poetry and extracts from Alan Paton's new book, *Cry, the Beloved Country*". Articles on soil erosion, farming, religion and African art with a rural focus were published. Bailey soon realised, as Chapman (2001: 187) puts it, that "Crisp did not grasp the full extent of the urbanizing process". After the first four issues, circulation dropped from 24 000 to 16 000 (Nicol 1991: 25) and the future of *The African Drum* looked bleak.

Bailey took over as sole publisher in the second half of 1951. He moved operations from Cape Town to Johannesburg and appointed British literature scholar Anthony Sampson, initially as circulation manager, and later as editor (Sampson 2008: 17). Bailey explained his decision to remove Crisp and appoint Sampson as "it seemed better to have for an editor a man who did not know the African world, and knew that he did not know it, than to have a White South African, however well-intentioned, who was convinced that he know it and thus could learn nothing" (Sampson 2008: 20).

Bailey's first order of business, after shortening the name of the magazine to *Drum* (Van der Merwe 2011: 11), was to appoint an African Advisory Board in order to "get rid of the white hand" and change the magazine into a publication for black people instead of "what white men wanted blacks to be" (Nicol 1991: 27; cf. Chapman 2001: 187; Sampson 2008: 21). According to Nicol (1991: 28; cf. Chapman 2001: 187-188) the first advisory board consisted of:

- Job Rathebe, Johannesburg business man, social worker, chairperson of the Transvaal Boxing Board, and secretary of the Bantu Men's Social Centre;
- Dan Twala, sports commentator and founder member of the Soccer Federation;
- Dr Alfred B. Xuma, a former ANC President-General and medical doctor from Sophiatown; and
- Andy Anderson, a printer who prepared pamphlets for Congress.

The "new" *Drum*'s personality reflected the era, with "hot dames, jazz, pin-ups, and sport" (Nicol 1991: 26; Sampson 2008: 20) as staple. Tomaselli and Louw (1991: 23) refer to this approach as "'gee whiz' journalism". Bailey and Sampson wanted *Drum* to portray the political events of the era as well as "capturing the 'real' feelings and tones of black urban living" (Chapman 2001: 186). Gready (1990: 142) writes that *Drum* was in essence the embodiment of Sophiatown; Makatile (2011: 71) sums it up: "Sophiatown was *Drum*; *Drum* was Sophiatown … [it] is difficult to say which of the two made the other. Clearly they had a symbiotic relationship" (cf. Stein 2013: Chapter 11).

Drum's "personality" also reflected the personality of Jim Bailey. Bailey was by all accounts an enigmatic character (cf. Nicol 1991; Sampson 1956, 2008; Stein 2013). Bailey's son Beezy, in an interview with Philip (2011: 14), described *Drum* and his father as two sides of the same coin: "*Drum* was an extension of my father. Like him, *Drum* was an independent anarchist; the eccentric upstart who wanted to kick convention in the backside." Jim Bailey was born in Johannesburg in 1919. As son of mining magnate Abe Bailey he had a privileged upbringing. Bailey was an adventurer at heart, and served as a Royal Air Force pilot during the Second World War. According to Beezy Bailey (*ibid*.) his father's many adventures included being shot down by a German fighter, receiving death threats and surviving an assassination attempt in South Africa: "My father was optimistic about any country where people were brave enough to take to the streets to fight for their freedom." One could argue that it was Bailey's inherent spirit of adventure combined with his admiration of bravery that brought him to the point where, despite being white in South Africa of the 1950s, he "could launch a magazine for blacks and still be deaf to howling ironies and paradoxes … keep it going … reach a six-figure circulation … and, for a while, succeed in putting together a publishing empire across Africa" (Nicol 1991: 22). Maybe his travels and exposure to different cultures and countries made him aware that "people most apt to devour mass media are exactly the people usually considered the most important in shaping the future of their countries" (Hachten (1971: 17, quoting a U.S. Information Agency survey). Or, as Swift (in Sutton 2006: *Foreword*) argues,

> There are two schools of thought on Jim Bailey. Some, myself included, believe he provided a vital outlet for emerging black writers, journalists and photographers and in so doing created the beginnings of a mass black reading audience across English-speaking Africa. Others believe he was less interested in his audience than in his bank balance and posterity. As with all such controversies, the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle and the jury will remain out on Bailey's contribution to African journalism until other *Drum* writers and photographers around the continent write their memoirs and until the media academics and biographers pick over the bones of *Drum* and its late publisher.

It remains, however, that Bailey was a complicated man. Nicol (1991: 23) writes about "legends of hard drinking, of seemingly endless parties, of meanness, generosity, wilfulness and a pig-headed attitude that ended in bad words with practically everybody who worked for him". According to Mervis (1989: 244) Bailey lost a good deal of money through his publishing ventures in Africa, but "that did not seem to concern Jim Bailey. It was his purpose to educate, enlighten, amuse and entertain black people; he succeeded magnificently. His contribution to literacy among blacks is probably greater than that of any other individual South African."

Bailey met Anthony Sampson at Oxford, where both were students during the late 1940s. Sampson (2008: 17) recounts receiving a telegram from Jim Bailey on Good Friday in 1951: "ARE YOU IMMEDIATELY AVAILABLE JOB NEW NEGRO PERIODICAL IN CAPE TOWN FIFTY POUNDS MONTH SAY YES JIM BAILEY". This was the start of what Sampson (2008: 41) initially described as "yet another story of a young white man's self-discovery by losing himself in Africa", only to realise later "that my view of the world … had been turned upside down by my Johannesburg experience and would never revert; and I would never imagined that South Africa would remain a consuming interest for the rest of my life".

Although Sampson (*ibid*.), at his farewell party after four years at *Drum*, said "I didn't make *Drum*, *Drum* made me", much of what was to become quintessential *Drum* was established under the editorship of Sampson from 1951-1955 (Gready 1990: 144). In turn, Sampson (in Stein 2013: *Foreword*) credits the *Drum* writers for the fact that "the magazine maintained such a continuous and consistent character under three editors who were so thoroughly different". He also acknowledges the "complex and lively personality" of proprietor Bailey and his vision for *Drum* as laying the foundation for the distinctive character of the magazine.

Sampson (2008: 21) writes that he was advised by his friend and fellow journalist Michael Davie from the *Observer* in London not to be "highbrow about using sex, the royal family and babies and animals to pull circulation". However, this approach was novel to South Africa's conservative approach to journalism. In addition, it was based on a philosophy that was the diametrical opposite of the philosophy on which apartheid was based. Sampson (2008: 21) refers to the "vulgar *Drum* with its cover girls, crime stories and lonely hearts" as implying that "urban Africans were much like city people everywhere".

The "vulgar *Drum*" approach was to prove successful, and *Drum* soon had offices operating in the rest of Africa "from where special copy was despatched to Johannesburg to be included in an

'international' edition of *Drum*, which was aimed at the African market outside South Africa" (Chapman 2001: 191). Switzer (1997: 41) writes that two independent editions of *Drum* were produced in West Africa in Ghana and Nigeria, as well as in East Africa in Kenya. At the start of Sampson's editorship in 1951, *Drum*'s circulation stood at 20 710. By 1955, it was 73 657 – the largest single-circulation magazine in Africa in any language (Choonoo 1997: 257). By 1969, *Drum* had a circulation of 470 000 (Tomaselli & Louw 1991: 23). In fact, the international edition of *Drum* was so popular that noted Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka (in Fleming 2011: 117) claimed "a generation of Nigerian readers was weaned on *Drum* magazine". Fleming (2011: 118) posits that *Drum* was a pan-Africanist product "that facilitated connections between readers across the African continent … *Drum*'s coverage and editorials lobbied for African independence, held leaders accountable and aimed to keep countries on the right track."

Illustrating the power of mass media is probably Bailey and Sampson's biggest *Drum* legacy, with Sampson turning a "magazine barely three years old" into "already a mature and mighty little urchin" by the time Sylvester Stein took over as editor (Stein 2013: Chapter 3). In fact, Stein (*ibid*.) writes that his new job came with a manual in the form of the manuscript of Sampson's book *Drum*, which presented Stein with "the complete history of the paper's early struggles … who was who on my staff, and a thing or two about how to manage the proprietor, the formidable Jim Bailey". Stein was editor from 1956-1957. His immediate challenge was the fact that Bailey chose the time of Stein's appointment to launch his new venture, *Golden City Post*, a tabloid Sunday newspaper, which meant that Stein "effectively lost most of the editorial staff [of *Drum*]" (*ibid*.).

Stein came to *Drum* from *Rand Daily Mail*, a white English liberal newspaper. Stein, also a "restless" spirit (Nicol 1991: 258), was editor for less than two years. During this time he often butted heads with Bailey over "editorial integrity", specifically over a decision by Bailey not to publish an edition of *Drum* with a cover photo of a white tennis player kissing a black tennis player (Nicol 1991: 258-259). Stein (2013: Chapter 15) writes that he was "infuriated at this flouting of editorial independence, no surer way to corrupt a magazine's integrity … This was a mighty important issue; in particular ours being a political paper we couldn't have a proprietor taking this sort of decision." Stein resigned and the "crisis" at *Drum* garnered a lot of press coverage. Stein (*ibid*.) recounts that Ruth First, editor of *Fighting Talk*, was supportive, while the publications of the predominantly Afrikaans Nasionale Pers "were very abusive and confrontational". Against the backdrop if this study, Stein was an important role-player in Nakasa's story, as described earlier, as he appointed Nakasa at *Drum* and effectively launched Nakasa's career.

After Stein left, *Drum* was edited by Can Themba, Jurgen Schadeberg and Humphrey Tyler for nine months before Tom Hopkinson took over to edit the magazine from 1958-1961 (Nicol 1991: 8; 346). Sampson (in Stein 2013: *Foreword*) describes Hopkinson as "a distinguished British editor, with an imaginative and fastidious eye for good photography and layouts, who gave the magazine new standards". Hopkinson had years of experience working for Britain's *Picture Post* and, through Bailey, consulted on layout matters for *Drum* for quite some time before joining the magazine as editor (Nicol 1991: 347). He brought with him an organised, more formal approach which, posits Nicol (*ibid*.), "was just what *Drum* didn't need" as the strength of the magazine was in its "wild bloodthirsty abandonment" (Nicol 1991: 347, quoting Stein). Schadeberg (in Nicol 1991: 348) claims that Hopkinson "had this British Labour Party idea of society which was totally unrealistic for South Africa … he didn't understand South Africa". Hopkinson (in Nicol 1991: 348) readily admitted to these accusations, but didn't see it as a handicap as he sought to bring structure to the "chaos in the newsroom … I [wanted] this to be a top-class magazine". Sampson (1956: 226) remarks on Hopkinson's skill in terms of picture-journalism "which showed the full political impact of events" in South Africa.

After Hopkinson's resignation in 1961 (Van der Merwe 2011: 13) – according to Nicol (1991: 350) money was a constant issue between Hopkinson and Bailey – *Drum*'s history hit a difficult period. The effects of the Sharpeville Massacre (discussed later in this chapter) caused the National Party government to become "more relentless and harsh in its enforcement of the apartheid statutes" (Van der Merwe 2011: 13). Circulation started to decline to the extent that *Drum* appeared only as a supplement to Bailey's Sunday tabloid *Golden City Post* by 1965. At this stage, most of the original *Drum* writers were either in exile, or dead.

In 1968, the magazine was relaunched but it would never again rise to its former glory. During this time, *Drum* was edited by the editors of *Golden City Post*, including Philip Selwyn-Smith, Cecil Eprile and George Oliver (*ibid*.). Notable amongst these, mostly for his notoriety, is Cecil Eprile, described by Stein (2013: Chapter 4) as "a creepy man … an early tabloid editor … dedicated to the slaying of immorality wherever it might be found, in the process dealing morality itself a death blow". During the 1960s, Eprile was unmasked as "a paid US spy for the CIA" (*ibid*.).

In the late 1970s, *Drum* did manage to regain some of its former character, with Tony Sutton as editor and Kerry Swift as news editor (Van der Merwe 1961: 13). A memorable edition was *Drum* of August 1976, published soon after the Soweto riots on 16 June 1976. Sutton (2006) writes that this issue was "judged so inflammatory that the government didn't just follow its normal practice and ban the issue

from sale, but made possession of it a criminal offence, an action that was usually reserved for the loudest of the hard-core political journals". Another incident that took place during Sutton's tenure also immortalised *Drum* – the November 1977 issue that carried an article on the death of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko in police detention. Sutton (2006) explains that *Drum* had no photos of Biko on file and Sutton had to persuade Donald Woods of the *Daily Dispatch* to send him a couple of black and white photos. From these, freelance artist Alex Groen created the now-famous photo-illustration of Biko – "it has become one of the most reproduced covers in *Drum*'s history" (*ibid*.).

During the late 1970s and the early years of the 1980s, *Drum* was embroiled in a battle against a rival magazine, *Pace*, launched in January 1979. *Pace* was eventually unmasked as a publication secretly funded by the apartheid government's Department of Information (Van der Merwe 2011: 13; Sutton 2006).

In 1984, Bailey, in a surprising twist, sold *Drum* to Afrikaans publishing group Nasionale Pers (Sutton 2006), who publishes the magazine, now an entertainment weekly, to this day. Bailey (in Van der Merwe 2011: 13) explained his reasoning behind selling *Drum* as follows:

> To be pinned between the South African censor, the demands of the white advertisers and white advertising agents, the three huge newspaper groups and now an opponent backed by the unlimited cash of the government, was to be put in an impossible position.

In Sutton's (2006) analysis of *Drum*'s final years under Bailey, and his decision to sell the magazine, he writes:

> Was the battle worth the effort and the ruined reputations? With 25 years' hindsight, there are two answers. Politically, yes, it was absolutely the right thing to do; it's our duty as journalists – and citizens – to do all in our power to prevent government from subverting the independent media, unless we enjoy the idea of living under an authoritarian dictatorship. But, it's probably fair to say that once *Pace* had been launched, all our shouting had little significant effect on the magazine's [*Pace*] circulation … Conversely, despite all its cash, *Pace* didn't kill *Drum* as its founders had threatened – in fact, *Drum* thrived, our issues during the early '80s regularly hitting 160 pages with the circulation peaking at around 140 000 copies a month, almost triple those of its fortnightly issues five years earlier. And, of course, *Drum* is still alive today …

2.6   THE RELEVANCE OF *DRUM*

More than 60 years later, the *Drum* generation, and specifically the writing from this golden era, remain relevant. Kerry Swift, *Drum* news editor during the 1970s, writes that the fact "that *Drum* holds a special place in South African journalism is incontrovertible. The number of books, academic papers, articles and movies that turn on *Drum* suggests that it fills an important space in African journalism" (Swift, in Sutton 2006: *Foreword*). Ferial Haffajee, South African journalist and current editor (as of the time of writing, August 2015) of another Jim Bailey venture, *City Press*, agrees that

> "[t]he *Drum*-era journalism was path-defining … It was fresh, it was different, it was brave … it was campaigning … Jim Bailey and the *Drum* generation are people I studied all my life. I try, successfully at some times and unsuccessfully at other times, to learn from them. It was Bailey and the journalists of the time … that famous generation of journalists who launched my personal aspirations (Haffajee, in De Waal 2012).

Sampson (in Stein 2013: *Foreword*) states that this enduring relevance is testimony to the quality of the writers and the authenticity with which they wrote about township life. In addition, Sampson (*ibid.*) adds the prose "reflected the extraordinary creativity of an age when writers, despite or because of the miseries and humiliations of apartheid, felt impelled to maintain their human spirit and values with a compassion and ironic humour which defied the encroachments of the police state".

In addition to extensive academic publication on the writing of the *Drum* generation, as well as the autobiographies of those involved with *Drum* over the years, numerous authors have written about the influence of *Drum*. Issues, both positive and negative, range from *Drum*'s treatment of women as sex objects (Choonoo 1997) to the magazine's portrayal of fatherhood (Clowes 2002); literature and social control (Dobson 1974); the Sophiatown writers as literary generation (Gready 1990); the symbiotic relationship between *Drum* and Sophiatown (Hannerz 1994); *Drum*'s contribution to black literature (Masilela 1990); historical perspectives (Keany 2010); cultural imagination, politics and transnationalism (Odhiambo 2006), advertising, race and gender (Rauwerda 2007); *Drum*'s influence on the development of the African film industry (Krings 2010); the gangster-figure in *Drum* (Fenwick 1996); the magazine's contribution to the humanist photographic essay (Newbury 2007); and *Drum*'s use of and references to Shakespeare (Distiller 2003), to name a few.

For the purpose of this study, the relevance of *Drum* is discussed with reference to *Drum* as social conscience, the magazine's distinctive style as well as *Drum*'s extra-textual significance.

2.6.1 *Drum* as social conscience

In part, *Drum*'s approach of sex, crime and sport was the result of Sampson's lack of journalism experience: "I had no alternative but to let black journalists tell their own stories, which they did with a vigour and freshness which broke all the rules but reflected the true life and spirit of the township" (Sampson 2008: 21). This focus was criticised by some of the *Drum* writers. *Drum* literary editor Es'kia Zeke Mphahlele (in Sampson 2008: 30) was dissatisfied with *Drum*'s "arbitrary standard of what the urban African wants to read: sex, crime and love stories; its use of Sophiatown as the yardstick of what the South African non-white should read".

In contrast, Chapman (2001: 183) posits that *Drum* was elevated above "pulp fiction" because of its writers' "concern … with moral and social questions". *Drum* wasn't just pin-up girls and jazz. The magazine's first black journalist, Henry Nxumalo, wrote an investigative article about forced labour on farms in the Bethal district (Stein 2013: Chapter 1; Ledwaba 2011: 49). Sampson (2008: 23) describes this investigation as "the first time I realised that *Drum* could have a serious influence". With this, Sampson established an approach which Stein (2013: Chapter 3) later described as "something of a challenge I'd inherited on taking over the magazine … to work up a feature with world impact from time to time". Nxumalo, writing as Mr Drum, undertook most of the investigative reporting until he was murdered in 1957 (Stein 2013; Sampson 1956: 225, *Afterword to the 2005 edition*). "[W]ith Henry's daredevilries, the first cracks started to appear. People of influence slowly became enlightened and concerned and started to enlighten others in turn," writes Stein (2103: Chapter 1).

Although not its primary focus (cf. Van der Merwe 2011: 12), *Drum* covered politics at length, though in a manner "guardedly sympathetic to ANC policies" (Choonoo 1997: 253). Sampson (2008: 33; 37) writes that white newspapers, especially in the early 1950s, largly ignored black politics, which meant that these publications did not pick up on "black politicians becoming more militant … which gave *Drum* a special opportunity". With the launch of the ANC's passive resistance campaign in December 1951, leading up to the Defiance Campaign, *Drum* reported on the activities throughout (*ibid*.). This resulted in Sampson commissioning Nelson Mandela, at that stage chief volunteer of the Defiance Campaign, to write an article for *Drum*. *We defy* (Mandela 1952: 56) was the first of a number of contributions from the eventual first democratically-elected black president of South Africa (Sampson: 2008: 35).

In Chapman's (2001: 194) analysis of *Drum*, he points out that *Drum* utilised a tactic of "social exposé" rather than investigative reporting: "[t]he magazine did not adopt a revolutionary voice, but appealed to authority in the name of civilized values and better race relations". This approach is in

line with Merrill's existential journalism (discussed in chapter 4), with *Drum* writers often using personal testimony in their stories, and suggesting or at least pointing towards solutions. Chapman (2008: 195) writes that this approach as "the ameliorative voice of social conscience" was the only way in which *Drum* writers could "indict white-ruled society while accepting the gatekeeping of 'responsible' white entrepreneurship" – a case of hiding in plain sight. *Drum* journalist, poet and author Mongane Wally Serote (in Brown 2013a: 47) describes their writing as "showing the evils of apartheid without directly condemning it". Keany (2010: 23) offers a similar observation, writing that *Drum* "indirectly indicted apartheid". Nkosi (1978: 479) calls it an "oblique, allusive style, as incisive as it was sometimes tendentious, schooled in laughter and mockery, while remaining 'purified' of the polemical extremities of radical politics".

The conclusion regarding this "indirect" style of writing is supported when taking into account that journalists "who worked on Bailey's publications apparently were forbidden to participate actively in politics" (Tomaselli & Louw 1991: 23, quoting Switzer & Switzer 1979). In comparison, Choonoo (1997: 253-254) posits that these journalists "chose to be independent, nonpartisan observers", but he also mentions "their contradictory position of writing piercing criticisms of white ignorance while at the same time sharing with them [white liberals] common middle-class values".

This brings us again to the "manifestation of contradictions" (Patel 2005: v) as a primary characteristic of the life of not only Nat Nakasa, but most of the *Drum* generation: forever balancing on the fine line – in this instance the colour line – "between two worlds" (Nakasa 1961) in "the country of paradox" (Nicol 1991: 257). In *Drum*'s journalism this manifested in what Chapman (2001: 195) refers to as "disjunctures of narrative intention" where heroes are villains and villains are heroes, or "protagonists who hover on the margins of so-called social respectability", all because of legislation that turned black people into "criminals without crime" (Nakasa, in Patel 2005: 33). Even the magazine's character was a contradiction, the result of *Drum*'s "ability to straddle the line between cheerleader for African nationalist causes and condemning critic of the continent's most corrupt dictators" (Fleming 2011: 119).

Chapman (2001: 185-186) posits that *Drum*, in shaping and conveying the textures of the "black experience", provided a social barometer of the decade by "tapping the most urgent currents of life in the townships of the Witwatersrand, from soccer and boxing to the politics of African nationalism … [by] combining a commercial image with journalism of heightened awareness". And, in communicating the black experience, *Drum* achieved what owner Bailey set out to do, namely "to create an African language, an African way to communicate" (Philip 2011: 14).

2.6.2   The *Drum* style

Defining the *Drum* style remains elusive. Gready (1990: 144) writes that "the line between hack journalist, sensitive reporter, and creative artist was blurred in *Drum*". Sampson (2008: 24) describes the writing style and language of *Drum* as follows:

> The *Drum* writers all told stories with a natural narrative vitality and a mastery of English which they acquired at mission schools, but which had been invigorated by the slang of the townships and the daily dramas of dangerous lives. Compared to the reined-in literary prose of most white South African writers, their language had a freshness which came from their streets and communities, and which made the words spring out of the page. Their stories … was the expression of a people who were embracing city life … with a creativity and energy which carried its own political message … I felt more certain that it did not come from a defeated race: they were bound to win their freedom.

Mphahlele (in Chapman 2001: 183) describes "the style of the fifties" as

> racy, agitated, impressionistic, it quivered with a nervous energy, a caustic wit. Impressionistic because our writers feel life at the basic levels of sheer survival, because blacks are so close to physical pain, hunger, overcrowded public transport, in which bodies chafe and push and pull.

Visser (1976: 48), in a frank description, writes that *Drum* was

> an incredible mixture of yellow-press and penetrating social and political analysis, genuine literature and the most ephemeral trash imaginable. The writers' … contributions are particularly striking for two reasons. The first is their language … theirs was a truly African English. Secondly, there is a strong American influence on the style and subject matter of the writing.

In addition to the "style of the fifties" as described above, the *Drum* writers each brought their own style and posture as well. For most, their lives and careers as journalists were characterised by three elements: most of them received a missionary education, most of them lived in Sophiatown at one stage or another, and all of them were at the receiving end of apartheid (Visser 1976: 46). But they were far from a homogeneous group. Choonoo (1997: 253), in a short overview of the style of the *Drum* writers, explains that their upbringing (from urban to rural and in different provinces), various tribal and clan associations and general exposure meant that they provided their readers with wide-ranging writing styles, focal points, genres and styles. For example, Nakasa (together with Mhpahlele

and Modisane) wrote "many short pieces that offered an impression of daily life for the average Sophiatownian" (*ibid*.).

Visser (1976: 51) posits that these writers, essentially middle-class but restricted to the physical and social environment of a township, "were aware that they can provide an inside view of a life virtually unknown to their middle-class readers". Choonoo (1997: 260) adds to this the problematic that *Drum* had two distinct "and essentially incompatible audiences – the working-class African, and the liberal white and black petty bourgeois elite":

> For working-class readers, they wrote short, entertaining stories in which they championed the resilient survivors or apartheid … For petty bourgeois readers, in particular white readers, they sought to use their stories to stir protest against the conditions wrought by apartheid. In essence, these literary journalists wrote stories to appeal to readers who sought to escape the reality of pain, but at the same time they sought to stir the consciences of readers who needed to be made aware of the pain.

Drum often published short stories as well as more conventional journalism. Choonoo (1997: 259) states that, between 1951 and 1958, *Drum* published more than 90 "short stories and 'opinion pieces' in which writer-reporters used the conventions of the short story form to capture the charged atmosphere of the urban townships". However, as Chapman (2001: 195) argues, "the entire *Drum* writing exercise forces us to examine assumptions about story-telling forms and purposes" with most of these short stories based on the *Drum* writers' real-life experiences. In several instances the line between the "social exposés", or investigative articles, and short stories was blurred, with articles including "several conventions of the fictional approach, such as the colloquial story-teller's opening remarks, descriptive evocations and the introduction of particular testimony" (*ibid*.). Chapman (2001: 196) quotes short fiction theorist Frank O'Connor as saying that a reader can get verisimilitude – or the appearance of being true – from a newspaper report. Chapman (*ibid*.) also refers to Lawrence's three ways of telling a story:

- historically – primarily recording the matter-of-fact nature of things as they happened;
- dramatically – seeking a single effect; or
- didactically – in effort to teach a lesson.

Against this background, a number of articles and short stories in *Drum* can be seen as examples of what is described as "literary journalism". Visser (1976: 43) posits that the journalist-author (or writer-reporter) "has become very nearly the paradigm of the black South African writer", going back to journalists and writers such as Sol T. Plaatje (1916: 17) who described his purpose as a journalist

as a "private inquiry … a sincere narrative of a melancholy situation, in which, with all its shortcomings, I have endeavoured to describe to difficulties of the South African natives under a very strange law, so as most readily to be understood by the sympathetic reader". Visser (1976: 49) posits that the *Drum* style was similar to the American New Journalism: "*Drum* writers were working in the mode [New Journalism] at least as long as their American counterparts who gave it its name."

A line can be drawn from New Journalism to literary journalism (also called literary nonfiction or creative nonfiction). Weber (in Choonoo 1997: 260) defines New Journalism as trying "to draw together … the conflicting worlds of journalism and literature". Sims (2012: 33) describes literary journalism as involving

> immersion reporting for a year or longer, the active presence of the author in the narrative, and tools long associated only with fiction such as elaborate structures, characterization, and even symbolism, but with the added requirement of accuracy. Literary journalism most often deals with ordinary people rather than celebrities or politicians.

Choonoo (1997: 261) highlights the writing of Can Themba and Nat Nakasa as examples of this "blend of journalism and creative writing", referring to Nakasa's article *The life and death of King Kong* (1959) about the legendary boxer Ezekial "King Kong" Dhlamini. Choonoo (1997: 262) writes

> Nakasa is deft at drawing out the classic tragedy here in his dramatic use of dialogue and in his emphasizing of a by-now clichéd thematic pattern: big tough boxer is putty in the hands of his only girlfriend, whom he kills out of blind jealousy. Nakasa conflates the myth with the real event to make his profile a more gripping tale.

2.6.3 *Drum*'s extra-textual significance

Possibly the most compelling evidence of the relevance of *Drum* is not found in its content, but in its existence – "extending beyond [its] communicative immediacy to release an extra-textual dimension of significance" (Chapman 2001: 184). Three incidents are discussed to illustrate this point.

In 1955, *Drum* started asking why black sportsmen from South Africa were not allowed to go to the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. Nicol (1991: 258) writes that Stein, in his first major feature for *Drum*, emphasised that the Olympic Games had rules that disqualified national teams that were selected based on race rather than merit. *Drum*'s articles on this issue set in motion "the first rumblings through South African sport on the question of the black man's taking part" (Stein 2013: Chapter 5). Eventually, South Africa was disqualified from the Games. Stein (*ibid.*) recounts this as "a hammer-force … which … spilt over to every corner of the world beyond South Africa and was

to influence very greatly the course of the apartheid war, and later to play a leading part in the very steps for reconciliation and peace that came after that war was won".

In 1959, the apartheid government, in reaction to an article in *Drum* following Nxumalo's investigation of prison conditions, imposed restrictions on the reporting of information about South Africa's prison system (Chapman 2001: 185). This would not be the only time that *Drum* inadvertently played a role in the formulation of apartheid legislation. Chief amongst these, and to the magazine's own detriment as well as that of many of the *Drum* writers, including Nakasa, was censorship legislation.

In 1957 the *Report of the Commission of Enquiry in regard to Undesirable Publications* [*Verslag van die Kommissie van Ondersoek insake Ongewenste Publikasies*], or *Cronjé Commission's Report* for short, was published (Cronjé 1957; McDonald 2009). This report was the culmination of the work of a government commission lead by Professor Geoffrey Cronjé that was appointed in 1954 to "find ways and means of combating the evil of indecent, offensive or harmful literature" (Cronjé 1957: iv; Mills 2007).

Up to this stage, censorship in South Africa was enacted through various older pieces of legislation, including the Customs Management Act 9 of 1913, the Customs Act 35 of 1944 and the Entertainments (Censorship) Act 28 of 1931 (Mills 2007: 79; McDonald 2009). The Entertainments Act 28 of 1931 made provision for the appointment of a Board of Censors to police film and film advertisements (Mills 2007: 80). The Customs Act 35 of 1944 "prohibited the importation of any indecent or obscene goods or on any ground whatsoever objectionable". Together these acts were utilised effectively to prevent "undesirable" material from entering South Africa. However, there was no formal legislation to control publications produced within the borders of South Africa. This resulted in the establishment of the Cronjé Commission in November 1954 (*ibid*.).

According to the instruction published in the *Government Gazette* on 17 November 1954 (Cronjé 1957: iv), the Commission had to:

> Investigate and report on and make recommendations regarding –
> (a) the most effective way to fight the evil of indecent, offensive or harmful literature, lithographic, photographic or other similar material of whatever nature printed or produced, published and/or distributed in the Union of South Africa and the Territory of South-West Africa, keeping in mind the unique circumstances of the composition of the population of the Union of South Africa and the Territory of South-West Africa;

(b) the expediency of coordinating the procedure recommendation under (a) with the existing system of control of imported literature, lithographic, photographic or other similar material and, if deemed necessary, the manner in which the coordination should take place: and

(c) any other related issues [my translation – WM].

The Commission's investigation took into account a broad spectrum of publications from literature to print advertisements. Of specific importance for this discussion is the investigation into "monthly magazines for non-Europeans" (Cronjé 1957: 11). The investigation based its recommendations in this regard on a sample of four magazines deemed "representative of the content of all the monthly magazines studies during the period of the investigation". The sample consisted of *Africa* (1954-1955), *Hi-Note* (1954-1955), *Zonk* (1949-1955) and *Drum* (1951-1955). Four issues per year (a total of 58) were studied.

Hi-Note existed only for a short period of time and very little is known about the publication. *Africa* was another Bailey venture that lasted for about a year (1954-1955) and was described as a "racy and earthy" magazine with "a profile more feminine than *Drum*'s" (Stein 2013: Chapter 3). Can Themba was the editor of *Africa*. *Zonk*, established in 1949, was South Africa's first mass-produced photomagazine published exclusively for a black readership (Laden 2001: 523-524). Laden (quoting Manoim 1983) describes *Zonk* as a magazine that "downplayed politics and, seeking to promote itself as a new public forum for urban sociability and egalitarianism, encouraged active participation by all potential readers". *Zonk* was considered to be *Drum*'s main rival (Sampson 1956: 22) but "was always a poor shadow of *Drum*" (Swift 1991: 35). Stein (2013: Chapter 3) describes *Zonk* as "a vulgar, kitschy, commercial monthly".

The Commission's findings included that incidences of undesirable material in magazines for "non-Europeans" were lower than in magazines for "Europeans". Undesirable material was defined as anything "that might cause friction or feelings of hostility between the European and non-European population groups of the Union" (Cronjé 1957: 82). The report then comes to the conclusion that "the Bantu appears to prefer periodicals aimed specifically at him" but warns that "undesirable and inferior publications aimed at Europeans might have a harmful effect on non-Europeans" and that specifically "the presence of undesirable illustrations of European women in the homes or rooms of the Bantu in Pretoria is not favourable phenomenon" [*The aanwesigheid van ongewenste illustrasies van blanke vroue in die wonings of woonvertrekke van die Bantoe in Pretoria is geen gunstige verskynsel nie*] (*ibid*.). (Sampson (2008: 25) describes apartheid officialdom's habit of referring to more than one black person or a group of black people as "the native" or "the Bantu" as "that significant singular".)

Drum's influence, more so than the other three magazines that formed part of the sample, is evident in the sources consulted as part of the investigation. "The Editor, *Drum*, Mr. R.A.J. Bailey" (Cronjé 1957: 269) is listed as one of the people who presented oral evidence to the Commission. "The Editor, *Drum*" is listed as giving written evidence, although it is not clear who this editor was, seeing as Bailey was listed as editor above. No sources are listed or references made to evidence, whether written or oral, from an editor or proprietor of *Africa*, *Zonk* or *Hi-Note*.

Drum editor Anthony Sampson's early history of *Drum*, originally published as *Drum: A venture into the New Africa* in 1956 (republished as *Drum: The making of a magazine* in 2005), is listed as reference consulted for the *Cronjé Commission's Report*. In fact, when read together it appears as if the authors of the report were readily and quite extensively influenced by Sampson's account of the philosophy of *Drum* and its approach to its readers.

As already mentioned, the report found that "magazines aimed at the Bantu are read more by them than magazines aimed at Europeans" and that "the Bantu prefer magazines that take into account their unique tastes, interests and level of development" (Cronjé 1957: 59). Sampson (1956) also mentions that black readers prefer magazines aimed specifically at them, though the "level of development" was probably not interpreted as intended by Cronjé. Sampson (1956: 8, quoting *Drum* advisory board member Job Rathebe) writes that the problem was that magazines for black readers, including *Drum* in its earlier guise, was

> what white men want Africans to be, not what they are. Now, take this tribal history business … we all know ourselves quite well enough … And we are trying to get away from our tribal history as fast as we can … What we want, is a paper that belongs to us – a real *black* paper. We want it to be our *Drum*, not a white man's *Drum*.

Sampson (*ibid*.) continues to explain that "Africans … suspected every African paper of being a white man's trick to keep them quiet" which compelled Sampson and Bailey to reconsider *Drum*'s content as "we were preaching tribal culture and folk tales, [while] they were clamouring to be let in to the Western world".

Sampson and Bailey considering letting black people "in to the Western world" must have been a red flag to the Commission, who specifically refers to "the Bantu's urge to be westernised" (Cronjé 1957: 255). If this exposure is not managed properly, the report warns, "literature that leads his [the Bantu's] interest subtly into this direction could cause the half-developed and culturally confused Bantu to

become the prey of inferior literature that alienates him from his own culture and that presents to him as attractive an inferior lifestyle and way of thinking of the European" (*ibid*.).

Sampson, worried about *Drum*'s dwindling circulation, visited the Bantu Men's Social Centre, where one patron begged for stories about "jazz and film stars, man! We want Duke Ellington, Satchmo and hot dames! Yes, brother, anything American. You can cut out this junk about kraals and folk tales and Basutos in blankets – forget it! You're just trying to keep us backward, that's what!" (Sampson 1956: 7). The report views reading material about "'jazz', 'jive', and 'slang'" aimed specifically at a black market as "even more harmful than inferior material aimed at Europeans" and that there are "certain magazines for the Bantu that is already highly guilty of this sin" [*Sekere tydskrifte vir die Bantoe besondig hulle reeds in hoë mate in hierdie opsig*] (Cronjé 1957: 255). The report warns that reading material exposing black readers to a Western lifestyle "could cause dissatisfaction and unrest under people who are not yet used to and who do not yet have a complete understanding of the Western lifestyle".

Even *Drum*'s quintessential writing style as described by Sampson is turned around by the *Cronjé Commission's Report*. "The sedate syntax of the European papers was all wrong for our readers, who thought and spoke in jazz and exclamation marks," writes Sampson (1956: 13):

> We wanted Drum to have an African style, and to capture some of the vigour of African speech; but it was not easy, for African intellectuals and writers, cut off from their own people, used long words and paraded dry facts to show off their learning.

This changed with the introduction of Todd Matshikiza, tasked with writing music reviews for *Drum*:

> He wrote as he spoke, in a brisk tempo with rhythm in every sentence. He attacked the typewriter like a piano. Our readers loved 'Matshikeze', as we called it, which was the way they talked and thought, beating in time with the jazz within them (Sampson 1956: 14).

Referring to the style of journalism in magazines for black readers, the report found that "a journalistic style that adapts to the comprehensive ability of the broad Bantu readers public appears to be applied with success" (Cronjé 1957: 255). Sampson's "African intellectuals", argued the report, was the result of "the Bantu's desire to pass examinations and to obtain the knowledge and culture of the European [through] an interest in school text books" (Cronjé 1957: 254). Though not specifically mentioning Matshikeze and *Drum* in general, the report states that "the Bantu has not yet managed to find his own literature and writing style; what he produces has little or no link with his daily life and is not from his own culture. The Bantu likes descriptions and vivid representations."

From the examples presented above it is clear that *Drum* embodied a specific threat to the "unique composition of the population of the Union of South Africa", which speaks to the relevance of the magazine.

In its final recommendations, the *Cronjé Commission's Report* proposes that any publication or material that could cause "problems of friction and feelings of hostility between the different population and racial groups" be deemed undesirable (Cronjé 1957: 136). This was also the definition of Communism according to the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, namely "any doctrine or plan … that stirs a feeling of hostility between the European and non-European races of the Union". Any publication that fans this flame was deemed part of the Communist threat which had as its ultimate aim the "disruption of the calm and peaceful race relations in the Union" (Cronjé 1957: 137).

The proposals of the Cronjé Commission were eventually incorporated into the Publications and Entertainments Act 26 of 1963, including

> 5.(2) A publication or object shall be deemed undesirable if it or any part of it –
>
> (d) is harmful to the relations between any sections of the inhabitants of the Republic
>
> 6. (1) if in any legal proceedings under this Act the question arises whether any matter is indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals, that matter shall be deemed to be –
>
> (a) indecent or obscene if, in the opinion of the court, it has the tendency to deprave or to corrupt the minds of persons who are likely to be exposed to the effect or influence thereof.

The publication of the *Cronjé Commission's Report* in 1957 coincided with Nakasa's appointment as a journalist at *Drum*. Although Nakasa did not contribute to the *Drum* that played a prominent role in informing the recommendations of this report, he joined the magazine at a stage when the influence of the magazine came to the attention of the government. By the time Nakasa founded the literary magazine *The Classic* in 1963, the state machinery had finalised the Publications and Entertainments Act 26 of 1963. This legislation give rise to the Publications Control Board, a "major mechanism of … 'thought control' to pass on books, motion pictures, magazines, and periodicals, both foreign and domestic" and which was responsible for banning more than 11 000 books between 1963 and 1968 (Hachten 1971: 266-267).

This legislation was just one of the indications that apartheid rapidly picked up speed during the 1960s, with a number of events that drew this decade in sharp contrast to the, albeit superficial, hopefulness of the 1950s.

2.7 THE SHARPEVILLE DECADE

The vibrant and hopeful 1950s ended with what is described by Stein (2013: Chapter 11) as the single biggest mistake by the apartheid government: the Sharpeville Massacre that took place on 21 March 1960. Sampson (2008: 97-98) writes that it was "one of those weird interims in history, so hard for any journalist to analyse, when the whole power system seemed to shake, and anything could happen".

The massacre was preceded by an anti-pass law campaign by the Pan Africanist Congress (Chapman 2001: 185) which saw protesters gathering at various police stations country-wide without their pass books, asking to be arrested. At Sharpeville, a township near Vanderbijl Park in the former Transvaal (today Gauteng), a large crowd of around 7000 gathered at the local police station. Baines (2010: 35) describes the crowd as "vociferous but not violent". A well-armed police contingent of about 300 men were present. In the ensuing confrontation between protesters and the police, the police opened fire on the unarmed protesters, killing 69 people and wounding 186, many of them shot in the back while fleeing (cf. Magubane *et al*. 2011: 69; Baines 2010; Mzamane 1985; Ledwaba 2011: 51; Sampson 2008: 97; Mandela 1994: 280-281). Zug (2007: 186) describes the scene as follows:

> A gate was opened to admit four PAC organizers who wished to be arrested. Dozens of demonstrators surged through the gate amid a hail of stones from the crowd. Someone yelled, 'Fire!' and in the next forty seconds the police fired 743 bullets. Sixty-nine dead bodies, including ten children, lay scattered on the ground. Most of them had been shot in the back.

On 30 March 1960, a State of Emergency was declared, and on 08 April 1960 the ANC and PAC were banned (Mzamane 1985; Brown 2013a: 78; Keany 2010: 63-66). In the October 1960 edition, *Drum* reported

> [a]fter the people's protest, after the Sharpeville killings, after 20 000 people had been detained, after 156 days of nightmare, the Government closed another chapter in our Country's history. There was to be no change. Apartheid and baaskap were here to stay.

The Sharpeville Massacre not only marked the beginning of anti-apartheid activists' armed struggle, but also set in motion United Nations resolutions condemning apartheid as well as a sharp increase in international attention. In September 1961, Nakasa's first international piece was published in *The*

New York Times (Brown 2013a: 79). In *The human meaning of apartheid*, Nakasa "flipping between reportage and personal narrative … crafted an image of a country where, 'however distinguished an African may become, there is no hope of escaping his black skin'" (*ibid*.).

Early in 1960, Nakasa and Lewis Nkosi met American academic and author Jack Thompson (Brown 2013a: 81), a meeting that would eventually lead to Nakasa being "drawn into the global struggle between East and West by agents acting on behalf of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)" (Keany 2010: 61). Thompson represented the Farfield Foundation in New York, a philanthropic organisation that funded cultural projects world-wide, as he explained to Nakasa and Nkosi (Brown 2013a: 81). The group was looking for black South African writers to spend a year at Harvard University as part of the Nieman Fellowship. Nkosi's application for the Nieman Fellowship was soon finalised and, after being denied a passport, he left the country in 1961 on an exit permit. At that stage, most of the original group of *Drum*'s writers were either dead or in exile (Chapman 2001: 221).

In the late 1960s, it was revealed that the Farfield Foundation was in fact CIA-funded (Simon 1980: 78; Maditla 2014). Brown (2013a: 97-98) describes it as "part of a constellation of philanthropic 'organisations' – in reality little more than letterheads and bank accounts – that the CIA developed in the 1950s and 1960s to cultivate a pro-American intellectual elite throughout the West and the non-aligned world … to promote a vaguely defined non-communist view". It is irony of the highest order – and another example of Nakasa's life between two worlds – that the path of his life was so directly influenced by two separate and ostensibly opposite countries: America as the leader of the "free world", and apartheid South Africa – both fighting Communism. While the apartheid government viewed Nakasa's and his contemporaries' work as authors and journalists as a Communist threat to be eliminated through the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, America and the CIA deliberately funded cultural activities such as literary magazines in an effort to prevent Communism in communities they viewed as susceptible to the expansion of Communism. One of these literary magazine was *The Classic*.

2.7.1   *The Classic*

Nakasa's favourite shebeen was the Classic on Mooi Street (Brown 2013a: 52). It also doubled as a dry-cleaning business called The Classic Laundry (Simon 1980: 75). The Classic was actually just a small backroom behind the dry-cleaners. Brown (*ibid*.) writes that the Classic was "strategically placed between the offices of *Drum*, the white liberal *Rand Daily Mail*, and the left-wing *New Age*, so it drew a large crowd of journalists".

During one of these sessions, Nakasa suggested the idea of a literary magazine for black authors (Simon 1980: 75; Chapman 2001: 221). Massey (2014) posits that Thompson and the Farfield Foundation were actually behind the idea. Eventually, the Farfield Foundation became the sponsor of *The Classic*, Nakasa's literary magazine named after his favourite shebeen. Gordimer was a trustee (*ibid*.). Bailey offered Nakasa office space in the offices of *Drum* and *Golden City Post* (Keany 2010: 58). The first two editions quickly became legendary, according to Barney Simon (1980: 75), later editor of *The Classic*.

Simon met Nakasa during the early 1960s as part of South African playwright Athol Fugard's theatre workshop, the Rehearsal Room. One of Simon's projects was a writer-actor workshop. He explains:

> [i]f you were a writer investigating a theme, or even suffering a writer's block, you could come to the non-racial workshop and conduct or have conducted for you improvisations on any theme you chose. Nat Nakasa and Dugmore Boetie were part of these workshops. I remember Nat Nakasa as a volatile improvisator, particularly a very funny performance he created as an irate factory worker (Simon 1980: 75).

Gordimer (1966: xxi), part of the committee that helped Nakasa run *The Classic*, also described Nakasa as "a brilliant mimic". She recounts how they usually started work on *The Classic* "about two o'clock in the afternoon. Very often he would rush in then, carrying his bulging attaché case, and we would eat bread and cheese on the verandah in the sun, laughing a lot … and getting on with the work at the same time" (*ibid*.).

Simon and Nakasa moved in the same social circles. Through attending the same parties, they got to know each other fairly well, to the extent that Nakasa asked Casey Motsisi and Simon to take over editing *The Classic* when he left the country in 1964 (Simon 1980: 76), with both Motsisi and Simon committing to continuing the character of *The Classic*, namely "African, but not racial" (*ibid*.).

Nakasa's editorial brief for *The Classic* was "African writing of merit … delivered through the medium of … short stories, poems, excerpts from plays, novels and other works" (Keany 2010: 72). Spector (2014) refers to *The Classic* as "an influential journal of opinion".

Keany (2010: 58) opines that *The Classic* was built on Nakasa's "gospel of multiracialism inscribed in the Freedom Charter and the sense of *Drum*'s literary cosmopolitanism" – a political ideal criticised

by Nkosi as "inchoate" (Makube 2014). In his analysis of *The Classic*'s contribution, Keany (2010: 59) concludes that

> [t]he themes and characters of *The Classic* illustrate how the powerful social and political forces at work in this decade permeated the literary field. Emerging through the fictional writing of *The Classic* were competing notions of modernity and tradition that were often deployed through the depictions of rural and urban settings, as well as dissonant concepts of the South African nation as a multiracial union or black republic. Many writers of this period seemed to recognize the power of the written word, and the critical essays published in Nakasa's magazine serve as a record of these writers' attempts to determine their purpose as artists in an artificially divided society.

Nakasa's biggest struggle was finding authors for *The Classic*, as new apartheid legislation was intent on smothering dissident voices (Simon 1980: 76). *The Classic* had to avoid banned authors while simultaneously avoiding publishing authors whose writing could result in the magazine being banned. Thus, as Keany (2010: 72) writes, "self-censorship became a common response to these new pressures exerted by the state, and throughout his correspondence with contributors and former *Drum* writers, Nakasa searched for a balance between his belief in uninhibited artistic expression and his desire to keep *The Classic* in circulation".

Nakasa would eventually edit only three editions of *The Classic* before leaving South Africa (Keany 2010: 61). In an ironic twist, Simon's first solo issue of *The Classic* was dedicated to the memory of Nakasa, who died in New York before the fifth issue was published:

> I remember driving around town with Nadine [Gordimer] on the day of Nat's death, talking about him and deciding that the next issue of *The Classic* would be dedicated to his work. It contained the best of his writing available then. It contained tributes to him from William Plomer, Can Themba, Nadine Gordimer and Athol Fugard.

The magazine, in various guises, continued until the early 1980s, along the way undergoing "a dramatic transformation that reflected the radical changes in black politics and social thought that had been brought about by the revolutionary ideas of Black Consciousness in the 1970s" (*ibid*.). In 1975, the magazine's name was changed to *New Classic*. In 1982 a new series started, once again under *The Classic* (Wits Historical Papers Research Archive n.d.). This 1982 version also carried Nakasa's only known short story, *My first love* (in Patel 2005), in print for the first time.

2.7.2 *Rand Daily Mail*

Nkosi (1978: 476) writes that he occasionally contributed to white daily newspapers in Johannesburg before he left the country in 1961, and adds "Nat Nakasa was to go one better. He was to be asked to write a weekly column reflecting life in the townships and offering his own individual opinions about the state of race relations in the country in a style both humorous and urbane." Nakasa was approached by Allister Sparks, then deputy editor, in 1964 to write a weekly column for *Rand Daily Mail*. Sparks (2014: 9) is of the opinion that Nakasa "reached his widest audience and did his best work" for *Rand Daily Mail* during this period. In addition, due to the banning of almost every black writer of the era under the Suppression of Communism Act, "Nakasa was damn near the only black voice of dissent still publishing in the country, making him a provocative addition to the paper's editorial page" (Sparks, in Brown 2013a: 109).

Rand Daily Mail was an English liberal newspaper founded in 1902 by Harry Freeman Cohen (Mervis 1989: 2). The newspaper was later bought by Sir Abe Bailey, father of *Drum* founder Jim Bailey (Mervis 1989: 22). Gibson describes *Rand Daily Mail* as initially a newspaper with "mining camp manners … often brash, sometimes loud, seldom genteel … In its time it was happy to denounce Chinese, Indians, Afrikaners, Germans and Africans". The newspaper's focus changed with the appointment of Laurence Gandar, who infused an "unequivocal political direction towards liberalism" (Gibson 2007: 19-20).

Sparks (2014: 9) also refers to Nakasa as an "anomalous figure in the South Africa of the 1960s. He was a black liberal, committed to nonracialism". He saw it as his mission, through his column, *As I see it*, to expose white South Africans to the reality of their country:

> To that end his columns focused on his everyday experiences as a black person living under apartheid, his observations, his difficulties, the personalities of township characters and their lifestyles, his personal thoughts and ideas and how the whole asymmetric society looked from a black perspective (*ibid*.).

According to Sparks (*ibid*.), Nakasa's column quickly gained a following amongst the newspapers white readership, evidence of which was found in their letters to the paper: "I believe Nat's real contribution to the eventual birth of the Rainbow Nation was in the many white eyes that he opened" (*ibid*.). This might have led Nkosi (1978: 479) to write that "part of the myth that now surrounds his [Nakasa's] name is of White liberal creation". Another of his *Drum* colleagues that was not too impressed with his work for *Rand Daily Mail* was Es'kia Mphahlele, who is quoted (in Nicol 1991: 342) as saying that Nakasa's "*Rand Daily Mail* articles were flabby, they didn't have any grit in

them". However, what remains is that Nakasa, through his columns to a predominantly white audience, managed to cross the boundary between the two worlds.

2.8   LIFE IN AMERICA

2.8.1   Disillusionment

It was Allister Sparks, also a Nieman Fellow, who nominated Nakasa for the Nieman Fellowship (Sparks 2014: 9). In April 1964, Nakasa was informed that he was selected as part of the 1965 class of Nieman Fellows (Brown 2013a: 113). However, Nakasa's joy at being accepted into the prestigious programme was short-lived: similar to his friend Lewis Nkosi a couple of years earlier, Nakasa was denied a passport – probably one of the 647 passport applications denied between 1962 and 1964 (Brown 2013a: 114).

While Nakasa was struggling with the decision of leaving South Africa permanently on an exit permit, circumstances in the country got bleaker. Chapman (2001: 185) writes that almost all the *Drum* writers, including Mphahlele, Modisane, Themba, Nkosi and Matshikiza, were silenced under the Suppression of Communism Act (cf. McDonald 2009). Even previous writing of those who had already left the country was not to be published. And, unbeknownst to him, Nakasa was inches away from being banned himself. Brown (2013a: 118-119) writes that the police had been following Nakasa since May 1959, with a file containing information of at least 26 other instances where he was followed during the next five years, attending mixed-race parties and "secret gatherings with likely communists … he is known everywhere as an enemy of the ruling government, in particular with the Afrikaans general public (Brown *ibid*., quoting a police report). A decision to ban him for a period of five years had already been ordered, but would never be issued, as Nakasa had already decided to leave the country on an exit permit (*ibid*.).

In a column for *Rand Daily Mail* titled *A native of nowhere*, Nakasa (1964: 203) wrote

> Some time next week, with my exit permit in my bag, I shall cross the borders of the Republic and immediately part company with my South African citizenship … According to reliable sources, I shall be classed as a prohibited immigrant if I ever try to return to South Africa … Once out I shall apparently become a stateless person, a wanderer, unless I can find a country to take me in.

In the same column, Nakasa explains that, while having an exit permit to leave South Africa, he did not have a visa to enter the United States, despite having a scholarship to take up: "The Americans will let me in only on a valid passport from a country that is prepared to have me when I leave

America" (*ibid*.). With his ever-present sense of humour, he explains that he briefly considered becoming a Cuban refugee, but "ruled that out as something too involved to try", and becoming an Egyptian is not an option because "I may be expected to declare war on all my Jewish friends – and, Heaven knows, there are many of them". He then proposes trying his luck with the Scandinavian countries: "I may become the first Scandinavian Pondo in history. A black viking! Imagine it!"

In a follow-up column, *Met with smiles and questions*, Nakasa (1964: 205) describes the "hazardous and exhausting business" of travelling without a passport. His trip took him to Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) and from there to Dar es Salaam in what is today Tanzania. Here he met American civil rights activist Malcolm X in the lobby of a hotel. The two discussed pan-Africanism and Malcolm X also "presented [Nakasa] with a far more bitter perspective about black life in the United States than Nat had likely come across in South Africa, where the American civil rights movement had been presented to him as a noble and largely successful struggle" (Masekela, in Brown 2013a: 127).

From Dar es Salaam, Nakasa travelled to London, where Nkosi worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation. It was here that he met Essop Patel, who was to compile the only anthology of Nakasa's work (Gray 2013). Patel (1975: xii) remembers the meeting in London as follows:

> On a crisp morning over cups of coffee, he asked, 'what happens to the writings of a man when he is dead and gone?' In response to that question, I have compiled this book which reflects *The World of Nat Nakasa*.

Eventually Nakasa was allowed to travel to America, but his visa was only for five months, until 10 March 1965, later extended to 31 August 1965. (Brown 2013a: 129). The Americans, a "gay, friendly lot" greeted Nakasa with "broad, welcome-into-the-fold smiles, which helped undo some of the tension" (Nakasa 1964: 205), although he was less impressed with New York as "the city has the looks of a great, modern slum … [with buildings] like giant filing cabinets, with people packed neatly inside, many of them doomed never to know the joy of a detached home with a back yard to themselves" (*ibid*.).

Initially, he spent most of his time at Harvard University, of which he wrote "Harvard is untypical of the 'American way of life'. I could probably spend a year without knowing the full meaning of being black in the United States" (Nakasa 1964: 206). This was to become his single biggest challenge of life in America – the racism he thought he had left behind in South Africa. Hope (2014) writes that Nakasa "wondered aloud why his liberal Harvard friends did not save their sympathy for black

Americans". He was also troubled by the fact that the residents of Harlem "wanted to get back to 'real' Africa, yet Africans back home in Jo'burg dreamed of Harlem. So who was a real African?" (*ibid*.). Bunsee (2014) describes it as a "culture shock – he had not expected to see such racism in the US". Nakasa's friend and fellow South African author Richard Rive (1981: 113) writes "[i]n his [Nakasa's] letters to me from the United States he became more and more pessimistic and despondent. How did one accustom oneself to exile? How did one become reconciled to never returning to one's own country again?"

Kathleen Conwell (1965: xxxii), who met Nakasa in America, also refers to how his dreams were shattered soon after arriving in America:

> And then the dream broke, crumbled, really, in the subtle way that America has of letting things crumble for the sensitive. He once said that he felt like a puppet dangling from a string – he was invited to speak so that people could hear horror stories, the ugliness of South Africa … we made him into an object. And Nat Nakasa knew this, and it killed him.

Despite his disillusionment with America, Nakasa still impressed people with his sincerity. John Gerhart (1965) met Nakasa following a speech by white South African Ronald Segal. In an article for *The Harvard Crimson*, Gerhart wrote about seeing Nakasa for the first time: "Segal was regally propped in large, red arm-chair … Nakasa was stretched out on the living room rug. The contrast between the two South Africans was startling … Segal, the white South Africa, was cynical, Nakasa, the black South African, was sincere." Gerhart (*ibid*.) also writes about how upset Nakasa was after seeing a copy of the Civil Rights photo-essay collection, *The Movement*, and especially

> a photo of a burned body of a Negro lynch-victim lying on a pile of embers while a crowd of grinning whites leered out of the darkness behind. 'That picture upset me for weeks,' said Nakasa. 'I had never known such personal fear, not even in South Africa.'

Brown (2013a: 132) writes that Nakasa struggled to make the transition from the "urgency" of life in South Africa to life in America. He couldn't connect with the American professors, students and writers, and he still had the sword of a soon-to-be-expired visa having over his head. In the ten months he spent in America, he wrote only two articles: a final column for *Rand Daily Mail* and an essay for *The New York Times*. For the *Times* piece, *Mr Nakasa goes to Harlem* (in Patel 2005: 207), Nakasa spent a day in Harlem together with his friend and former *Drum* editor, Anthony Sampson (2008: 105), who wrote that he "spent a happy Sunday in New York touring Harlem with him [Nakasa] and the next month he wrote to me in London gleefully reporting that *The New York Times* were

publishing a piece about Harlem". However, Sampson also noted that Nakasa felt desperately isolated in America, and especially at Harvard.

It was a trip to the American South that was the last straw (Conwell 1965: xxxiii). He struggled to write an honest story of what he experienced in the South, in Alabama and Selma (Maditla 2014). He was joined on this trip by his old friend and colleague, photographer Peter Magubane. But the trip did not go as planned and Nakasa returned too shocked to write. "He knew that no magazine would touch what he had to write. He knew that what this society [America] has done to the American Negro was far more terrible than what South Africa was doing to the black South African" (*ibid*.). Conwell (*ibid*.) writes that he explained his observation as "[i]n South Africa we have a culture that has lasted for generations; we have a language; we are a people; we are grounded in something solid" and that, in his view, America has stripped the African American even of these things.

After his fellowship at Harvard ended, Nakasa moved to Harlem, with less than three months left on his visa (Brown 2013a: 155). His friends and acquaintances all remarked how sad and depressed he was becoming. Even Gordimer expressed her shock at seeing him "so levelled by sadness" (*ibid*.).

Nakasa and others' experience of exile is captured in an award-winning short story by Rose Moss, published in *The Massachusetts Review* in 1970. Moss, a South African-born author, tutored the Nieman Fellows in the local law school at Harvard University (Gray 2013). Moss's story, *Exile*, tells the story of fictional South African exile Stephen Katela from "a stretch between Mooi River and Pietermaritzburg" who came to America to study music. Although the story relates detail pertaining to a fictional character, the similarities with Nakasa's story is obvious – growing up near Durban, attending mixed-race parties in Johannesburg's white suburbs of Houghton and Northcliff, visiting shebeens, people telling him to leave South Africa to finish his education, leaving South Africa on an exit permit, a stop-over in Dar es Salaam. Then struggling to fit in, struggling to work, and eventually starting to feel depressed. And finally the decision "to accept America … to throw himself into it" (Moss 1970: 366). In Moss's story, Stephen leapt off a freeway bridge; in real life Nakasa jumped from a window of a high-rise building.

2.8.2   The death of Nat Nakasa

On the eve of his death, Nakasa was supposed to meet his friends, the musicians Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba, in New York to see a play, but he never showed up (Brown 2013a: 155). Earlier that week, Nakasa sent two telegrams to Sampson, simply saying "I need to speak to you." (*ibid*.). However, Sampson had no way of getting hold of Nakasa.

Instead of joining Masekela and Makeba, Nakasa ended up at the apartment of Jack Thompson. He told Thompson that he was scared that he was "doomed to be mentally ill" like his mother (Brown 2013a: 156). After they talked for a while and Nakasa seemed calmer, Thompson offered to let him stay the night in the guest room. On 14 July 1965, Nakasa fell to his death from Thompson's seventh-story window (*ibid.*). He was buried in the Ferncliff Cemetery, not far from Malcolm X (Tsedu 2014: 3).

A number of people who knew Nakasa have commented on his mental instability. Mphahlele (in Nicol 1991: 342) says his wife told him that Nakasa, who was staying with them before leaving South Africa, "looked pretty mentally unstable but he was functioning". Nicol (1991: 340) also quotes Gordimer as saying "the terrible thing is that nobody seemed to realise what was happening to him in New York. He was having a full-scale nervous breakdown and it was just ignored or regarded as an amusing eccentricity." *Drum* writer Obed Musi (in Nicol 1991: 341) says Nakasa "was totally unbalanced. I'm sure it was his instability that led to his suicide."

Others disagree. Juby Mayet (in Nicol 1991: 340) experienced Nakasa as "a pretty stable character … I couldn't imagine Nat doing a thing like that. I heard one rumour that he may have been pushed. If he was here [in South Africa] I might have said it was a political act, but he was too far away." During his reburial in South Africa in September 2014, a family representative also said that he didn't believe that Nakasa committed suicide: "I accept that he was a casualty of the Cold War. He may have started asking questions which led him to a tragic death" (Masondo, in Patel, F. 2014; cf. Zondi 2007).

Nakasa's friend and journalist Bennie Bunsee (2014), who also lived in exile, explains

> it is difficult to know what was going through Nakasa's mind in 1965, the time of his suicide. Nkosi's view was that Nakasa was afraid of the streak of madness that ran in his family. Did the sense of isolation in the US get too much for him? Not knowing when he might be able to return home must have added to that. Alienation in our new environments best many of us in exile, especially black people who found it difficult to get jobs.

Despite rumours of foul play surrounding his death, the most logical explanation, given the testimonies available, remains that Nakasa committed suicide as a result of suffering from terminal depression. Less than a week after Nakasa's death, Afrikaans poet Ingrid Jonker also committed suicide. Fugard (1966) wrote in *The Classic* that "Nat and Ingrid are dead. And South Africa being

what it is, they have gone their separate ways. Laws are laws. But no one can legislate for our hearts and memories … we have the memory of a man and a woman. In mine they share the same grave."

Upon hearing of the deaths of Nakasa and Jonker, South African author Sir Laurens van der Post asked his friend, fellow author and journalist William Plomer to write something about their deaths: "I told William that the timing of the two suicides was too mysterious to be misinterpreted: there's something, a message, in there." (Van der Post, in Van Bart 1994: 4). Plomer's poem *The taste of the fruit* was published in *The Times Literary Supplement* on 16 September 1965, and was later included in Sergeant's (1966) *Commonwealth poems of today*. It includes the following verses:

> A man with no passport, / He had leave to exile / Himself from the natural / Soil of his being, / But none to return
>
> Now he is free in / A state with no frontiers, / But where men are working / To undermine frontiers, / He is not there.

In defining Nakasa's role, Rive (1981: 113) quotes from a letter he received five years after Nakasa's death. Rive writes that the letter was signed "M. Pascal Gwala" and was a "brilliant exposé of the South African literary scene". Gwala (in Rive *ibid*.) wrote:

> All that 'us' young people have been told about Nat Nakasa is that he was in an emotional state – in a bad fix so to speak – and that he suddenly lost the yap to go on and threw himself out of a 'skyscraper-window'. If his thoughts had, for more than five years (maybe ten), been flying high about race harmony and change of heart – in whitey's heart – it must have come naturally to some secret enclave in his strangeland (sic) mind that the best way to end one's life was to spend the last grim moments in the air. A symbolic death … What will always remain the truth however is that Nat Nakasa died right here in this country – the day he walked out of Jan Smuts Airport terminal knowing he was leaving the land of his birth – for good. Not to return 'unto Kingdom come'.

In 2015, award-winning South African artist Kemang wa Lehulere presented a solo exhibition, "To whom it may concern", in which he explored hidden memories of the apartheid era, with Nakasa at its core. Wa Lehulere (in Blaine 2015) explained his art as "making reminders that our history is incomplete and needs a lot of rehabilitation".

Perhaps the final word on his death should come from Nakasa. About six months before leaving South Africa, and before he knew that his passport application would fail, Nakasa (1964: 202) contemplated life as an exile in his article *Castles in the air*:

Heaven knows, the last thing I want is an exit permit. I've seen enough of my friends leave the country on those things. Some of them are now living as exiles in Europe, England, and America. Nearly all of them write miserable letters reminiscing about the good old days in South Africa. They plead for letters and newspapers from here … Life abroad lacks the challenge that faces us in South Africa. After a lifetime of illegal living in the Republic's shebeens, the exiles are suddenly called upon to become respectable, law-abiding citizens. Not a law to break in sight. For my part, it would be an act of providence if I survived under such circumstances. I have broken too many curfew laws and permit regulations to change so easily. Even if I did change, I would miss the experience of illegal living.

2.9   MAJOR INFLUENCES

Apart from instances where overtly stated, any discussion of the major influences on a historical figure's life contains an element of speculation. That being said, from available literature and testimonies it is possible to highlight certain exposures a person have had to specific ideas or world-views. Whether these exposures had any direct or indirect influence will remain speculation. In terms of this study, five influences – or exposures – are relevant in terms of what could or might have influenced Nakasa's writing. Two of these, *Drum* magazine and Sophiatown, have been discussed above. In addition, the following three will be discussed briefly: Nakasa's father, in terms of both world-view and career choice; his friendship with Lewis Nkosi; and his friendship with Nadine Gordimer.

2.9.1   Joseph Nakasa

Nakasa's father, Joseph, published a book, *The Gospel of Self Help* (bilingual: *Ivangeli Lokuz' Akha* in isiZulu) in 1941 (Brown 2013a: 13) in which he advocates the idea of self-autonomy for black people. Briefly summarised (Brown 2013a: 13-14), *The Gospel of Self Help* argues that black people were at the receiving end of the colonisation whip, bearing with it "prostitution, murder, drunkenness and poverty ... courtesy of the white man" (*ibid*.), but stresses at the same time that the "development of the African would depend heavily on the support and camaraderie of white allies and aid organisations" (*ibid*.), and that the only way out of poverty and dislocation is for black people to "change things on their own" (*ibid*.). With the exception of his emphasis on the assistance of white people, Joseph Nakasa's views show some comparison with Stephen Bantu Biko's philosophy of Black Consciousness. Sesanti (2012: 62) states "[t]his insistence on self-mastery, with special reference to African culture, is a reflection of Biko's Black Consciousness philosophy. Biko, in a speech at a South African Students' Organisation leadership training course in 1971, defined Black Consciousness as follows:

What Black Consciousness seeks to do is to produce at the output end of the process real black people who do not regard themselves as appendages to white society … We are aware of the terrible role played by our education and religion in creating amongst us a false understanding of ourselves. We must therefore work out schemes not only to correct this, but further be our own authorities rather than wait to be interpreted by others (Biko 1978: 55-57).

Where Joseph's view differs from the philosophy of Black Consciousness, however, is his insistence on liberalism, or the idea of non-racialism and non-sexism that also formed the basis of his son's philosophy (Thloloe 2014). Joseph Nakasa's world-view "hung over Nat's childhood … Gladys remembered that her father insisted they do well in school and taught their children English from a young age, so that they could move more easily through all corridors of South African society" (Brown 2013a: 15). His father's influence on Nat Nakasa's own world-view is evident in the following comparison between Nat's and his father's writing:

Jospeh Nakasa (in *The Gospel of Self Help* in 1941, in Brown 2013a: 14):
> The gold mines, roads and magnificent buildings which the white man regards as modern European achievements, have been constructed through the joint labour of white and black … So, how can you call it a whiteman's civilization?

Nat Nakasa (in a column for *Rand Daily Mail*, 1964):
> Johannesburg was built by the White technical knowhow and enterprise plus the indispensable co-operation of Black labour. To that extent, this city will never be Black or White, Black men cannot look at the tall buildings of Johannesburg and say 'this is ours' without being fraudulent. Nor can the Whites.

Despite his family's "African middle-class" existence (Brown 2013a), Joseph Nakasa was a firm believer in and protector of rural African culture and traditions. In a column published in *Ilanga lase Natal* in 1957 (the same year in which the younger Nakasa moved to Johannesburg to join the staff of *Drum* magazine) the older Nakasa defends African rural culture through the metaphor of the dutiful daughter, Gugu, and the city girl, Bajabulile (Brown 2013a: 12). Joseph writes that Bajabulile represents "a life unmoored from tradition, buffeted by the constant temptations of urban existence". The story of Gugu and Bajabulile is based on the Parable of the Lost Son in the Book of Luke in the Bible (NIV, Luke 15:11-31), in which a farmer's son chooses to leave home with his share of the estate, then ends up in poverty after squandering all the money in a distant land before realising the value and quality of the life he lived with his family.

Brown (2013a: 12) mentions that Joseph Nakasa was a religious man whose writing is characterised by a strong influence from the Bible. His belief in mission education, the gospel and a respectable life rubbed off on the younger Nat – *Drum* writer Obed Musi (in Nicol 1991: 341) states that "Nat began his career as a street preacher". Nakasa (1965, in Patel 2005: 215) also mentions that he "used to preach in the street myself".

It is therefore all the more ironic that his son's life, after moving to Johannesburg, turned into what Joseph feared most: Nat Nakasa became a member of "this lost generation, the newly urbanised Africans who straddled two worlds and often seemed unable to find their feet in either" (Brown 2013a: 13). Sampson (2008: 27) has a different view of the perceived threats posed by urbanisation: "The newly urbanised black were less confused and rootless than whites expected them to be. The huge influx of city dwellers in the 1940s and 1950s included thousands of durable people – such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu – who retained many of their country roots, which helped them survive the fierce challenges of urban life."

Nat Nakasa's life after leaving his parents' home for Johannesburg became the antithesis of his father's traditional views on culture, with Nat becoming thoroughly Westernised. His was the embodiment of the Jim comes to Joburg trope that forms the backbone of some many *Drum* articles and short stories (Keany 2010: 35). Nkosi (in Keany *ibid*.) explains the basic concept of these stories as

> the innocent African's transition from the tightly knit tribal community to the lonely hustle and bustle of urban existence: Jim's disaffiliation from the tribe in favour of the self-seeking individualistic ethos of urban life, we were made to understand, was tantamount to Jim's loss of manhood.

Yet despite Nakasa's self-confessed lack of tribal association – "I am just not a tribesman, whether I like it or not. I am, inescapably, a part of the city slims, the factory machines and our beloved shebeens" (Nakasa 1964a: 192) – he realised the value of this sense of belonging near the end of his life. As quoted earlier, he told his American friend Kathleen Conwell (1966: xxxiii) "in South Africa we have a culture that has lasted for generations … we are grounded in something solid".

His father's world-view of a liberal, non-discriminatory, equal and democratic society stayed with Nakasa throughout his life. Thloloe (2014; cf. Tsedu 2014) writes "when [the rest of us] were stewing

in our bitterness and dreamt of tearing this country apart", Nakasa reminded them "there must be humans on the other side of the fence; it's only we haven't learned how to talk".

2.9.2   Lewis Nkosi

As mentioned earlier, Nkosi and Nakasa were childhood friends who met when they attended the same Lutheran missionary school in Eshowe. Nkosi (1978: 477) writes

> Nat Nakasa was more than a friend to me; he was my brother; he was also, in many respects, a pupil and protégé on whom I lavished much attention and unasked advice in a fiercely tyrannical effort to turn him into a literary figure that even I had not as yet succeeded in becoming. I put books in his way to read and was often frustrated by his singular lack of interest. He seemed to be someone who wanted to absorb life directly.

Nkosi was introduced to Gordimer by Nakasa, whom she met earlier. She remembers Nkosi as "funny, cocky … immensely sophisticated" (Gordimer, in Nicol 1991: 338). Nkosi loved books and regularly visited the Wits University library. Musi (in Nicol 1991: 336) says Nkosi carried American author James Baldwin's *Go tell it to the mountain* with him. The novel explores the religious experience in African American life, while incorporating certain existentialist elements through a 14-year-old boy's journey of self-discovery. Gordimer (in Nicol 1991: 338) also writes of Nkosi's self-confident approach. He openly lived with his white girlfriend in a white suburb in Johannesburg. According to Gordimer he simply lived as though this was not illegal: "He would come out of that house in the morning along with all the whites who knew he was not the 'garden boy', but he carried it off with his Jean-Paul Sartre under his arm" (*ibid*.).

For most of their time in Johannesburg, Nkosi and Nakasa were drifters without a fixed address. They slept over in guest rooms and on couches where ever someone offered. This "nomadic" existence remained an element of Nkosi's life throughout (Nicol 1991: 339), and also characterised Nakasa's life. In *Johannesburg, Johannesburg* (Nakasa 1964), he writes that he "chose to become a wanderer … for roughly eighteen months, on and off, I wandered about without a fixed home address … Friends who invited me to their flats soon got used to me turning up for a bath in addition to dinner and a drink."

Pulling pranks was one of Nkosi and Nakasa's favourite hobbies. One evening, Nkosi and Nakasa went to drink coffee at a white coffee bar known as the Texan. They ordered coffee, but instead of taking it outside to drink on the pavement, they began to talk loudly about a portrait of American president Eisenhower. The owner, an American, got involved in a heated argument with the two, who

meanwhile finished their coffee right there inside the bar. "Nobody seemed to remember the colour bar," wrote Nakasa (1964: 6). Their most famous prank was an advertisement they placed in a white newspaper: "Wanted, white maid for two black journalists living in Hillbrow. Must not mind sleeping in." (Nkosi, in Brown 2013a: 60). This little bit of fun was later turned into the play *Sophiatown* by the Junction Avenue Theatre Company (Hlongwane 2006), in which the rest of this story is taken to its logical conclusion with Jewish girl Ruth Golden moving in with a *Drum* journalist called Jakes. Although criticised as portraying stereotypical characters (*ibid*.), *Sophiatown* echoes the quest for identity that most fringe-dwellers struggled with.

Nkosi as serious author and journalist believed that the writer's most significant role in the postcolony would be to act as the "critical consciousness of the nation" (Soske & Gunner 2012: 11), which ties in with Sartre's statement in *What is literature?* that "the writer gives society a guilty conscience" (Sartre 1948: 81) in the sense that "the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it's all about" (Sartre 1948: 24). Despite his believe in and commitment to this task, Nkosi was disappointed with the rewards, given the monumental task of "interpreting a seethingly angry Black world to a nervously speculative White public" (Nkosi 1978: 479), implying that, although most of the *Drum* writers achieved relative prominence, for most the price they had to pay was too high. "What black author has received the amount of analysis lavished on a single JM Coetzee novel?" Soske and Gunner (2012: 11) ask. In addition, Nkosi also believed that the writers of his generation were affected negatively in terms of their style due to the "insecurity of our rulers, the beady-eyed watchfulness of the censor, and the swiftness of the retribution" which caused most of them to develop a "bland" style, something he also found in Nakasa's writing (*ibid*.).

2.9.3 Nadine Gordimer

In her essay *Living in the Interregnum* (1982), Gordimer describes life in apartheid South Africa is living in the interregnum "not only between two social orders but also between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown an undetermined". Striving towards finding the "unknown and undetermined" identity – the existential quest for authenticity – is how Gordimer views the role of the writer in the interregnum. Dimitriu (2000: 14) writes that Gordimer identified two competing responsibilities

> that of the writer in opposition to apartheid and that of the writer who shapes the raw material of life … The novelist cannot avoid commitment to a just social cause: at certain points of history, this will be the 'necessary' gesture [also 'essential gesture'].

Dimitriu (2000: 169) writes that Gordimer was influenced by "a general ethos in South African intellectual and artistic circles of emulating European existentialism as an escape from the mentality of a 'crude' pioneering society … her fascination with Sartre and Camus suggest her direct interest in the mainstream existentialist thought". Dimitriu (*ibid.*) then lists some of Gordimer's main influences as indicated in her Nobel Prize Lecture in 1991, including, amongst others, Dostoyevsky, Kafka and Borges in terms of the absurdity of the human condition and the individual's vulnerability in a faceless social machine. Dimitriu (2000: 168) posits that almost all Gordimer's fiction contains an element of the "existential", with an "outsider" as rebellious element since her earliest writing. Gordimer, in her essays *Living in the Interregnum* (1982) and *The essential gesture* (1984) quotes both Sartre and Camus extensively, and refers to Camus as "one of the great of our period" (Gordimer 1984: 242).

Whether Gordimer recognised Nakasa as an "outsider" is not known, but in her essay *One man living through it*, written after Nakasa's death, Gordimer (1966: xx) describes Nakasa as "going somewhere … he was set upon the only course that was valid for him: the course of independent self-realisation". Through Gordimer's tutelage, amongst others on *The Classic*, she assisted Nakasa on his journey toward self-realisation. He became part of Gordimer's family: "He was drawn into the working life of our house. He heard squabbles and learnt private jokes … He was asked to pick up a schoolboy from the bus-stop or to buy a pint of milk while on the way from town. The process is known as becoming one of the family and it implies chores as well as privileges" (Gordimer 1966: xxi). Nakasa welcomed Gordimer's mentorship. She recounts that "he was not at all touchy about gaps in his knowledge and experience; he had none of the limitations of false pride … One of the reasons he hoped to go to Harvard was because he wanted time to read the great poets and imaginative writers" (*ibid.*).

Gordimer considered Nakasa one of her closest personal friends, but she was also aware that some of Nakasa's black friends referred to him as a "coconut – a black man with a white disposition" (Brown 2013a: 75), a description which painted him as an outsider, a "'white' black man" (Gordimer 1966: xxv). However, Gordimer recognises that Nakasa was rather a "new kind of man" who accepted his Africanness as well as his identity as a human among fellow humans and who ultimately did not belong "between two worlds, but to both" (*ibid.*).

In *The essential gesture* (discussed in more detail in chapter 4), Gordimer (1984) explains the writer's dual commitments to society and to the craft of writing. She posits that, for most writers, this is a source of constant conflict between the demands of society and the writer's duty to his or her work.

However, for black writers in apartheid South Africa, there was no opposition "of inner and outer demands":

> At the same time as they are writing, they are political activists in the concrete sense, teaching, proselytizing, organizing. When they are detained without trial it may be for what they have written, but when they are tried and convicted of crimes of conscience it is for what they have done as 'more than a writer' (Gordimer 1984: 243).

In this sense Nakasa also did not belong between two worlds, but to both: a "synthesis of creativity and social responsibility" (*ibid*.). The social responsibility of the black writer, according to Gordimer, is "that of being the only historians of events among their people" (*ibid*.).

2.10   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided the reader with an overview of the socio-political context in which Nat Nakasa's story took place, and against which this analysis of his writing as "human products" will be analysed in chapter 5. This chapter provided biographical data of Nakasa's journey from missionary school boy through his days as a cub reporter at *Ilanga lase Natal* to his days as a member of the *Drum* generation of writers. Background to the establishment of *Drum* was provided, including references to the unique character of *Drum* as an ostensibly superficial "pulp fiction" magazine yet at the same time a serious player in the anti-apartheid struggle. The relevance of *Drum* in terms of its role as social conscience (cf. Sartre's *What is literature?*, 1948), the magazine's unique style as well as its "extra-textual" contribution were discussed. Brief references to other publications that Nakasa wrote for, including *Golden City Post* and *Rand Daily Mail*, were also made.

A key discussion in the chapter pertains to Sophiatown as both a physical space where most *Drum* writers, including Nakasa, lived at some stage, as well as a mystical place that embodied the hopefulness of the 1950s as well as the despair of the 1960s. Sophiatown and *Drum* are highlighted as to major influences in Nakasa's life. Three other influences are discussed, namely his the role of his father, Joseph Nakasa, as well as the influence of his friendships with Lewis Nkosi and Nadine Gordimer respectively. Throughout these discussions a line that links Nakasa to existentialism is maintained.

In the next chapter, existentialism as philosophical framework for this study is discussed and relevant existential themes and concepts are identified and defined.

Chapter 3

BEING-IN-THE-WORLD

Relevant existential themes and existentialism in contemporary African philosophy

3.1   IN THIS CHAPTER

The purpose of this chapter is three-fold: Firstly, it provides a brief background on the development of existentialism at the hand of contributions by Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre as exponents of existentialism, or various elements or themes of existentialism. The selection of these four philosophers are based on Barrett's suggestion of "direct lineage of existential thinking" (Barrett 1964: 20), with Kierkegaard as the starting point and main influence on Jaspers and Heidegger, and Heidegger as one of the primary influences on Sartre. The second part of the chapter provides an exploration of relevant themes of existentialism, which forms the primary philosophical framework of this study. This discussion is based primarily on the work of Heidegger and Sartre, viewed as the two foremost existentialist philosophers (cf. Audi 1999; Barrett 1964; Gravil 2007; Kaufmann 1956; Wartenberg 2008, amongst others). Finally, the chapter provides a discussion of existentialism as it pertains to contemporary African philosophy. Although the purpose of the study is to link Nakasa's writing to the broader Western existentialism, his facticity as a black, male, South African citizen, and from a more general perspective as an African, validates a brief discussion on existentialism in terms of contemporary African philosophy.

Any history of philosophy is philosophy in itself. German existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers (1941: 134) describes it as demanding a "concrete solution in each age", with each age appropriating for its history of philosophy what is required at the time: "Having been written down it can be rediscovered: at any time it can spark a new blaze." Barrett (1964: 30) describes the history of philosophy as a "dialogue continuing in time". According to Jaspers (1941: 134), a theoretical attitude towards philosophy "becomes real only in the living appropriation of its contents from the texts". Appropriation (using the words or ideas of others to explore your own thought) is one of the existential themes referred to in this chapter, in addition to existence, freedom, anxiety, bad faith, negation and nothingness, facticity and transcendence, temporality and finitude, and absurdity and authenticity.

The brief background on existentialism provided in this chapter should be read keeping in mind the above-mentioned view of any attempt to describe the history of philosophy or a philosophical theory. It is in fact an appropriation – the author taking the liberty of creating contrariety in order to

demonstrate to the reader and discovering for herself certain aspects of existentialism relevant to this study. The brief background serves the purpose of illuminating an existential strain of thought by highlighting certain ideas of certain philosophers and authors. By no means does this imply that other philosophers or authors are not considered important; merely that the ones mentioned or discussed here are particularly relevant to this discussion. For more detailed analyses of some of the authors and philosophers mentioned in this chapter, see, for example, Kaufmann (1956).

The main title of this chapter refers to Heidegger's primary definition of the Being of humans, namely "being-in-the-world": "The phenomenological exhibition of the being of beings encountered nearest to us can be accomplished under the guidance of the everyday being-in-the-world, which we also call *association in* the world *with* inner-worldly beings" (Heidegger 1927: 1.III.#15).

3.2   INTRODUCTION

There is certainly some irony in the fact that existentialism, in this study the lens used to study journalism, once was a newsworthy topic in itself that raised much "journalistic titter of excitement" (Barrett 1964: 7). Existentialism was arguably one of the first philosophical theories that received extensive coverage in newspapers, especially in continental Europe during the 1940s, and later even in popular magazines in America. Barrett (1964: 19) writes that "people began speaking of philosophical matters in the most unexpected places … the art world of Fifty-seventh Street [in New York City], as well as the fashion world of *Vogue* magazine". The *Vogue* article was written by Jean-Paul Sartre, and even *Mademoiselle*, a magazine for teenagers, published an article on existentialist literature (Wahl 1946: 3).

This entry into and visibility in popular culture – and away from philosophy as primarily an academic practice – demonstrates one of the primary characteristics of existentialism, namely that it is or should be viewed rather as a "broad cultural practice" (Wartenberg 2008: Preface). Wartenberg (*ibid*.) is of the opinion that "the Existentialists took their philosophy into the public sphere". Kaufmann (1956: 11) calls it "not a philosophy but a label for several widely different revolts against traditional philosophy". Baskin (1965: v) also mentions the idea that "existentialism is not a disciplined philosophical system but a label for revolts, in diverse guises, against traditional philosophy".

This revolution that Kaufmann is referring to is largely a reaction against traditional philosophy's rational approach that sought to explain human existence as part of a system that exists outside of and to some extent irrespective of human beings. This universalistic view "attempts to surrender all societal actions, entities and communicative processes to one all-encompassing societal totality or

whole" (Strauss 2015: 28). These types of philosophy are "concerned with a realm of permanent 'realities' above and beyond this world of unstable 'appearances'" (Gravil 2007: 7). In addition, it introduces a much deeper and more abstract metaphysical element that seeks answers to questions regarding the "reality" of reality: How can we be certain of anything? Is what we experience around us, including other people, real or are we, to use imagery from popular culture such as the science fiction movie *The Matrix*, in essence "dreaming"? (Rowlands 2003: 33). This course of reasoning is both highly speculative – what if? – and extremely analytical in the sense that only that which can be proven beyond doubt can be accepted as real. In this case the only reality is our awareness or consciousness – there is no way to prove that anything else (this keyboard I am typing on and the chair I am sitting on and the world I perceive when I look through the window) is real. The "slogan" for this realism became French philosopher René Descartes' famous "I think, therefore I am" [*Cogito ergo sum*] – referring to the Cartesian reasoning that the only proof we have of our existence is our thoughts (Audi 1999: Descartes, René; Gravil 2007). Descartes' scepticism can be traced back to the Greek Sceptics and refers to a belief that "evidence of the senses is suspect, given the (occasional) inability to distinguish between 'true' perception' and 'false' perception" (Cohen 2006: Scepticism and the Sceptics). A detailed discussion of this matter falls outside the scope of this study, and it is only mentioned here to serve as contrast for the development of existentialism.

3.3   A BRIEF BACKGROUND OF EXISTENTIALISM

The above-mentioned "existentialist revolt" against the rationalistic philosophy is contributed by most authors to Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) (cf. Barrett 1964; Kaufmann 1956; Audi 1999; Gordon 1999; Wahl 1946) who, according to Barrett (1964: 9-10), revolted against Descartes and "arch rationalist Hegel … in the name of our poor, tattered, finite, fragmentary, and quite unsystematic human existence". However, Barrett (1964: 10-11) does not see Hegel as only a classical rationalist, but also as "the first pioneer of a new historical mode of thought [in which] Reason itself plays second fiddle to Spirit (Geist)". This Hegel, according to Barrett, insists that our Spirit is what distinguishes man from animal, but that man is immersed within history – "any human product requires that we grasp it within the unfolding pattern of history" (*ibid*.). Wahl (1946: 4-5) also holds the opinion that Hegel, although primarily focused on the notion of rationality, differed from most traditional philosophers in terms of his "insistence on Becoming". From this point of view, Hegel, a firm believer in universal reason, could be seen as a catalyst for the development of what is today considered the philosophy of existentialism.

Wahl (1946: 27) posits that existentialism calls for the destruction of the "majority of the ideas of so-called 'philosophical common-sense,' and of what has often been called 'the eternal philosophy …

Philosophy … must cease to be a philosophy of essence and must become philosophy of existence". Audi (1999: Existentialism; cf. Wahl 1946) describes Kierkegaard as the first modern existentialist, but adds that the term "existentialism" only came into use mid-way through the 20th century. In fact, most philosophers, theorists and authors whose ideas or work are described as existentialist in nature have rejected this label and Kaufmann (1956: 11) even posits that "the label 'existentialism' ought to be abandoned altogether". Wahl (1946: 4) writes that Heidegger "opposed what he terms 'existentialism', and Jaspers has asserted that 'existentialism' is the death of the philosophy of existence".

Apart from Barrett's inclusion of (certain elements of) Hegel's philosophy, and Kierkegaard, another notable precursor of existentialism is Pascal (Kaufmann 1956; Audi 1999), with both Kierkegaard and Pascal being dedicated Christians. Kaufmann (1956) also adds Jaspers, Heidegger, Sartre, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, and Camus to his list of "existentialist" authors and philosophers although "it is extremely doubtful whether they would have appreciated the company to which they are consigned" (Kaufmann 1956: 11). Barrett's (1964: 11) list of existentialists also boasts Kierkegaard and Nietzshe, with Marx added (he refers to these as Hegel's "rebellious sons"). Audi (1999: Existentialism) posits that, apart from Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir was the only philosopher who "unqualifiedly accepted the existentialist label". Although this lack of coherence, resistance to being labelled, and wide-ranging and often conflicting world-views complicate the task of describing the development of the movement (or whether it is a movement at all), it does very ably demonstrate a key theme of existentialism, namely individualism (cf. Kaufmann 1956).

In terms of some form of direct lineage for existential thinking, Barrett (1964: 20) suggests Kierkegaard as the starting point and main influence on German philosophers Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger, who "systematically" took up Kierkegaard's ideas and developed it into existentialism in its present form (cf. Wahl 1946: 9). However, as Kaufmann (1956: 34) explains, Jaspers and Heidegger "were separated by a gulf" and both were quite critical of the other. Next to Kierkegaard, Nietzsche is considered an important influence by at least Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre (Kaufmann 1956: 21-22). Although not usually considered an existentialist, Nietzsche occupies a central place in the story of existentialism (*ibid*.). After the Second World War, and with both Kierkegaard and Heidegger translated into French, existentialism took on "the dimensions almost of a popular movement, whose high priest became the energetic Jean-Paul Sartre" (Barrett 1964: 21).

3.3.1   Kierkegaard

Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a Danish philosopher whose works include, amongst others, *Either/Or* and *Two Edifying Discourses* (both published in 1843), *Philosophical Fragments* (1844), *The Point of View for My Work as an Author* (1859) and *The Sickness unto Death* (1849). Kierkegaard, it is told (cf. Kaufmann 1956; Barrett 1964; Wahl 1946), realised that "everyone was engaged everywhere in making things easy" (Barrett 1964: 21) and resolved "to create difficulties everywhere" (Kaufmann 1956: 15). Wahl (1946: 5) writes that Kierkegaard rejected Hegel's idea that "to understand anything that happens in our inner life we must go to the totality which is our self, thence to the larger totality which is the human species, and finally to the totality which is the absolute idea". Not because he necessarily wanted to complicate his or anybody else's life, but because Kierkegaard was intrigued by the fact that people are required to make decisions, or choices, in any given situation and that these choices ultimately determine our fate.

Kierkegaard was searching for the meaning that informs this decision-making process, and was convinced that reason in the classical philosophical sense was not the answer (Kaufmann 1964: 17). Wahl (1946: 5) explains Kierkegaard's thinking about our existence as having a subjective focus, "that true existence is achieved by feeling". However, Kaufmann (1964: 17) concludes that this total disregard of reason as a possibility for thinking or decision-making is also Kierkegaard's central error. He renounced reason as the sole avenue for solving or addressing life's problems, instead arguing for passion (or feeling), yet never acknowledging the possibility that a combination of reason and passion could be an option. However, one of Kierkegaard's main contributions to philosophical thought was his recognition of the individual (to the extent that he suggested his epitaph be "That Individual" – Kaufmann 1956: 16).

Wahl (1946: 5-6) highlights four characteristics of Kierkegaard's "existent individual", namely:
- that he has an infinite relationship with himself and an infinite interest in himself and his destiny;
- that he always feels himself to be in Becoming, with a task before him;
- that he is impassioned with a passionate thought; and
- that, as a result of his passion, he is "the passion of freedom".

Wahl (*ibid*.) explains that all these actions are focused on or originate from the primary goal of existentialism, namely "to return to [Becoming] the original and authentic experience". For Kierkegaard this Becoming was rooted in Christianity, with a human being becoming aware of his sin and then progressing through a spiritual voyage to contact with or a relationship with "the absolute Other [God]" (*ibid*.).

Kierkegaard (1847: 92-93) defined his existent individual by comparing it to a crowd, with this crowd referring to an actual group of bodies: "[A] crowd in its very concept is the untruth, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility by reducing it to a fraction."

Included in his criticism of the crowd as detractor to the responsibility of the individual is the press, of which Kierkegaard was highly critical, especially "the fact that an anonymous author by the help of the press can day by day find occasion to say … whatever he pleases to say, and what perhaps he would be very far from having the courage to say as an individual" (Kierkegaard 1847: 96). Kierkegaard's "crowd" is in fact a warning against conformity and a critique against our inability "to be silent" in order to contemplate, as individuals, our responsibility in living an authentic life: "From becoming an individual no one, no one at all, is excluded, except he who excludes himself by becoming a crowd" (Kierkegaard 1847: 98). The idea of the "popular mind" – or the existentialist theme of inauthenticity – was also discussed by Gustave le Bon in *The Crowd: A study of the popular mind* (1895). It resurfaces a number of times in the writing of Nat Nakasa, who refers to this state of mind/being as "mental corrosion" (Nakasa, in Patel 2005: 46). It is a central theme in Nakasa's work and is discussed in detail in chapter 5.

Barrett (1964: 152-153) provides the following key points in relation to Kierkegaard's treatment of existence:

- Actuality is prior to possibility. Life is not an affair of hypotheticals and contrapositives, but of actual situations;
- The point of view on human existence is not that of the philosophical theorist, but of the ethical and religious teachers who seek to summon other individuals to the task of becoming a self; and
- Kierkegaard's treatment of existence does not deal at all with the strictly philosophical problem of "transcendence".

3.3.2 Jaspers

Jaspers and Heidegger's journeys into existentialism started after the First World War. Jaspers, a doctor of medicine, also rejected the term "existentialism", instead preferring *Existenzphilosophie*, or the philosophy of existence. True to existentialistic form Jaspers was highly critical of most philosophers before him, as well his contemporaries, despite describing Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as "the original philosophers" of the age. Most important to Jaspers (1941: 163) was that both his

original philosophers' thinking "was not academically inspired but rooted in their *Existenz…* Never on such a high level of thought had there been such a thorough-going and radical opposition to mere reason." Wahl (1946: 9) describes Jaspers' contribution as a "secularization and generalization" of Kierkegaard's work, and with a similar focus on the multitude of possibilities that a human being has.

Jaspers explains in *On my philosophy* (1941) that philosophy, for himself as well as for Europeans in general, became more important and relevant after the First World War "caused the great breach in our European existence" (Jaspers 1941: 133). This ties in with the work of other existentialist philosophers and authors, many of whom wrote during or directly after a period of often dramatic socio-political upheaval, which could be attributed to the existentialist view that, as Wahl (1946: 10) explains, human beings "fully realize ourselves … in situations in which we are strained to the utmost". Or, to use Heidegger's famous paraphrasing of Plato: "All that is great stands in the storm" (Heidegger 1933, in Stassen 2003: 11).

Kaufmann (1956: 30-31) writes that Jaspers' philosophy was set apart from all the great philosophers by two things. The first is his insistence that reason, or the rational sphere, is subphilosophic and that philosophy begins where science ends, or fails us – Jaspers uses the image of a shipwreck to explain this experience of discovery as a result of failure (cf. Wahl 1946: 10; Kaufmann 1956: 31). According to Jaspers (1941: 144), science (or reason) "affords no aim to life [and] has no answer to the essential problems that move man". Secondly, Jaspers, despite his views on rationality and ironically probably because his training as a scientist, sought to find practical application in philosophy. His accent was less on theoretical analyses and more on the activity of philosophy: "Philosophizing is the activity of thought itself, by which the essence of man, in its entirety, is realized in the individual man" (Jaspers 1941: 138).

3.3.3   Heidegger

Fellow German Martin Heidegger is described as one of the foremost philosophers of the 20th century. Stassen (2003: ix) views Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre as "the two philosophers that left more of an indelible mark on the intellectual landscape of that century than any other". Not only influential, Heidegger is also considered highly controversial due to his involvement with Nazism and his membership of the German National Socialist Workers' Party (Critchley 2009a). Although some view this in such a serious light as to say that it "contaminated" his work, Stassen (2003: xix; cf. Malpas 2008: 17) writes that a thorough reading of Heidegger indicates that he never subscribed to the basic characteristics of fascism, namely biological racism and territorial imperialism. However, Stassen (*ibid.*) writes that Heidegger's thought could have been contaminated by the fact that he was looking

for a way out of what Stassen describes as the "inauthenticity of politics" and that he initially saw National Socialism as the solution.

Heidegger's principal publication is *Being and Time* (*Sein und Zeit*), published in 1927 and considered to be the first and probably foremost attempt to a "intellectual summary" of the ideas of what was to become existentialism put forward by Kierkegaard (Wahl 1946: 9) and Nietzsche (Kaufmann 1956: 33). As Kaufmann (1956: 34-35) puts it

> Heidegger made discussion of death and despair and dread and care and other previously unacademic subjects quite respectable. He made it possible for professors to discuss with a good conscience matters previously considered literary, if that.

However, Heidegger is also notoriously difficult to understand due to his idiosyncratic use of language (Tietz 2001: 7). In fact, with *Being and Time* he "invented a new philosophical vocabulary" (Critchley 2009a). According to Wahl (1946: 11) Heidegger was primarily concerned with the age-old problem of Being, in terms of *in general* what it is "to be" for all things but from the perspective of human *existence* as that is the only direct access we have to Being – the "mode of Being best knowable to us" (Kaufmann 1956: 37). In this sense Heidegger set out his aim as ontological, with ontology as the study of Being (*ibid*.). In other words, Heidegger tried to describe what it is "to be" in general for all things through an analysis of how human beings "be". For Heidegger there are other forms of Being as well: the being of tools and instruments; the being of mathematical forms; the being of animals (Wahl 1946: 11) – but these simply *are*, they don't *exist*, with existence referring to being conscious of your Being. Existence in this regard therefore implies action(s) and the awareness of these actions. The author of this study takes existence to be exclusive to *human* beings in their specific circumstances as opposed to the Being of a rock or a tree which simply *is* and which has no choice in the matter. Existence is therefore the mode of Being for humans. There could be, and probably are, other modes of Being, but there is no way for a human being to gain direct access to the mode of Being of, for example, a tree. To bring this back to Heidegger: he professed to be interested in the philosophy of Being in a general sense by looking at human existence as an example, and in addition he attempted to revolutionise how we look at Being, while others, for example Sartre, were focused solely on existence as the human being's mode of Being. Or, to put it in another way, Heidegger was concerned with our awareness of ourselves, while Sartre was concerned with what we *do* with this awareness, or our *reason* for Being. (Heidegger's use of the capitalised Being refers to an action, it is therefore a verb.)

Kaufmann (1956: 39) writes that Heidegger's biggest revolt was against representation – the idea that there is a (general) human nature which is our essence and which precedes our existence: I am a human (essence) firstly and therefore I act is this manner (existence). For Heidegger and most existentialists, existence precedes essence: we can determine, or decide, or change (the concept of transcendence) what our essence is to be or should be (Barrett 1964: 53). Or, as Wahl (1946: 13) explains it, we are existence without (prior) essence.

Although one of Heidegger's early mentors was Edmund Husserl, Stassen (2003: xxviii) suggests that Heidegger became progressively more critical of Husserl's transcendental phenomenology as a rigorous methodology for philosophy. However, existentialism remains indebted to phenomenology. Cox (2009: 20) describes this relationships as follows: "It is the phenomenological theory of consciousness that underpins all the other claims that existentialism makes … [and] is the key to understanding existentialism." In fact, Cox (*ibid*.) summarises existentialism as "a theory of consciousness". Heidegger's departure from Husserl's phenomenology is his insistence that existence is never general, but always particular to a specific person. "Heidegger proposes to understand our human existence by beginning from our ordinary everyday existence, rather than from the purified philosophical existence that is reached after we practice the Cartesian doubt about the existence of external objects and other people," writes Barrett (1964: 55).

Heidegger never completed *Being and Time* and Wahl (1946: 19) posits that one reason for this could be that the relationship between existence and the search for Being cannot be simplified to the extent that Heidegger might have wanted. Wahl (1946: 20) writes that Heidegger, in most of his work, "is forced to be now a realist, now an idealist, and … he does not succeed in passing beyond the domain in which these two doctrines stand in opposition".

3.3.4 Sartre

The French school of existentialism is characterised by the disappearance of the line between philosophy and literature; "the nature of human existence would seem to be such that it compels philosophers to write novels, plays, and literary criticism" (Barrett 1964: 27). As mentioned before, existentialism rose to its current prominence primarily through French philosopher and author Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre was a soldier during the Second World War and joined the French Resistance after being held captive as a prisoner of war in Germany for nine months (Kaufmann 1956: 40).

Sartre is credited for bringing existentialism in "contact with experience" by bringing existential motifs to life through his own lived experience instead of the often abstract intellectual activities of

two of his greatest influences, Husserl and Heidegger (Kaufmann 1956: 41; Wahl 1946: 23). As with most French philosophers the line between philosophy and literature in Sartre's work is not clear-cut (Kaufmann 1956: 41). His oeuvre includes philosophical works such as his principal philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness* (*L'Etre et le néant*, 1943) and *Existentialism is a Humanism* (*L'existentialisme est un humanisme*, 1946), as well as short stories, novels, essays, plays and literary criticism, including *Nausea* (*La nausée*, 1938), *No Exit* (*Huis clos*, 1944) and *The Wall* (*Le mur*, 1939). Sartre was also a frequent contributor to *Combat*, a clandestine Resistance newspaper edited by French-Algerian philosopher, author and journalist Albert Camus (Zaretsky 2013: 96).

Similar to Heidegger, Sartre did have some concern regarding the ontology of Being, with Sartre's Being having two forms: "in-itself" and "for-itself". A being "in-itself" (similar to Heidegger's being of tools or instruments) is not aware of itself – a rock is a rock and does not know that it is a rock. The being "for-itself" is aware of itself – a human being (Kaufmann 1956: 43). This difference, and the consciousness of this difference, is the foundation of existentialism. As does Heidegger, Sartre emphasises the importance of death in determining existence – a being "in-itself" is not aware of death (animals), or cannot die (rocks). It is in his confrontation with death that the human being finds (or could find) authentic life.

The consciousness of for-itself affords it the option of change: to become something else. But Sartre's freedom is not freedom, it is responsibility. It requires us to take the blame (or praise) for whatever we are or become – no other can carry the blame, not even God or a god or any heredity or circumstance (Kaufmann 1956: 46-47).

Sartre (1946: 24), in his defence of existentialism in *Existentialism and Humanism* (also translated as *Existentialism is a Humanism*), defines existentialism as follows:

> We can begin by saying that existentialism, in our sense or the word, is a doctrine that does render human life possible; a doctrine, also, which affirms that every truth and every action imply both an environment and a human subjectivity.

3.3.5   Summary of brief background of existentialism

To summarise this short overview of elements of the history and main contributors to existentialism, Wahl's (1946: 26) "rules-of-thumb" for distinguishing between the main strains of existentialism, and between existentialism and other philosophies, are useful:

> If we say: 'Man is in this world, a world limited by death and experienced in anguish; is aware of himself as essentially anxious; is burdened by his solitude within the horizon of his

temporality'; then we recognize the accents of Heideggerian philosophy. If we say: 'Man, by opposition to the 'in-itself' is the 'for-itself', is never at rest, and strives in vain towards a union of the 'in-itself' and the 'for-itself''; then we are speaking in the manner of Sartrian existentialism. If we say: 'I am a thinking thing,' as Descartes said; or, 'The real things are Ideas,' as Plato said; or, 'The Ego accompanies all our representations,' as Kant said; then we are moving in a sphere which is no longer that of the philosophy of existence.

Gravil (2007: 8-9) summarises existentialism through Sartre's phrase "existence precedes essence":

> You are what you do. This is an attack on the notion that people come ready-made, as it were, with predetermined personalities or fates. In Existentialism you choose your own fate, and you determine what you (in essence) are: even if you avoid decisive choices, or acts, you are responsible for that avoidance. You also create your own values … Existentialists posit that only people can *exist*. (Tables and dogs just are.)

Barrett (1964: 150-159) also distinguishes between two kinds of existentialism, or "the two existentialisms", based on Heidegger's distinction between the ontic and the ontological. The ontological refers to a general structure of the nature of Being, while the ontic refers to individual actions as examples of the ontological structure. Barrett (1964: 152) explains this position by contrasting Kierkegaard's and Heidegger's approaches. Kierkegaard deals with the "actual existing individual" and not the "detached contemplation" of speculative philosophy. Barrett (1964: 152) describes Kierkegaard's treatment of existence as that

> [W]e cannot sit as mere spectators: we have to be involved [in life], and as soon as we have made the decision of involvement, we have passed from a purely aesthetic to an ethical stage. In so doing, we become, as the common phrase puts it, a real person: we have put off childish things and become serious.

For Kierkegaard, actuality is prior to possibility, an approach which Barrett (1964: 153) calls "traditional and Aristotelian". Heidegger's untraditional approach is the exact opposite, with possibility being higher than (prior to) actuality. For Barrett (1964: 154), Heidegger deals in generalities and possibilities, which he (Barrett) likens to Kant's distinction between an "empirical" and a "transcendental" inquiry: "An empirical inquiry examines individual facts or events. A transcendental inquiry seeks to find the a priori conditions without which there could be no experience of particular facts or events" (*ibid.*). In this regard, "ontic" existentialism is empirical (as practiced by Kierkegaard), and "ontological" existentialism is transcendental (as practiced by Heidegger).

According to this rationale authors such as Camus and Orwell are "ontic" existentialists, describing individual facts or events in order to illustrate the larger ontological structure of existentialism. Sartre, according to Barrett (1964: 157-158), moves back and forth between ontic and ontological "without ever seeming to be aware of their difference". Heidegger described Kierkegaard as a "religious writer" rather than a philosopher or "thinker" (Barrett 1964: 154). Or, to explain it in a current context, Heidegger believed Kierkegaard practiced *applied* existentialism. If this rationale is extended to the work of other recognised authors whose work is characterised by existentialist elements, Camus, Orwell and Ortéga are also applied existentialists rather than existentialist philosophers, with Sartre straddling both worlds. The aim of this study is to demonstrate that Nat Nakasa's work, whether intended by him or not, also serves as an example of applied existentialism, i.e. explaining existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts).

This brief overview served to provide the reader with some basic points of reference in terms of existentialism. It is not the purpose of this study to provide a comprehensive history of existentialism, nor of those authors and philosophers (those mentioned here and others) who, wittingly or unwittingly and often willingly or unwillingly, represent existentialism in some form. Although elements of existentialist thought are evident in the work of most philosophers (cf. Kaufmann 1956: 48-51; Wahl 1946; Barrett 1964), the following discussion on relevant existentialist themes rests mostly on the work of Heidegger and Sartre.

3.4   RELEVANT EXISTENTIAL THEMES

The purpose of this section is to discuss certain existential themes relevant to the analysis of Nakasa's work. The relevant themes include being-in-the-world, anxiety, bad faith, negation and nothingness, facticity and transcendence, temporality and finitude, as well as absurdity and authenticity.

3.4.1   Being-in-the-world

"The phenomenological exhibition of the being of beings encountered nearest to us can be accomplished under the guidance of the everyday being-in-the-world, which we also call *association in* the world *with* inner-worldly beings," wrote Heidegger in *Being and Time* in 1927 (1.III.#15). With his concept of "being-in-the-world" Heidegger captures the core idea of existentialism: we are already situated in the world, in "place", alongside other persons and things (Malpas 2008: 6; 39). As mentioned earlier, this is a central point of departure for Heidegger, who is of the opinion that the philosophical tradition has largely ignored this "situatedness". Heidegger (1927: 1.III.#14) explains the "world" in this context as more than just the "outward appearance" of houses, trees or people, but as a phenomenological world, thus with individual meaning attach to the "beings in the world".

However, to avoid this world becoming subjective in the sense that each person has, and is aware of only, his or her "own" world, which will take us back to a philosophy that largely ignores "situatedness", Heidegger (1927: 1.III.#14) suggests we rather refer to "worldliness", or the *worldliness of world in general* – a common world in which we all exist. Our being in this general world is what Heidegger calls our "everydayness". Fox-Muraton (2014: 107-108) refers to this common world as our "shared social space".

To understand the human being's place in this "common world", we need to take a step back to Heidegger's preferred description of human beings: *Da-sein*, a combination of the German words for "there" (*da*) and "being" (*sein*) because in his view humans are more than just another type of being; we are distinctive to the extent that we are in a class of our own: we are aware of our being, or existence, and we can determine what we do with it. This was also the starting point for Heidegger's attempt to break with traditional philosophical thought that used Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as departure point for attempts to understand human being from the categories of Nature (Barrett 1964: 50). Heidegger proposed Man as the metaphysical animal: in being he is concerned with his own being – and this quest for understanding his own being is what characterises his being (Barrett 1964: 51-52).

Heidegger (1927: Introduction.II.#5) writes

> Da-sein is a being that does not simply occur among other beings. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its being this being is concerned *about* its very being. Thus it is constitutive of the being of Da-sein to have, in its very being, a relation of being to this being. And this in turn means that Da-sein understands itself in its being in some way and with some explicitness … Da-sein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself.

In Sartre's ontology, or theory of being, of existentialism, human Being (as the action of existence) has three modes: *being-in-itself*, *being-for-itself* and *being-for-others* (Gravil 2007: 9). Being-for-itself refers to a free, unconditioned consciousness (a dog's consciousness, for example), being-in-itself is what you are conscious of in self-consciousness (what you are aware of when you are aware of yourself) and being-for-others is what you are as the object of someone else's consciousness. Through these modes of being another existential concept comes to the fore, namely appropriation. At any given time, we will identify wholly with our past, as though we are unchanging, yet we may refuse to acknowledge or be identified with an action we just performed. Gravil (2007: 9) provides the following example:

I *am* a radical, even though I haven't done anything radical for twenty years and habitually resist all proposals for change in my daily life; but I *am not* a wife beater even though I struck my wife yesterday. In other words we all have different ways of thinking about who we are, and we pick and choose according to whichever theory produces the most flattering self-image or the least anxiety.

From the above, two existentialist principles become clear:

- We as human beings are the only beings that are concerned with our being; and
- We are beings-in-the-world – we share a "common world".

So, we are concerned about our existence, and our existence always takes place within a context – we are always *in* the world and *with* others (Barrett 1964: 55). For Sartre, these two aspects cannot be separated. "The concrete is man within the world in that specific union of man with the world which Heidegger, for example, calls 'being-in-the-world'," writes Sartre (1943: 78) in *Being and Nothingness*. This "totality which is man-in-the-world" has led Sartre to ask two interdependent questions, namely 1) What is the synthetic relation which we call being-in-the-world?, and 2) What must man and the world be in order for a relation between them to be possible? (*ibid*.). Sartre then continues to explain that the answer to these questions can be derived from human conduct: "… each type of human conduct, being the conduct of man in the world, can release for us simultaneously man, the world, and the relation which unites them" (Sartre 1943: 78-79). He also sees this question – "Is there any conduct which can reveal to me the relation of man with the world?" – as a question that can be considered objectively

> for it matters little whether the questioner is myself or the reader who reads my work and who is questioning along with me. But on the other hand, the question is not simply the objective totality of the words printed on this page; it is indifferent to the symbols which express it. In a word, it is a human attitude filled with meaning. What does this attitude reveal to us?

While Sartre suggests we look at human conduct for clues as to man's relation to the world, Heidegger is more specific. For him, language, and more specifically speech or discourse, is what gives expression to our being. Barrett (1964: 56) explains it as "our everyday existence *is* in speech. Our Being-in-the-world comes to expression in speech, and through expression to interpretation and understanding."

Irrespective of whether we look at human conduct in general, or speech specifically, for clues to tell us about our being-in-the-world, these clues invariably reveal two possibilities of human existence

(Barrett 1964: 57). The first is a "common and humble creature" which Heidegger refers to as "the One" (*das Man*) who is "Everybody and Nobody", typically conjured up when we refer to rules of behaviour such as "one doesn't do that, one doesn't smoke here" (*ibid.*) This everyday existence is where our "consciousness" interacts with clues or evidence (human conduct, speech) that there are others similar to us. This is what is known in existentialism as inauthentic being, which should not be seen as a "lower" or "lesser" way of being, but merely one of two possibilities (*ibid.*). It is only through this inauthentic or everyday existence that we can strive for or transcend to what could be described as the existentialist first prize, or the second possibility of human existence, namely authenticity. However, the essence of our concern with our existence, whether authentic or inauthentic, is freedom.

3.4.2 Freedom

From the perspective of existentialism, freedom is the fundamental characteristic of human beings (Wartenberg 2008). This freedom includes social and political freedom (liberty), which refers to the fact that human beings have developed social conventions and political institutions to regulate their interaction with one another, and that these conventions and institutions may not illegitimately constrain the human beings governed by them (*ibid.*). This notion also forms the basis on which democracy is built, and it stands in direct contrast with the socio-political circumstances in which Nakasa found himself during his life in South Africa.

Social and political freedom, and any other type of freedom where freedom is seen as being unrestricted by human convention, culture, institution or even restraint in a physical sense, rest upon a type of über or meta-freedom, which Wartenberg (2008) calls metaphysical freedom. This, in essence, refers to the concept of free will. Philosophy of all branches, including the existentialists, have recognised a distinctive characteristic that sets human beings apart from the rest of the physical world, namely the ability to initiate and not simply react on instinct. This is embodied in the existential concept of being-in-the-world, as described earlier. However, the existentialists' freedom is a more radical concept, defined by our concern with our nature, "of how we are and will be" (Wartenberg 2008).

Existential freedom arises from the idea that our human being is a mode of being concerned with our being. This is captured in Sartre's famous expression, and also the well-known existentialist slogan, that "Man's existence precedes his essence" (Sartre 1946: 26). A table can just be a table, a knife is a knife – it has a definite purpose. Their essence – "the sum of the formulae and the qualities which made its production and its definition possible" – precedes its existence. However, a human being

comes into existence without an essence, or nature, attached to it. Our future is open, or "we must begin from the subjective" (*ibid.*). Sartre (1946: 28) clarifies it as follows:

> We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him as not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism.

Sartre was a self-declared representative of what he called atheistic existentialism, but the idea that a human being does not have a predetermined nature is also evident in the work of Christian existentialist Kierkegaard. In recognising his responsibility as Christian to move from the temporal to the eternal (the Christian heaven), Kierkegaard also recognises human beings' ability, and responsibility, to choose. Sartre's "man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself" is Kierkegaard's self-determination: "… here it is left to the individual himself whether one will or will not" (Kierkegaard 1847, in Come 1995: 232).

Both authors recognise that human beings do not have a pre-determined nature, but rather the ability of self-determination. This is existential freedom: "… every man is in possession of himself as he is, and the entire responsibility for his existence [is placed] squarely upon his own shoulders" (Sartre 1946: 29). Adding to this burden, for freedom is not really free, Sartre (*ibid.*) writes that man is not only responsible for his own individuality, but for all men:

> When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men. For in effect, of all the actions a man may take in order to create himself as he wills to be, there is not one which is not creative, at the same time, of an image of man such as he believes he ought to be.

Sartre therefore states that every choice I make is my affirmation of what I think humankind should be therefore when choosing for myself I am choosing for everyone. Sartre places much more emphasis on freedom than Heidegger, whom Barrett (1964: 67) describes as presupposing that freedom is part of the phenomenologically given – "something that is immediately grasped as soon as we grasp that man is to be defined by his possibilities".

For Sartre (1943: 63),

> man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as way of being. We are taking the word 'responsibility' in its ordinary sense as 'consciousness (of) being the incontestable author of an event or of an object' … He [man] must assume the situation with the proud consciousness of being the author of it, for the very worst disadvantages or the worst threats which can endanger my person have meaning only in and through my project; and it is on the ground of the engagement which I am that they appear. It is therefore senseless to think of complaining since nothing foreign has decided what we feel, what we live, or what we are.

From literature to philosophy to religion, the idea that human beings have the unique ability to choose has been perpetuated, fighting against natural science's (and some traditional views of philosophy's) claim of the preordained: that anything and everything, including the actions of human beings, can be explained. In 1864, Dostoyevsky's Underground Man (in *Notes from the Underground*) threatened to "purposely go mad in order to be rid of reason and have his own way". Almost a century later, Dylan Thomas (1951) in a similar vein urged us "not go gentle into that good night… [but to] rage against the dying of the light". Even in popular culture this idea is repeated often. In the science fiction classic *The hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy* (Douglas Adams 2002: 401-402; 409) the character Arthur Dent suddenly found himself "in a terrifically good mood":

> He had just had a wonderful idea about how to cope with the terrible lonely isolation, the nightmares, the failure of all his attempts at horticulture, and the sheer futurelessness and futility of his life here on prehistoric Earth, which was that he would go mad [reminiscent of the Underground Man – WM] … Arthur felt happy. He was terribly pleased that the day was for once working out so much according to plan. Only twenty minutes ago he had decided he would go mad, and now here he was already chasing a sofa across the fields of prehistoric Earth.

In terms of a human being's responsibility towards choice, Kierkegaard's *The point of view for my work as an author* (1859) serves more as an example of one man's struggle in choosing a specific path than as an elucidation of specific existentialist principles. Kierkegaard (1859: XIII 530) states that "the total thought in the entire work as an author is this: becoming a Christian".

Our freedom, and the responsibility encapsulated in the ever-present choices to be made as a result of this freedom, manifests itself through arguably the most written-about or best described existentialist theme: anxiety (Sartre 1943: 34).

3.4.3 Anxiety

Anxiety (French *nausée*, also anguish or angst) is the form that our consciousness of freedom assume. It should be clearly distinguished from fear. Here Sartre acknowledges Kierkegaard's concept of anguish or anxiety:

> Anguish is distinguished from fear in that fear is fear of beings in the world whereas anguish is anguish before myself. Vertigo is anguish to the extent that I am afraid not of falling over the precipice, but of throwing myself over. A situation provokes fear if there is a possibility of my life being changed from without [forces outside myself]; my being provokes anguish to the extent that I distrust myself and my own reactions in that situation. The artillery preparation which precedes the attack can provoke fear in the soldier who undergoes the bombardment, but anguish is born in him when he tries to foresee the conduct with which he will face the bombardment, when he asks himself if he is going to be able to 'hold up' (Sartre 1943: 29).

While Sartre is fighting the urge to throw himself over the edge of the precipice – because that is a possibility, but one that would, from a common sense point of view, end in disaster – Kierkegaard (in Wartenberg 2008: Anxiety) suggests taking that leap. While appearing to be diametrically opposed, these two options describe one of existentialism's interesting features, namely that it is a platform for both theists (like Kierkegaard) and atheists (like Sartre). It is up to the *individual*. Kierkegaard's leap of faith is based on his view that religion has no rational basis – which is then also the source of anxiety, namely making crucial decisions without having a standard to appeal to in making these decisions (Wartenberg 2008: Anxiety).

For Heidegger, anxiety is caused by our being-in-the-world (Barret 1964: 58), which makes anxiety more fundamental than fear. Barret (*ibid.*) writes that fear is definite, while anxiety "discovers to us the world; i.e., brings us face to face with a world, to which we now sense ourselves to be in a precarious relation". Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness* (1943: 29), writes that Heidegger's view is that anguish, or anxiety, is "the apprehension of nothingness", or the overwhelming responsibility of becoming *a something*.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1927: I.VI.#40) writes: "So if what *Angst* is about exposes nothing, that is, the world as such, this means that *that about which* Angst *is anxious is being-in-the-world itself*. Being anxious discloses, primordially and directly, the world as the world."

Sartre (1946: 30) explains the origin of this anguish as stemming from our realisation of the responsibility we have:

> When a man commits himself to anything, fully realising that he is not only choosing what he will be, but is thereby at the same time a legislator deciding for the whole of mankind – in such a moment a man cannot escape from the sense of complete and profound responsibility.

This "complete and profound responsibility", as mentioned before, is not only an individual responsibility, but a "commitment to humanity as a whole" (*ibid*.). For Sartre (1946: 31-32), this commitment to humanity cannot but cause anxiety:

> [O]ne ought always to ask oneself what would happen if everyone did as one is doing; nor can one escape from that disturbing thought except by a kind of self-deception. The man who lies in self-excuse, by saying 'Everyone will not do it' must be ill at ease in his conscience, for the act of lying implies the universal value which it denies by its very disguise his anguish reveals itself … Everything happens to every man as though the whole human race had its eyes fixed upon what he is doing and regulated its conduct accordingly.

This argument brings Sartre (1946: 34) back to his original statement, namely that existence precedes essence, and that therefore we will never be able to explain our actions by reference to a given and specific human nature:

> We are left alone, without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does.

Sartre (1946: 35-38) illustrates anxiety at the hand of a dilemma experienced by one of his students. The student's brother was killed during the German offensive of 1940 and the young man wanted to avenge his brother's death. At the same time his mother lived alone with him. She has already lost her one son as well as her husband, who was a "collaborator" and therefore seen as a traitor. The young man was struggling to choose between patriotism and his love for his mother – this choice being an intensely personal one and at the same time representative of the universal choice of "what would everyone else do in this situation?":

He found himself confronted by two very different modes of action; the one concrete, immediate, but directed towards only one individual; and the other an action addressed to an end infinitely greater, a national collectivity, but for that very reason ambiguous … At the same time, he was hesitating between two kinds of morality; on the one side the morality of sympathy, of personal devotion and, on the other side, a morality of a wider scope but of more debatable validity.

Consider this student's dilemma together with the following explanation from Sartre (1946: 39-41):

That is what 'abandonment' implies, that we ourselves decide our being. And with this abandonment goes anguish. As for 'despair', the meaning of this expression is extremely simple. It merely means that we limit ourselves to a reliance upon that which is within our wills, or within the sum of the probabilities which render our action feasible … When Descartes said, 'Conquer yourself rather than the world,' what he meant was, at bottom, the same – that we should act without hope … First I ought to commit myself and then act my commitment, according to the time-honoured formula that 'one need not hope in order to undertake one's world.'

The above discussion has provided us with a brief description of what existentialist anxiety is – the manifestation of our freedom, with that freedom being the relentless responsibility of choosing. However, anxiety cannot be understood completely without a discussion of the equally relentless efforts to avoid anxiety – what existentialists call "bad faith".

3.4.4 Bad faith

Cox (2009: 55) defines bad faith as the denial of the reality of freedom and choice, whether in an effort to avoid anxiety or as a coping strategy, perhaps with the aim of relinquishing responsibility. Basically "it is freedom where freedom aims at its own suppression and denial" (*ibid*.).

Our first experience of ourselves is through the eyes of others, which gives us "a distorted view of what we are" (Wartenberg 2008: Encountering ourselves). When we face anxiety, it allows us to develop a more accurate view of who we are. But either the presence of the anxiety, or the more accurate picture developing through encountering ourselves is often more than enough for a person to employ certain tactics, sometimes called self-deception, in order to escape the anxiety or the view of him or herself that is developing. However, bad faith is not self-deception but rather self-distraction or self-evasion (Cox 2009: 58). Sartre (1943: 48) writes that self-deception is impossible simply

because we are unable to lie to ourselves: "The essence of the lie implies in fact that the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding."

Gordimer, in her essay *Living in the Interregnum*, refers to apartheid as an effort to lie, a "dependency on distorted vision induced since childhood, and we are aware that with the inner eye we have 'seen too much to be innocent'" (Gordimer 1982: 222, quoting Edmundo Desnoes).

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1943: 43) writes that we cannot hide from anguish, or anxiety, as we can only try to avoid an aspect of our being if we are acquainted with that aspect, because, similar to lying, the liar already holds both the lie and the truth:

> This means that in my being I must indicate this aspect in order to be able to turn myself away from it; better yet, I must think of it constantly in order to take care not to think of it … In a word, I flee in order not to know, but I cannot avoid knowing that I am fleeing; and the flight from anguish is only a mode of becoming conscious of anguish.

Sartre (1943: 44) then continues to describe what "bad faith" is:

> If I am my anguish in order to flee it, that presupposes that I can decenter myself in relation to what I am, that I can be anguish in the form of 'not-being-it,' that I can dispose of a nihilating power at the heart of anguish itself. This nihilating power nihilates anguish in so far as I flee it and nihilates itself in so far as I am anguish in order to flee it. This attitude is what we call bad faith.

While a lie or a falsehood requires the "duality of the deceiver and the deceived" (Sartre 1943: 49), bad faith takes place in a "single consciousness" – it involves only the individual and no other people. Sartre (1943: 50) further describes bad faith as that "it can even be the normal aspect [or state] of life for a very great number of people. A person can live in bad faith, which does not mean that he does not have abrupt awakenings to cynicism or to good faith, but which implies a constant and particular style of life." (It is on this basis that Sartre rejects Freud's approach to psychoanalysis in terms of "hidden" causes that impels us to act in certain ways. According to Sartre, we must be aware of it to be able to hide it.)

Sartre's description of bad faith in *Being and Nothingness* begins with an example of a young woman flirting with a presumably older man. At some stage he takes her hand. If she leaves her hand in his, she continues to flirt. If she removes her hand she breaks "the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm" (Sartre 1943: 55):

The aim is to postpone the moment of decision as long as possible. We know what happens next; the young woman leaves her hand there, but she does not notice that she is leaving it. She does not notice because it happens by chance that she is at this moment all intellect. She draws her companion up to the most lofty regions of sentimental speculation; she speaks of Life, of her life, she shows herself in her essential aspect – a personality, a consciousness. And during this time the divorce of the body from the soul is accomplished; the hand rests inert between the warm hands of her companion – neither consenting nor resisting – a thing. We shall say that this woman is in bad faith.

Sartre then continues to describe how being in bad faith is akin to existing with all the possibilities without taking responsibility for these. The woman in Sartre's example is engendering at the same time both the properties of facticity and transcendence – the factual situation of the moment as well as all the possibilities of transcending that moment. Bad faith, Sartre (1943: 56) explains, is not to avoid creating a synthesis between these two properties (when a decision is made) but rather to "affirm their identity while preserving their differences". Cox (2009: 61) refers to this as "choosing not to choose".

In another of Sartre's examples he uses the waiter in a café (a favourite setting of Sartre's) to demonstrate how we "play at being" *something* although that is not who we are – because we are never who we are and always who we are not. Sartre's waiter is overly attentive, "a little too precise, a little too rapid" (Sartre 1943: 59) – he is playing "with his condition in order to realize it":

> This obligation is not different from that which is imposed on all tradesmen. Their condition is wholly one of ceremony. The public demands of them that they realize it as a ceremony; there is the dance of the grocer, of the tailor, of the auctioneer, by which they endeavour to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor. A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer. Society demands that he limit himself to his function as a grocer … There are indeed many precautions to imprison a man in what he is, as if we lived in perpetual fear that he might escape from it, that he might break away and suddenly elude his condition.

Heidegger (1927: II.I#47) refers to this as "representation":

> The broad multiplicity of ways of being-in-the-world in which one person can be represented by another extends not only to the used-up modes of public being with one another, but concerns as well the possibilities of taking care of things limited to definite circles, tailored to professions, social classes, and stages of life.

A human being, or the mode of being of a human, is that of a consciousness. According to Sartre, a consciousness is a nothingness, meaning it is not a permanent, definite thing (like a rock), but rather it encompasses possibilities. It is against this measure that the waiter plays at being a waiter. It is impossible for him to be a waiter permanently in the same way that a rock will be a rock, but by choosing not to choose he continues to be a representation of a waiter, thereby avoiding the anxiety that will come with having to choose.

Bad faith is an almost inescapable state. Sartre (1943: 68) writes that being in bad faith is not the result of a reflective, voluntary decision on the part of the person in bad faith:

> [It is] a spontaneous determination of our being. One puts oneself in bad faith as one goes to sleep and one is in bad faith as one dreams. Once this mode of being has been realized, it is as difficult to get out of it as to wake oneself up; bad faith is a type of being in the world, like waking or dreaming, which by itself tends to perpetuate itself, although its structure is of the metastable type.

In addition, bad faith is a permanent characteristic of consciousness. It is always a possibility. With every new decision, or choice, the possibility of bad faith is also renewed: "If bad faith is possible, it is because it is an immediate, permanent threat to every project of the human being; it is because consciousness in its being a permanent risk of bad faith" (Sartre 1943: 70).

Even entire generations, in the historical context put forth by Ortega y Gasset (1931: 19) in *The Modern Theme*, can suffer from this permanent, inescapable bad faith:

> Generations, like individuals, sometimes fail in their vocation [historical mission] and leave their mission unachieved. There are in fact generations which are disloyal to themselves and defraud the cosmic intention deposited in their keeping. Instead of resolutely undertaking their appointed task they remain deaf to the urgent summons of the vocation that is really theirs and prefer a supine reliance on ideas, institutions and pleasures created by their forbears and lacking affinity with their own natures.

To summarise our discussion of relevant existentialist principles thus far:
- We as human beings are the only beings that are concerned with our being;
- We are beings-in-the-world – we share a "common world" with others;
- We are free, or more correctly, we are freedom. This freedom is not liberty (socio-political freedom) but rather an inescapable responsibility to make choices;

- Existential freedom manifests through anxiety of which the source is this overwhelming responsibility; and

- In an effort to escape or avoid this anxiety we are in bad faith – a state of being where we choose not to choose, or not to be responsible for our responsibility. Bad faith is a permanent feature of consciousness – it is always a possibility, and it is renewed through every possibility.

The aim or goal of existentialism is authenticity, which is achieved through the existential categories of negation and nothingness, and facticity and transcendence. These are discussed next.

3.4.5 Negation and nothingness

Since being free is inescapable, and the responsibility cannot be shirked, how do we navigate this freedom? Sartre has developed a set of concepts to describe human existence which arguably flies the flag for existentialism. Sartre's views are built on the basic philosophical concept of humans possessing consciousness. However, he choose to use contrast to illustrate the difference between conscious beings and all other beings. Consciousness (human beings) exists for-itself, with all other beings existing in-itself, as mentioned earlier. The difference between existing for-itself and existing in-itself is *nothing*. Sartre's "nothingness" is a dense philosophical concept that he employs to illustrate a human being's ability to nihilate – to make something "nothing" (Lt. *nihil* = nothing). This nothingness, according to Sartre, is the distinctive characteristic of human beings. We do not act on impulse, as animals do. We can choose to ignore a desire or a thought, or give in to it; we can take away something, or add to it. Or do nothing at all – it is our choice.

To explain the concept of nothingness, or our ability to nihilate, Sartre (1943: 9) uses the example of a café where he is supposed to meet his friend Pierre. However, Pierre is not there. Sartre asks what must be true for him in order to notice that Pierre is not waiting at the café. He suggests a process of phenomenological reduction by which he nihilates or negates all the other patrons in the café one by one in order to determine that Pierre is not one of them. Picture him going through the café and looking at everything in it, and going: "No, this is not Pierre", "This is also not Pierre" and so forth until every single item (person or other being) in the café has been cancelled out. All these items where nihilated – made nothing in the sense that it is not the "something" Sartre is looking for. For the mind of the 21st century it is perhaps easier to picture this scene on a computer screen with each item that is not Pierre being deleted until Sartre is left with a blank screen, an empty café, the absence of Pierre. Sartre then goes on to explain Pierre's absence as a nothingness: We are aware of Pierre in the mode of negation or nihilation, of not being there. Sartre (1943: 11) writes that negation is a

"refusal of existence. By means of it a being (or a way of being) is posited, then thrown back to nothingness." Basically this is a process of "Is this X? No, it's not. Is this X? Not it's not." until "Is this X? Yes, it is." takes place.

Ortega y Gasset (1931: 99) writes that for most of us negation has an inherently positive character in the sense that we negate in terms of what is good. He uses the example of saying that someone is "an excellent person": "Do we mean anything except that he will not rob or kill us, and that if he does covet his neighbour's wife no one will be very much concerned about it?" It is the approach of "at least we didn't" as in "we killed someone, but at least he didn't suffer", as if that will somehow make it more acceptable.

According to Sartre human beings are alone in this ability to add nothingness to the world. Being in contact with nothingness is the only way in which we can make determinations about how things might have been otherwise. By using contrast, Sartre is able to explain the unique human ability to become conscious of other possibilities. When Sartre says human beings contribute nothingness to being he actually means that we can take away something in order to show the presence or possibility of something else.

Consider the following quote from Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943: 57): "The being by which nothingness arrives in the world must nihilate nothingness in its being, and even so it still runs the risk of establishing nothingness as a transcendent in the very heart of immanence unless it nihilates nothingness in its being in connection with its own being."
- *The being by which nothingness arrives in the world*: We are the beings who bring into the world the ability to take something away, to make it go away, to ignore it, to choose against it, or to imagine a situation or context where that *something* is not present.
- *must nihilate nothingness in its being*: Our own being is characterised by nothingness in the sense that our existence precedes our essence. When we come into existence we are non-beings, or nothing, and through the process of *becoming* we nihilate or take away or replace that nothingness.
- *nihilates nothingness in its being in connection with its own being*: We create awareness by adding nothingness (erasing) until the absence of everything else shows up or makes visible the presence of something in relation to our own being.

Sartre says consciousness is itself a nothingness (we can choose to ignore ourselves) or take ourselves out of the equation. For example, you can imagine a situation in which you play no part or where you

are not present. Also, we can choose not to be aware of our being. But at the same time consciousness (a human being; I) is the being that injects nothingness into being – I have the ability to give being or existence to nothingness, or that which has been ignored or negated or taken out of the equation.

3.4.6   Facticity and transcendence

Everything that is in my mind is content. As a human being I am able to nihilate any content that I can entertain in my consciousness – if you can dream it, you can become it. Or if you can dream it, you can negate it.

Apart from human beings, everything else is what it is. According to Sartre, a human being is the only entity in the world that is what it is not, and is not what it is. He writes that "freedom is the human being putting his past out of play by secreting his own nothingness" (Sartre 1943: 28). This statement is explained by two more Sartrean existentialist concepts: facticity and transcendence. Facticity, according to Sartre, is the context that a person currently finds him or herself in, including setting, conditions and facts about yourself – your concrete current existence (fact = a thing that is indisputably the case). Transcendence refers to the ability to transform ourselves – to move beyond our current circumstances or existence. The concept of nothingness, of course, is what makes transcendence possible – by nihilating or negating some or all of the aspects of your current existence, or "putting your past out of play", you will be able to "picture" a new or different existence, or different elements to your current existence. It is important to take note of the fact that Sartre considers negation as continually happening – it is not something that we occasionally or deliberately do, but "consciousness continually experiences itself as the nihilation of its past being" (*ibid*.).

Transcendence is only possible with facticity as counter-balance. Sartre calls our actions and decisions our "projects". We undertake projects in our current condition in order to move to new conditions. The basic act of being alive illustrates this concept: Being born and transforming into someone.

The concepts of transcendence and facticity are used to understand Sartre's statement that a human being "is what it is not and is not what it is". The ability to change refers to "being what we are not" – becoming something different from what we are now. "Becoming" is another concept used by existentialists to describe the process (or projects undertaken) that leads to a person's essence.

However, no freedom is absolute. There will always be constraints in any given situation; constraints over which the human being in the situation has very little or no control. Sartre, using contrast again,

says that freedom only makes sense because of constraints. Wartenberg (2008) explains this as follows: "When I am presented with a choice that is not of my own making, one that is a result of my situation, I get to exercise my freedom and to show that I am a being who exists through my own nihilation of my circumstances. For only in such cases can I exercise my freedom by nihilating a given content."

Both Nat Nakasa's life and his writing illustrates this ability to exercise freedom. His socio-political circumstances (his facticity) were characterised by severe constraints to or the complete absence of social and political freedom. The act of applying for the Nieman Fellowship could be seen as his project which could possibly enable transcendence and resulti in becoming someone else. He had to nihilate his current circumstances – a black man living in apartheid South Africa (a given content, facticity) – in order to consider the possibility of something else – a human being with social and political freedom (transcendence). Upon being awarded the fellowship, a host of other circumstances (including considering permanently leaving the country of his birth) had to be nihilated, followed by projects, including actually permanently leaving the country of his birth.

Human beings are never a finished product. Human life is a repetitive process involving facticity, nihilation, projects, transcendence, and starting again with facticity, nihilation, projects, transcendence – Sartre refers to this cycle as our "restless existence". Living in America became Nakasa's new facticity, his "new" current circumstances. The process repeated itself again, ending in his eventual suicide, referred to by Camus as the one truly serious philosophical question. Only human beings can nihilate their own physical being – the ultimate nothingness, the ultimate project and the ultimate transcendence. Of course, not being alive could also be considered a person's current circumstances (facticity), which will lead to the inevitable discussion of what, if anything, happens to human consciousness after death. While the possibility of a continuance of human consciousness after death forms part of the existential discourse as it has an influence on human consciousness before death, a discussion of the question as to "what, if anything, happens after death" does not fall within the scope of this thesis.

An apt illustration of time and possibilities is found in Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges' short story *The garden of forking paths* (1941). Borges, as in most of his work, uses magical realism as literary style. In this story, the character Yu Tsun is a spy for Germany during the First World War. His only way of letting "The Leader" know that the city of Albert is to be attacked is to kill a man named Albert as the resultant news coverage would allow Germany to link the names "Albert" and "Yu Tsun" and thus convey the message. The story is based on the themes of time and of the infinite

possibilities available to any individual at any moment. In typical Borges style all these possibilities exist simultaneously in *The garden of the forking paths*, with Yu Tsun and Stephen Albert (the man he kills) both being aware of all the possibilities and both able to see these possible scenarios play out all at once. Borges tells the story in the mode of choice as non-being – in this garden choice does not exist (non-being) because every conceivable possibility already exists. The purpose is to show, even when faced with Yu Tsun's impossible circumstances, that possibility abound, but that "each time a man meets diverse alternatives, he chooses one and eliminates the others" (Borges 1941: 83).

3.4.7   Temporality and finitude

Man's being is temporal through and through (Barrett 1964: 68). This is one of the core ideas that Heidegger puts forward in *Being and Time* (1927), in which he distinguishes between temporality and time, with time entailing clocks and calendars and something that takes place in a series of moments passively succeeding each other. On the other hand, temporality, explains Barrett (1964: 69), entails the three "ecstasies": future, present and past, with ecstasies referring to displacement: "here man's existence appears essentially incomplete, perpetually displaced or spread out into these three phases". The three phases do not adhere to a time-series – there is no time passing from past to present to future. Instead, temporality is the presence of all three at once:

> The *future* reveals itself as that toward which existence is projected; the *past* is that which our existence perpetually transcends … and toward which also we may turn back in choosing to affirm this or that part of the past; the *present* is that in which we make-present, realize, a future in this transcending of the past (*ibid.*).

All three are thus always simultaneously present as this is the only way in which we can project our existence toward the future in anticipation of our death. In this endeavour, time serves a valuable purpose as a tool (Barrett 1964: 70).

In addition to our temporality, Heidegger also adds historicity to our existence. Historicity is prior to history in the same way that temporality is prior to time, explains Barrett (1964: 71): "Because man's existence is historical, whether we try to escape history or not, because, perpetually projecting a future, we transcend and yet return to our past." According to Barrett's (*ibid.*) analysis, Heidegger wants us to understand that our future defines our past. In other words, because our being-in-the-world is future-oriented (transcendence) and because transcendence is based on the temporal nature of our being (requiring the past to project ourselves into the future) we write history to fit the future we are projecting. Barret (*ibid.*) writes that "we choose ourselves in choosing our personal heroes out of history" and "the contrast between the histories written by bourgeois and by socialist historians is

the result of their different projects for the social future of mankind". This brings us again to the existential principal of appropriation, of choosing from the available possibilities in order to fit the future we are projecting. As mentioned in chapter 1, this forms the basis for the argument put forward in this thesis for studying history or an historical figure. To quote Jaspers (1941: 136) again: "Only through being conscious can the contents of the past, transmuted into possibilities, become the fully real contents of the present."

Temporality as a mode of being is of course defined by our finitude, or death. Our awareness of death, or human finitude, influences every aspect of our lives (Wartenberg 2008: Finitude). However, Heidegger (in Wartenberg *ibid*.) states that although our death is certain – it is going to happen – it is also indeterminate, as we don't know *when* it is going to happen:

> Someone or other 'dies', be it a neighbour or a stranger. People unknown to us 'die' daily and hourly. 'Death' is encountered as a familiar event occurring within the world … The analysis of 'one dies' reveals unambiguously the kind of being of everyday being toward death. In such talk, death is understood as an indeterminate something which first has to show up from somewhere, but which right now is not yet objectively present for oneself, and is thus no threat (Heidegger 1927: II.I#51).

According to Barrett (1964: 157), Heidegger is not referring to death as the actual physiological end to life, but as a possibility – the possibility not-to-be: "As such a possibility, it forms the temporal context, or horizon, of my finitude; and it is only within such a context that I can make any actual decision about my own personal attitude towards death." To this end, Heidegger (1927: II.I#53) refers to death as our "ownmost nonrelational possibility not-to-be-bypassed".

Heidegger (1927: I#46) writes that

> a *constant unfinished quality* thus lies in the essence of the constitution of Da-sein. This lack of totality means that there is still something outstanding in one's potentiality-for-being. However, if Da-sein 'exists' in such a way that there is absolutely nothing more outstanding for it, it has also already thus become no-longer-being-there. Eliminating what is outstanding in its being is equivalent to annihilating its being. As long as Da-sein *is* as a being, it has never attained its 'wholeness.' But if it does this gain becomes the absolute loss of being-in-the-world. It is then never again to be experienced *as a being*.

This is similar to Sartre's explanation put forth earlier, that a human being is never "done" with his or her projects. Should he or she have "nothing more outstanding" and achieve his or her "wholeness"

he or she will cease to exist. "Da-sein reaches its wholeness in death," writes Heidegger (1927: I#47). However, my own death would exclude me from gaining an understanding of my wholeness – therefore grasping some form of understanding is only available to me through the death of Others. Even in death, Heidegger explains, someone remains "with us" in some mode of being:

> The 'deceased', as distinct from the dead body, has been torn away from 'those remaining behind', and is the object of 'being taken care of' in funeral rites, the burial, and the cult of graves. And that is so because he is 'still more' in his kind of being than an innerworldly thing at hand to be taken care of. In lingering together with him, in mourning and commemorating, those remaining behind *are with* him in a mode of concern which honors him … In such being-with with the dead, the deceased *himself* is no longer 'factically' there. However, being-with always means being-with-one-another in the same world. The deceased has abandoned our '*world*' and left it behind. It is *in terms of this world* that those remaining can still *be with him*.

Becoming aware of death through the death of Others eventually leads us to internalising death as our own. Sartre (1943: 532) writes:

> Death is no longer the great unknowable which limits the human; it is the phenomenon of *my* personal life which makes of this life a unique life – that is, a life that does not begin again, a life in which one never recovers from his stroke. Hence I become responsible for my death as for my life … [D]eath has become the peculiar possibility of the Dasein … Inasmuch as the Dasein determines its project toward death, it realizes freedom-to-die and constitutes itself as a totality by its free choice of finitude.

Sartre (1943: 539-540) argues that "death is never that which gives life its meaning; it is, on the contrary, that which on principle removes all meaning from life". This is where the absurdity stems from, because "[i]f we must die, then our life has no meaning because its problems receive no solution and because the very meaning of the problems remains undetermined" (*ibid.*).

In this regard, Fox-Muraton (2014: 118) refers to Kierkegaard, who, in *At a graveside*, "insists on the fact that a confrontation with death leads us to a higher understanding of ourselves". She quotes Kierkegaard as saying that "by going to the dead once again in order *there* to take an aim at life" (*ibid.*). On other words, our understanding of life comes from our awareness of our death. From the above it is also clear that Fox-Muraton provides us with an escape clause for the struggle to find *meaning* in life – instead, we should focus on *understanding* life.

In addition to the not-to-be-bypassed possibility of death, human beings are alone in the capability to end their own life, with suicide one of the endless possibilities available to the human being. This is of particular relevance to the current study given the fact that Nakasa took his own life (see chapter 2). Suicide is an authentic act as it represents an action based on a choice. Camus (in Zaretsky 2013: 11) writes: "There is just one truly important philosophical question: suicide. To decide whether life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question of philosophy. Everything else … is child's play; we must first of all answer the question."

Greenman (2008: 1) writes that suicide "is the terminal possibility of choice, a final, devastating act of freedom". He then continues to explain the two possible "faces" of suicide: asserting control or giving it up. Greenman's *Expression and Survival* (2008) rests upon the thesis of aesthetics, and specifically art, as the philosophical answer to the question of suicide. Greenman (2008) posits that the act of creation may provide another possibility to someone confronted by the absurdity of life. This gains relevance when read with Nakasa's words to a friend two days before his death: "I can't laugh any more – and when I can't laugh I can't write" (Patel 1985: ix). If Greenman's suggestion is applied to Nakasa's statement, the option of creation, of writing, is no longer a possibility, which leaves him with the "final, devastating act of freedom".

Suicide is a central focus of Camus' essay *The myth of Sisyphus*, in which Sisyphus is condemned by Zeus to roll a huge rock up a mountain for all eternity. As soon as he reaches the top, the rock rolls back and Sisyphus has to start again. In his analysis of *The myth of Sisyphus*, Zaretsky (2013: 12) concludes that Camus was not writing about suicide but about the absurdity of life. As will be explained later in this chapter, existential absurdity refers to a contradiction of reason, especially in reference to finding meaning in life. In this regard, suicide is also an absurdity in that it represents a contradiction of reason. Camus (*ibid*.). writes that suicide "imposes itself as the sole response" when a quest for meaning comes up empty-handed. However, Camus, in *The myth of Sisyphus*, then suggests that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy" because he scorns the gods and "there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (in Wartenberg 2008: The Absurd; cf. Gravil 2007: 24).

Greenman (2008: 11) disagrees with Camus' treatment of suicide – the suggestion that absurdity should be embraced: "It is an existential stoicism, a forced indifference to the brutality of the world. This indifference may be useful – for the world is hard, and becoming hard may help us survive it – but it also may be numbing." Greenman (2008: 10) writes that Sisyphus' fate – rolling his rock up the mountain for eternity – cannot be compared to, for example, someone being tortured in prison. And on the surface rolling a rock seems less of a challenge than relentless physical and emotional

pain. However, one could also take Sisyphus' circumstances as representative of any situation where the possibilities of escape has been narrowed down to two: stay in this situation, or leave through the final act of freedom. In the context of the current study suicide's relevance is in the choice or possibility that it represents as an authentic act. In Sartre's words (1943: 540):

> Since it [suicide] is an act of my life, indeed, it itself requires a meaning which only the future can give it, but as it is the last act of my life, it is denied this future … Suicide is an absurdity which causes my life to be submerged in the absurd.

Once dead, the individual's life changes from for-itself to in-itself – we can almost say that the person becomes a thing in the sense that "it is the triumph of the point of view of the Other over the point of view which I am toward myself" (Sartre *ibid.*). In other words, once I have died I no longer have the ability to transcend my facticity, to change my life. What remains is what others think of my life. This is coming full circle, as our initial view of ourselves starts with the view that others have of us. Although death "is the project that ends all projects" in terms of the individual's ability to make choices about his or her life, the "dead life" now opens "thousands of shimmering, iridescent relative meanings" that can be attached to this person's life by others. This study is an example: We are analysing and thereby attaching a meaning (one of many possible meanings) to Nakasa's life through "risking a description" (Sartre 1943: 541). Sartre (*ibid.*) writes that "[t]he unique characteristic of a dead life is that it is a life of which the Other makes himself the guardian". This guardianship, or perspective of someone else's (dead) life, becomes a responsibility for another individual. As author of this study, Willemien has chosen to individualise Nat Nakasa instead of collectivising him (as simply an unnamed member of the grouping "South African journalists"). Of course the guardianship, or responsibility, covers all lives that has come before us. Sartre (*ibid.*) says we choose the fate of the dead by either making them individuals – a son continuing a father's work, or choosing to live a life different from his father for whatever reason; or part of a collective – people who died during the Second World War, or during apartheid. Sartre (*ibid.*) writes "of course the dead choose us, but it is necessary first that we have chosen them. We find here again the original relation which bind facticity to freedom: we choose our own attitude toward the dead, but it is not possible for us not to choose an attitude."

What is it that death reveals to us that enables us to strive for authenticity? Fox-Muraton (2014: 118-119) posits that

> [w]hat the dead reveal is finally the equality of our human condition, that despite the facticity (biological or social) which differentiates us in life from others, all of these differences (being rich or poor, healthy or sickly) all come down to nothing; that the end is the same for all, that

our final resting place is the same, that the particularities which distinguish us in our worldly existence, and to which we attribute so much import in our everyday lives, are merely futile and passing attributes. Death, then, seems to found the possibility for ethical relation, for an understanding of human kinship fundamental to engaging with others in the right type of way.

It is death and our awareness of our own and others' death that afford us the ability to "rise to authentic existence" (Barrett 1964: 88). However, Heidegger (1927: II.I#53) writes that "factically, Da-sein maintains itself initially and for the most part in an inauthentic being-toward-death". How would we go about, or are we even able to, being-toward-death *authentically*?

3.4.8   Absurdity and authenticity

In another Borges short story, *The library of Babel* (1941: 65-74), the universe is imagined as an endless library containing books with every conceivable configuration of the letters of the alphabet, which means that "for every rational line or forthright statement there are leagues of senseless cacophony, verbal nonsense, and incoherence". But somewhere in this infinite library are also "all that is able to be expressed, in every language. *All* – the detailed history of the future, the autobiographies of the archangels, the faithful catalog of the Library, thousands and thousands of false catalogs … the true story of your death, the translation of every book into every language …". People spend their lives roaming the Library on the search for books containing something meaningful, but "clearly, no one expects to find anything". Some believe in the Book-Man, a librarian who have read the one book "that is the cipher and perfect compendium of all other books". The absurdity and pure pointlessness of existence in the Library causes suicide amongst the librarians to become "more and more frequent every year". The overwhelming possibilities and human inability to find meaning in these are summarised by the narrator's view of his life in the Library:

> Like all the men of the Library, in my younger days I traveled; I have journeyed in quest of a book, perhaps the catalog of catalogs. Now that my eyes can hardly make out what I myself have written, I am preparing to die, a few leagues from the hexagon where I was born.

The library of Babel serves as an illustration of the absurdity of life as a theme of existentialism, a story in which "mankind searches in vain for an overall purpose to the vast, geometric edifice in which it is trapped" (Williamson 2004: 254).

One of the reproaches often laid against existentialism is its pessimistic outlook. In his defence of existentialism in *Existentialism and Humanism*, Sartre (1946: 23) highlights some of these reproaches, including that existentialism is "an invitation to dwell in quietism of despair", that the

philosophy underlines "all that is ignominious in the human situation, for depicting what is mean, sordid or base", that existentialism is subjective and that it denies "the reality and seriousness of human affairs". Even from the brief overview of the relevant themes of existentialism set out above, the basis for some of these reproaches is quite clear. The basic idea that I as a human being is relentlessly responsible for everything in my life (as well as the broader humanity) and that this responsibility is so vast that it causes near-constant angst from which I will try and escape by basically pretending it is not true does not paint an overly optimistic picture of life.

However, Sartre disagrees. His argument that existentialism "is a doctrine that renders human life possible" (Sartre 1946: 24) is based on the fact that existentialism defines man by his actions and that it is the ultimate optimistic doctrine in that it places the destiny of man within himself (Sartre 1946: 44). This is drawn from the primary goal of existentialism, namely to live an *authentic life*. Authenticity in this regard is the opposite of bad faith, which is inauthentic and "the attempt to evade responsibility" (Cox 2009: 81):

> Inauthentic people sustain particular projects of avoiding responsibility for their present situation or their past deeds by refusing in bad faith to admit that they are responsible. Specifically, they refuse to admit the inability of the self to coincide with itself as a facticity or as a pure transcendence, and they refuse to admit the unlimited or near unlimited freedom of the self and what this freedom implies. They refuse to recognize that a person must always choose what he is because he is unable to simply be what he is. As we know, a person cannot not choose his responses to his situation, and because his responses to his situation are chosen, he is responsible for his choices. Even if he chooses to do nothing that is still a choice he is responsible for.

Authenticity is the opposite of Cox's description above – it is the acceptance of existential freedom, and it is made possible through "anticipating one's own demise" (Wartenberg 2008: Authenticity). At the hand of Heidegger's "dictatorship of the They", with They being the faceless Others that form part of our everydayness, Wartenberg (*ibid.*) explains that we conform, or internalise, what we think other people wants us to be or do. We live according to social norms, often because we experience these as our own values. Through conforming, we tranquilise, or silence, our "inner voice". Wartenberg (*ibid.*) refers to Tolstoy's expression of "an act of willful forgetting" which implies "losing touch with the quiet promptings of the authentic self".

In Sartre's play *No Exit* (1944) three people find themselves in hell (a Second French Empire drawing room): Garcin, a journalist who is upset that others view him as a coward, Inez, a lesbian, and Estelle, a superficial socialite. They soon realise they are to spend eternity together, with Garcin remarking

> So this is hell. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the 'burning marl.' Old wives' tales! There is no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is – other people.

"Hell is other people" refers to our trying to figure out how others see us, and then adapting to this view or trying in vain to rectify what we perceive to be another person's "incorrect" opinion of us. This inauthentic mode of being prevents us from being authentic. Fox-Muraton (2014: 107) takes "hell is other people" as to refer to determination: "one is what one is because others *see* one as such". She criticises Sartre for this statement in as much as this determination would then undermine Sartre's and other existentialist writers' view of our freedom (responsibility) of choosing who we are. "Can we really admit that the individual is nothing, that there is no reality to one's ethical character independent of the evaluations and judgments given of that character through others?" (Fox-Muraton 2014: 108). However, she does concede that Sartre does not posit the views of others as a single determining factor in our view of ourselves:

> Sartre insists, to the contrary, on the fact that the other is not merely an object, but is first and foremost 'the indispensable mediator between me and myself', the one who reveals to me the very possibility of my actions and myself being seen, recognized and judged in the world. The example of shame, which Sartre offers – the feeling of shame which only appears when it is clear that one is being observed; thus that the individual's existence and actions are situated within a shared social sphere – gives rise to the understanding of individual actions as subject to moral evaluation, awakens the individual to an understanding of his non-isolation or non-indifference to the world and the other human beings that comprise it (Fox-Muraton 2014: 108).

Trying to be who others want us to be, or to explain to them that we "are not like that" is often the result of the absurdity of life, an existentialist concept which refers to a contradiction of reason (Wartenberg 2008: The Absurd). This stems from the existential idea that we are a nothingness (we have no specific nature), and therefore we, as humans, have no specific "end goal". Because we are nothing (taken to mean the possibility of anything) we do not have a purpose in the sense that a knife's purpose is to cut. Our meaning, or the meaning of human life, is thus open-ended, which is to say, absurd (it is in contradiction with everything else that has a purpose or meaning). This reconfirms the existential axiom that "man's existence precedes his essence". Authenticity is therefore not striving

to find *the* meaning of life, but *a* meaning of life, or rather a meaning of a specific event or phase, as this would differ for each person.

The possibility of authentic existence is our "*ownmost* and extreme potentiality-of-being" (Heidegger 1927: II.I#53), and we can only become aware of it through anticipation of death: "Death is the *ownmost* possibility of Da-sein. Being toward it discloses to Da-sein its ownmost potentiality-of-being in which it is concerned about the being of Da-sein absolutely." In Heidegger parlance, "ownmost" correlates with "authenticity".

Heidegger (*ibid.*) also posits that death, or the possibility of death, is what individualises us:

> Death does not just 'belong' in an undifferentiated way to one's own Da-sein but it *lays claim* on it as something *individual*. The nonrelational character of death understood in anticipation individualizes Da-sein down to itself … Da-sein can *authentically* be *itself* only when it makes that possible of its own accord.

Malpas (2008: 58-59) writes that Heidegger presents a close connection between authenticity and situatedness – our being in the world: "[W]e do not find ourselves in the world through encountering the world, or the things within it, as something that stands over and against us as separate and apart from us. The world is that to which we are already given over and in which we are taken up." For Heidegger (quoted in Malpas *ibid.*) our experience of things in the world is an "event of appropriation" – meaning that we take it and make it our own. It is through this belonging to or owning that authenticity becomes possible.

Finally, Camus (1942: 7) posits that

> what saves us from our worst suffering is the feeling that we are abandoned and alone, and yet not sufficiently alone for 'other people' to stop 'sympathizing with us' in our unhappiness. It is in this sense that our moments of happiness are often those when we are lifted up into an endless sadness by the feeling that everyone has forsaken us. Also in this sense that happiness is often only the self-pitying awareness of our unhappiness.

Sartre said to name is to change. If you identify what you are feeling, or "name" it, it has already changed. And through this we are, as Heidegger explained, "owning" our circumstances, which allows for authenticity.

3.4.9 Summary of relevant themes

The discussion presented above serves to provide the reader with an overview of existential themes that are relevant to this study. It is by no means comprehensive and the purpose is not to provide a critique of existentialism, but rather to provide a structure against which Nat Nakasa's journalism is to be analysed. The relevant themes discussed here can be summarised as follows:

- **Existence precedes essence**: As human beings we don't merely exist; we are the only entity that are concerned with our existence. We are a nothingness, meaning we have the duty to become a something.

- **Being-in-the-world**: We share our existence with others that are similar; our existence is therefore characterised by a shared social experience.

- **Freedom**: We are freedom, meaning we have the inescapable responsibility for our choices irrespective of our circumstances.

- **Anxiety**: Our freedom manifests itself through anxiety.

- **Bad faith**: We try to avoid anxiety by living in bad faith – an inauthentic existence.

- **Actions**: Our existence is characterised by certain actions. At any given moment an individual's life is characterised by *facticity* (certain biological and social circumstances). Our ability to *negate* (to think of ourselves in different circumstances) allows us the ability to *transcend* – to change our circumstances, even if it is just to change our opinion of the current circumstances.

- **Temporality and finitude**: Our existence is characterised by temporality (of which time is an indicator, or tool) – we are at all times aware of, and in, our past, present and future as a result of transcendence, which requires all three. Included in temporality is our awareness of death, which has the ability to make us aware of our life. Through our confrontation with death we are able to live an authentic existence (which is the opposite of bad faith, or an inauthentic existence).

- **Absurdity and authenticity**: Life is a "contradiction of reason" as a result of the fact that there is no "end goal", apart from the fact that life ends (in death). This absurdity is what provides impetus for living an authentic live in which we take responsibility for our freedom.

FIGURE 3:   STRUCTURE OF RELEVANT EXISTENTIAL THEMES
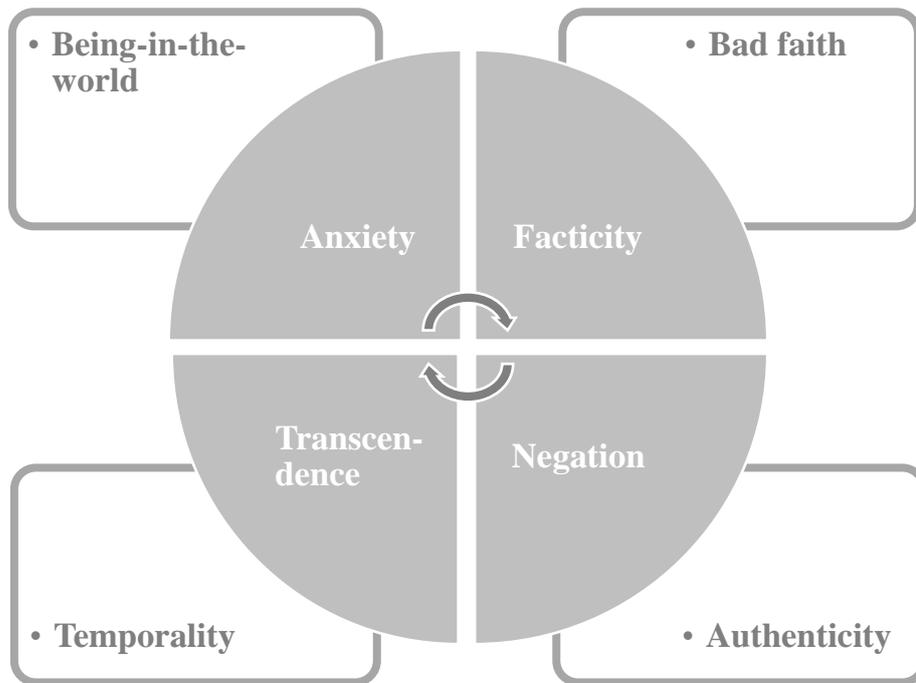
As mentioned before, Sartre (1946: 41; cf. Cox 2009: 57) is of the opinion that "there is no reality except in action … Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realises himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is." According to Sartre's rationale, actions are therefore our only evidence of our existence. The structure of relevant existential themes set out above would therefore become evident through actions, broadly speaking, that demonstrate or serve as evidence of being-in-the-world, anxiety, bad faith and authenticity. If applied to Nakasa's work, an analysis would include looking for descriptions of anxiety (as manifestation of freedom), descriptions of moments or instances of bad faith and descriptions or efforts to live an authentic life. This is discussed in chapter 5.

The next section takes a look at existentialism in terms of African philosophy, and especially contemporary African philosophy, given the facticity of Nakasa's life as an African writer in an African country.

3.5   EXISTENTIALISM IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

"African philosophy" as a term is often problematic, for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is the notion that philosophy is a strictly Western activity or discipline, and that all other thought is simply an application of Western philosophical ideas (cf. Ramose 2002: 1; Sesanti 2015: 346). Omoregbe (1998: 4; cf. Sesanti 2015: 346; 349) writes that this argument is mostly based on the notion that there is little or no evidence of very early African reflective thought (books, etc.). Ramose (2002: 1) adds that most of the discourses on Africa have been dominated by non-Africans. However, Omoregbe (*ibid*.) posits that "it is not necessary to carry out this reflective activity in the same way that the

Western thinkers did … Wherever there is reflection on the fundamental questions about man or about the universe (whatever form this reflection may take) there is philosophy." He suggests that, similar to a number of ancient Western philosophers of whose work there are also often only fragments that were preserved, there is evidence of the work of early African thinkers as well, "for we have fragments of their philosophical reflections and their views preserved and transmitted to us through channels other than writing such as mythologies, formulas of wise-sayings, traditional proverbs, stories, and especially religion" (Omoregbe 1998: 5; cf. Sesanti 2015: 349). Omoregbe also suggests a distinction between African traditional philosophy and contemporary African philosophy, with, amongst others, Kwame Nkrumah, Leopold S, Senghor, Nyerere, Kwasi Wiredu, and Frantz Fanon as exponents of contemporary African philosophy. (See also Biakolo's (2002) categories of cross-cultural cognition and the African condition.)

The second problematic that arises with the term "African philosophy" is the fact that it could create the idea that there is simply one unifying "African" idea, with no distinct schools of thought. However, this problem is more one of perspective than of anything else, as it can then be levelled against "Western" or "Eastern" philosophy as well. In terms of this discussion, African philosophy is taken to mean a variety of contemporary philosophical ideas or theories with an African origin, whether originally and uniquely African or an African adaptation of a Western or Eastern philosophy (cf. Biakolo 2002).

One unifying feature of African philosophy is suggested by Serequeberhan (1998: 9), namely that most of contemporary African philosophy is the result of colonialism, whether as a search for that which was "obliterated" by colonialism, or the "prolonged, deep reflection and self-examination" that is a characteristic of post-colonial Africa (cf. Ramose 2002; Sesanti 2015).

Outlaw (1998: 25-26) provides the following broad taxonomy of African philosophy, based on the work of Alphonse J. Smet and O. Nkombe:

- **Ideological:** A school of thought that includes ideas geared towards redressing the political and cultural situation of African peoples under the conditions of European imperialism, enslavement, and colonisation. Developments include African personality, Pan-Africanism, Négritude, African humanism, African socialism, scientific socialism, Consciencism, and of importance to this study, authenticity.
- **Traditional:** A school of thought that includes works which recognise the existence of philosophy in traditional Africa, examines its philosophical elements as found in its various

manifestations, and systematically explores complexes of traditional thought as repositories of wisdom and esoteric knowledge.

- **Critical:** A school of thought that is shaped by reactions to the ideological and traditional trends. This school of thought is also labelled "ethnophilosophy", where philosophers in the above-mentioned groups are questioned in terms of relevance and validity. Another section of the critical school also criticises Western conceptions of science and philosophy.
- **Synthetic:** A school of thought based on philosophical hermeneutics to explore new issues and problems that emerge in the African context.

3.5.1 Existential concepts in contemporary African philosophy

In terms of the development of a philosophy of "authenticity" that is mentioned as part of the ideological tradition above, Outlaw (1998: 40) views it as a "cultural nationalist" programme that emerged as a result of anti-colonial struggles: "Here again the objective is to argue on behalf of a complex of indigenous and/or reconstructed values, practices, and social arrangements which, supposedly, will best serve contemporary Africa." This provides us with our first link between existentialism and contemporary African philosophy. This strive towards looking for, or redefining, identity is an example of transcendence from colonial rule as historicity, keeping in mind Barrett's (1964: 71) quote earlier in this chapter: "Man's existence is historical, whether we try to escape history or not, because, perpetually projecting a future, we transcend and yet return to our past." Nakasa's work also includes numerous examples of efforts, both personal and as a group, of redefining, or transcending, the specific facticity of the effects of colonialism.

Another link, this one regarding the existentialist view of a human being's finitude, is provided in an essay by Ugandan author Okot p'Bitek (1985, in Eze 1998: 73-74). p'Bitek writes that man is never free because "only [by] being in chains can he be and remain human". Although the first part of his statement – that man is never free – seems to be in direct contrast with the existentialist idea that man *is* freedom, his meaning becomes clear when he explains that these chains are the "rights and privileges that society owes" us. Therefore, what appears to be an advantage, or "freedom" on the surface – rights and privileges – becomes our responsibility, or our freedom. p'Bitek adds that in African belief even death does not free a person from these responsibilities. Similar to Sartre's (1943: 541) concept of the "dead life" discussed earlier, p'Bitek explains that someone who was an important member of his or her community is expected to "guide and protect the living". This is done through, for example, teachings, sayings and proverbs similar to what Sartre explained as the living becoming the guardian of the "dead" life by continuing to attach meaning to that life.

In the same essay p'Bitek also discusses what is, in essence, the existentialist idea of a shared or common world; our being-in-the-world. p'Bitek (1985, in Eze 1998: 74) writes that the central question "Who am I?" cannot be answered without taking into account the various relationships that a person has: "'I' has a clan, and a shrine, a country, a job. 'I' may or may not be married, may or may not have children. Is 'I' a chief? Then he has subjects or followers, etc. etc." Fox-Muraton (2014: 107) identifies one of existentialism's most enduring problems as our (Da-sein's) perspective of the Other. She writes that a view of others as existing "for me" inevitably leads to some form of solipsism, or the idea that the self is all that can be known to exist. Solipsism, as can be derived from the discussion on relevant existential themes above, is the exact opposite of existentialism with its view of humans as beings that share a social space. Fox-Muraton (2014: 108) sees the starting-point of existentialism as "the existing human perspective, which we might understand as fundamentally concerned about itself … and its relations to others and the world".

3.5.2 Consciencism and negritude

In terms of facticity, the people of Africa's relations to others and the world are unique due to the presence of a wide variety of influences, not only as a result of colonialism, but also through, for example, elements of religions such as Islam. Nkrumah (1964, in Eze 1998: 81) suggests a philosophy of consciencism as a model for social revolution in Africa, with the aim of incorporating, amongst others, Western, Euro-Christian and Islamic elements into Africa, and to "develop them in such a way that they fit into the African personality". He describes consciencism as "that philosophical standpoint which, taking its start from the present content of the African conscience, indicates the way in which progress is forged out of the conflict in that conscience" (*ibid.*). Although Nkrumah (1964, in Eze 1998: 93) suggests socialism as the socio-political framework for consciencism, he also warns that

> socialism in Africa today tends to lose its objective content in favour of a distracting terminology and in favour of general confusion … When socialism is true to its purpose, it seeks a connection with the egalitarian and humanist past of the people before their social evolution was ravaged by colonialism; it seeks from the results of colonialism those elements (like new methods of industrial production and economic organization) which can be adapted to serve the interest of the people …

One example of Nkrumah's consciencism is provided by Wahba (1985, in Eze 1998: 53), who writes that there are elements in Egyptian professor of philosophy Abdel-Rahman Badawi's system of "Arab existentialism" that represents a close connection between Sufism and existentialism. Wahba (*ibid.*, quoting Badawi) explains that both the Islamic concept of Sufism as well as the essentially Western philosophy of existentialism place a high regard on "subjective existence" as the existence of the self,

an independent and quite isolated existence to be distinguished from a "physical existence", which is the existence of objects in the world in which man exists. The similarities between Sartre's being-in-itself and being-for-itself and physical and subjective existence are obvious.

From the above it becomes clear that contemporary African philosophy has at least one unifying focus, namely adapting to a post-colonial society. Eze (1998: 217) posits that contemporary African philosophy is a counter-colonial practice that has its roots in the "effort of African thinkers to combat political and economic exploitations, and to examine, question, and contest identities imposed upon them by Europeans". Although this is a complex, multi-faceted *project* (in the existentialist sense of a human activity) that takes place in many shapes and forms across the continent, its primary characteristic is that of transcendence; of giving meaning to the past through the future. Eze (1998: 218) writes that one way of understanding colonialism is that "by negating Africa, Europe was able to posit and represent itself and its contingent historicity as the ideal culture, the ideal humanity, and ideal history". This essentially existentialist standpoint is equally applicable to apartheid South Africa – by negating *black people*, the *ruling white minority* was able to posit and represent itself and its contingent historicity as the ideal culture, the ideal humanity, and ideal history.

In *The wretched of the earth*, Fanon (1963: 51) explains this "ideal history" as the result of the fact that

> [t]he settler makes history and is conscious of making it. And because he constantly refers to the history of his mother country, he clearly indicates that he himself is the extension of that mother country. Thus the history which he writes is not the history of the country which he plunders but the history of his own nation in regard to all that she skims off, all that she violates and starves. The immobility to which the native is condemned can only be called in question if the native decides to put an end to the history of colonization – the history of pillage – and to bring into existence the history of the nation – the history of decolonization.

In terms of historicity, Serequeberhan (1994: 80) refers to Heidegger's view that "it is only in view of a future that a past is fruitfully appropriated". While the colonising force, as explained by Fanon above, writes the history of his mother country, the colonised society is simultaneously "without a future precisely because this is what colonialism negates and grounds itself on" (*ibid*.). This forces the oppressed into an inauthentic mode of being, which can only be escaped by confronting colonialism: "In confronting colonialism, the colonized projects a future and claims, for the vitality of the present, the effective heritage of the past" (Serequeberhan 1994: 81). However, Serequeberhan (1994: 88) warns that the aim of a liberation struggle should not be to return to an original nature, as

transcendence is always future-oriented. The essence of Serequeberhan's study is that reclaiming history in Africa constitutes a practice of freedom in the sense of an existential responsibility. A liberation struggle, or any element thereof, is thus an example of an authentic action. Nakasa, in *The myth of the born musicians* (in Patel 2005: 118), urges people to confront their circumstances, and speculates as to why it takes so long for some of his countrymen to come to this realisation:

> My feeling is that, generally speaking, Africans in this country have not yet shown a really fervent interest in their political advancement. Perhaps the oppression we have suffered so long, and the lack of individual initiative produced by our tribalist systems, have prevented us from developing a militant spirit. And I am sure the distractions of urban life, of the bright lights and football matches and American clothes, have had a lot to do with it. But, ironically, it is also these very aspects of the good life which are whetting African appetites. Africans have tasted enough to make them realise what they are being deprived of by apartheid, and it is this which in the long run will make them transcend their present preoccupations and awaken their political fervour.

In his Preface to *The wretched of the earth*, Sartre (1963: 13) provides us with another reason why Fanon's work is not only an example of Nkrumah's consciencism but also qualifies as an act of existentialism, or existential communication. Referring to historicity and history, Sartre urges Europeans to read *The wretched of the earth* in order "to get to know yourselves in the light of truth, objectively" as Fanon, according to Sartre, is explaining Europeans, and colonisers in general, "to his brothers and shows them the mechanism by which we are estranged from ourselves" (*ibid*.). In this sense, the duty of the existential writer is, to paraphrase Sartre, to *make life hell for other people* in the sense that the writer is showing the Other how they are seen. Existentialism posits that human beings are influenced by and fashion themselves according to the view of Others, but through appropriation – taking that which we deem necessary in order to create a specific image, often in bad faith. By being shown ourselves from another angle, or being forced to see ourselves in a different light, the existentialist writer have the ability to force us to confront our "ideal image".

As will be discussed in the next chapter, it is not only the duty of the existentialist writer to show the opposing force (in the case of colonialism) another angle of themselves, but also to show members of his or her own group (the oppressed, in the case of colonialism) what they are and what they could be like. Cabral (1973, in Eze 1998: 260) writes that culture is a powerful weapon in both the hands of the oppressor and the oppressed. For the oppressor, sustained repression of the cultural life of the oppressed is necessary in order to sustain domination: "In fact, to take up arms to dominate a people is, above all, to take up arms to destroy, or at least to neutralize, to paralyze, its cultural life. For, with

a strong indigenous cultural life, foreign domination cannot be sure of its perpetuation …" (*ibid*.). In chapter 2, efforts by the apartheid government to undermine and repress black cultural life through legislation was discussed in detail. Robbing a people of their cultural life also robs them of their identity and their individuality. This creates the perfect breeding ground for what Nakasa refers to as mental corrosion. In apartheid South Africa it was not only the aim of the government to rob black people of their culture, but also to create an "ideal culture" for white people against which to measure themselves as well as all other cultures and thus maintaining dominance. Nakasa (in Patel 2005: 46) writes that "the tendency to treat Africans as labour and not as individuals, human beings with human sentiments and desires, is devastating".

Similarly, restoring cultural life is the first step towards overthrowing a dominating force. In this regard, Masolo (1994: 24-25) writes about the role of the Harlem Renaissance (referred to in chapter 2), which he sees as a movement that has it origin in negritude. Masolo (*ibid*.) posits that negritude was influenced by, amongst others, existentialism. He quotes Senghor, who called for a "harmonious integration of black and white values as the basis of the new 'African personality'" (*ibid*; cf. Abiola Irele 2002: 117; Soyinka 2002: 611). Masolo (1994: 27) refers to Senghor's approach as "epistemological existentialism" which gave rise to, amongst others, African socialism. In terms of this form of socialism, Senghor is critical of Julius Nyerere's system of socialism which took as its foundation the idea that African traditional society is inherently communal. Masolo aligns himself with Senghor's view of the human being as an individual, and existence as an individualistic experience. Although similar to existentialist thought, Senghor sees "the African mind" as "characterized by the emotive faculty", as opposed to the Western ideal of reason. This idea is encapsulated in Senghor's well-known saying: "Emotion is black as much as reason is Greek" (in Masolo 1994: 26).

Masolo (1994: 29) also refers to Sartre's analysis of Senghor's approach to negritude in his [Sartre's] preface to Senghor's 1948 publication *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*. Masolo (*ibid*.) writes that Sartre saw negritude as an act of creation or construction: "For him, it is not merely a matter of knowing, or of withdrawing into the self as if in a trance, but rather a matter of *discovering* and *becoming* what one authentically is. Negritude was therefore a project or plan of action. It was not enough to feel oneself black, it was also necessary to realize oneself as such." Sartre considers negritude as a movement aimed at helping the black man regain his authentic existence and expression. Masolo (1994: 30) explains negritude as "a dedicated enterprise, a patient construction, a future, or a time of dialectic progression in which the white is the thesis and the negritude the antithesis".

Masolo (1994: 33) also labels Fanon as an existentialist, describing Fanon's ideology as

> a revolutionary political ideology, since its objective is primarily the achievement of political freedom through the battering of colonialism. But it is also a philosophy, a metaphysics, a critical analysis of the meaning of the being of man through the analysis of his social being … First, like the existentialists, Fanon draws a large part of his philosophical thought from the unique concreteness and applicability of personal experience. His philosophy, in a way, is the spelling out of individual commitments … Second, we are thinking of Sartre, whose thought influenced Fanon in a special way.

In particular, Fanon, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, describes black people's existence in a white-dominated world as an inauthentic existence in which black people are constantly forced to act in a way which is similar to or would be deemed acceptable by white people (Masolo 1994: 34):

> The white man needed his Negro, according to Fanon, to serve as a mirror reflection of what the white man was not. The Negro was a necessary medium for the white man's attainment of self-consciousness … For Fanon, this white man-Negro relationship was a reproduction of a normal existential condition in which 'Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not yet been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions.'

Similarly, Steve Biko (1970: 21) criticises white liberals for claiming that they are black souls in white skins: "The role of the white liberal in the black man's history in South Africa is a curious one. Very few black organisations were not under white direction. True to their image, the white liberals always knew what was good for the blacks and told them so." This is also an example of an inauthentic existence, in this instance that of (some) white liberals who, in Biko's view, pretended to be sympathisers with the struggle but still did so from the perspective of white privilege and a "superior" position.

Both contemporary African philosophical movements mentioned here, consciencism and negritude, are criticised for various reasons (negritude, for example, is often labelled as "anti-racist racism" – see Masolo 1994: 31). However, from the brief discussion above it is clear that both can be considered philosophical movements. In addition, both display elements of the relevant existential themes as discussed in this chapter. If we were to take contemporary African philosophy as an overarching movement (which it most certainly is not) we can identify as a primary driving force a desire to redefine an African identity in a post-colonial context, which is of relevance to this study.

3.5.2 Non-racialism and the Black Consciousness movement

While the philosophical movements discussed above in general apply to the entire African context, two specific developments are relevant to South Africa. These are the concept of non-racialism and the Black Consciousness movement. Given the broad explanations of consciencism and negritude provided above, non-racialism bear similarities to consciencism as the development of a new identity built on various influences. On the other hand Black Consciousness and negritude share a number of similarities.

South African activist Steve Biko is considered the father of the Black Consciousness movement (Tutu, in Biko 1978). He set out his views in his column *I write what I like* in the newsletter of the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), of which he was president from 1969-1970. Biko (1970: 23-24) was of the opinion that integration and non-racialism are not solutions for South Africa's problems. True integration, writes Biko (*ibid*.), does not need to be actively encouraged:

> Once the various groups within a given community have asserted themselves to the point that mutual respect has to be shown then you have the ingredients for a true and meaningful integration. At the heart of true integration is the provision of each man, each group to rise and attain the envisioned self. Each group must be able to attain its style of existence without encroaching on or being thwarted by another. Out of this mutual respect for each other and complete freedom of self-determination there will obviously arise a genuine fusion of the life-styles of the various groups. This is true integration.

However, his concept of Black Consciousness is based on the fact that Biko did not believe that a non-racial approach would be the idea solution to apartheid, at least not initially, due to his standpoint that white liberals still operated from a position of privilege: "They are claiming a 'monopoly on intelligence and moral judgement' and setting the pattern and pace for the realisation of the black man's aspirations. They want to remain in good books with both the black and the white worlds" (Biko 1970: 22-23). Biko acknowledges that white people who participated in the struggle did make a valuable contribution, but says that their contribution was an appeal to "white conscience, everything they do is directed at finally convincing the white electorate that the black man is also a man and that at some future date he should be given a place at the white man's table". In the next chapter it is shown, through the words of Gordimer, that efforts to convince your "own" grouping of an injustice, of acting as their guilty conscience, is an essential duty of the existential writer. Biko's issue was not with the fact that white liberals made an effort to convince their fellow white countrymen of the injustice of apartheid, but that black people were not allowed to decide for

themselves; the solutions were not determined by black people but rather on the terms of white people. Being able to make your own decisions and determine your own fate is at the heart of Black Consciousness (and existentialism, as seen above).

In 1964, Nakasa (in *Afrikaner youth get a raw deal*) wrote about black people's total immersion into apartheid: "The very conditions under which we live incite us to insubordination. Just being an African in itself is almost illegal. There are too many laws which we cannot humanly obey." Biko (1970: 24) also referred to this inescapable facticity of black people as opposed to that of white people, including white liberals, who are able to escape "the black problem" by going to their homes, while black people "are experiencing a situation from which they are unable to escape at any given moment. Theirs is a struggle to get out of the situation and not merely to solve a peripheral problem as in the case of the liberals. This is why blacks speak with a greater sense of urgency than whites." Gordimer (1982: 227) agrees with Biko:

> Between black and white attitudes to struggle there stands the overheard remark of a young black woman: 'I break the law because I am alive.' We whites have still to thrust the spade under the roots of our lives; for most of us, including myself, struggle is still something that has a place. But for blacks it is everywhere and nowhere.

Biko, in his column *We blacks* (1970), defines Black Consciousness from the existential position of non-being, or negation, i.e. describing what is *not there*:

> His heart yearns for the comfort of white society and makes him blame himself for not having been 'educated' enough to warrant such luxury. Celebrated achievements by whites in the field of science – which he understands only hazily – serve to make him rather convinced of the futility of resistance and to throw away any hopes that change may ever come. All in all the black man has become a shell, a shadow of a man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity.

The reason why apartheid, and any other regime of oppression, was, and often still is, so successful in obtaining defeat is to be found in Ortega y Gasset's (1931) view that culture, which he considers "thought", is an essential biological function of the human being, similar to digestion and locomotion, or physical movement. If you cut off a human being's access to food (digestion, which allows for nutrition), he will die. Similarly you can culturally *starve* a person in the most literal sense of the word.

Biko (1970: 31) then proposes the solution:

The first step therefore is to make the black man come to himself; to pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused and therefore letting evil reign supreme in the country of his birth. This is what we mean by an inward-looking process. This is the definition of 'Black Consciousness'.

In his explanation of how black people were defeated, Biko (1970: 31) makes use of Heidegger's temporality, of defining the past to determine the future: "They [oppressors] turned to the past of the oppressed people and distorted, disfigured and destroyed it. No longer was reference made to African culture, it became barbarism. Africa was the 'dark continent'. Religious practices and customs were referred to as superstition." By wiping out or changing their past, the oppressors effectively determined the oppressed's future.

Biko was eventually criticised for his hard-line approach. For example, Gordimer (1982; 226) disagreed with Biko on the direction in which the Black Consciousness movement started to develop, criticising the "extreme wing of the Black Consciousness movement, with its separatism", which bears similarities to the criticism of "anti-racism racism" that was levelled against negritude. Instead Gordimer (*ibid.*) advocated for "the return to the tenets of the most broadly based and prestigious of black movements, the banned African National Congress: non-racialism, belief that race oppression is part of the class struggle, and recognition that it is possible for whites to opt out of class and race privilege and identify with black liberation".

Her suggestion of non-racialism was echoed by, amongst others, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who is quoted as saying: "I am firmly non-racial and so welcome the participation of all, both black and white, in the struggle …" (Tutu, quoted in Gordimer 1982: 223). However, both Gordimer and Tutu agree that the direction of the struggle was to be determined by black people. As was mentioned in chapter 2, and will be elaborated on in chapter 5, Nakasa was also of a supporter of non-racialism. It must be made clear though that Black Consciousness and non-racialism, as with consciencism and negritude, are not diametrically opposed viewpoints with no common ground. Instead, all these movements should be seen within the larger context of contemporary African philosophy. Although these may differ on certain aspects, they share the common believe of the development of a new post-colonialist identity. What is important for this study are the elements of existentialism that are present in all these philosophical approaches, schools of thought or movements.

3.6   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided the reader with the philosophical approach and theoretical framework of the study, with three focus areas, namely a brief background on the development of existentialism, a discussion of the main existential themes relevant to this study and an overview of existentialism in contemporary African philosophy.

The reader was provided with a brief background to existentialism in as much as a "history" of philosophy is possible. The contributions of Kierkegaard, Jaspers, Heidegger and Sartre were discussed as exponents of existentialism, or various elements or themes of existentialism. It was explained that existentialism is a broad and varied philosophy with few authors and philosophers outright claiming to be existentialists. However, the contributions of the four philosophers discussed here serve as a basis for the discussion of the main themes relevant to this study.

The existentialist themes discussed as part of this chapter serve to provide a structure against which Nakasa's journalism is to be analysed. The relevant themes include being-in-the-world, anxiety, bad faith, negation and nothingness, facticity and transcendence, temporality and finitude, as well as absurdity and authenticity. The structure of relevant existential themes as set out in this chapter was developed to allow analysis of Nakasa's work in terms of, amongst others, descriptions of anxiety (as manifestation of freedom), descriptions of moments or instances of bad faith and descriptions of efforts to live an authentic life. This is discussed in chapter 5.

In terms of existentialism in contemporary African philosophy it was indicated that contemporary African philosophical movements such as consciencism and negritude contain elements of existentialism, with contemporary African philosophy's primary driving force a desire to redefine an African identity in a post-colonial context, which is of relevance to this study. Black Consciousness and non-racialism as movements were also discussed briefly, with parallels drawn between consciencism and non-racialism, and negritude and Black Consciousness.

Chapter 3 provided the reader with a general philosophical framework against which to read this study. Chapter 4 will take the reader into journalism as ontic act of existentialism, thus taking the general existential framework as structure to investigate the duty of the writer as it applies to one specific "act" of writing, namely journalism. As was mentioned in this chapter, Sartre (1946: 41) is of the opinion that "there is no reality except in action … Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realises himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is." According to Sartre's rationale, actions are therefore our only evidence of our existence. Sartre (1946) also posits that writing is an act – the action of disclosure.

Once something has been named (disclosed or revealed) it inevitably changes. According to this rationale, writing, and in this case specifically journalism, is thus an action that causes change, making the journalist a change agent. This is the focus of the next chapter, with Merrill's notion of existential journalism as the framework against which this concept will be explored.

Chapter 4

TO NAME IS TO CHANGE

Existential journalism, the journalist as change agent and the duty of the writer

4.1   IN THIS CHAPTER

The existentialist themes discussed in the previous chapter have provided us with a general structure against which to explore a writer's work for existentialist themes. This chapter drills down further into existentialist writing as it manifests in journalism specifically.

First, a note on the terms used in this chapter: In order to situate existential journalism on the continuum of journalism, this chapter refers to *conventional* and *unconventional* journalism as the two extreme ends of the continuum. These terms carry no other meaning than simply to serve as an indication of the two opposite ends. Conventional journalism represents the current dominant journalistic orientations, approaches and practices. Other general though not necessarily synonymous terms used under the "conventional" umbrella include "mainstream", "traditional", "rational", "objective", "standard" and "unifying". At the other end of the continuum, under the "unconventional" umbrella, are included orientations, approaches and practices identified by labels such as "alternative", "existential", "subjective", "public", "non-standard" and "decentring". Although the various orientations, approaches, types and practices all differ in various ways, they are grouped together for ease of explanation. Where a specific form of journalism is referred to in its unique context, it will be indicated clearly.

Although the terms "journalist" and "writer" are used interchangeably throughout this chapter, the reader is reminded that the focus of this chapter is journalism and any references to writing, creative output, etc. should be read as taking place within the context of journalism. Similarly, the use of "press" and "media" both refer to the current media landscape that consists of not just newspapers and magazines (the traditional press) but broadcast media as well as online and social media.

The chapter sets out by providing a background of the development of existential journalism as conceived by journalism and philosophy professor John Calhoun Merrill (1974; 1977). Although the idea of "involved writing" (Sartre's concept) was not developed by Merrill, he is credited for developing and describing a structure for existential journalism, i.e. the journalist as "involved writer". Basic journalistic orientations are discussed, including the two super-stances of rational journalism at the one end and existential journalism at the other. A more recent contribution in terms

of an analysis of journalism, namely Géraldine Muhlmann's (2008; 2010) concepts of unifying and decentring journalism, is also discussed. An outline of existential journalism is provided and attention is paid to some of the most contentious issues pertaining to existential journalism (and other types of unconventional journalism), namely subjectivity, individual responsibility and authenticity. The discussion concludes with a section on the existential journalist as agent of change.

The final section of the chapter provides an analysis of "involved writing" as a form of applied existentialism, or existentialism in practice (the ontic act of writing). This is provided through a discussion of the duty of the writer based on essays by Sartre (*What is literature?*, 1948), Gordimer (*A writer's freedom*, 1975; *Living in an Interregnum*, 1982; *The essential gesture*, 1984), Orwell (*Why I write*, 1946) as well as Camus's Nobel Prize in Literature Banquet Speech (1957).

The main title of this chapter is derived from a quote from Sartre (1948: 21-22) in which he explains the act of writing as an act of disclosure: "If you name the behavior of an individual, you reveal it to him; he sees himself. And since you are at the same time naming it to all others, he know that he is *seen* at the moment he *sees* himself … Thus, by speaking, I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others in order to change it."

4.2   INTRODUCTION

One of the characteristics of Kierkegaard's writing is his contempt of the press (cf. Holt 2012). He went as far as stating that "the daily press is and remains the evil principle in the modern world" (Lappano 2014: 783, quoting Kierkegaard). In 1846, Kierkegaard, in *The present age*, wrote that he blamed newspapers for creating "the public":

> The public is not a people, it is not a generation, it is not a simultaneity, it is not a community, it is not a society, it is not an association, it is not those particular men over there, because all these exist because they are concrete and real; however, no single individual who belongs to the public has any real commitment … This lazy mass, which understands nothing and does nothing, this public gallery seeks some distraction, and soon gives itself over to the idea that everything which someone does, or achieves, has been done to provide the public something to gossip about … The public has a dog for its amusement. That dog is the Press. If there is someone better than the public, someone who distinguishes himself, the public sets the dog on him and all the amusement begins. This biting dog tears up his coat-tails, and takes all sort of vulgar liberties with his leg—until the public bores of it all and calls the dog off. That is how the public levels.

Kierkegaard was not alone in his scorn of the press. Ortega y Gasset extended Kierkegaard's "public" into his well-known "mass-man", described in *The revolt of the masses* (1930). Ortega y Gasset described journalism as "reducing the present to the momentary, and the momentary to the sensational" (Merrill 1977: 62, quoting Ortega y Gasset). In his essay *The question concerning technology* (1962), Heidegger states that technology (or media) is not a tool but rather "it is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth" (Gunkel & Taylor 2014: 127, quoting Heidegger). Heidegger (*ibid.*) then warns that technology, and all that it enables, "dominates not simply in terms of its omnipresence but, even more importantly, through the standardized mindset that it inculcates in its users *whatever piece of technology is used*" (cf. Holt 2012). In fact, Holt (2012: 2) writes that there is a dimension of media criticism in existential thought "that reacts against mediated sensationalism, shallowness and 'idle talk'" and that "existentialism reveals anxieties about the consequences of levelling, alienation, and anonymity resulting from an increasingly artificial, superficial, and media saturated milieu".

From being the dog of Kierkegaard's lazy mass to Ortega y Gasset's assertion that journalists turns everything into sensationalism, presumably for mass-man to consume, to Heidegger's fear that the media (through technology) will brainwash us all into thinking in a standardised way... The authors and opinions mentioned above are a mere drop in the ocean in terms of criticism of the media in general, and journalism specifically. Criticism of journalism has existed as long as journalism has existed. Yet when one reads, for example, Kovach and Rosenstiel's (2007) *The elements of journalism*, the underlying theme of the practice of journalism is that of integrity and noble intentions. Kovach and Rosenstiel's well-known study, conducted on behalf of the Committee of Concerned Journalists and published in 2004, with an update in 2007, presents the opinions of thousands of journalists regarding the process of news-gathering and journalism's responsibilities. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007: 5-6) conclude that the purpose of journalism is to "provide people with the information they need to be free and self-governing". In addition, these authors posited the following elements of journalism:

1.   Journalism's first obligation is to the truth.
2.   Its first loyalty is to citizens.
3.   Its essence is a discipline of verification.
4.   Its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover.
5.   It must serve as an independent monitor of power.
6.   It must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise.
7.   It must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant.
8.   It must keep the news comprehensive and in proportion.
9.   Its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience.

10.   Citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news.

These elements are similar to Deuze's (2005, in Hanitzsch 2007: 367) five ideal-typical elements of a "shared occupational ideology among newsworkers", namely that journalists 1) provide a public service; 2) are impartial, neutral, objective, fair and credible; 3) ought to be autonomous, free and independent in their work; 4) have a sense of immediacy, actuality and speed; and 5) have a sense of ethics, validity and legitimacy.

With a credo such as that of Kovach and Rosenstiel (which is just one example of thousands of press codes, etc.) and a view of the "ideal journalist" as described by Deuze it could be difficult to understand how journalism could be at the receiving end of so much criticism, with a large proportion of that criticism being negative. However, as will become clear throughout this chapter, the root of the problem could be the responsibility that these doxa place on the individual journalist in terms of determining what exactly vague or relative terms such as the "truth" imply. The truth according to whom? The wide scope of interpretation of, for example, Kovach and Rosenstiel's element 1 has an influence on virtually all the other elements. This was also the key for Merrill's plea for an existential orientation to journalism as this allows the individual journalist to determine *a* truth and to understand that once a commitment to that particular truth has been made, the responsibilities and consequences are that individual's to bear.

It would be difficult to argue that news is not important to us. Tuchman (1978: 1) writes that news "aims to tell us what we want to know, need to know, and should know". Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007: 2) write that we need news "to live our lives, protect ourselves, bond with each other, identify friends and enemies". Referring back to chapter 3, one of the primary concepts of existentialism is our being-in-the-world, or our existence in a shared social space. In order to function in this shared social space, we require, and have to process, information constantly. News is one format in which we receive some of this information. And journalism is the system by which we get this news (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2007: 3). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007: 2) posit that this is why we care about "the character of news and journalism … they influence the quality of our lives, our thoughts, and our culture". Although sceptical about the intentions of (some of) the media, De Botton (2014: 13-14) writes that

> [t]he news, however dire it may be and perhaps especially when it is at its worst, can come as
> a relief from the claustrophobic burden of living with ourselves, or forever trying to do justice
> to our own potential and of struggling to persuade a few people in our limited orbit to take

our ideas and needs seriously. To consult the news is to raise a seashell to our ears and to be overpowered by the roar of humanity.

This brings the sceptic to a "can't live with it, can't live without it" conundrum. The importance of journalism cannot be denied but in order to find a solution to some of the challenges faced by journalism, it is important to understand the character or distinctive nature of journalism.

Muhlmann, who proposes two archetypes of journalists, namely the unifying journalist and the decentring journalist, argues that journalism's original purpose was to provide a diversity of opinions. According to Muhlmann (2008: 1), the news aspect of journalism only came to the fore through the technological advances that took place towards the middle of the nineteenth century:

> The newspaper ceased to be simply a forum for the expression of diverse opinions and became a source of news, ever more news, gathered by people who began to call themselves 'reporters'. The nascent press agencies increasingly established 'reporting' as the core of journalistic activity and, broadly speaking, journalism embarked on the path to its professionalization. In the eloquent metaphor used by one media specialist [Cornu] to describe these changes, 'The press no longer gave voice, or less so. It relayed. The newspaper had been a voice. It became an echo.'

The emergence of conventional journalism as we currently know it is tied to the birth of the "penny press" in the 1830s in the United States (Muhlmann 2008: 2; Kovach & Rosenstiel 2007: 6; Altschull 1990). These were mass-circulated, cheap and popular newspapers which, for the first time, meant that life, as Ortega y Gasset (1930: 38) puts it, "became world-wide in character". The invention of radio in the 1920s further contributed to the accessibility of news (Kovach & Rosenstiel 2007: 6). The emergence of modern conventional journalism, and more specifically the concept of news, also brought forth "those concerns about journalism that have dogged it ever since" (Muhlmann 2008: 2), some of which were voiced by Kierkegaard in 1946, barely a decade after the publication of the first "scandal sheet" (Kierkegaard's term). It also gave us the "reporter" as a new type of journalist (*ibid*.): "The cult of 'facts' was beginning to rule supreme, and the journalist-reporter set to work, that is, to observe and to write, on behalf of an even larger public" (cf. Altschull 1990: 1).

It is against this backdrop that Merrill set out to describe a journalistic orientation that embodied the original purpose of journalism, namely *being a voice* (cf. Holt 2012: 3). Merrill acknowledged that conventional, mainstream journalism has nothing to fear "as there is no serious danger from these existential journalists. They will simply not be numerous enough to pose any real danger to the ever-

growing corporate structure of journalism" (Merrill 1977: 67). From the discussion below, it will become clear that Merrill's apparent disregard of existential journalism is not based on a lack of belief in what he is arguably the best-known exponent of, but rather because of the average person's inherent propensity for bad faith, or inauthenticity. As discussed in the previous chapter, existentialism requires a person to act and to take responsibility for this action. In the context of journalism, this requires the journalist to *be a voice* (action) instead of *being an echo* (no action required). While Merrill's existential journalism focuses on the individual journalist, Muhlmann's decentring journalism presents the practitioner (which in this case could only be an existential journalist) with an approach to achieve his or her goals. Both are discussed as unconventional journalisms.

4.2.1   Deviating from the norm

Not only is it difficult to find an agreed-upon term to describe that type of journalism which is not conventional journalism, but whichever term is used, be it existential, decentring, alternative, public or sometimes even literary journalism, it is known more for what it is not than what it is. As mentioned above, journalism, whether as discipline, practice or social institution, is often criticised by insiders and outsiders, as part of a general criticism of "the media" and as unique activity within the media. This situation is far more pronounced for those practitioners and scholars who choose to focus on the instances where journalism is practised or viewed in a manner different from the standard, or in an unconventional manner.

If journalism is the topic, any unconventional journalistic orientation, approach or practice, anything that deviates from the norm, becomes the Other. And, as will be demonstrated in this chapter, inserting conflict into this centre (the standard theories, practices and beliefs about journalism), let alone any effort towards decentring it, will be met with opposition. "What's wrong with journalism created by witness-ambassadors who bring us simple truths that might otherwise be hidden? And why would we prefer a 'deeply disturbing' journalism that threatens to dissolve the bonds of community?" writes Norman Sims (2010: 430) in his literary criticism of Muhlmann's *A political history of journalism*. Similarly, Bromley (2010: 429) asks whether there is any applicability for this kind of journalism "beyond the narrow range of activist journalists and politicized text".

Merrill (1977: 139-146), having already acknowledged that existential journalism will be criticised severely for issues such as, amongst others, subjectivity, included a postscript to *Existential journalism*. Here he included, and responded to, criticism on existential journalism received from journalists as well as journalism scholars. The postscript includes comments such as this one from journalism professor John DeMott:

Existential journalism is a contradiction in terms, really. Why? Because the essence of journalism is its objectivity. Now we all know, and concede readily, that no journalist can be 100 per cent objective. Or 100 per cent fair. Or truthful. Or accurate. Or anything else. However, an account of any 'news' development is journalistic – rather than existential – it appears to me, to the degree that it corresponds to the relevant objective reality. If it's primarily an expression of the 'reporter's' subjective reaction to the news event, or an opinion concerning it, then it's not journalism, in a professional sense.

Chief amongst concerns about existential journalism is that it is "ruleless", existing in a "play world" (in reference to New Journalism), the opposite of "precision journalism", and "irrational" (*ibid*.). Merrill, in his conclusion, writes that although most of the criticism levelled against existential journalism stems from a legitimate desire by journalists and journalism scholars to protect the integrity of journalism, a lot of the comments also reflected ignorance in terms of general concepts regarding philosophy as well as misconceptions such as the existence of an absolute truth. These issues are addressed later in this chapter.

While acknowledging the criticism levelled against journalism, and specifically the forms of journalism grouped under the "unconventional" umbrella, the purpose of this chapter, and this study in general, is not to argue for or against the existence or the merits of any type of unconventional journalism. Instead, this study acknowledges that there are other, arguably less prominent or popular, ways of approaching and practicing journalism, and the focus is rather on how some of these unconventional journalisms look, what their characteristics are and how they are practiced. In this process mention is made of various types of unconventional journalism, including decentring journalism, alternative journalism and public journalism, but the primary focus is on existential journalism.

With this in mind, we now look at an overview of the development of existential journalism as suggested by Merrill.

4.3   THE DEVELOPMENT OF EXISTENTIAL JOURNALISM

Sartre's engaged writer, and writing as an engaged activity, have always been part of journalism. Evidence is found in the work of existential writers and journalists such as Camus and Orwell, who wrote primarily from a political perspective, but also in the work of a journalist such as Elizabeth Cochrane, who wrote under the pen name of Nellie Bly and is considered one of the earliest female investigative journalists. In 1887, *The New York World* published a series of articles by Bly, who was

incarcerated in the infamous women's "lunatic asylum" on Blackwell's Island in New York City. Her goal was "writing a plain and unvarnished narrative of the treatment of the patients therein…" (Bly 1887: 25). Although Muhlmann (2008: 62-78) sees Bly as a unifying, and therefore conventional journalist, Bly's personal involvement and the self-analytical way in which she presented her stories, also identifies her as an existential journalist.

While movements such as the New Journalism of the early 1960s and various other earlier examples of unconventional journalism existed, it was only in the early 1970s that Merrill, an American scholar in the fields of media ethics and philosophy of journalism, attempted to describe existential journalism as a philosophical strand of journalism representing a counterbalance for conventional journalism. Holt (2012: 3) writes that since Merrill's publication of *Existential journalism* in 1977, "there has been an awareness in the scholarly field of journalism that existentialist philosophers have much to offer in terms of raising important questions about the ethical aspects of journalistic work" (cf. Baggini 2002). Altschull (1990: 5) supports this notion when he writes that

> the journalist who is able to identify these voices [of the past] can play a role more useful to society than that of scribbler about events and recorder of gossip because he or she is able to not only report and interpret events but also to demonstrate the *ideas* that lie behind them. By recognizing the historical and intellectual roots of those ideas, the journalist can locate them in the only perspective we all have, the perspective of time and space, and thereby bring the underlying reality of the story into focus. No benefit of a liberal education is greater than acquiring the ability to bring objects and ideas into focus. If something is new, then it is proper for the journalist to report it as new, but before the journalist does this, he or she had better know enough about the past to recognize whether or not it is in fact new.

The following discussion refers to Merrill's first attempts to describe existential journalism, his view of media autonomy, the role of media in society as well as his philosophical and ideological orientations that formed the foundation of existential journalism. (For details on Merrill's career and credentials see, for example, Gordon 2012 and Sloan 1990).

4.3.1   Background to Merrill's existential journalism

In his introduction to Merrill's *The imperative of freedom* (1974), William Bluem (1974: xvii) writes that "each of the public media, in varying degrees, in different ways, and in distinct presentational methods, brings us to confrontations with ourselves as social beings. By doing so they shape our collective hopes, aspirations and futures." What Merrill attempted, first in *The imperative of freedom*, and later in *Existential journalism* (1977), was to describe how media units or individual journalists

would go about "bringing us to confrontations with ourselves as social beings" while at the same time confronting themselves (from a journalistic perspective) as social beings.

Although Merrill's original orientation towards journalism had undergone a number of redirections, and in some instances a complete about-face, over the course of his career, the core of his approach never wavered, namely the importance of *individual* choices as made by the *individual* journalist (Gade & Gordon 2012). It is this central axiom of his orientation of existential journalism that provides the link to the philosophy of existentialism.

In Merrill's original approach in *The imperative of freedom* he discussed "freedom" in the context of press freedom. The book was written against the backdrop of the United States' involvement in the Cold War and what Merrill interpreted to be the threat of not only government control but also corporate control of journalism (Gade & Gordon 2012). This concern was not resolved with the end of the Cold War. Instead, new developments over the past more than four decades, both technologically and ideologically, continue to threaten media autonomy. Throughout his career, Merrill advocated absolute media autonomy (Merrill 1974; 1977; cf. Gordon 2012). Early in his career this took on a more extreme form to the extent that he initially considered the professionalisation of journalism a threat to this freedom because "having a basic knowledge agreed upon by all the 'professionals'" would keep journalism from being "vigorous and diversified" (Merrill 1974: 133-137). Merrill changed his views on journalism as profession in the early years of the 21st century, but more on this later.

For Merrill "vigorous journalism" as well as sophisticated conclusions and solutions to current journalistic problems were not to be found in establishing a profession or developing codes of ethics, but rather through "philosophical personalism, that is, individuals enriching their minds and pushing themselves to intellectual maturity through ideas, and in the process becoming more competent professionals" (Christians 2012). Christians (*ibid.*) suggests that understanding Merrill's orientation to journalism is to be found in his classical liberal view of the press, which will be described next.

4.3.2   Media autonomy and the four theories of the press

Merrill was a staunch supporter of the libertarian press theory, which he considered the only one of the original four press theories that did not constitute a threat to journalistic autonomy. In their 1956 publication *Four theories of the press*, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm set out what they consider concepts of what the press should be and do, with four major theories behind the functioning of the world's press, namely 1) the authoritarian theory, 2) the libertarian theory, 3) the social responsibility

theory and 4) the Soviet Communist theory. While efforts to curtail freedom of speech, together with press freedom, are obvious characteristics of the authoritarian and Soviet Communist theories, Merrill also considered the social responsibility theory as problematic due to the fact that it "places more emphasis on the press's responsibility to society than the press's freedom" (Merrill 1974: 35).

Briefly, the four theories as proposed by Siebert *et al*. rest upon the thesis that the media in a specific country "takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates" (Siebert *et al*. 1971: 1). Merrill (1974: 24) agrees with this statement, and adds that "a media system reflects the political philosophy in which it functions … A nation's journalism cannot exceed the limits permitted by the society; on the other hand it cannot lag very far behind." The symbiotic relationship between media and government is thus clear. What Siebert *et al*. did with the four theories concept is to provide a typology of this symbiotic relationship.

Siebert *et al*. (1971: 2) explain that there are actually only two original theories, namely the authoritarian and the libertarian theories. The other two are developments and modifications of the first two, namely Soviet Communist of authoritarian, and social responsibility of libertarian. The basic tenets of each theory are (Siebert *et al*. 1971: 2-6):

- **Authoritarian**: Truth is not the product of the great mass of people but of a few wise men who are in a position to guide and direct their fellows. Truth is centred near the centre of power, and the media functions from the top down and is a servant of the state.
- **Soviet Communist**: Grounded in Marxist determinism. This theory differs from the older authoritarianism in that, while a servant of the state, the media in an authoritarian state is still privately-owned. In terms of the Soviet Communist theory, media is state-owned with the profit motive removed. It speaks the truth as the ruling party sees the truth. Soviet Communism was the best known totalitarian regime when Siebert *et al*. published their original four theories in 1956. However, the theory applies to any totalitarian of fascist regime, including apartheid South Africa.
- **Libertarian**: Citizens are seen as rational beings able to discern between truth and falsehood, between a better and worse alternative, when faced with conflicting evidence. The right to search for truth is one of the inalienable natural rights of man. The media is conceived as a partner in the search for truth and a device for presenting evidence and arguments on the basis of which the people can check on government and make up their minds as to policy.
- **Social responsibility**: The power of mass media impose on them an obligation to be socially responsible, to see that all sides are fairly represented and that the public has enough

information to decide. In addition, this theory states that if the media do not take on themselves such responsibility it may be necessary for some other agency of the public to enforce it.

TABLE 2:   FOUR RATIONALES FOR THE MASS MEDIA

	AUTHORITARIAN	LIBERTARIAN	SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY	SOVIET COMMUNIST (totalitarian)
Purpose	To support and advance the policies of the government in power, and to service the state	To inform, entertain, sell – but chiefly to help discover truth, and to check on government	To inform, entertain, sell – but chiefly to raise conflict to the plane of discussion	To contribute to the success and continuance of the Soviet socialist system, and especially the dictatorship of the party
Control	By government patents, guilds, licensing, sometimes censorship	By "self-righting process of truth" in "free market place of ideas", and by courts	By community opinion, consumer action, professional ethics	By surveillance and economic or political action of government
Forbidden	Criticism of political machinery and officials in power	Defamation, obscenity, indecency, wartime sedition	Serious invasion of recognised private rights and vital social interests	Criticism of party objectives as distinguished from tactics
Ownership	Private or public (state)	Chiefly private	Private unless government has to take over to insure public service	Public (state)
Essential differences from other theories	Instrument for effecting government policy, though not necessarily government owned	Instrument for checking on government and meeting other needs of society	Media must assume obligation of social responsibility; and if they do not, someone must see that they do	State-owned and closely controlled media existing solely as arm of state

(Source: Siebert *et al*. 1971: 7)

Although the four theories typology was quite severely criticised, adaptations to this typology still utilised the basic approach used by Siebert *et al*. Merrill (1974: 36-43) suggests four modifications, which include:

- **The "Three-and-One" Model** groups authoritarianism, Soviet Communism and social responsibility together as "concepts springing from a belief in the need for some kind of outside control" with libertarianism on the other side emphasising freedom.
- **The "Development Triangle" Model** suggests a cyclic or triangular development or progression starting with authoritarianism, moving into libertarianism, then social responsibility, and then back to authoritarianism or the more extreme Soviet Communism.
- **The Lowenstein Progression Model** replaces Soviet Communism with a social-centralist theory and social responsibility with social-libertarian. The only difference is that social-

libertarian is closer to libertarian with the social-libertarian theory admitting to the unavoidability of some form of government regulation. This model also ties the theories to the development stages of a society, implying that all societies will exhibit some elements of these theories at any given stage.

- **The Political-Press Circle** states that there is a circle of progression with the media tied in with the political philosophy of the society in which it operates, and with a general progression towards some form of authoritarianism as complete freedom (in the socio-political sense, or pure libertarianism) remains an unattainable goal.

The only form of libertarianism for Merrill (1974: 12; cf. Gordon 2012) was pure libertarianism: "In an open society each individual should be free to act in accordance with his own rational self-determinism if his action does not restrain another from doing the same thing. A person should do what he would be willing to have everyone do." This last sentence closely resembles Sartre's (1946: 29) view that man is not only responsible for his own individuality, but for all men: "When we say that man chooses himself, we do mean that every one of us must choose himself; but by that we also mean that in choosing for himself he chooses for all men."

For Merrill (1974: 12), journalistic self-determinism is resisting "any effort to take the decision-making out of the hands of the individual medium and invest it in some 'outside' authority. Such authorities would include any of the branches of government, advertisers, or pressure groups, including press councils, 'professional' organisations and societies of any kind." Merrill (*ibid*.) also acknowledged that absolute media autonomy meant that "all of us must suffer gladly (or at least, suffer) those media and journalists which might offend our sensibilities. Of course, we might want to 'reform' some of them through discussion or education, but we should respect the right of all to continue in the way they prefer."

Merrill's original imperative of freedom was a no-strings-attached media freedom: pure and simple freedom without any obligations such as a responsibility towards the truth or towards society. Although this might seem radical, bordering on irresponsible and a type of anything-goes attitude, Merrill's view of "freedom' makes sense if one takes freedom to be the "quality of being independent of fate or necessity" (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*). Merrill (1974: 13) explains it as that "the central value of freedom of expression is in free expression, not in any truth it might somehow unearth, although this might be a peripheral 'bonus-value'". He adds that "the autonomous man or journalistic medium does not have to *do anything* to be 'free'; it is only necessary that he be unrestrained so that he can *choose* whether he wants to do anything or not" (Merrill 1974: 32).

For Merrill, libertarians who justified freedom of expression, or who qualified it with "the press should be free *because/but/in order to…*" are not libertarians but rather utilitarians. "This utilitarian premise implies that the press does not have the right to freedom, but only the right to serve the collectivist interests; in other words, it can have freedom as long as it serves society in a 'responsible' manner," writes Merrill (1974: 13). He adds that "any power to make the press 'responsible' or 'accountable' is the negation of liberty; if society, or a press council, or a judge, or a jury, or any other non-journalistic group assumes the power to define for the press what 'responsible' journalism is, then liberty is surrendered" (Merrill 1974: 83). This is another of Merrill's original views that has undergone changes over the years. This is referred to again later in this chapter.

Merrill (1974: 15) explains his support of libertarianism as "it permits maximum personal freedom, leads to more informational pluralism, forces the responsibility on the individual medium for its actions, and finally, permits greater creativity – and fun – for those exercising their own freedom". In addition, Merrill (1974: 17) places great emphasis on individual responsibility:

> Selfhood, self-esteem, integrity – whatever it might be called – is basic to a humanistic journalism, which is at once free but mature, experimental but moderate, rational but sensitive. When selfhood is minimized, or subordinated to something else, then a totalitarianism creeps into journalism like a cancerous growth insisting that all other cells of the system become like itself. Selfhood does not imply the denial of selfhood to others. I believe, as did Albert Camus, that the perfect society or the perfect journalistic system is one where everyone is assuming his complete potential and individualism without distorting or destroying the selfhood of others.

For Merrill (1974: 19) the meaning of libertarianism is found in the autonomous journalist and the autonomous medium:

> Autonomy implies integrity and self-determinism. Integrity implies commitment and freedom. Authenticity (personal and media) results from autonomy and integrity, and gives real meaning to the journalist and to journalism. Freedom is at the root of all this, and it is my contention that for the authentic journalist (or journalistic medium) there is a strong and unwavering imperative of freedom.

The purpose of the media and journalism, and thus the task or responsibility of the journalist, vary according to the various stages of the development of a specific society. Merrill's views on the role of the existential journalist during these stages are discussed in the next section.

4.3.3 Media and society

It was mentioned earlier that any society's media constantly progresses through a cycle of libertarianism and authoritarianism, with various elements present at various stages. In addition, Merrill (1974: 54) posits three basic stages of development of any society. The media's role, and own development, is closely tied to this societal development. This is important in terms of existential journalism as the individual journalist or media unit's choices are based on or influenced by the stage in which the society finds itself. The three stages are 1) a traditional society, 2) a transitional society, and 3) a modern society (Merrill 1974: 55-62):

- **Traditional society:** This society is not characterised by the presence of what could be described as *mass* media, but rather *elite* media. No mass media exist mainly because there is no mass literate audience. Media cannot really communicate *with* (or even *to*) the masses of people. Communication takes place along elite lines – from elite to elite within the Power Structure. Very little information regarding especially policies is shared with the general population. This stage is mostly authoritarian.

- **Transitional society:** Development from a traditional society to a transitional society (and then to a modern society) takes place over a period of time rather than abruptly. The transitional society is characterised by a merging of autocracy (personal elitism) into democracy. The society becomes more affluent, which allows for growth in the media sector as well. This development stage is also characterised by a natural pull towards democracy and libertarianism. In the early transitional stage the media is *mass* but not specialised or elite. This stage corresponds to the late authoritarian and early libertarian stages. Once emphasis starts to shift from individualism to collectivism the modern stage is about to take root.

- **Modern society:** The early modern period is still characterised by democratic and libertarian principles and a focus on individualism, but is gradually merging back into a growing authoritarianism. Media becomes more specialised and media pluralism fades. Although emphasis during this stage is on the total society, individual freedom, self-determinism (especially for media), competition and ideological conflict are disappearing. Merrill (1974: 60) sums up this stage by quoting Karl Jaspers: "Great men pass into the background and efficient men come to the foreground, and the power of the masses remain effective through the instrumentality of mass-organisations, majorities, public opinion, and the actual behaviour of vast multitudes of men."

This cyclical development of the state/media symbiosis are described as follows (Merrill 1974: 62):

Media freedom provides a good barometer to a society's general political atmosphere and democratic health. Societies tend to develop or progress from autocracy, to democracy, to statism, with their media systems going from authoritarianism through libertarianism back to authoritarianism … Media systems as they naturally evolve, first discourage, then encourage, then discourage social 'friction' or dissonance.

Throughout these external or outside forces that influence media and journalism, Merrill (1974: 63) views freedom as "essential to authentic journalism, to creative press systems and to expanding, vigorous and self-assured journalists". The influence of societal development as described above, as well as an increasingly corporate approach to media, will, according to Merrill, turn "editors and publishers, news directors and various media managers into passive 'secretaries for the public' (or various public pressure groups and lobbies) who will provide the various audiences only with what they want, what pleases them, what reinforces their prejudices and what enhances their social position". It should be mentioned that Merrill here goes against his own earlier statement that the media and individual journalists should be allowed the choice of what they want to do or not do. Should that choice be to become a "secretary for the public" in Merrill own words we "must suffer gladly (or at least, suffer) those media and journalists which might offend our sensibilities" (Merrill 1974: 12). Be that as it may, Merrill's opinion that some resistance is required against the influence of societal development, including the corporatisation of the media, is echoed decades later by authors such as Atton (2004, in Coyer *et al*. 2007) as he aims to define "alternative media" as "a range of media projects, interventions, and networks that work against, or seek to develop different forms of, the dominant, expected (and broadly accepted) ways of 'doing' media".

Although it provides a framework from which to interpret the role of the individual journalist, Merrill's societal development phases are criticised for a lack of a definition of what "society" entails within this framework (Sloan 1990: 163). Here Sloan (*ibid*.) refers to the position of utilitarian philosopher Adam Smith that there is "an 'invisible hand' at work in the affairs of men so that what was produced by one benefited all others". However, given Merrill's absolute position on media authority, this lack of (utilitarian) definition of society could be explained as also placing an obligation on the journalist and thereby providing a boundary to media freedom.

Briefly, Merrill's (and other exponents of libertarianism, including Milton, Locke and Mill – cf. Siebert *et al*. 1971; Merrill 1974) argument for responsibility in journalism is based on freedom, both in the socio-political context of liberty as well as the existential idea of metaphysical freedom. For Merrill, freedom of the press means complete media autonomy without any obligations in terms of

"outside" prescriptions such as social responsibility, accountability or a responsibility towards the truth. This does not mean that he advocated "anarchy in journalism"; instead, he placed the responsibility squarely in the hands of the media and journalists. In "freedom" of the press Merrill read Sartre's freedom, namely responsibility.

Many of the ideas developed in *The imperative of freedom* was distilled into a more specific focus in Merrill's 1977 publication *Existential journalism*. In the preface to *Existential journalism* Merrill (1977: 14) states that, after the publication of *The imperative of freedom*, he was accused of "encouraging anarchy in journalism":

> Nothing could have been further from the truth than that I was trying to enthrone 'responsibility' in journalism. The very purpose of the book was to give an emphasis to ethical and responsible journalism …

In his framework for existential journalism, Merrill can already be seen as moving towards being more inclusive of the concept of the social responsibility of journalists (one of Siebert *et al.*'s four theories of the press). Gade and Gordon (2012) note that Merrill's evolution of thought is "one that moves from the mountaintop of freedom to a moderate view balancing freedom and responsibility". An in-depth reading of *The imperative of freedom* also provides evidence that Merrill's concern was not so much the fact that media or individual journalists should have a social responsibility, but rather that Siebert *et al.*'s original social responsibility theory posited that, should the media or journalists fail in this responsibility, or is perceived to be failing, an "outside" body is to see to it that this responsibility is enforced.

The above discussion on the functioning of the media within society, the concept of media autonomy and especially libertarianism serves as the framework for Merrill's description of existential journalism as a possible orientation that will enable the individual journalist (for that is Merrill's core focus) to fulfil his or her duty as an involved writer. In other words, the existential journalist is the only type of journalist, according to Merrill, that is able to contribute effectively to an autonomous media in a libertarian society, and conversely such a media (and society) can only be maintained through the sustained efforts of the committed individual journalist. The next section provides an outline of this existential journalist.

4.4   OUTLINING EXISTENTIAL JOURNALISM

As mentioned before, existential journalism is a journalistic orientation, i.e. one of the standpoints from which journalism can be approached. To gain a better understanding of the characteristics of

existential journalism, a brief look at some of the main journalistic orientations is necessary. This will be followed by a discussion of Muhlmann's concept of the unifying and decentring journalistic types, as it contributes to the understanding of existential journalism.

4.4.1   Journalistic orientations

Merrill (1977: 36) describes a journalistic orientation as a "basic and dominant psycho-ideological orientation" which characterises each individual journalist and which is based on that journalist's general orientation, or stance, towards his or her being. Merrill (*ibid*.) posits that a journalist's journalistic orientation has a determining influence on how this journalist approaches his or her journalism:

> One's orientation, undoubtedly, has a great deal to do with the kind of outlook one adopts as a journalist and even with stylistic characteristics of his journalism. In fact, his orientation affects his total journalistic *Weltanschauung* [world-view], for it leads him to consider certain fundamental issues related to journalism in ways consistent with this orientation … A journalist, of course, may have a mixture of orientations, but one will usually dominate.

From the above it is clear that an individual's orientation is influenced directly by his or her being-in-the-world – our common world, or shared social space (Fox-Muraton 2014: 107-108). The myriad of aspects that form a shared social space and that influence an individual and force him or her to make choices also determine that individual's general orientation, and in this instance specifically their journalistic stance.

Merrill (1977: 36) proposes two basic journalistic orientational types, namely 1) the mainly *objective* (scientific; conventional) journalist; and 2) the mainly *subjective* (artistic; unconventional) journalist.

While both are present in all individuals, one orientation is dominant. However, an individual journalist, irrespective of his or her dominant orientation, will adapt their approach depending on circumstances or subject matter (this relates directly to Muhlmann's theory, discussed later in this chapter). Although Merrill (*ibid*.) warns against any classification system for any purpose, due to its distortion of reality, a basic binary classification of the journalistic stances does provide an indication of some of the characteristics present in these orientations even if it does not indicated the strength of that trait's presence. To describe existential journalism Merrill uses two "super-stances" as the binary opposites. These super-stances are based on the basic journalistic orientational types mentioned above. At the one end is the rational super-stance, which represents the objective, scientific, conventional journalist, while at the other end we find the existential super-stance, which represents

the subjective, artistic, unconventional journalist. It should be noted that very few journalists actually occupy space at either of the extreme ends; most find themselves closer to the middle.

According to Merrill (1977: 41), the basic questions behind these stances are:

- How involved and committed should journalists be?
- What is reality and how should journalists best get at it?
- How should journalists pass on such "reality-information"?

Table 3 summarises the various stances, and also provides an overview of the characteristics of the two super-stances. It is important to note that, while presented here in table-format, these are binary opposites, or extreme ends, that exist on a continuum.

TABLE 3:   JOURNALISTIC STANCES AS CHARACTERISTICS OF SUPER-STANCES

SUPER-STANCE: EXISTENTIAL	SUPER-STANCE: RATIONAL
Stance: Involved	**Stance: Aloof**
Indicates level of involvement	
Oriented towards participation, activism, being personally and emotionally involved in events of the day; committed; brings own ideological beliefs, preferences, biases to bear on journalism; reports the truth as they see it	Considers journalism as disinterested activity where audiences should not be encumbered by the journalist's biases, prejudices, judgements, feelings, opinions
Stance: Dionysian	**Stance: Apollonian**
Indicates level of emotion	
Indicates tendency towards emotion; represented by Dionysus, Greek god of wine; symbol of emotion, mysticism, free and unfettered spirit, intuition, irrationality; considered by Nietzsche to provide more valid, profound vision of reality due to intuition, taking into account human experience	Indicates tendency towards reason; represented by Apollo, Greek god of light; symbol of reason, beauty, order, wisdom, light; considered by Nietzsche to provide inadequate view of reality due to lack of incorporation of human experience
Stance: Poetic	**Stance: Prosaic**
Indicates stylistic proclivity and communication expression	
Indicates stylistic proclivity towards fuller, more authentic picture; style is personal, less dogmatic; respect for self-expression, freedom, autonomy; adapts style to story	Indicates stylistic proclivity towards traditional style of expression; style is impersonal, dogmatic; respect for literalness, explicit statements, accuracy; considers objective as synonymous with factual; less emphasis on interpretation
Stance: Personalist	**Stance: Factualist**
Indicates total outlook on journalism and its purpose	
People-oriented; makes decisions based on how these might affect people; keeps consequences in mind; controlled by sensitivity towards people connected with story	Story-oriented; fact-oriented; dispassionate neutralism; focused on *what* rather than *why* of story; detached; strives to present best possible picture of total event

(Source: Adapted from Merrill (1977: 37-41)

Similar to the journalistic orientations above are the seven principal dimensions of journalism culture as suggested by Hanitzsch (2007). These are interventionism, power distance, market orientation, objectivism, empiricism, relativism and idealism. Hanitzsch (2007: 371) explains that each of the seven dimensions spans two ideal-typical extremes that, similar to the orientations presented above, "rarely manifest in the 'real' world of journalistic practice". The seven dimensions are summarised in table 4.

TABLE 4: SEVEN PRINCIPAL DIMENSIONS OF JOURNALISM CULTURE

Interventionism	
Interventionism reflects the extent to which journalists pursue a particular mission and promote certain values, stretching from "passive" (low) to "interventionist" (high)	
Passive (low)	**Interventionist (high)**
Journalists subscribe to ideology of "professionalism"; information function of journalism; disinterested transmitters of news; contribute to vertical communication in society; dedicated to objectivity, impartiality	Journalists perceive themselves as "participants", "advocates", "missionaries"; more active, assertive role in reporting; act on behalf of socially disadvantaged; impetus is to participate, intervene, get involved, promote change
Power distance	
Power distance refers to the journalist's position toward loci of power in society, stretching from "loyal" (low) to "adversary" (high)	
Loyal (low)	**Adversary (high)**
Perceived as loyal to those in power; often "propagandist" role; routinely engages in self-censorship; serving as mouthpiece of government, ruling party; accept information provided by official sources as authoritative, credible, trustworthy	Openly challenges powers that be; "fourth estate" (countervailing force of democracy); watchdogs; agents of social control; independent, radical critique of society and institutions, sceptical of assertions made by those in power
Market orientation	
Market orientation is reflective of the primary social focus that guides news production and stretches from "public interest" (low) to "market interest" (high)	
Public interest (low)	**Market interest (high)**
Addresses audience as citizens; primary role of journalism is to provide citizens with information needed to be free, self-governing; journalism is central to functioning of democracy; encourages political participation	Addresses audience as consumers; emphasis on giving audience what they want to know at expense of what they should know; focus is on everyday life issues, individual needs; driven by ratings mentality; commercial media; provides help, advice, guidance, information about management of self and everyday life; "news-you-can-use" approach
Objectivism	
Objectivism relates to the question of how truth can be attained, is concerned with a philosophical or absolute sense of objectivity rather than with a procedural sense of objectivity as method and refers to a journalist's perception of reality, stretches from subjectivism (low) to correspondence (high)	
Subjectivism (low)	**Correspondence (high)**
Constructivist idea that there is no absolute truth (existentialist); journalists inescapably create their own realities; news is representation of world; all representations are inevitably selective, require interpretation; truth and pursuit of truth cannot be separated from context and human subjectivity; impossible for journalists to create value-free accounts of events; truth will emerge from	Totalitarian understanding of "truth"; perceive objects as independent of existence of perceiver (rationalist); truth is "out there" and ought to be "mirrored" and not created, invented, altered in any way; precision journalism; scientific; journalist can and should be able to separate facts from values; observer and observed are distinct categories; resonates with Western cultures

combination of potentially infinite number of subjective accounts; resonates with Eastern cultures	
Empiricism	
Empiricism is concerned with the means by which a truth claim is ultimately justified by the journalist, stretches from "analytical" (low) to "empirical" (high)	
Analytical (low)	**Empirical (high)**
Accentuates reason, ideas, values, opinion, analysis; priority given to analytic knowledge; truth dependent on facts; manifest in commentary, opinion journalism; credibility rooted in ability to persuade audience	Strong emphasis on observation, measurement, evidence, experience; truth needs to be substantiated by facts; priority to factual knowledge over analytical knowledge; high value on procedural, methodological aspects of proper reporting (investigation, fact checking); record events and let facts speak for themselves
Relativism	
Relativism focuses on the extent to which individuals base their personal moral philosophies on universal ethical rules. This dimension is highly culture-bound and cannot serve as a common denominator of global variations in professional practice. Some individuals tend to reject the possibility of relying on universal moral rules (high), whereas others believe in and make use of moral absolutes (low).	
Idealism	
Idealism refers to the consequences in the response to ethical dilemmas. There are individuals who assume that desirable outcomes should always be obtained with the "right" action (high, means oriented), while less idealistic individuals are more outcome oriented and admit that harm will sometimes be necessary to produce good (low).	

(Source: Adapted from Hanitzsch 2007)

With both Merrill's journalistic orientations and Hanitzsch's dimensions of journalism culture, most journalists would be represented somewhere closer to the middle of the continuum. In both tables above, the binary extremes are described. However, it is clear that the basic tendency in journalism has always been more towards the rational, objective, logical end of the continuum (cf. Tuchmann 1978; Singer 2006; Kovach & Rosenstiel 2007; Coyer *et al*. 2007; Hanitzsch 2007; Randall 2011).

Merrill (1977: 45-47) also acknowledges that a tendency towards the rationalist orientation remains a characteristic of conventional journalism, or what he refers to as "Establishment journalism". In Merrill's "existential journalism hall of fame" he includes, amongst others, Thomas Paine, Henry Thoreau, Hodding Carter, Ernest Hemingway, H.L. Mencken, Sartre, Camus, Dan Rather and Daniel Schorr – "journalism history can, indeed, dredge up some notable examples of existential journalists – but not very many" (Merrill 1977: 60).

The existential super-stance not being the dominant orientation in journalism does not negate its existence, nor does it mean that it should not be described or analysed. Although the bulk of journalism research is conducted from the perspective of rational, conventional journalism (Löffelholz & Weaver 2008), there are a number of authors who focus on describing what "the other

side" looks like (Donsbach 2008). Of relevance to this study is the concepts of the unifying and decentring journalist, as described by Muhlmann (2008; 2010).

4.4.2 Unifying and decentring journalism

Muhlmann's (2008) development of the concepts of the unifying and decentring journalistic types are based on the following question:

> The desire to bring people together, to *unify*, is most visible in journalism's concern to give readers the 'truth' – that is, something that is acceptable to all, beyond differences of opinion … [T]he 'unifying' journalist often assumes the features of … a *witness-ambassador*, a key figure in the 'dominant' modern journalism. [I asked] what figures 'of resistance' can be opposed to the witness-ambassador, in fact, whether a journalism that *decentres* is possible (Muhlmann 2008: 6).

Unifying journalism is aligned (but not synonymous) with the rational super-stance and a conventional approach to journalism, and is characterised by a concern for factual accuracy, discipline and impartiality. Muhlmann (2008: 8) writes that unifying journalism is produced with the express purpose of appealing to the widest possible audience. The idea is to provide "a narrative that could be received collectively, in fact 'de-singularized', and so of interest to the largest number". This approach to journalism also gave rise to the development of the notion of "human interest", which here refers to "that part of human curiosity that is common to the largest number, that is of *general interest*, and that is seen by the wide circulation press as its prime aim" (*ibid*.).

According to Muhlmann (2008: 9) the key to understanding unifying journalism is the idea that journalism addresses a public perceived as a unified entity. Journalistic efforts are thus concentrated on this unification process: "This aim continues to show through whenever journalism insists, especially in discussions of an ethical nature, on its ideal of 'truth', whether the vocabulary is that of factual accuracy, objectivity, impartiality or fairness" (*ibid*.). The notions of objectivity, impartiality and fairness all rest upon a perception of what is considered objective, impartial and fair in terms of a common reality. The problem arises when having to determine who or what is responsible for making this decision: "It means honouring a pact with the public, which allows journalists to aspire to a collectively acceptable approach; but it is a pact that does not necessarily have great epistemological coherence" (Muhlmann 2008: 10).

The unifying journalist makes use of common criteria in his or her work. For example, a "fact" is considered a fact dependent on common agreement, or what is accepted as a fact in a specific group

or community. In other words information is considered factual when adhering to criteria defined by a specific community (Muhlmann 2008: 11, quoting Tuchman 1978). The element of fairness is brought in by presenting "opposing facts" or opinions. Muhlmann (2008: 12) writes "the juxtaposition of many points of view is certainly a ritual of objectivity in the journalistic profession". She points out that some newsgathering "rituals" (Tuchman's term) have a more precise epistemological basis, such as empirical verification of the facts presented, while others, such as a "balanced point of view" is far less empirical. In fact, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007: xiii) go as far as suggesting that the concept of objectivity as it relates to journalism should rather be seen as a unity of method instead of an aim.

Another characteristic of unifying journalism is it reliance on "the eye, as opposed to the voice" (Muhlmann 2008: 13). Conventional journalistic vocabulary abounds with the sense of sight: exposure, exposé, revealing, and even the view that facts are "what is visible or can be made visible to all, as opposed to … what is simply said" (*ibid.*). Acceptable proof is *seen*; rumour is *heard*: If someone tells us something bad is going on, we have to see it for it to become true, or a fact (cf. Esser 2008). Esser's (2008) study on sound bites and image bites refers to a number of scholarly interpretations that have found that "an enhanced visual style of news … is professionally motivated behavior by journalists to increase their influence, authority, and prestige – and ultimately their control over the news".

Muhlmann (2008: 22) describes the unifying journalist as a witness-ambassador, a trustworthy source (by common agreement) who sees on behalf of the members of a specific group. The observations of this witness-ambassador are characterised by "aperspectival objectivity", in essence a "neutral observer" who watches or observes in a disinterested manner. The witness-ambassador's journalism relies on the presence of an omnipresent "I", a unifying "narrator" that sees on behalf of all of us. Even news reports written in the first person create the impression that "I" does not refer to the journalist who wrote the story, but rather "the 'I' here is collective, appointed as 'our' ambassador" (Muhlmann 2008: 26-27). Using the example of the French journalist and anarchist Séverine, who reported on the trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus in 1899, Muhlmann (2008: 36) points out that the witness-ambassador "is more a *body* than a person, and this makes her [Séverine] the ultimate witness, who achieves universality" – a way of "embodying the people" (*ibid.*). It is important to note that, for the unifying journalist, there is less distance from the event reported on than for a traditional news reporter, who is expected to report from a distance. The unifying journalist presents his or her experience of the event, but on behalf of the people they are writing for, and the aim is not to decentre this community, but to reassert itself, or adapt, but either way keeping its original centre.

Muhlmann (2008: 128) describes the biggest limitation of the unifying journalist as follows: "This figure is imprisoned by the very thing that is its greatest asset: its link with the public, a public which it has to make 'feel' events, situations and problems."

Muhlmann (2008: 28) warns that her concepts of unifying and decentring journalism should not be seen as a right/wrong set-up, with one approach acceptable and one not:

> It is mistaken, in particular, to see the journalistic process of unifying as implying a smoothing over of all the conflicts in this unified community. Witness-ambassadors, who set themselves up as the centre of the community and who, in doing so, define this centre, open a latent debate about 'our' identity. In many cases – including the most combative pages in modern journalism – this debate about identity involves *putting 'us' to the test*: the journalists, by their gaze, introduce something which questions 'our' identity and which sets off a conflict around this very identity; it is through the presentation of this conflict that they reaffirm the centre. The unification is achieved, therefore, both in and through a test.

The unifying journalist therefore does embody some elements of the journalist as change agent, as will be discussed later. Muhlmann (*ibid*.) suggests the value of journalists who choose to be witness-ambassadors is found in the following questions: What sort of tests are unifying journalists able to inflict on the community, simply by deploying their own gaze? And what sorts of conflict can take place within this process of bringing the public together? The purpose of unifying journalism as a vital element of modern democracies, writes Muhlmann, is to "combine the desire to *unify* with that to inject *conflict*". To understand this, Muhlmann, in *Journalism for democracy* (2010), explains that unifying journalism should not be confused with consensus journalism. In fact, the unifying journalist is focused on effecting change; it is in how it is *practiced* that it shares similarities with Merrill's rational journalist. The unifying journalist, especially in a democracy, aims to achieve what is also the ideal of democracy as a political community, "a community that is both one and conflictual, but which also understands that the place where one can achieve the unification, the centre, the *meson*, only reveals itself in conflict" (Muhlmann 2010: 185-186). According to this statement, a democracy as a specific type of community is characterised by constant conflict, a "constant interplay of resistance" within the centre but without decentring, or moving away from what it essentially is, i.e. a democracy. The goal of the unifying journalist becomes clear against this background: It is to continue to insert conflicts into the centre in order for the system (the community or group) to change, be that to adapt to a new perspective or the reassert an existing perspective.

For Muhlmann (2010: 186), the "modern figure of the reporter", a character she describes as a creation of Western democracies, is crucial to unifying journalism, tasked with searching for "the 'facts' on which everyone can agree, hence 'unifying' facts" and making themselves "representative of the 'we'".

If unifying journalism is the dominant journalism of the day (and for many a day before – Muhlmann 2010: 186), decentring journalism is a counter-model and decentring journalists "are resistance fighters who have to be tracked down, often on frontiers: for example, that between journalism and literature":

> Decentring journalists seek to make the public which 'receives' their gaze feel something very different, something deeply disturbing to the 'we'; not just a bone of contention by means of which the community ultimately reconstructs itself, but an otherness liable to dissolve the 'we', something which says to it: you hardly exist as a constituted or a to-be-constituted 'we'; the 'we' that you are, or think you are, is undone (Muhlmann 2008: 29).

If the witness-ambassador is "our representative" the decentring journalists set themselves apart from "us" in order to address us as "you": "They say to their readers: what *I* see is precisely what *you* do not see and probably cannot easily see, so profoundly does it challenge your usual categories" (*ibid.*). In other words, they take on the role of outsiders. This challenge differs from the tests, or conflicts, that the unifying journalist puts to his or her audience. The unifying test presents an adversity which allows for unifying or "rebinding" the "us". Decentring journalism aims to destroy the "us/non-us" frontier. The unifying journalist aims at upholding the centre, or the status quo, even if changes and adaptations through tests and conflicts are taking place. The decentring journalist aims to push the entire status quo off-centre, it is a *disruptive* activity that aims to cause a paradigm shift. The decentring journalist seeks "whatever shatters the 'common': an otherness of a type that will destroy the unity" (Muhlmann 2010: 188). A challenge facing the decentring journalist is that the aim of decentring journalism is often in contradiction with the possibility of achieving it – in some instances the "otherness" presented is so extreme that the reader is unable to form any connection with it. The challenge for the decentring journalist is finding a balance between "making us see otherness" and "connecting it to us" (Muhlmann 2008: 31).

Muhlmann (*ibid.*) views the 1960s movement of New Journalism as an example of decentring journalism. New Journalism, as explained later in this chapter, is also presented as an example of existential journalism, i.e. a type of journalism that challenged the status quo, both in terms of society as well as journalism. However, Muhlmann (*ibid.*) warns against the temptation to see decentring

journalism as a type of "travelling" journalism: It is not merely a matter of someone "navigating 'other' points of view" and then "re-creating them for the 'us' that they address". Muhlmann (2008: 32) points to this "temptation of ubiquity" as one of the characteristics of New Journalism that it does not share with decentring journalism.

Another problem that faces the decentring journalist is falling into the trap of creating a new unified "we" against the dominant force or point of view, or lapsing into just another form of unifying, even if it is from a different perspective. This simply turns the decentring journalist into a unifying journalist for a new community. Gordimer (1975: 89) refers to this as an "orthodoxy of opposition", which she sees as a threat to the writer's ability to interpret his or her surroundings. Gordimer's views on the duty of the writer is discussed later in this chapter.

The French daily newspaper *Libération*, established in May 1973, is presented by Muhlmann (2008: 164) as another example of decentring journalism, albeit it with some flaws. Jean-Paul Sartre was the chairperson of the editorial board of *Libé*, as it was popularly known. During the early days of *Libé* Sartre warned on a number of occasions that *Libé* should avoid creating a new "us/them" situation, with "us" in this instance the dominated or oppressed group and "them" the oppressors or dominant group. Similar to Gordimer, Sartre was aware that the "orthodoxy of opposition" could lead to the dominated group ignoring differences of opinion within the group in an effort not to damage the unity. This, Sartre believed, would defeat the purpose of giving "voice" to a variety of other opinions (Muhlmann 2008: 166). However, Muhlmann (*ibid.*) points out that despite Sartre's vision to accommodate various voices, his ultimate aim with *Libé* was still to achieve some type of unification amongst the dominated or oppressed. This is also the essence of Merleau-Ponty's criticism of Sartre in this regard, writes Muhlmann (2010: 208). Merleau-Ponty accuses Sartre of "a failure to engage in confrontation" because, despite Sartre's own warning against forming a new "we", he still focused on unification. "In Sartre there is a plurality of subjects but no intersubjectivity" (Merleau-Ponty, quoted in Muhlmann 2010: 208). The paradox of decentring, according to Muhlmann (2010: 188-189) is that is needs a bond in order to operate: "In short, whether it likes it or not, the conflict that is born of a journalist's gaze still needs, by its very nature, a common space in which to emerge." However, merely juxtaposing opposing voices in a random manner (as Sartre was accused of) is not what decentring journalism is about; instead, the aim should be to decentre entirely the existing community (or current dominant view). Decentring journalism must create a confrontation in order to be successful. The above-mentioned paradox is addressed to some extent by the decentring journalist who, although forced to forge a bond, "rejects the possibility of establishing a centre":

Spontaneously, they would like to go further and act out an ever more serious, deeply divisive and irreparable conflict, demonstrate an absolute otherness, which would be there, wide open, within this falsely integrated 'we' (*ibid*.).

One could conclude that the decentring journalist is "an enthusiast for permanent metamorphosis", but Muhlmann (2008: 177) suggests seeing the decentring journalist rather

as an 'I', who is, after all, singular, with all the limitations attached to the fact of always taking up a position somewhere (whatever is said), even if it means assuming this journalist to have, at the same time, a capacity for permanent self-criticism and for 'change'.

This implicit focus on individuality, self-criticism and change places decentring journalism within the realm of existentialism, with its related focus on the individual, his or her facticity, and the ability of transcendence.

As with the unifying journalist, the decentring journalist does not view events from a distance. And for both the challenge is not to "cling to those they support": For the unifying journalist, this implies holding up a mirror to his or her "own people" with the intent on encouraging them (a "them" which includes the journalist) to adapt or change, but without losing the centre. For the decentring journalist, avoiding clinging to those they support implies always looking for the "non-place", i.e. continuing to find new, previously unexplored or unrecognised places or viewpoints from which to expose the conflict (Muhlmann 2008: 178).

Writer-reporter George Orwell can be considered an archetype of decentring, posits Muhlmann (2008: 195): "What Orwell was seeking, in a way, was a different gaze at 'the others' (the colonized, vagrants, the unemployed, men in war), that is, a gaze other than the dominant one." In order to achieve this ability to "see differently" Orwell employed self-criticism: "His self-analysis gave Orwell a masterly grasp of all the problems in the act of decentring; indeed, it turned it into a morass of difficulties and temptations" (*ibid*.). In addition, Muhlmann notes, Orwell considered decentring the real purpose of observing. Decentring in the Orwellian sense implies a personal metamorphosis – in order to be able to "see differently" the decentring journalist has to challenge his or her own limitations, or "dominant gazes" before being able to provide others with a different view (Muhlmann 2008: 198), or "to see is to be decentred in relation to all other perspectives, whether they are dominant or not" (Muhlmann 2008: 214). This personal experience on the part of the decentring journalist is what constitutes authenticity, which is the key focus of both decentring and existential journalism, as well as existentialism. Orwell's views on the duty of the writer are discussed later in this chapter.

The similarities between Muhlmann's two approaches to journalism, namely unifying and decentring journalism, and the two journalistic super-stances described by Merrill above, namely rational and existential journalism, are clear. This does not imply that they are carbon copies; in fact, as with any orientation, these approaches and orientations are present on a continuum. As will become clear in this chapter, the existential journalist could, depending on circumstances, be a unifying *or* a decentring journalist as both, depending on the intent of the individual, require a measure of disclosure. The shared goal, it appears, is to effect change.

Against the background of the two main journalistic orientations, as well as the unifying and decentring approaches, the basic characteristics of existential journalism will be discussed next.

4.4.3 Basic characteristics of existential journalism

Merrill's quest for describing a more existential, subjective, intuitive approach is based on the basic tenets of existentialism as world-view. Existentialism, as described in chapter 3, is a reaction to the philosophical view of objectivity (as in "reality exists outside and irrespective of human perception"). Instead, the existentialist world-view is based on the phenomenological experience particular to a specific person (as in "reality is what an individual experiences it to be"). Against this background, Merrill (1977: 43) describes the existential orientation to journalism as follows:

> The existentialist position insists that the journalist involves himself, commits himself, ever moving, ever changing – in short, he must continue to make or create himself. 'Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself,' Sartre has said, calling this the first principle of existentialism. Certainly the existential journalist, in the serious business of making himself, would not be devoid of rationality, nor would he be a complete foe of Reason. Again, it is a matter of emphasis: the existential journalist would stress intuition, feeling and any other aspect of subjectivism which might help him acquire a more complete and realistic picture of the event or personality he is describing.

A close reading of Merrill's *Imperative of freedom* and *Existential journalism* indicates that Merrill's purpose was not to convince (or some would argue "convert") journalists to existential journalism. Instead, he set out to describe how someone with an existentialist world-view could write in such a manner that his or her output or creations would be considered journalism, and not propaganda. Merrill (1977: 48) acknowledges that true existential journalists are few and far between. This is probably a result of the general (conventional, also Western) expectation of what a journalist should be and the influence of journalism training that is focused on producing conventional journalists, but

most importantly it is the result of the individual responsibility required to practice existential journalism.

Merrill's (1977: 49) first characteristic of existential journalism is what it is *not* (the classic existentialist approach of negation):

> "[T]he term is too often denuded of its vital meaning by being considered, when it is considered at all, as something nearly synonymous with 'New Journalism'. Actually it is different; for it is not simply an attitude or stance of rebellion for rebellion's sake, nor is it an obsession with writing style or form, nor is it a concern for exhaustive communication.

New Journalism, as practiced by Tom Wolfe, Truman Capote, Hunter S. Thompson and others (cf. Weingarten 2005; Shikha 1991), has been alluded to in various parts of this thesis (see, for example, chapter 2, as well as Muhlmann's views earlier in this chapter). To understand New Journalism in relation to existential journalism it is helpful to consider it in the same way that the discussion of the duty of the writer later in this chapter relates to existentialism as discussed in the previous chapter. Within the ontology of existentialism the writing of, for example, Sartre, Gordimer, Orwell and Camus are *ontic acts* of existentialism, i.e. "applied" existentialism, or examples of existentialism. Similarly, within the ontology of existential journalism, New Journalism would be one example of existential journalism (an ontic act). It is *representative* of the thing (there are certain common characteristics), but is not *the thing itself*. Put in another way: If existentialism describes one way of being a human, then existential journalism would describe one way of being a journalist, and New Journalism would describe one way of being an existential journalist.

Merrill (1977: 53-55) provides the following outline of existential journalism:

- It emphasises that the existential journalist is a free and authentic person, not simply a cog in the impersonal wheel of journalism; that he is not replaceable or expendable;
- It brings into sharp relief the uniqueness of every journalist's individual existence and personality;
- It causes practitioners to develop their integrity and individual personalities and to project their personalities into society through their journalism;
- It makes them rebel against being lost, anonymous functionaries in journalism;
- It extols freedom and responsibility for decisions;
- It requires the journalist to take a certain viewpoint, position, or stand;

- It requires the journalist to consider alternatives of action and to make a commitment to one or some, not resting on the comfortable assumption that a little of everything ranged rather equally is the best, the fairest, truest, and most objective journalism;

- It requires the journalist not to hesitate in choosing, selecting, making decisions as to editorial determinations; the journalist insists on persistent choices, hard ones as well as easy ones (Sartre's statement that choosing for an individual is choosing for all humanity is probably truer in journalism than in most areas of life.);

- It requires the journalist to consider the consequences of journalistic action and to take responsibility for it instead of saying that he is following the orders of a superior;

- It requires the journalist to accept and use freedom – personal and journalistic;

- It requires the journalist to be vital, dynamic, passionate, and committed in order to practice vigorous, dangerous journalism; and

- It requires the journalist to extol individualism, looking at the world and journalistic issues from his personal viewpoint.

Merrill's statement that "the existentialist position insists that the journalist involves himself, commits himself, ever moving, ever changing – in short, he must continue to make or create himself" (Merrill 1977: 43) is what ties existential journalism to Muhlmann's concept of decentring journalism. If the above-mentioned characteristics of the existential journalist are read together with the description of decentring journalism, it provides one answer as to how a person with an existentialist world-view could practice his or her journalism without it becoming propaganda: If existentialism is a person's world-view, then existential journalism would constitute his or her journalistic orientation, and within this orientation the approach of decentring journalism could be applied. The journalist as change agent is discussed later in this chapter. For now, we turn to some of the most contentious issues associated with existential and decentring journalism, including subjectivity vs objectivity, individual responsibility and authenticity in journalism.

4.4.4 Subjectivity vs objectivity

Arguable the most contentious aspect relating to existential journalism, and all forms of unconventional journalism, is the matter of subjectivity. The biggest criticism is that these practices produce not journalism but "agonic texts" (Angenot, in Muhlmann 2008: 15) that actively promote a specific viewpoint, often in a "combative" manner (*ibid*.). Muhlmann (2008: 14) sees unconventional journalism, i.e. journalism with a specific purpose in mind, or representative of a voice, as the heir to the "journalism of opinion" that was considered mainstream before the Industrial Revolution. In other words, what was conventional journalism early on in journalism's history became what is today

considered to be unconventional journalism. In those instances where it is "allowed" or "accepted" as part of current conventional journalism, these texts are considered editorials, op-eds or columns.

Apart from external criticism about its right to exist as a type of journalism, unconventional journalism is also threatened from inside. Muhlmann (*ibid.*) warns that "as a journalism of the voice, it risks being seen as not more than a voice".

Merrill addresses this issue early in his writing, and continuous to mention and dissect elements of subjectivity throughout his work. As mentioned earlier, he views the existential journalist as subjective "in the sense that it puts special stress on the *person* of the journalist himself" (Merrill 1977: 50):

> I am not talking of an extreme subjectivism; rather the kind of existential journalism that is realistic and meaningful is a modified subjective journalism. It is mainly subjective, personal, and passionate; but at the same time it has a firm foundation of reasonableness. And, of course, reasonableness impinges on journalistic freedom, limiting it by self-assertation, making it 'responsible' freedom.

In dealing with the issue of subjectivism vs objectivism, Merrill (1977: 41) explains that most people, including journalists, tend to confuse "objectivity" with "factuality". A conventional journalist who thinks he or she is objectively reporting on an event, is still simply providing "an accurate account of somebody else's version of what happened, or somebody else's opinion". Objectivity is often considered to be the same as reliability and truthfulness, with "sticking to the facts" being akin to responsibility, and everything else becoming irresponsibility (Merrill 1977: 40). Merrill (1977: 47) quotes Jaspers as saying that "truth is infinitely more than scientific correctness".

Heidegger also writes about the difference between what is "correct" and what is "true":

> Unconcealment in accordance with which nature presents itself as a *calculable complex* of the effects of forces can indeed permit *correct determinations*; but precisely through these successes the danger can remain that in the midst of all that is correct the truth will withdraw (Gunkel & Taylor 2014: 61, quoting Heidegger).

Gunkel and Taylor (*ibid.*) write that Heidegger's statement above contains two issues relevant to the current media landscape:

> 1) The conceptual distinction between what may be *correct* and what is ultimately *true*. These authors demonstrate their point by using computer-generated imagery (CGI) as an example.

Using CGI, movies can portray space invasions, modern warfare and the spread of disease in a very convincing and believable manner, i.e. it "looks correct" but it is of course not necessarily true. They also refer to Baudrillard's concept of simulation, which describes "the complex imbrication of the real with its representations to the extent that they can no longer be separated";

2) The consequently derived paradox whereby the truth becomes hidden, not because of efforts to cover it up, but paradoxically, because it is displaced by an over-abundance of correctness.

Gunkel and Taylor (2014: 62-63) explain Heidegger's view as follows:

In the context of the mediation, representation and technological framing of things, taking both points together enables us to recognize the usually unacknowledged ways in which truth is routinely subordinated to correctness … Put more simply … it is in the very guise of being so explicit that the media manages to conceal its true impact.

In terms of defining objectivity, Ryan (2001: 3) writes that objective journalism shares the core values of the scientific method, with "the overarching value for the objective journalist (or scientist) [being] the collection and dissemination of information that describes reality as accurately as possible". Ryan (2001: 4) posits that objective journalism is not completely value-free. For example, making a strategic decision about a source is a value-laden action, but for the objective journalist this decision is based on professional norms, i.e. "the reporter consistently seeks the most informed, qualified, forthcoming source available to address each side". He also acknowledges that objective journalists are aware that simple labels for people, such as "liberal" or "conservative" are not sufficient, as people and events are multi-faceted and extremely complex (Ryan 2001: 5, quoting Merrill & Lowenstein). However, as discussed above, the idea of a single, universal reality that is "out there" and can be described is only one (rationalist) way of understanding reality.

The age-old problem with not only defining but achieving objectivity casts a shadow over conventional journalism's claim to objectivity. Donsbach (2008: 67) quotes Walter Lippmann's comparison of journalism with other professions:

There is no discipline in applied psychology, as there is a discipline in medicine, engineering, or even law, which has authority to direct the journalist's mind when he passes from the news to the vague realm of truth … his version of truth is always his version.

It should be stressed that existential journalism, and Merrill, do not view objectivity as an ideal as "wrong". What Merrill aimed to do with his concept of existential journalism is to describe how, for someone with an existentialist world-view, the ontic act of journalism would look like. For the existentialist, the world is *my experience of the world* (or Lippmann's *version of the truth*), thus everything is subjective in the sense of being from the perspective of the subject (me, the individual). That is why Sartre, as discussed later in the section on the duty of the writer, explained that the existentialist experience is inherently subjective. Living, and more important to this discussion, writing, is an act of disclosure (Sartre 1948: 23). Writing is an act of disclosing an aspect of the world, and to reveal is to change. Therefore the journalist through his or her writing, despite all efforts towards and talk of objectivity or neutrality, will effect change. Muhlmann (2010: 197) explains that subjectivity is also an unavoidable characteristic of decentring journalism as a result of its dependence on the gaze as "preferred mode of access to the real", or, in other words, phenomenology.

How would subjectivity manifests in the work of an existential journalist? Merrill (1977: 51) quotes Erich Fromm as saying that "objectivity does not mean detachment, it means respect; that is, the ability not to distort and to falsify things, persons, and oneself". Gunkel and Taylor (2014: 68) posit that it is not a question of what is the truth, but rather a question of what we have in mind when we ask whether something is true. The conundrum this poses to the rational, objective journalist is obvious as the truth is considered to be something out there that must be discovered and consequently uncovered. For the existential journalist, there is no central or single truth, as truth, according to Heidegger, is essentially a relative concept (Gunkel & Taylor 2014: 69). This idea was discussed extensively in chapter 3, but it is necessary to mention it again due to its relevance to existential journalism.

Donsbach relates this "relativity" of truth to the psychological concept of uncertain or undetermined situations. He refers to Leon Festinger's social comparison theory, which states that "an opinion, a belief or an attitude is 'correct', 'valid,' and 'proper' only to the extent to which it is anchored in a group of people with similar beliefs, opinions, and attitudes" (Festinger, in Donsbach 2008: 67). According to the social comparison theory there are three conditions under which people are most dependent on others, namely:
- when external reality is ambiguous and difficult to assess;
- when there is a dualism between physical and social reality; or
- when physical reality takes precedence over social reality.

It is under these conditions that the journalist, whether conventional or unconventional, operates. This confirms the importance of journalism as a way of providing people with information, but it also underscores the immense responsibility resting upon the journalist as someone whom others depend on for information as well as the interpretation of that information. Donsbach (2007: 67) suggests "intersubjectivity" in the place of subjectivity or objectivity. Based on the shared reality theory of Hardin and Higgins (1996, in Donsbach 2007: 67), intersubjectivity is explained as the outcome of a process of social verification through which an experience (or fact) is established as valid and reliable to the extent that it is shared with others in that group or community.

Given this background, journalism's directive of objectivity should rather be viewed as relative objectivity. Objective reporting therefore should be in relation to what is considered to be the truth for that community or group, instead of assuming that the truth is universal and therefore applicable to all people or all situations. In addition, should the existential journalist, through the Orwellian process of self-criticism, come to realise that what is considered to be the truth by this community (of which he or she forms part) is in fact not the truth, he or she should attempt to change this community's perception of this truth. The context will determine whether he or she should attempt this change through unifying journalism, namely introducing a conflict to make the community aware of the untruth of this truth (as an insider), or through decentring journalism, namely attempting bring about change through complete decentring (as an outsider). As described earlier, the decision as to which approach to utilise rests upon Merrill's three basic stages of societal development as the media's role, and the goal of journalism, is closely tied to these stages of societal development (Merrill 1974: 55-62). In a transitional phase, and especially early in this phase, the efforts of the existential journalist practicing decentring journalism could be required, while during the modern phase, unifying journalism has probably a bigger role. Similarly, existential, decentring journalism is key should the goal be overthrowing a totalitarian regime (Nat Nakasa being a case in point).

In choosing between the unifying and decentring approaches, Muhlmann (2008: 16) also suggests keeping in mind the difference between a discourse and narrative. She posits that "to pass from the singular voice to a more unifying gaze is surely to attempt to turn discourse, as far as possible, into a narrative". Although there is no clear line distinguishing a discourse from a narrative, there are some differences (Muhlmann 2008: 16, quoting Genette). One of these is that a narrative has a descriptive dimension, which places it in the realm of a story, which a discourse is not. In addition, in a discourse, someone speaks and their situation is the focus of the meaning. In a narrative, no one speaks in the sense that we do not need to know who is speaking in order to understand the meaning. Discourse is saying while narration is seeing. Muhlmann (2008: 17) writes that many of the great journalists of

opinion were already great reporters, or narrators, which she suggests as a possible way in which to combine unifying and decentring journalism: a fusion of saying and seeing, or a combination of objectivity and subjectivity.

Conventional journalism's claim to the moral high-ground of objectivity, as has been mentioned a number of times in this chapter, is not easily defended either. Esser refers to a study by Farnsworth and Licther (2007, in Esser 2008: 401) which has found that the average sound bite (being a block of uninterrupted speech by, in this case, a political candidate on television) has shrunk from 42 seconds in 1968 to about eight seconds in 2004. With this in mind, Semetko *et al*. (1991, quoted in Esser 2008: 403) suggests the labels of a "pragmatic" journalistic culture and a "sacerdotal" journalistic culture:

> Whereas a sacerdotal approach considers political statements and activities as intrinsically important and as something that deserves to be reported authentically and extensively, a pragmatic approach insists that political material should fight its way into news programs on its news value only and in consideration of the newsworthiness of competing stories. In a pragmatic news culture, candidates' statements are likely to be used to a lesser extent and more often as raw material in the construction of the reporter's own story.

The pragmatic journalistic culture is usually characterised by scepticism about the veracity of claims made by news sources (Esser 2008: 403). This pragmatic approach is a characteristic of what is considered to be mainstream journalism. However, in reference to the current discussion about subjectivity and objectivity, the responsibility that rests on the journalist in terms of choices is quite staggering. From the quote above, it is clear that this journalist does not provide the news makers or sources the space to tell their story; instead, the information is *interpreted* (used as raw material) by the reporter in his or her *own* story.

Stoker (1995), also writing about objectivity and ethical behaviour, suggests linking the occupational norms and standards of objective journalism with a "subjective existentialism". This approach would require a journalist who is aware of his or her moral duties, which, as Merrill proposed, is made possible through a more intellectual, philosophically aware practice (and training) of journalism and journalists. Stoker (1995: 18) writes that

> "[r]ather than contradicting moral philosophy, existentialism emphasizes the importance of the individual identifying and fulfilling his or her moral responsibilities. Existential journalists would refuse to surrender their own integrity when faced with a conflict between the objective account and the journalist's knowledge of the truth … The authentic journalist would adhere to deontological duties, such as nonmaleficence, beneficence, fidelity, gratitude, justice,

reparation, and self-improvement. The authentic journalist would question the credibility of official sources, not because of an inherent distrust in authority, but because of a duty to verify statements of fact, and understand the context and underlying causes of events … Existentialism would free journalists not only from their own biases but also from the biases of their profession.

It is thus clear that, irrespective of whether the journalist is practising conventional or unconventional journalism, he or she will be required to exercise his or her existential freedom, namely to accept the responsibility of making a choice, or risk bad faith.

4.4.5   Responsibility in journalism

The most important aspect of existential journalism is the emphasis it places on individual responsibility. This flows from the concept of existential freedom, namely that an individual has to choose, and will always remain responsible for these choices. If I am responsible for my choices as an individual human being, it goes without saying that these choices include the choices I make as part of my work as a journalist. These can be as big and influential as choosing to leave a media unit because of ideological differences, or as small, yet often equally as influential, as choosing the angle of a story. Even if my editor tells me which angle to pursue, as the journalist writing the story I am still the person *interpreting* that angle. In the case of a journalist like Nat Nakasa, choosing to write, choosing which stories to cover, and choosing the angles of these stories held more than the inconvenience of losing a job, it placed him in direct physical danger, as explained in chapter 2.

Merrill (1977: 55) writes that *what* a journalist does in a specific instance is not as important as the fact that he *does something*, i.e. making a choice to write, and writing in a specific way about something. And, seeing as the existentialist chooses for everyone each time he or she chooses, the weight of this responsibility is evident. Although this might not be as clear or direct in most people's everyday existence, for a journalist this has direct implications: When I choose how to report on an event, I choose on behalf of everyone who will read my story because in essence I am determining what they will know about his event. Of course the journalist is not alone in carrying this responsibility – the reader shares the responsibility in choosing what to do with the information that I share with them. But the initial action, the first step, remains the journalist's. Later in this chapter, the section on the duty of the writer sets out what this responsibility entails.

In practical terms individual responsibility is not an easy burden to bear. For a journalist working in a newsroom instructions from editors are part and parcel of the work environment. Opting to go

against the wishes of an editor or media owner might result in the termination of the journalist's contract. In the case of most of the journalists of the *Drum* generation, going against the wishes of the apartheid government had severe consequences. Merrill (1977: 56) takes a hard-line approach in this regard, stating that the journalist who shifts the responsibility of a decision (or the *freedom* of choice) to someone else is in bad faith, i.e. choosing not to choose and at the same token accepting or acknowledging some form of determinism in their life:

> Man is an individualist; he is the end-all and be-all of values. If the journalist is free he is, in a sense, condemned to live with his freedom – condemned to live with uncertainty and shifting situations in which he must constantly fashion his own standards. This is a terrifying, uncertain experience, filled with anguish; but it is the key to authentic essence-building existence.

Bad faith in journalism can also manifest through choosing correctness as a way to avoid a perhaps uncomfortable truth. Gunkel and Taylor (2014: 89) posit that striving towards correctness, or objectivity, as if it is the same as truthfulness can provide the journalist with a way out of committing or becoming involved – especially when the subject matter is something that is uncomfortable or when it challenges existing perspectives or commonly held beliefs.

It boils down to the *consequences* of being a journalist. For Merrill being a journalist is not, and should not be, for everyone:

> Freedom may indeed be dangerous. And for many it is uncomfortable; they constantly attempt to escape from it and live inauthentic lives … Nevertheless, freedom is absolutely necessary to an open society, to a democracy, to a libertarian people – and certainly to a pluralistic and diversified journalism.

Merrill's call for journalists to be involved in their stories does not refer, for example, to picking sides when writing about a domestic dispute. It is a call for journalists to be involved in their society, to participate in the democratic process. In fact, it is this author's contention that Merrill was not referring to the minutiae of a news report, but to the *act* of journalism as an act of *disclosure*. Admittedly, for the journalist currently working in a safe and stable society and writing about the comings and goings of celebrities (remember that Merrill warned us that media autonomy requires us to "suffer" this journalism as well) it might be difficult to grasp the implications of existential or decentring journalism, or see the necessity. The choices for our entertainment journalist might not be big or difficult, but neither are the consequences. For the likes of Nakasa, and any journalist working in an authoritarian, and specifically a totalitarian space, the consequences were and continue to be

dire. For Merrill, the existential, committed, involved orientation to journalism is the only way to ensure a libertarian, or free, society.

Merrill (1977: 60) views Camus as "perhaps the best" example of an existential journalist. In addition to the views of Camus discussed earlier in this chapter, Merrill also refers to Camus' view that "a good journalist is one who, first of all, is supposed to have ideas". Merrill (1977: 61) writes that Camus realised that "rebellion implies responsibility" and that "maturity demands realism". Merrill acknowledges that Camus, as well as Ortega y Gasset and Jaspers, did not have a very positive view of journalism. Merrill (1977: 61) posits that these authors' view of the media could be the result of their exposure to inauthentic journalism, produced by journalists who sublimated their individuality to organisations:

> He passes his day writing what he is told to write, doing what he is told to do; he has little incentive or energy to 'do his own thing'. If the average journalist stopped to think about it, he would realize that he, like Camus' Sisyphus, is constantly rolling the heavy stone of news and opinion up the hill of daily journalism only to have it slide back down the slippery slope … doing the same old journalistic tasks in the same old ways … Most journalists, however, *do not stop to think about it*. They are oblivious to this meaninglessness of their journalism (Merrill 1977: 80).

But in the process of being an existential, decentring journalist who is avoiding the inauthentic journalism described above, how does this journalist know how far to push these boundaries? Muhlmann (2010: 195) posits that "it certainly goes further than the journalism that has been dominant in the western democracies since the birth of reporting in the second half of the nineteenth century":

> This has primarily celebrated the figure of the reporter as the witness-ambassador of the public. The desire to unify has dominated the history of modern journalism, even if the figure of the witness-ambassador is no stranger to the tactic of also stimulating conflictuality in the public it addresses. But the conflict this figure sets out to activate fits the model of the *test*. In other words, it is a conflict that allows the 'we' to reconstruct itself better and experience itself better.

The responsibility of the decentring journalist is so big that it seems impossible that any boundary would ever be crossed:

> Decentring journalists seek a radical otherness which puts the 'we' into a more serious conflict. But they also need to make this 'other' seen, this other destined to reveal to the 'we'

its hollowness, to unmake its fragile unity, to decentre it. Decentring journalists need to make seen the ignored marginalities and the 'other' viewpoints of the collective life, which reveal the immensity of the misunderstandings on which the development of a 'we' is based (*ibid*.).

Muhlmann (2010: 196) suggests that decentring journalism, as a journalism of limits, is also the limits of journalism. She writes that there is "an otherness that cannot be grasped by the journalist because it defies *visibility*" and at this point "failure is guaranteed" (*ibid*.). Although failure of practicing decentring journalism is guaranteed once the limits of a particular gaze is reached, it does not absolve the existential journalist of his or her responsibility. In order to live and work authentically, the existential journalist has to continue to make choices in order to avoid "succumbing to the organisation", or bad faith.

4.4.6 Authenticity in journalism

Although existentialism situates authenticity as an intrinsic characteristic of the individual, the contemporary application has deviated from the original philosophical term. Holt (2012: 4) writes that authenticity is often regarded as "something that is manufactured and then approved by others". Deuze (2007, in Holt 2012: 4) posits that authenticity has become a way of "accentuating one's uniqueness as *trademark*, rather than the ethical commitment of true individuals. It seems in most modern applications of the concept, authenticity is taken to mean the same as originality."

Holt (2012: 11-12) summarises (with reference to the work of Adorno and Taylor) three problematic aspects of the concept of authenticity, namely

1) The idea of an authentic self is derived from a theological perspective, with God as fundamental source of value. However, attempts by, amongst others, existentialist philosophers to secularise this idea has failed as someone without a religious perspective will not have God as source of value and therefore might find the concept meaningless;

2) Authenticity suffers from the weakness of soft relativism and moral subjectivism. This implies that it is impossible to postulate any general ethical stance other than an imperative to strive for personal authenticity;

3) The subjectivist idea of an authentic, original self that can develop irrespective or in spite of surrounding social and material contexts is an exaggeration of the personal freedom that human beings can ever hope for.

In terms of the existential elements as applied in this thesis, these concerns have already been addressed, and will be addressed further in this section. Briefly, the focus on a religious or theological

basis as the only way to manifest authenticity is only relevant to the extent that living an authentic life and finding something, a purpose or a meaning, is difficult; whether that is based on religion or not is irrelevant. In fact, as was described in chapter 3, authenticity is the result of being confronted with our own death and our awareness of death. Authenticity is made possible through "anticipating one's own demise" (Wartenberg 2008: Authenticity). In terms of the second concern: Authenticity cannot be anything but personal, and therefore cannot be used as a concept to be applied to larger, varied or more diverse units. Regarding the third concern, the subjectivist idea of an authentic, original self that can develop irrespective or in spite of surrounding social and material contexts: As is explained throughout this thesis, existentialism is based on the primary concept of our being-in-the-world. Therefore, striving for authenticity is exactly that: the continuous effort to balance our social and material contexts with our chosen purpose or meaning.

For Merrill authenticity is the fundamental ethical guiding principle of existential journalism (Holt 2012: 8). Merrill's (1977: 85) Cyclic-Entropic Hypothesis of Journalistic Freedom and Development is based on the concept of entropy as described in physics. It states that any system tends to run down, dissolve or lose energy. According to Merrill's hypothesis, media systems will also lose energy and become passive and conformist, with an unavoidable death. The existentialist ideas of death and absurdity are evident in this hypothesis. This absurdity is what causes the inauthentic journalist to succumb to the organisation, living "peaceably and harmoniously with the institutions that increasingly subsume him, and in this way achieving the greatest happiness for himself" (Merrill 1977: 91). This inauthentic journalist is in bad faith in order to avoid acknowledging the "frightening implications of the journalistic future", as Merrill (*ibid.*) describes it.

Paradoxically, it is the very same hypothesis that provides the impetus for the existential journalist's strive towards authenticity, namely how to find meaning in the meaningless or absurd. By viewing the "frightening implications of the journalistic future" as a challenge, the existential journalist finds meaning in the absurd:

> Gain as much freedom, be as original and as creative, write as intensively and vigorously as possible; relate to the journalistic problems courageously, and exercise the maximum autonomy or self-determination: this is the imperative of the existential journalist. Instead of retiring from the struggle because of the danger of it, or because of the meaninglessness of it all, or because of the gloomy future that lies ahead, the existential journalist takes all of this as an inspiration and a stimulus to live a more intensive life (Merrill 1977: 93).

This approach is only possible through the existential concept of transcendence – the ability to move on from one's current situation, or facticity. The absence of efforts towards transcendence, or what Merrill (1977: 101) refers to as non-action, leads to "a kind of passive non-involved state". Of course one can refuse to choose, as this would also constitute a choice or an action, "but it would come from a superficial level of the self … and hardly amounts to more than a conditioned reflex" (Merrill 1996, in Holt 2012: 8). Instead, the existential journalist has to venture, force or will himself to take actions in order to "reestablish and reinforce his own individuality" (*ibid*.).

Merrill (1977: 102) suggests style as one of the ways in which a journalist can assert his or her individuality as part of his or her efforts to be authentic. The importance Merrill attaches to an individual writing style is apparent when he writes that a journalist *is* his or her style: "Therefore, a negation of style indicates a negation of self" (*ibid*.).

Conventional journalism is often characterised by anonymity, neutrality and conformity in terms of style as this serves as evidence of the distance that there is between the journalist and the topic. It is, to use Tuchman's phrase, a "ritual of objectivity". The journalist is the writer-ambassador and even when writing from a first-person perspective the "I" still represents the "we", as Muhlmann was quoted earlier.

The imperative of being a voice or providing a different gaze requires the existential or decentring journalist to demonstrate a unique style. The process of self-criticism and analysis that is required to present to the community a different gaze will necessarily result in change in the journalist as a person, which in turn will require of this journalist to reconsider his or her style. As Merrill (1977: 103) explains, it is not possible to present new ideas through "trite patterns of thought and action". At its most basic, a different perspective or new idea will require new terminology. At a more complex level, style requires the journalist to present his or her true self: "He must be honest with himself and his reader; pretense will find him out. Or, at least, he will find his own dishonesty out – and it will dissolve his authenticity" (Merrill 1977: 104).

However, an individual style should not and cannot be forced, it must be an honest reflection of the writer. Merrill (*ibid*.) warns that "the temptation is great to be eccentric, to be inauthentically impressive or profound – or, even worse perhaps, to avoid portions of the truth which might pain the journalist or someone else." Neither does an individual style means that the journalist should be non-conformist for the sake of being non-conformist: "[o]ne must, of course, adapt one's style to the particular situation and circumstance … but the core, the foundation, of one's style is manifest in all

of the existential journalist's work" (Merrill 1977: 105). Finally, style as an expression of authenticity also applies to the journalist's choice of stories, and the ideas he or she chooses to expand upon in their writing. This is where decentring journalism enters the picture again as an approach to journalism characterised by a specific choice of subject matter, and a specific view on this subject matter.

An important aspect of the existential and decentring journalist's style is that it is presented as a personal experience. As explained earlier, decentring journalism depends on the journalist's gaze as "preferred mode of access to the real" (Muhlmann 2010: 197). This brings us back to the matter of subjectivity. In terms of the generally accepted principles of mainstream, rational journalism mentioned throughout this chapter, a journalist's personal opinion on a topic or his or her personal experience of an event take it out of the realm of (objective) news and positions it as a column or op-ed piece, or even literature (this is one of the main criticisms levelled against New Journalism). As argued in the discussion on subjectivity vs objectivity, and especially when operating within the framework of existentialism, the rituals of objectivity do not ensure objectivity as this is a concept relative to the community that the particular message is aimed at. In fact, Merrill (1977: 109, quoting Novak) writes that "human observers become not more, but less astute when they try to be neutral". The aim, stylistically, is therefore rather to select a set of values, to explain to the audience what this values entail and to write from within that framework. Consistency of voice, to use a term from the field of branding, instils more credibility than what Novak (in Merrill 1997: 108) calls "pretended objectivity". It should again be reiterated that neither Merrill nor Muhlmann nor most of the existentialist authors referred to in this study advocate abolishing objectivity as a goal. However, the one point that they are in agreement on is that universal objectivity does not exist and that imploring journalists to achieve this is setting them up for failure.

Fenton (in Coyer *et al*. 2007: 144) provides one possible avenue for the existential journalist, even when working in a mainstream newsroom, to inject an alternative voice into his or her journalism in order to produce authentic writing. Her "portal" through which this can be achieved is based on Atton's (*ibid*.) three forms of coming together of mainstream and alternative media:

- coming together through a collision between mainstream and alternative media where both news agendas come together and fulfil the requirements of each;
- coming together through incorporation, where alternative news sources are used to provide oppositional views or personal witnesses to satisfy the requirements of mainstream news for human interest and conflict; and

- coming together through dissidence, where alternative news sources become newsworthy to the mainstream by dint of their alternativeness.

Authenticity in journalism manifests on two fronts (Merrill 1977: 120), namely

1) concern with changing *directly* the outer conditions of men's lives – a kind of "external" rebellion, exemplified by Sartre; and

2) concern with altering society *indirectly* through changes man can effect in himself, exemplified by Camus and Orwell.

The direct approach is focused on defying the dominant powers full-on, Sartre's "extrinsic rebel" (*ibid.*). The indirect approach requires personal transformation (transcendence), seeking to change society through changes a person can bring about in himself. For Merrill this second approach is embodied in the journalism of Camus, while Mulhmann's decentring journalist with an indirect approach is embodied by Orwell. Both wrote about their own struggles and in doing so presented their readers with a personal view, or gaze, to which they could relate, or which could guide them to a different perspective. While there are circumstances that demand "journalism of shock" (Muhlmann 2010: 101), the subtler, more personal and often self-deprecating approach followed by Camus and Orwell might prove to be more convincing in the long run. This is especially true in the three conditions under which people are most dependent on others, mentioned earlier (Festinger, in Donsbach 2008: 67). While both Camus and Orwell qualify as decentring journalists, focused on introducing the Other, their personal, self-critical styles presented the reader not with a upfront order to change, but with an account of one person's struggle in coming to terms with an "otherness" that eventually might trigger a response in the reader. Camus' and Orwell's views on the duty of the writer is discussed later in this chapter.

The following section provides a discussion of the journalist, and specifically the existential journalist, as agent of change.

4.5   THE JOURNALIST AS CHANGE AGENT

At the time of the final writing of this thesis during the latter half of 2015, world news was dominated by the refugee crisis in Europe, the war in Syria, bombings in Paris, France, mass shootings (or terrorism, depending on the source of your news), mostly in the United States but also in Kenya and Mali, increased global pressure on leading nations to take a stand on climate change, concern over the ever-decreasing effectivity of antibiotics and other health threats such as HIV/Aids, TB and Ebola. At home in South Africa a severe drought is wreaking havoc on agriculture but increasingly also on

service delivery in urban areas, economic stability is under threat due to a variety of socio-political aspects, including widespread corruption, the state of the country's 21-year-old democracy is being questioned, and, for many people by far the most serious issue, our national soccer, rugby and cricket teams are not delivering an escape from all the other pressing issues. (Except for the severe drought, the author of this thesis is aware of all this information only on a second-hand basis through the media, and therefore has to place her trust in the various journalists in terms of the veracity of this information…)

From the above it is clear that we are living in "postnormal times", as Sardar (2009: 435) writes. "The spirit of our age is characterised by uncertainty, rapid change, realignment of power, upheaval and chaotic behaviour … We live in a state beset by indecision: what is for the best, which is worse? We are disempowered by the risks, cowed into timidity by fear of the choices we might be inclined or persuaded to contemplate" (*ibid*.). This is a transitional age and what is required of humankind is different from what is required during normal times.

What would be required by the journalist in these postnormal times? What role can the existential journalist play? Do journalists believe that they can effect change? Do society believe that journalism can effect change?

It seems that in countries such as Egypt, Turkey, Mexico and Indonesia, journalists do see themselves as critical change agents (Hanitzsch 2011: 487-488). The large-scale Worlds of Journalism study, conducted from 2007 to 2011, involved interviews with 2100 journalists from 413 news organisations in 21 countries (Worlds of Journalism n.d.). The first project of the study focused on differences in journalism cultures – the seven dimensions described earlier – as well as on perceived influences on the news and journalists' trust in public institutions. The study grouped journalists into four professional milieus (Hanitzsch 2011: 484-486):

- The **populist disseminator** share the strongest orientation towards the audience. Journalists in this group are most likely to provide the audience with interesting information and concentrate mainly on news that attracts the widest possible audience. In this group there is a stronger professional orientation towards an understanding of the journalist's role as detached observer.
- The **detached watchdog** displays a relatively high regard to their social position as detached observer. Journalists in this group primarily see themselves as watchdogs of government and business elites. Journalists in this milieu are less interventionist than their counterparts in other

milieus. They are least likely to advocate for social change, influence public opinion and set the political agenda.

- The **critical change agent** are similar to the detached watchdog in their critical attitude towards the government and business elites. However, they are much more driven by an interventionist impetus. These journalists emphasise the importance of advocating social change, influencing public opinion and setting the political agenda. This group is most eager to motivate their audiences to participate in civic activity. On the other hand, these journalists least support an opportunist approach to journalism. They heavily disagree with the idea that journalists should convey a positive image of political and business leadership, and they are strongly opposed to providing public support for government policy.
- The **opportunist facilitator** holds a strong opportunist view of journalism's role in society, namely as constructive partners of the government in the process of economic development and political transformation. These journalists are most likely to support official policies and convey a positive image of political and business leadership, and are least willing to act as watchdogs.

FIGURE 4:   THE FOUR PROFESSIONAL MILIEUS IN JOURNALISM
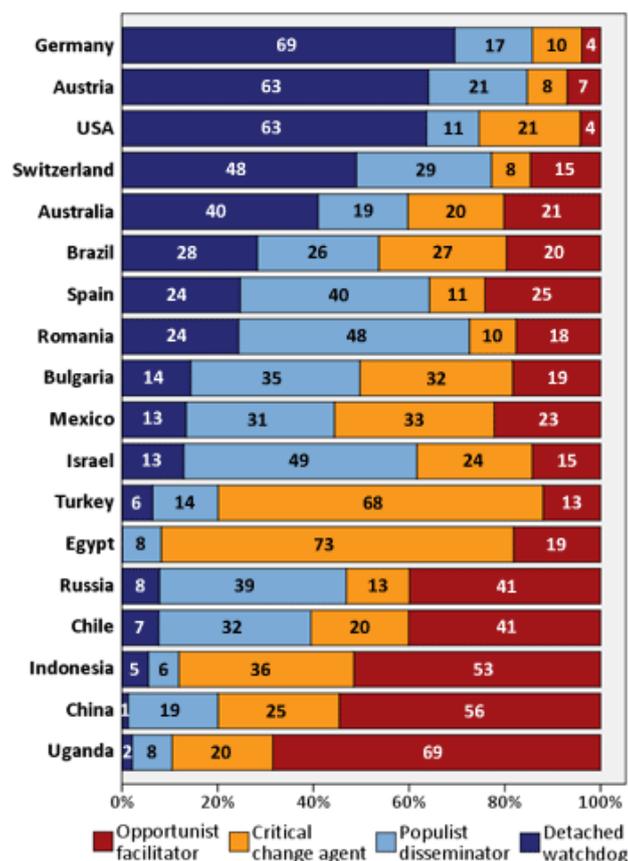
(Source: Worlds of Journalism n.d.)

Figure 4 sets out the distribution of the four milieus across the countries that took part in the first project of the study. While the milieu of the detached watchdog dominates in especially Western countries (Hanitzsch 2011: 488), the populist disseminator appears to be the only genuinely global milieu. However, it is the milieu of the critical change agent that is of interest to this discussion. From figure 4 it is clear that all four milieus are present in all the participating countries. The presence of the milieu of the critical change agent varies from 8% in Austria and Switzerland to 73% in Egypt. On average, 25% of the journalists in the participating countries form part of the professional milieu of the critical change agent. If the two highest percentages, those of Egypt and Turkey, are discounted, the average drops to 19.87%. Hanitzsch (2011: 489) posits that the milieu of the detached watchdog is a characteristic of an older generation of journalists, while "[y]ounger generations of journalists, by way of contrast, may have a stronger affinity to alternative professional networks". The study also found that female journalists are most likely to be found among critical change agents and populist disseminators.

Based on the findings of Hanitzsch (2011), between one-fifth and a quarter of journalists work in a milieu in which the journalist operates as a change agent. Although not the dominant or conventional approach, the presence cannot be discounted. But how do these journalist bring about change? What types of change could reasonably be effected through journalism?

To name is to change, according to Sartre (1948: 22). By this measure, writing, including journalism, is an act of disclosure: "If you name the behavior of an individual, you reveal it to him; he sees himself." (*ibid*.). Within the framework of existentialism, every choice we make, and every action that results from that choice, brings about change. Existentialism is future-oriented, meaning that transcending the facticity of the present is the goal. According to this rationale, existentialism equals change. Therefore the existential journalist is by definition also a change agent, or someone who facilitates change. Both Muhlmann's unifying and decentring journalists' goal is to bring about change – whether that change is brought about by the action of injecting conflict into the centre, or be decentring. Similarly, Merrill's existential journalist is compelled, through his or her existential freedom, to make choices and to continually transcend themselves. And when choosing for himself, the individual chooses for all. Transcendence implies change, choosing for all implies facilitating change.

While change is an established fact in existentialism, and by extension then in existential journalism, the actual process of how this change is effected is not as clear. Despite the obvious existentialist

credentials of change even Merrill (1974: 53) had doubts as to whether the media, and journalists, could actually effect change:

> I have always considered media systems mainly as reflectors or indicators of a nation's progress, freedom, sophistication and modernization – and *not as determinants*. But I do not have any more real evidence to back up this notion than do those who are convinced that the media are *change agents*. I see the whole question as correlational or relational.

Although reluctant to call it change, Merrill (*ibid.*) does acknowledge a "cause-effect interaction", a concept he describes as "a stance which maintains that the media and other factors and forces operating simultaneously within a nation bring about growth and progress". From these statements it could be deducted that Merrill did not see mass media as bringing about change single-handedly, or what he calls "single-factor determinism". This ties in with the existential concept of being-in-the-world – every action is a cause-effect interaction.

Referring back to Merrill's journalist orientations and Hanitzsch's dimensions of journalism culture, it is clear that the element of change, or rather the possibility of bringing about change, is situated more towards the side of the unconventional journalist. In contemporary journalism this has taken place through journalistic approaches such as alternative journalism (Atton 2003) and public journalism (Haas 2007), to name two of the more prominent approaches.

Atton (2003: 267) describes alternative journalism as:

- contemporary practices that present ways of reporting radically different from those of the mainstream;
- radical in the sense that these alternative practices are opposed to hierarchical, elite-centred notions of journalism as a business; and
- an ideology that holds that it is only through more egalitarian, inclusive media organisations that it is possible to even think about a socially responsible journalism.

Alternative journalism, as with other unconventional forms of journalism, suggests "a fundamental realigning of writer and reader, a re-coupling or 'community' within which practitioners and audiences might engage" (Atton 2003: 268). This is practised in a "multiplicity of hybridized, context-specific and contingent ways" (*ibid.*). Atton (2003: 270) writes that alternative journalism often has a local perspective and is practiced by journalists working in community media. This is also evident in the spirit of South Africa's Media Development and Diversity Agency Act (14 of 2002). The MDDA was established, amongst others, to create an enabling environment for media

development and diversity that is conducive to public discourse and which reflects the needs and aspirations of all South Africans and to redress exclusion and marginalisation of disadvantaged communities and persons from access to the media and the media industry. The focus, especially for community media in South Africa, is clearly on effecting some form of societal change, which allows for the practice of alternative journalism or public journalism. Voltmer (2010: 143) posits that community media, and specifically community radio, has provided developing countries with a cheap, flexible and easy-to-produce medium that has been "extremely instrumental in the diffusion of innovations, the empowerment of citizens, and the solutions of problems at grassroots level".

Public journalism (also referred to as civic journalism) is another of the more recent journalistic developments that supports the journalist's role as change agent (Rosen 1995, in Haas 2007. For a detailed description of the theory, practice and criticism of public journalism, see Haas 2007.). Although Atton (2003: 268; cf. Howley 2003: 273) situates public journalism as straddling alternative and mainstream journalism, it is usually grouped with the more unconventional forms of journalism. In fact, the idea of public service as a function of journalism is not new, especially amongst Western journalists. Ellis (2011) refers to this concept as "democratically significant journalism". Altschull (1990: 359) writes that "[i]t is part of the belief system of virtually all American journalists that the rationale for newspapers and broadcasting outlets – all the mass media for that matter – is public service." Haas (2007: 2; cf. Voltmer 2010) posits that public journalism is based on the underlying assumption that journalism and democracy are intrinsically linked, if not mutually dependent:

> While advocates [of public journalism] acknowledge that the practice of journalism depends upon certain democratic protections, most notably freedom from government intervention, they maintain that a genuine democracy depends upon a form of journalism that is committed to promoting active citizen participation in democratic processes.

Haas (2007: 3) also quotes Glasser and Lee (2002) as stating that "public journalism rests on the simple but apparently controversial premise that the purpose of the press it to promote and indeed improve, and not merely report on and complain about, the quality of public or civic life". Rosen (1998, in Haas 2007: 3) adds that "journalists should help form as well as inform the public".

The aims of public journalism as described by Haas (2007: 67) include:
- reporting on problems of particular concern to citizens (e.g., by focusing more attention on substantive policy issues than on isolated political events);
- covering those problems from the perspectives of citizens (e.g., by including more citizens, including women and minorities, as sources of information); and

- involving citizens in efforts to address problems in practice (e.g., by including more mobilising information about how to become involved in local community affairs).

Merrill was critical of public journalism. Christians (2012) writes that Merrill's biggest criticism against public journalism was that it limits individual autonomy. This fits in with Merrill's support of libertarianism and absolute media autonomy, as described earlier. For Merrill, anything that limits the individual's ability to choose limits his freedom, or in this instance press freedom. Merrill viewed public journalism as a type of communitarianism, a "theory of democracy rooted in the common good" (Christians 2012; cf. De Beer & Merrill 2004: 70-71). Gade and Gordon (2012) confirm Merrill's concern that public journalism, as a form of Siebert *et al.*'s social responsibility theory of the press, cuts into press autonomy. They describe public, or civic, journalism as follows:

> With its emphasis on community and social harmony, civic journalism extended social responsibility into an active platform for media reform. Its communitarian ethic called for a journalism focused on the aspirations of 'real people' (non-officials and average citizens). To civic journalists, telling the truth was not enough. Journalism should be used as a tool for social transformation, and judged by the extent to which it contributes to positive social outcomes.

According to these authors, Merrill was concerned about the effect this might have on journalists' autonomy and editorial control, which would in turn reduce the social influence and power of the press. In his 2001 publication *Twilight of press freedom*, Merrill posited that the popularity of giving the media a social responsibility is a reaction to the "age of fitful, gossip-mongering, sensational journalism that shamelessly and arrogantly throws the filth of society in the public's face" (Merrill 2001, in Gade & Gordon 2012). Roefs (1998) referred to Merrill original position as a "false dichotomy", arguing that the existential journalist and the social or communitarian journalist share many traits, including "their mutual concern for the social fabric and a world free of exploitation and oppression".

It is this author's contention that Merrill's original criticism of public journalism specifically, and the notion that any type of responsibility should be required from the media from outside forces, stems from his position that the media should be self-regulating and self-rectifying. For Merrill, attaching some form of social responsibility to journalism would provide journalists and the media with a "sanctuary that makes journalistic missteps appear well-intended" (Gade & Gordon 2012). All freedom, including press freedom, implies accountability (after all, freedom is the responsibility to choose, and when we choose for ourselves we choose for everyone). Merrill was of the opinion that

a journalistic approach such as public journalism would provide journalists and journalism with a way out of this responsibility, or at least the consequences thereof.

Gade and Gordon (2012) write that Merrill did acknowledge the value of a participatory media system (such as prescribed by public journalism), but that he was concerned that it would result in a shallow and superficial democracy (and media). Again we have to refer to Merrill's own admonition that if we leave journalism free to determine its own course we should be willing to "suffer" those that practice a journalism that we might see as a superficial, mud-slinging activity. In fact, Merrill adapted this view somewhat in *Media, Mission and Morality* (2006) by acknowledging that a completely free journalism also implies no clear social or democratic mission. Societal changes over the course of the more than three decades since the publication of *The imperative of freedom* caused him to change his original opinion and to call for the professionalisation of journalism (Gade & Gordon 2012). In 2004, Merrill (in De Beer & Merrill 2004: 27) wrote that "if democratization is really important in today's media world, the media will begin to stress ways that people can have greater impact on governmental decision making, and also how the media can share their own decision making with the public".

Key to Merrill's change of heart, and the journalist as change agent, is *societal changes*. For Merrill the media has different roles to play at different stages during a society's development. The earlier mention of the milieu of the critical change agent as part of the Worlds of Journalism study confirms this as the two countries who scored the highest in terms of the milieu of the critical change agent, Egypt and Turkey, are both seemingly in a transitional phase. These roles are also determined and influenced by complex societal systems. Irrespective of journalistic orientation or approach, a journalist remains a member of society, and the media a social institution. As such, journalists are participants in democracy, whether they want to or not. Their actions influence the society in which they live (Haas 2007: 67).

However, unconventional forms of journalism remain under intense scrutiny (cf. Howley 2003; Haas 2007). Haas (2007: 65) writes that public journalism "has been and continues to be one of the most controversial, if not divisive, topics in journalism research. One of the issues often raised in respect to unconventional journalism is whether practitioners actually "qualify" to be seen as journalists (Singer 2006: 2). Singer (*ibid.*) writes that "historically, journalists have been defined mainly by professional practices and associated norms, and those in turn have been tied to the media environments in which journalists work". Technological advances enabled by the internet, including social media, has *decentred* the above definition of journalists, to adapt Muhlmann's term. In a world where anyone with access to the internet can easily and quite cheaply produce what journalists

"through professional practices and associated norms" have produced for decades it has become difficult to define "who is, and is not, a journalist" (*ibid.*; cf. Schudson 2009: 5).

Singer's solution to this problem is not to provide definitions or guidelines to determine who is a journalist. She criticises such attempts as avoiding the issue through their focus on "what processes do or do not constitute journalism, what content is and is not journalistic in nature, what media entities do or do not produce news, and what evolving technologies are or are not platforms for journalism" (Singer 2006: 3). Instead, Singer proposes connecting production to the individual producer, "an existential approach appropriate in a media environment open to all contributors and all sorts of ways to provide information" (*ibid.*). The basis of Singer's solution is a fusion of existential journalism and the social responsibility theory, namely the socially responsible existentialist (Singer 2006: 13). In a new media environment, "more information means a greater need for trustworthy sources of, and guides through, that information".

Making sense of information is not a new role for the journalist. In the early days of journalism, illiteracy and lack of access to information, amongst others, created an environment where citizens needed someone to act as a guide to interpret information. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, journalism's earliest character was that of a journalism of opinion. Technological advances has changed journalism's character to that of a journalism of facts. However, the almost incomprehensible vastness of information now available to the citizen again has created the need for a guide, or interpreter. And, as Hanitzsch (2007) posited, younger generations of journalists have an alternative view of the purpose and culture of journalism. Against this background the need for the journalist to act as critical change agent, within the framework of a *journalism of action* (in the existential context of action), becomes clear.

4.5.1 Summary of existential journalism and the journalist as change agent

The first sections of this chapter provided the reader with a description of existential journalism as one form of what, in this chapter, is considered unconventional journalism, as opposed to conventional, mainstream journalism. As mentioned before, and although a number of contentious issues were touched upon, the aim was not to provide an argument for existential journalism, or any other form of unconventional journalism. Instead, the purpose was to give the reader an idea of what the characteristics of such a journalist would be, how he or she would practice journalism and what the purpose or purposes of such as type of journalism could entail.

To summarise, the unconventional journalist – and in this context, specifically the existential journalist – is characterised by a combination of the following:

- usually most prevalent in an authoritarian, and more specifically a totalitarian regime, although his or her purpose is not limited to these types of societies;
- suited to the needs of a society in a transitional phase;
- participatory in his or her approach;
- placing trust in his or her intuition and analytical abilities;
- accentuates reason, ideas, values and opinion;
- people-oriented and acknowledges human experience as well as taking into account the consequences of actions;
- interventionist;
- practices a modified subjective journalism, understanding that there is no ultimate or universal truth "out there" but that his or her view is merely a representation of reality;
- practices decentring journalism from the perspective of an outsider, or at the very least from an individual perspective;
- acknowledges individual responsibility of choices and actions, and accepts the consequences of these choices and actions;
- strives to produce authentic journalism, which includes self-criticism and self-analysis in order to change and adapt (transcend);
- acts as a change agent.

This thesis' focus on the existential journalist as a type of unconventional journalist is important in lieu of the fact that Nat Nakasa practised his journalism in the authoritarian society of apartheid South Africa (his facticity) and, based on the evidence that will be presented in chapter 5, aimed, through a variety of the practices and characteristics above, to bring about change (transcendence).

With the character of the existential journalist now established, the next section will analyse how the specific act of writing, or producing journalism, looks like from an existential perspective.

4.6   THE DUTY OF THE WRITER

The following section provides a more focused exploration of existentialism in practice through a discussion of the duty of the writer based on essays by four writers whose work contain elements of existentialism or who have acknowledged existentialism as having had an influence on their writing: Sartre (*What is literature?*, 1948), Gordimer (*A writer's freedom*, 1975; *Living in the Interregnum*,

1982; *The essential gesture*, 1984), and Orwell (*Why I write*, 1946) as well as Albert Camus' Nobel Prize in Literature Banquet Speech (1957). (Sartre was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1964 and Nadine Gordimer in 1991 – Nobelprize.org: n.d.)

4.6.1 Sartre

To understand Sartre's view on the duty of the writer, we have to understand his definition of writing as an engaged activity as opposed to art. This is a matter he addressed extensively in his 1948 essay *What is literature?* For Sartre (1948: 8), words as used by the writer (taken here to include journalism, but not poetry which he considers art – cf. Muhlmann 2010: 206) have the value of signs. He uses an example of white roses as a sign of "fidelity" – in this context the roses disappear, "my attention cuts through them to aim beyond them at this abstract virtue", namely fidelity. "The writer can guide you and, if he describes a hovel, make it seem the symbol of social injustice and provoke your indignation. The painter is mute. He presents you with *a* hovel, that's all. You are free to see in it what you like" (Sartre 1948: 10). The reason for this distinction is that Sartre sees words as used by the writer as having the ability to take us beyond the object (letters as random squiggles in groupings) to pursue the thing signified: "The man who talks [or writes] is beyond words and near the object, whereas the poet is on this side of them. For the former, they are domesticated; for the latter they are in the wild state" (Sartre 1948: 13). Sartre's definition of writing thus is that it is an activity that uses language [words – whether written down or spoken] as a tool. For a poet words are similar to colours for a painter or sounds for a musician – the words (or colours or sounds) are objects to be used, or "natural things which sprout naturally upon the earth like grass and trees".

The reason for this explanation is to illustrate that the writer's duty is to convey a specific meaning as opposed to the artist's duty to create the possibility of meaning. Sartre (1948: 19) explains that "prose is, in essence, utilitarian" and the writer is someone "who *makes use* of words … The writer is a *speaker*; he designates, demonstrates, orders, refuses, interpolates, begs, insults, persuades, insinuates", similar to what was described earlier as journalism of *the voice*. The writer uses language to transmit an idea. Prose in the context that Sartre uses it refers to the ordinary written or spoken language, employed to convey an idea, whether through fiction or non-fiction writing. In the context of this study, Sartre's "prose-writing" is taken to include journalism, and in general communication as an act with the aim of creating shared meaning. The writer should be engaged, should speak about something; if this is not the case, writing becomes art which invites meaning rather than creates shared meaning.

Given our being-in-the-world as a characteristic of our existence, being aware of the other people in our shared social space is a necessity. Sartre (1948: 20) sees language as the tool that we use in this regard: "Thus, regarding language, it is our shell and our antennae; it protects us against others and informs us about them; it is a prolongation of our sense, a third eye which is going to look into our neighbor's heart."

Against this background, Sartre (1948: 21-22) suggests that one has the right to ask any writer at the start: "What is your aim in writing? What undertakings are you engaged in, and why does it require you to have recourse to writing?" because "to speak is to act; anything which one names is already no longer quite the same; it has lost its innocence". Sartre's explanation of this act is not only the embodiment of an existential effort towards authenticity, but could also serve as a description of journalism's purpose, and more specifically the journalist's watchdog role, not only of government but of society in general:

> If you name the behavior of an individual, you reveal it to him; he sees himself. And since you are at the same time naming it to all others, he knows that he is *seen* at the moment he *sees* himself … Thus, by speaking, I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others in order to change it.

The writer, according to Sartre (1948: 23), has chosen as his or her action the "action by disclosure". Writing, or communication, is an act of disclosing an aspect of the world, and to reveal is to change. Therefore the journalist through his or her writing, despite all efforts towards and talk of objectivity or neutrality, will effect change – or at the very least force someone to choose – as it is impossible to avoid:

> [T]he writer has chosen to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object which has been thus laid bare … Similarly, the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it's all about (Sartre 1948: 24).

The writer's choice of topic, as well as the choice of topics not covered, should also be investigated – "Why have you spoken of this rather than that, and – since you speak in order to bring about change – why do you want to change this rather than that?" (Sartre 1948: 25). As a practical example, this is a question that should form part of every action in a newsroom. Whether to an individual journalist or a publication or newsroom in general, this question can serve to bring to the fore hidden biases or assist in determining the angle or purpose of a story. For, as Sartre (*ibid.*) states,

[o]ne is not a writer for having chosen to say certain things, but for having chosen to say them in a certain way … It is true that the subjects suggest the style, but they do not order it … In short, it is a matter of knowing what one wants to write about, whether butterflies or the condition of the Jews. And when one knows, then it remains to decide how one will write about it.

It also behoves the writer to keep the reader in mind. The writer does not write for himself, instead the operation of writing implies that of reading as its dialectical correlative and these two connected acts necessitate two distinct agents. It is the conjoint effort of author and reader which brings upon the scene that concrete and imaginary object which is the work of the mind (Sartre 1948: 43).

Sartre refers to reading as "directed creation" – in other words the reader creates his or her own message but in this instance that creation is directed by the writer, with the aim of shared meaning. What the writer is responsible for in terms of the reader is to guide them on a path of transcendence; the writer "shapes our feelings, names them, and attributes them to an imaginary personage who takes it upon himself to live them for us" – it allows you to experience someone else's reality as if it is your own. In journalistic terms, the journalist gives a "face" to a story – the Aids orphan is no longer a statistic but a living, breathing person whose reality I as the reader am able to experience through the journalist who acts as interpreter. In Nakasa's work we find evidence of this in a series of articles he wrote for *Drum* during a period of severe drought and resultant famine in what was previously known as the Northern Transvaal (today's Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces). In *I saw them starve* (Nakasa, in Patel 2005: 87) Nakasa provides the following description of a starving child:

After driving through drought-stricken villages, where goats chew newspapers, I stepped into the children's ward at Jane Furse Hospital, Sekukuniland. There were two rows of beds and cots carrying dozens of babies, victims of malnutrition. Among the cases was a little girl, just under two years old, her name written on a piece of plaster across her forehead, Kompetsana Maje. Her flabby skin hung from her bones like an oversize vest.

The above quote from Nakasa's article should be read against the background of the following by Sartre (1948: 46): "To write is to make an appeal to the reader that he lead into objective existence the revelation which I have undertaken by means of language … Thus, the writer appeals to the reader's freedom to collaborate in the production of the work." Collaborating on the work therefore becomes the reader's responsibility. "You are perfectly free to leave that book on the table. But if you open it, you assume responsibility for it," writes Sartre (1948: 48). Because reading the work will

"force" the reader into making a choice regarding this matter (either choosing to ignore it, which of course will constitute a lie, or by accepting awareness of the issue), the writer should be very conscious of the responsibility of choosing the possibilities that he or she picks to expose the reader to through his or her writing. Sartre (1948: 55) refers to this give-and-take trust relationship between writer and reader as a "pact of generosity".

Good writing "is an exigence and an act of faith", by which Sartre (1948: 63) means that it places an urgent demand on the reader: "The unique point of view from which the author can present the world to those freedoms whose concurrence he wishes to bring about is that of a world to be impregnated always with more freedom." Sartre (*ibid*.) believes it inconceivable that a reader would be able to "enjoy his freedom", i.e. accepts responsibility, while reading a work that authorises an injustice. Such a reader would be in bad faith. Because the writer asks of the reader to assume the attitude of generosity, or open themselves up to a possibility, that reader, once becoming aware of that responsibility, will not be able "to identify [themselves] with a race of oppressors":

> For, the moment I feel that my freedom is indissolubly linked with that of all other men, it can not be demanded of me that I use it to approve the enslavement of a part of these men. Thus, whether he is an essayist, a pamphleteer, a satirist, or a novelist, whether he speaks only of individual passions or whether he attacks the social order, the writer, a free man addressing free men, has only one subject – freedom (Sartre 1948: 64).

That last sentence could also be read as: The writer, as a person with responsibilities addressing other people with responsibilities, has only one subject – responsibility. Nakasa was aware of this exigency, as is evident from the following quote from *Living with my private thoughts* (1964):

> I may shut up for some time because of fear. Yet even this will not make me feel ashamed. For I know that as long as the ideas remain unchanged within me, there will always be the possibility that, one day, I shall burst out and say everything I wish to say – in a loud and thunderous voice. And this is true of many people, too.

Nakasa as an engaged writer is an expression of Sartre's position that "writing is a certain way of wanting freedom":

> One does not write for slaves. The art of prose is bound up with the only regime in which prose has meaning, democracy. When one is threatened, the other is too. And it is not enough to defend them with the pen. A day comes when the pen is forced to stop, and the writer must then take up arms. Thus, however you might have come to it, whatever the opinions you might have professed, literature throws you into battle (Sartre 1948: 65).

Another duty of the writer is to choose his audience. We've already mentioned that the writer does not write into a vacuum, or for a universal reader. In fact, Sartre (1948: 71) posits that "it is by choosing his reader that the author decides upon his subject" and a story "is defined by its public; by defining it, it defines itself" (Sartre 1948: 74). According to this rationale, the message is constructed with a specific reader in mind. As has become clear throughout this study, Nakasa wrote for two distinct audiences: a black reader, his fellow oppressed, whom he wanted to "awaken" from their passive acceptance of their socio-political circumstances; and a white reader, whom he wanted to "awaken" from their passive acceptance of a gross injustice. For both audiences, he applied the same tactic: relentlessly pointing out the absurdity of the "social experiment" to which both his audiences were party.

To illustrate the point of writing for more than one audience at the same time, Sartre (1948: 77-80) uses African-American writer Richard Wright (1908-1960) as example. Wright is the author of, amongst others, *Black Boy* and *Uncle Tom's Children*. He was born in the American South during a time of deep racial divide and later moved to New York and then to Paris, France, eventually becoming a French citizen. His life shows several parallels with that of Nakasa, also born into poverty and racial divide, moving to Johannesburg and eventually to New York. Even Sartre's description of Wright's subject matter as a writer applies to Nakasa:

> He is the man who sees the whites from the outside, who assimilates the white culture from the outside, and each of whose books will show the alienation of the black race within American society. Not objectively, like the realists, but passionately, and in a way that will compromise his reader… [His audience] is certainly not the universal man … He is addressing himself to the cultivated negroes of the North and the white Americans of good-will (Sartre 1948: 78).

Sartre explains that Wright, when addressing his fellow black Americans, "[i]n trying to become clear about his own personal situation, clarifies theirs for them … He is their conscience." Simultaneously, when addressing his fellow white Americans, he "implicates them and make them take stock of their responsibilities. He must make them indignant and ashamed." In both instances, the writer is a mediator. Sartre (*ibid*.) uses Baudelaire's concept of "a double simultaneous postulation" to describe Wright's, and by extension Nakasa's, work:

> Each word refers to two contexts; two forces are applied simultaneously to each phrase and determine the incomparable tension of his tale. Had he spoken to the whites alone, he might have turned out to be more prolix, more didactic, and more abusive; to the negroes alone, still

more elliptical, more of a confederate, and more elegiac. In the first case, his work might have come close to satire; in the second, to prophetic lamentations … Wright, a writer for a split public, has been able to both maintain and go beyond this split.

According to Sartre (1948: 81), it is the duty of the writer to give society a guilty conscience as a counter-weight to writers whom Sartre refers to as "pensioned by the ruling class" and who are tasked with preventing the general public from becoming self-aware. These "pensioned writers" operate in a society where "the power of the religious and political ideology is so strong and the interdictions so rigorous that in no case is there any question of discovering new countries of the mind, but only of putting into shape the commonplaces adopted by the élite … author and reader are of the same world and have the same opinions about everything" (Sartre 1948: 91-92).

To summarise, Sartre places two duties upon the existentialist writer, namely to consider *why* he or she is writing, and secondly *to whom* he or she is writing. The choice is inescapable, to delay it would be to live in bad faith. Once the writer has chosen to become a writer (*why*) he or she must choose *whom* he or she will address, which of course leads to another round of why in terms of choosing a topic, and angle, etc. The choices remain ever-present, in life as in writing.

4.6.2   Gordimer

Although not exclusively limited to the three essays discussed here, Nadine Gordimer makes strong points about the responsibilities of the writer in *A writer's freedom* (1975, originally given as an address at the Durban Indian Teachers' Conference), *Living in the Interregnum* (1982, originally given as the William James Lecture at the New York University Institute of the Humanities) and *The essential gesture* (1984, originally given as the Tanner Lecture on Human Values at the University of Michigan).

With Gordimer's question regarding a writer's freedom, she refers to freedom in the sense of liberty: "Living when we do, where we do, as we do, 'freedom' leaps to mind as a political concept exclusively" as also in terms of the writer's "private view":

> All that the writer can do, as a writer, is to go on writing the *truth as he sees it*. That is what I mean by his 'private view' of events, whether they be the great public ones of wars and revolutions, or the individual and intimate ones of daily, personal life (Gordimer 1975: 87).

The essence of this freedom for Gordimer (1975: 88) is that "real writers go on writing the truth as they see it". This is the imperative of freedom – Sartre's freedom as responsibility: You are not merely

at liberty to write the truth as you see it, it is your *duty* to write the truth as you see it. On the surface this might seem subjective – "the truth as you/I/they see it". However, keeping in mind Sartre's statement that *to write is to disclose and to disclose is to change* means writing is inherently subjective. It always contains elements of choice that stems from the freedom of the individual writer, what Gordimer refers to as the "private view". This metaphysical freedom is what is threatened in societies where liberty, or socio-political freedom, is threatened or suppressed. Gordimer (1975: 88) writes that this threat to the writer's private view comes "from the very awareness of *what is expected of him*", in other words the anxiety that stems from being aware of your responsibility.

Gordimer (1975: 89) explains that the anxiety of this responsibility does not always stem from the obvious fear of being in opposition to the status quo; often it stems from the expectation to conform to an "orthodoxy of opposition":

> There will be those who regard him as their mouth-piece; people whose ideals, as a human being, he shares, and whose cause, as a human being, is his own. They may be those whose suffering is his own. His identification with, admiration for, and loyalty to these set up a state of conflict within him. His integrity as a human being demands the sacrifice of everything to the struggle put up on the side of free men. His integrity as a writer goes the moment he begins to write what he is told he ought to write.

Gordimer (*ibid.*) extends demands on what the writer "ought to write" to include demands of style and vocabulary; the demands of living in "the time of the bomb and the colour-bar" but also those other conditions that affect the freedom of the writer, including literary fashion. She warns that the writer "needs to be left alone, by brothers as well as enemies, to make this gift. And he must make it even against his own inclination." In this regard, Gordimer quotes Sartre's definition of the writer's responsibility to his society: "He is someone who is faithful to a political and social body but never stops contesting it. Of course, a contradiction may arise between his fidelity and his *contestation*, but that's a fruitful contradiction. If there's fidelity without *contestation*, that's no good; one is no longer a free man." While the relevance of contesting those whom the writer are faithful to, or at the very least experiences a sense of belonging with, as is evident for writers who are part of the oppressed, it is especially relevant for writers that form part, willingly or not, of the ruling class or oppressor. This is also the embodiment of the watchdog function of the journalist. Gordimer (1975: 90), using Russian author Turgenev as example, explains this contradiction between fidelity and contestation as "awakening the conscience of the educated classes … to the evils of a political regime based on serfdom … even if this truth does not coincide with his own sympathies". Of course the biggest threat

resulting from contesting those whom you "belong" to is being labelled a traitor, and the resultant struggle for the writer to find a "place of belonging".

As the primary focus of this study is the work of Nakasa, Gordimer's essay *Living in the Interregnum* is of specific relevance as it talks to the duty of the writer when "between two social orders" but also broader, to include any circumstances of being "between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined". This essay, in the context of this study, is an extension of Sartre's views on the audience of the writer, the fact that the story is defined by the public. Gordimer's audience for this essay are white people living in South Africa as well as people of any race that form part of a set of circumstances that are about to change. And her call to action is "how to offer *one's self*" in terms of redefining your position "in a new collective life within new structures" (Gordimer 1982: 222). Although Gordimer's interregnum concerns the socio-political circumstances of South Africa in the 1980s, she makes a case for any situation of change.

Gordimer (1982: 222), in true Sartrean style, describes apartheid as a "special contact lens" that white people used to negate the presence of black people:

> We actually *see* blacks differently, which includes *not seeing*, not noticing their unnatural absence, since there are so many perfectly ordinary venues of daily life – the cinema, for instance – where blacks have never been allowed in, and so one has forgotten that they could be, might be, encountered there.

It is then the duty of the writer to swop this "special contact lens" for a new one, "[w]e have to believe in our ability to find new perceptions, and our ability to judge their truth" (Gordimer 1982: 223). Gordimer (1982: 224) urges the writer to help his or her audience to see new possibilities, to find ways to adapt to their new facticity. In the context of Gordimer's essay, white South Africans have to find "their own forms of struggle", and these will only occasionally coincide with the struggle of black South Africans due to the fact that the facticity (the facts of their current situation) differs:

> So, for whites, it is not simply a matter of follow-the-leader behind blacks, it's taking on, as blacks do, choices to be made out of confusion, empirically, pragmatically, ideologically, or idealistically about the practical moralities of the struggle. This is the condition, imposed by history, if you like, in those areas of action where black and white participation coincides.

Although mainly addressing the writer who is "within" or who belongs to a specific grouping, Gordimer stresses the fact that it remains possible for a writer outside a grouping to write about members of that grouping. She uses as example a question put to her during a conference, namely

"Do I think white writers should write about blacks?" Her argument – that we can and should write about one another – rests upon the existential concept of being-in-the-world, the fact that we share a common space and therefore, however imperfect, we do know things about one another: "What's certain is that there is no representations of our social reality without that strange area of our lives in which we have a knowledge of one another" (Gordimer 1982: 235).

This is also the basis of the idea of the writer as interpreter. The writer's "torturous inner qualities of prescience and perception" allows him or her to provide his or her audience with access to "knowledge of one another". Gordimer (1982: 228) describes her duty as a white South African author as "the peculiar relation of the writer in South Africa as interpreter, both to South Africans and to the world, of a society in struggle, which makes the narrow corridor I can lead you down one in which doors fly open on the tremendous happening experienced by blacks".

Another freedom of the writer discussed by Gordimer in *Living in the Interregnum* is that the writer is always part of an inner as well as an outer world, or "the duality of inwardness and outside world" (Gordimer 1982: 231, quoting Lukács). Gordimer explains this as simultaneously being part of the world while also being able to stand back and view the circumstances as an "outsider" through what she calls the writer's "faculties of supra-observation and hyperperception not known to others". This ties in with the previously mentioned duty of the writer as conscience of a group, especially when part of this group (Gordimer 1982: 232-233):

> The white writer has to make a decision whether to remain responsible to the dying white order – and even as dissident, if he goes no further than that position, he remains *negatively* within the white order [bad faith - WM] – or to declare himself positively as answerable to the order struggling to be born [authenticity - WM]. And to declare himself for the latter is only the beginning; as it is for whites in a less specialized position, only more so. He has to try to find a way to reconcile the irreconcilable within himself, establish his relation to the culture of a new kind of posited community, non-racial but conceived with and led by blacks.

As became evident from the discussion on existential themes, this process of transcendence, of measuring the future against the past and adapting, is never-ending. For the writer in the interregnum, this means that "[w]e must continue to be tormented by the ideal. Its possibility must be there for peoples to attempt to put into practice, to begin over and over again…" (Gordimer 1982: 237). Thus, a call to persistence and perseverance.

The above-mentioned "duality of inwardness and outside world", or the writer's dual commitments to society and to the craft are further developed in Gordimer's essay *The essential gesture* (1984), with the "essential gesture" a phrase borrowed from Barthes and referring to a writer's work as "his essential gesture as a social being" (Gordimer 1984: 240, quoting Barthes). For writers from societies "in a crisis of survival concentrated on a single moral issue" (in reference to apartheid South Africa) this essential gesture contains additional responsibilities: "a double demand, the first from the oppressed to act as spokesperson for them, the second, from the state, to take punishment for that act" (*ibid*.). When taking a broader view, even "safe people", writers who live in stable societies, are challenged, for their essential gesture as a social being "is to take risks they themselves do not know if they would", even if only in reference to a topic, or a specific angle to that topic. In this regard, Gordimer (1984: 241) uses the example of what she calls the "wish-fulfilment distortion" of the writer who is not true to his or her essential gesture as a social being: "the homebody's projection of his dreams upon the exotic writer: the journalist who makes a bogus hero out of the writer who knows that the pen, where he lives, is a weapon not mightier than the sword".

In *The essential gesture*, Gordimer (1984: 241) expands on what is expected of the writer "by the dynamic of collective conscience and the will to liberty in various circumstances and places: whether we should respond, and if so, how we do." And her conclusion is that, in a specific world situation (an interregnum) "the greater responsibility is to society and not to art" (Gordimer 1984: 242). Here Gordimer refers to Camus, whom she sees as "one of the great of our period", who wrote that the writer is also more than a writer, he also fulfils other functions as a man among men. And his decision to be more than a writer, to be an activist as well, was the result of "a writer anywhere where the people he lives among, or any sections of them marked out by race or colour or religion, are discriminated against and repressed". To illustrate this point, Gordimer explains that many black writers in South Africa began to write as a result of their being more than a writer. For these writers, Gordimer (1984: 243) posits, "there are no opposition of inner and outer demands" – their responsibility towards being a writer and their responsibility towards society are one and the same.

What then about the writer who, by virtue of birth or other circumstances, are a member of the ruling class, the oppressor, or those yet to awaken to their social reality? Gordimer (1984: 244) considers herself a writer from this segment of people – a white writer writing "to raise the consciousness of white people, who, unlike [herself], have not woke up". As a result, this writer in this context is "only a writer", but there is still a social responsibility that rests upon this writer. Gordimer quotes Mexican writer Octavio Paz as saying that this writer who is "only a writer" has the function of a social critic

who has to interpret and "re-establish" meanings, both in terms of messages as well as at the level of vocabulary in an effort to awaken people to their social reality.

"The transformation of experience remains the writer's basic essential gesture; the lifting out of a limited category something that reveals its full meaning and significance only when the writer's imagination has expanded it," writes Gordimer (1984: 249) in explaining the writer's professional responsibility. She summarises this duty through Chekhov: The duty of the writer is "to describe a situation so truthfully … that the reader can no longer evade it" (Gordimer 1984: 250, quoting Chekhov).

4.6.3 Orwell

In reference to Gordimer's views on writing above, and the writer's duty to write as truthfully as possible even if it goes against his or her own beliefs or that of the group which he or she belongs to, Orwell (1946) writes that he discovered at a young age within himself "a facility with words and a power of facing unpleasant facts".

In his essay *Why I write*, Orwell sets out the various motives a writer could have, while acknowledging, like Sartre and Gordimer, that, for any writer, the "subject matter will be determined by the age he lives in – at least that is true in tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own". Orwell's four categories confirms Gordimer's two commitments of the writer (a commitment towards writing and the urge to create, as well as a social responsibility). Orwell describes his four motives for writing as follows:

- **Sheer egoism**: The desire to be talked about is not only a primal drive for the writer, but also a trait that sets what Orwell calls "the whole top crust of humanity" apart from "the great mass of human beings [who] are not acutely selfish". This desire to be talked about, although on the surface a selfish urge, is also, according to Orwell, a characteristic of "the minority of gifted, willful people who are determined to live their own lives to the end" – a nod to the existential theme of authenticity.
- **Aesthetic enthusiasm**: The desire to share "an experience which one feels is valuable and ought not to be missed", including descriptions of the natural world as well as demonstrating the beauty of language, both of which Orwell deems important.
- **Historical impulse**: The desire to "see things as they are, to find out true facts and store them up for the use of posterity".
- **Political purpose**: The desire to "push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after".

Orwell's first two motives, sheer egoism and aesthetic enthusiasm, form part of Gordimer's inner world of the writer – the commitment to the craft and to the individual writer's personal ideals. The second set, historical impulse and political purpose, represent the writer's commitment to social responsibility, or the outer world. Orwell explains that these various impulses are always at war, a conflict that Gordimer also refers to in the essays discussed above. For Orwell, the motives of historical impulse and political purpose as representative of social responsibility gained prominence following the Spanish war and resulted in his primary message "*against* totalitarianism and *for* democracy".

Orwell, in reference to the duty of the writer in tumultuous times (Gordimer's interregnum), is of the opinion that it is impossible "to think that one can avoid writing of such subjects" and that "everyone writes of them in one guise or another". He believes that the writer's integrity is not compromised by supporting any cause, in fact: "the more one is conscious of one's political bias, the more chance one has of acting politically without sacrificing one's aesthetic and intellectual integrity".

The challenge, according to Orwell, is to reconcile the writer's ingrained likes and dislikes with "the essentially public, non-individual activities that this age forces on all of us". In other words, to reconcile being "only a writer" and "more than a writer". Orwell writes that this challenge "raises problems of construction and of language, and it raises in a new way the problem of truthfulness". He uses his book about the Spanish civil war, *Homage to Catalonia*, as an example of writing that he tried to do "with a certain detachment and regard for form". Yet he was criticised for turning "what might have been a good book into journalism" through the inclusion of more time-bound information gained from newspaper reports. However, Orwell defends this decision by explaining that he "happened to know, what very few people in England had been allowed to know, that innocent men were being falsely accused. If I had not been angry about that I would never have written the book." This is also an example of Sartre's "engaged writer".

Orwell stresses that it is important, and also a continuous struggle, for the writer to efface his or her personality in order to write something readable. But he also adds that, in his own work, lacking a political purpose lead to "lifeless books … betrayed into purple passages, sentences without meaning, decorative adjectives and humbug generally". Given Sartre's view that the writer's audience determines the subject, Orwell's purpose could be seen as that any writing lacking an express purpose will result in lifeless words.

4.6.4 Camus

"Every man, and for stronger reasons, every artist, wants to be recognised. So do I." These words by Albert Camus in his speech at the Nobel Prize in Literature Banquet in 1957 confirms Gordimer's and Orwell's views above that the writer as creator has an inner yearning towards having his or her creations acknowledged by the outer world. But, also similar to Gordimer and Orwell, Camus is very aware of the social responsibility of the writer, and his dependence on his fellow man as part of his, and their, shared being-in-the world. Camus explains his passion for writing as

> something that cannot be separated from my fellow men, and it allows me to live, such as I am, on one level with them. It is a means of stirring the greatest number of people by offering them a privileged picture of common joys and suffering. It obliges the artist not to keep himself apart; it subjects him to the most humble and the most universal truth. The artist forges himself to the others, midway between the beauty he cannot do without and the community he cannot tear himself away from. That is why true artists scorn nothing: they are obliged to understand rather than judge.

However, Camus acknowledges that the writer's role is not free from difficult duties: "By definition he cannot put himself away today in the service of those who make history; he is at the service of those who suffer it." This is similar to what Sartre described as the goal of the engaged writer – to disclose in order to change, with the assistance of an audience that has been awakened.

Camus identifies two tasks for the writer: the service of truth and the service of liberty. And these two tasks are rooted in two commitments: the refusal to lie about what one knows and the resistance to oppression. These tasks, together with the two commitments, are present in those who have "engaged upon a quest for legitimacy":

> Each generation doubtless feels called upon to reform the world. Mine knows that it will not reform it, but its task is perhaps even greater. It consists in preventing the world from destroying itself. Heir to a corrupt history, in which are mingled fallen revolutions, technology gone mad, dead gods, and worn-out ideologies, where mediocre powers can destroy all yet no longer know how to convince, where intelligence has debased itself to become the servant of hatred and oppression, this generation starting from its own negations has had to re-establish, both within and without, a little of that which constitutes the dignity of life and death.

If the above discussions on the views of the duty of the writer have created an (improbable) image of the writer as someone with almost superhuman virtues and access to the moral high ground, Camus

is quick to dispel this notion. The writer, according to Camus, is no different from his or her fellow man:

> [V]ulnerable but obstinate, unjust but impassioned for justice, doing his work without shame or pride in view of everybody, not ceasing to be divided between sorrow and beauty, and devoted finally to drawing from his double existence the creations that he obstinately tries to erect in the destructive movement of history. Who after all this can expect from him complete solutions and high morals?

The duty of the writer is this, states Camus: "To support unquestioningly all those silent men who sustain the life made for them in the world only through memory of the return of brief and free happiness."

4.6.5   Summary of the duty of the writer

Based on the relevant existential themes discussed in chapter 3, a more focused discussion on the existential responsibility, or duty, of the writer was put forward. This discussion is based on essays by Sartre, Gordimer, Orwell and Camus. Although these essays by no means constitute everything that these authors have written on the topic, the essays were selected because they have writing and the freedom or responsibility of the writer as primary focus. From these essays the following duties of the existential writer were identified, presented here first according to author.

According to Sartre (1946) the duties of the writer include:

- to convey a message, or meaning
- to disclose, based on the statement that to write is to act, and this action is the action of disclosure
- to change, through disclosing or revealing a topic or issue
- to know why you choose a topic
- to know why you choose to write in a certain way about this topic (in terms of angle and style)
- to write for the reader, as reading is a directed creation that allows the writer and reader to enter into a dialectical relationship
- to place an urgent demand on the reader, to present a call to action
- to act as society's guilty conscience
- to keep in mind that a story is defined by its public
- to act as a mediator

According to Gordimer (1975; 1982; 1984) the duties of the writer include:

- to guard against the threat, and resultant anxiety, of being aware of what is expected of you
- to know that our being-in-the-world allows us to "know" one another and to write about each other
- to help your audience navigate a new shared social space
- to act as interpreter
- to be both insider and outsider by developing your faculties of supra-observation and hyperperception
- to develop persistence and perseverance
- to produce an essential gesture
- to know that in a specific world situation (an interregnum) the greater responsibility is to society and not to art
- to know when to be more than a writer and when to be only a writer
- to know what being more than a writer requires of you (social responsibility)
- to know what being only a writer requires of you (social criticism)

According to Orwell (1946) the duties of the writer include:

- to be aware of the four motives of writing, namely sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose
- to know that the motives of sheer egoism and aesthetic enthusiasm represent the inner world of the writer
- to know that the motives of historical impulse and political purpose represent the outer world of the writer
- to be conscious of bias
- to reconcile your dislikes and likes
- to be aware that all writing needs a purpose

According to Camus (1957) the duties of the writer include:

- to be aware that writing is living through your fellow men
- to stir the greatest number of people by offering them a privileged picture of common joys and suffering
- to understand, not to judge
- to know that you are in service of the truth
- to know that you are in service of liberty

- to be committed to a refusal to lie

- to be committed to resistance to oppression

- to serve those who suffer history

- to know that you are not morally superior and the reconcile yourself with your humanity

- to reconcile the double existence of creator and socially responsible member of society

Sartre divided his argument in *What is literature?* in two main focus areas, namely "Why do you write?" and "For whom do you write?". If combined with Gordimer's explanation of the duality of the writer's duty as having an inward focus and an outward focus, one can conclude that the answer to the question "Why do you write?" is to be found in the writer's inward focus, while the answer to the question "For whom do you write?" could be found in the writer's outward focus. Orwell provides us with possible answers to these questions through his suggestion of the four motives of the writer, namely sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose. The first two seem to fit in with the writer's inward focus, while the last two fit in with the writer's outward focus. And finally Camus warns that the writer has to find a balance between this double existence of creative, inward focus and outward social responsibility. Table 5 presents a suggested framework based on the duties identified and the two main dualities that the writer faces.

TABLE 5:   THE EXISTENTIAL DUTY OF THE WRITER

Inward focus	Outward focus
- to convey a message, or meaning - to disclose, based on the statement that to write is to act, and this action is the action of disclosure - to change, through disclosing or revealing a topic or issue - to know why you choose a topic - to know why you choose to write in a certain way about this topic (in terms of angle and style) - to guard against the threat, and resultant anxiety, of being aware of what is expected of you - to be both insider and outsider by developing your faculties of supra-observation and hyperperception - to develop persistence and perseverance - to produce an essential gesture - to know when to be more than a writer and when to be only a writer - to know what being only a writer requires of you (social criticism)	- to write for the reader, as reading is a directed creation that allows the writer and reader to enter into a dialectical relationship - to place an urgent demand on the reader, to present a call to action - to act as society's guilty conscience - to keep in mind that a story is defined by its public - to act as a mediator - to know that our being-in-the-world allows us to "know" one another and to write about each other - to help your audience navigate a new shared social space - to act as interpreter - to know that in a specific world situation (an interregnum) the greater responsibility is to society and not to art - to know what being more than a writer requires of you (social responsibility) - to know that the motives of historical impulse and political purpose represent the outer world of the writer

- to be aware of the four motives of writing, namely sheer egoism, aesthetic enthusiasm, historical impulse and political purpose - to know that the motives of sheer egoism and aesthetic enthusiasm represents the inner world of the writer - to be conscious of bias - to reconcile your dislikes and likes - to be aware that all writing needs a purpose - to understand, not to judge - to know that you are in service of the truth - to be committed to a refusal to lie - to know that you are not morally superior and the reconcile yourself with your humanity - to reconcile the double existence of creator and socially responsible member of society	- to be aware that writing is living through your fellow men - to stir the greatest number of people by offering them a privileged picture of common joys and suffering - to know that you are in service of liberty - to be committed to resistance to oppression - to serve those who suffer history

4.7   CHAPTER SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter was to drill down further into existentialist writing as it manifests in journalism specifically. This was done through a discussion of existential journalism as a form of unconventional journalism, which also includes other forms such as public journalism and alternative journalism. The main focus was on existential journalism as described by Merrill (1974; 1977), as well as Muhlmann's (2008; 2010) concept of the decentring journalist. While existential journalism has a purely individual focus, specifically in reference to a journalist's individual responsibility, decentring journalism describes an approach to journalism aimed at decentring or disrupting a specific gaze, or point of view.

Characteristics of the existential journalist include practicing journalism in an intuitive, participatory and analytical manner with a focus on the public and human experience. The existential journalist has a personal style and self-criticism and an analysis of personal beliefs are necessary in order to produce authentic journalism. The analysis of the characteristics of the existential journalist made the purpose of change clear. The journalist acts as an agent of change, and in this regard reference was made to the practices of alternative and public journalism.

The discussion on the duty of the writer looked at essays from Sartre, Gordimer, Orwell and Camus and identified certain duties (or responsibilities as freedoms) that are required of the existential writer. It was demonstrated that Sartre views the duty of the writer as having two main focus areas, namely "Why do you write?" and "For whom do you write?", with Gordimer's inward and outward focus as

characteristics of the duality of the life of the writer supporting Sartre's view. Orwell's four motives of the writer and Camus' views on being more than a writer are discussed within this context.

This chapter, in combination with chapter 2 (the life of Nat Nakasa) and chapter 3 (the elements of existentialism), form the background against which Nakasa's journalism will be analysed in chapter 5.

ALL THAT IS GREAT STANDS IN THE STORM
Findings and interpretation of results

5.1   IN THIS CHAPTER

This chapter presents the results and interpretation of the study within the research framework as set out in chapter 1. While the reader is provided with a brief recap of the research design in this chapter, it is important that this chapter be read together with the entire chapter 1.

The results of both the deductive theme analysis and the inductive theme analysis are presented, followed by the main discussion and interpretation, namely the construction of an existential storyline as evidence for the argument put forward in this thesis: that Nat Nakasa's work, whether intended by him or not, serves as an example of applied existentialism, i.e. explaining existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the value of this study beyond the single-case, i.e. some contemporary applications of the study's findings.

The main title of this chapter refers to a quote from Heidegger and refers to the existentialist view that human beings fully realise themselves in situations in which they are strained to the utmost. Heidegger's words paraphrase Plato: "All that is great stands in the storm" (Heidegger 1933, in Stassen 2003: 11).

5.2   INTRODUCTION

As part of the discussion of Muhlmann's (2008) unifying and decentring approaches to journalism in chapter 4, mention was made of the difference between a discourse and a narrative. Muhlmann (2008: 16) posits that "to pass from the singular voice to a more unifying gaze is surely to attempt to turn discourse, as far as possible, into a narrative". In Muhlmann's argument, the decentring journalist is the singular voice, representative of a discourse, while the unifying journalist represents the narrative. Some of the differences between a discourse and a narrative are that a narrative has a descriptive dimension, which places it in the realm of a story, which a discourse is not. In addition, in a discourse, someone speaks and their situation is the focus of the meaning. In a narrative, no one speaks in the sense that we do not need to know who is speaking in order to understand the meaning. Discourse is *saying* while narration is *seeing*. Muhlmann (2008: 17) writes that many of the great journalists of opinion were already great reporters, or narrators, which she suggests as a possible way in which to

combine unifying and decentring journalism: a fusion of saying and seeing, or a combination of objectivity and subjectivity.

In chapter 1 it was mentioned that there are a number of similarities between the interpretive research paradigm and journalism in the sense that, irrespective of the circumstances, at some stage during either process, information will be interpreted by an individual. This brings a subjective element to both these processes, which should not be disregarded on face-value because subjectivity, discussed in detail in both chapters 1 (as pertaining to research) and 4 (as pertaining to journalism), brings a unique existential element to these processes.

The current chapter is perhaps the area in this study where these disciplines overlap the most as it requires the researcher to demonstrate skills related to both qualitative research and journalism. This chapter presents both a discourse and a narrative. As discourse, it presents the single voice of a journalist named Nat Nakasa who wrote not only to transcend his own facticity, but who also made it his responsibility to enable others to do the same. As narrative, it presents a meaning, or interpretation, that allows us to appropriate from Nakasa's discourse something of value for our contemporary context.

5.3   BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The elements of the research framework were discussed in detail in chapter 1. Here only a brief overview will be provided in order to refresh the reader's mind.

The *purpose* of this study is to consider how Nat Nakasa's writing, irrespective of his intention in this regard, serves as an example of applied existentialism, i.e. explaining existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts) as it manifests in his journalism.

To achieve the purpose of the study as set out above, the research is guided by two *primary research questions*:

- Research question 1: Which evidence is there of the main existentialist themes in Nat Nakasa's journalism?
- Research question 2: Which main themes would emerge through analysing Nat Nakasa's writing as example of existential journalism?

In addition to the primary research questions, the following *secondary research questions* will be addressed:

- Secondary research question 1: Which existentialist themes are relevant to develop a framework for analysing a body of journalism at the hand of existentialism?
- Secondary research question 2: What are the existential duties of the writer or existential journalist?
- Secondary research question 3: What is the role of the existential journalist in a developing society?

Conceptually, this study is situated within the philosophy of existentialism. According to existentialism, life can only be experienced, described and made sense of from an individual perspective; it is inherently subjective and there is no universal truth "out there". In addition to the importance placed on the individual experience, existentialism also emphasises the fact that this individual experience coincides with other individual experiences – we share a social space. The third important element is that, as human beings, our existence precedes our essence (Sartre 1946: 34), in other words we do not have a predetermined, definite nature (or essence); instead, we have the ability to be or become anything.

The emphasis that existentialism places on the individual requires this study to employ an *interpretive research paradigm*. Within this position, humans construct knowledge out of their somewhat subjective engagement with objects in their world (Caelli *et al*. 2003: 3). The interpretive paradigm situates the study methodologically within the *qualitative approach* to research. Whittemore *et al*. (2001: 524) describe qualitative research as seeking "depth over breadth" and attempting "to learn subtle nuances of life experiences as opposed to aggregate evidence".

In terms of *method* this study employs an adapted deductive/inductive hybrid theme analysis executed on two levels:
- The **first level** is a **deductive theme analysis** with existentialism as framework. Relevant existential concepts and themes are identified and discussed. This provides a general structure against which Nakasa's work is explored for existentialist themes. Coding for the deductive analysis is done according to the theme descriptions found in chapter 3 as well as the existential duties of the writer as identified in chapter 4. The deductive analysis addresses primary research question 1, while the existential themes developed in chapter 3 addresses secondary research question 1, and the existential duties of the writer, developed in chapter 4, addresses secondary research question 2.
- The **second level** is an **inductive theme analysis** that is informed by the deductive theme analysis. The purpose of the inductive theme analysis is to identify themes specific to

Nakasa's work that are based on existential themes. Coding for the inductive analysis is done *in vivo*, using words, labels or phrases from the text and building new themes from there. It is important to keep in mind that these themes are identified against an existential framework, and that the analysis is not a general analysis of all themes in Nakasa's work. The inductive analysis addresses primary research question 2.

The research process is summarised in table 1 (see chapter 1).

5.4   RESULTS

This section reports on the results of both the deductive and inductive theme analyses. Although this study is entirely qualitative in nature, some visual data presentations are included in the form of, for example, bar charts that include coding incidences. The purpose of these charts is to provide a visual overview and it should not be used for any quantitative deductions as to the results or interpretation. As was mentioned in chapter 1, a theme analysis differs from a content analysis in the sense that a single mention of an aspect merits value. Or, using Alexander's identifiers of salience, omission, negation or (lack of) prominence can also be used to determine meaning. In addition, a section of the text can be coded for more than one theme, in other words in a theme analysis themes are not mutually exclusive and a unit of analysis can be included in more than one theme.

This section provides only a brief overview of the results. In the next section the findings of both the deductive and inductive analyses are combined in order to create the main discussion and interpretation of the results.

5.4.1   Results of the deductive analysis

A deductive theme analysis was conducted using relevant existential themes and concepts identified *a priori* as part of the analysis of existentialism in chapter 3. Also included were aspects identified as part of an analysis of the existential duty of the writer in chapter 4 (summarised in table 5). This provided a general structure against which Nakasa's work was explored for existential themes. Coding for the deductive analysis was done according to the theme descriptions summarised below. These themes and concepts are discussed in detail in chapters 3 and 4 and only an overview is presented here:

- **Existence precedes essence**: As human beings we don't merely exist; we are the only entity that are concerned with our existence. We are a nothingness, meaning we have the duty to become a something. We don't have a predetermined nature; instead, human beings can be or become anything – we have the ability (and responsibility) of self-determination.

- **Being-in-the-world**: We share our existence with other human beings; our existence is therefore characterised by a shared social experience.

- **Freedom and responsibility**: We are freedom, meaning we have the inescapable responsibility for our choices irrespective of our circumstances. We are "condemned" to be free, which means we are always responsible for making choices. In addition, when we choose, we are choosing for everyone. In other words, every choice I make is my affirmation of what I think humankind should be therefore when choosing for myself I am choosing for everyone.

- **Anxiety**: Our freedom, or our awareness of our relentless responsibility to choose, manifests itself through anxiety or anguish. Anxiety is distinguished from fear in that fear is fear of beings in the world whereas anxiety is anxiety before myself, i.e. anxiety is more fundamental than fear. Fear has a definite object and contains a more immediate threat to physical or mental well-being.

- **Bad faith**: We try to avoid anxiety by living in bad faith – an inauthentic existence. Bad faith is the denial of the reality of freedom and choice, whether in an effort to avoid anxiety or as a coping strategy, perhaps with the aim of relinquishing responsibility. This is often influenced, or exacerbated, by how we experience ourselves through the eyes of others – "hell is other people" – as we gravitate towards either being the person others think we are, or trying to convince others that we are not that person. Bad faith is an exercise in self-distraction or self-evasion and is an almost inescapable state, a permanent characteristic of consciousness. It is always a possibility, and it is renewed through every possibility.

- **Facticity:** At any given moment an individual's life is characterised by facticity (certain biological and social circumstances). It is the context that a person currently finds him or herself in, including setting, conditions and facts about yourself – your concrete current existence.

- **Negation and nothingness:** Our ability to negate (to think of ourselves in different circumstances) is what enables us to change either our circumstances or our opinion of those circumstances. Negation is an existential action that implies "taking away" or nihilating our current facticity. This allows us to transcend our current circumstances.

- **Transcendence:** Transcendence refers to the ability to transform ourselves – to move beyond our current circumstances or existence. It allows us to make determinations about how things might have been or could be otherwise.

- **Temporality and finitude**: Our existence is characterised by temporality (of which time is an indicator, or tool) – we are at all times aware of, and in, our past, present and future as a result of transcendence, which requires all three. In other words, temporality refers to our

ability to be aware, simultaneously, of what was, is and can be, and we are able to do this because we have time as an indicator. Included in temporality is our awareness of death, or finitude, which has the ability to make us aware of our life. Through our confrontation with death we are able to live an authentic existence (which is the opposite of bad faith, or an inauthentic existence). Our understanding of life comes from our awareness of our death.

- **Historicity:** Temporality takes place against the backdrop of historicity – we always return to the facts of our past, but every time we return, we appropriate (or "take") different aspects of it as part of our efforts towards transcendence. In existentialism, the future is used in order to "tell" the past – we write our history in order to fit the future we are projecting.

- **Absurdity**: Life is a "contradiction of reason" as a result of the fact that there is no "end goal" apart from the fact that life ends (in death). Our meaning, or the meaning of human life, is thus open-ended, which is to say, absurd (it is in contradiction with everything else that has a predetermined purpose or meaning). Although absurdity is a metaphysical concept it often manifests in real-life situations of which the meaning, or a meaning, or end-goal, is impossible or at least very difficult to determine. Absurdity also causes despair.

- **Authenticity:** Absurdity is what provides impetus for living an authentic life in which we take responsibility for our freedom. It is death and our awareness of our own and others' death that afford us the ability to rise to an authentic existence. Our experience of things in the world is an "event of appropriation" – meaning that we take it and make it our own. It is through this belonging to or owning of that authenticity becomes possible. Authenticity is the opposite of bad faith – it is actively acknowledging circumstances and our opinions of those circumstances and then making a deliberate choice regarding those circumstances or our opinions of those circumstances.

The following two themes were coded as separate themes due to their ability to inform or form part of more than one of the themes mentioned above:

- **Future-oriented:** Existentialism is a future-oriented philosophy – all actions are based on future results. This speaks to both transcendence, negation and temporality.

- **Sense-of-belonging:** While our unique type of being is being-in-the-world, all the other elements of existentialism are aimed at or try to explain how we find our feet in this shared social space. A sense of belonging can be viewed positively (belonging) or negatively (not belonging) or as a continuous effort of trying to belong somewhere (efforts to fit in). It underscores themes such as absurdity, anxiety, negation, transcendence, facticity and responsibility.

Using the themes above, the following overview of the incidences of these themes in the sample can be presented:

TABLE 6: RESULTS: DEDUCTIVE THEME ANALYSIS
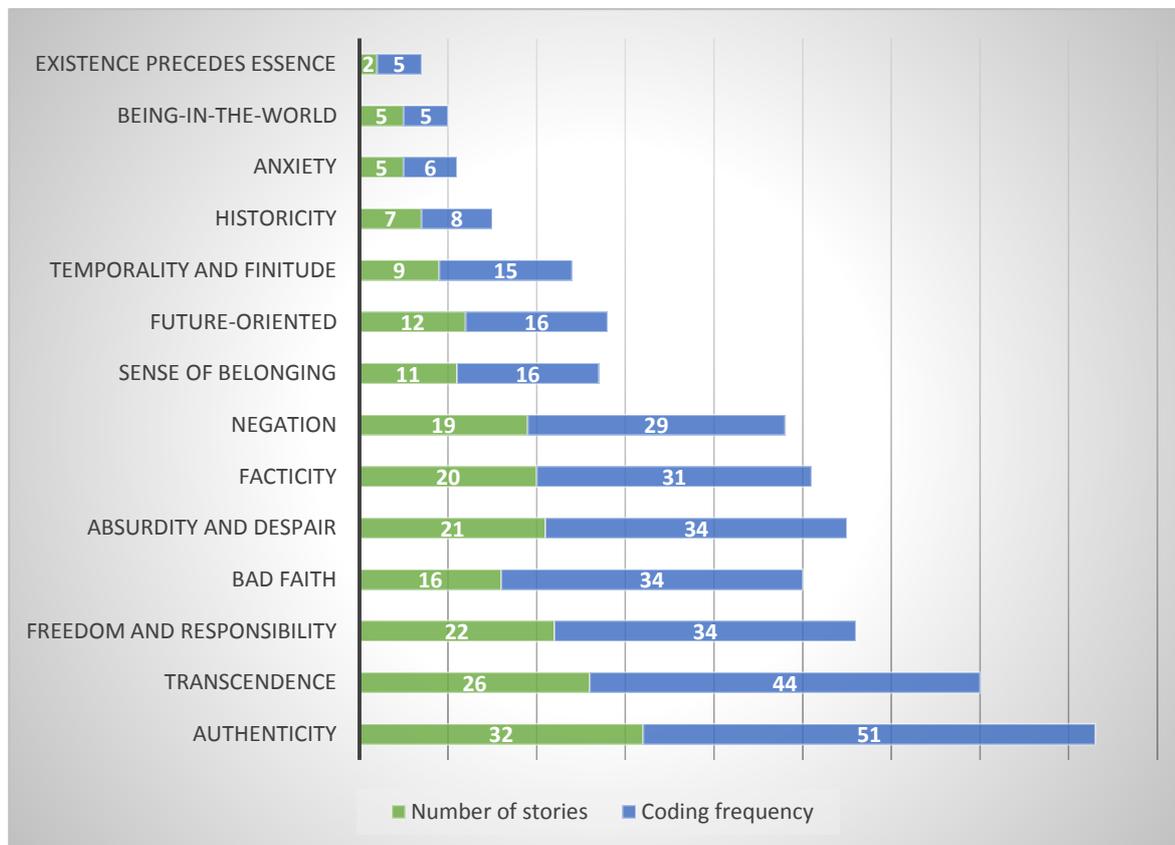
5.4.2 Results of the inductive analysis

The inductive theme analysis was informed by the deductive theme analysis conducted as part of the first level of the study. The purpose of the inductive theme analysis was to identify themes specific to Nakasa's work that are supported by existential themes. Coding for the inductive analysis was done *in vivo*, using words, labels, phrases or ideas from the text and building new themes from there.

In total, including the *a priori* themes used for the deductive analysis, 35 themes were identified. If the 14 general existential themes from the deductive analysis are removed, 21 themes remain. These are listed in table 7. (The reader is again reminded that this study is entirely qualitative in nature and that very little significance is to be attached to the coding frequency or number of incidences.)

TABLE 7: RESULTS: INDUCTIVE THEME ANALYSIS

Chart legend: ■ Number of stories ■ Coding frequency

Theme	Number of stories	Coding frequency
BE AWARE OF BIAS	2	2
UNDERSTAND NOT JUDGE	3	3
FITTING IN	6	7
EXPOSURE TO THE OTHER	1	7
CONSEQUENCES OF STATUS QUO	6	7
PROFILES	7	7
SOCIAL EXPERIMENT	6	7
PERSONAL JOURNEY	9	10
CONTEMPORARY ECHOES	8	16
TINY SUBVERSIVE ACTS	12	16
WANDERER	1	2
VISITORS	3	3
OUTSIDER	5	6
THE FRINGE	5	13
PLACES AND SPACES	10	13
JOURNALISM	3	6
GIVING FACE TO STORY	12	14
INTERPRETER	22	25
TOWARDS A COMMON EXPERIENCE	15	30
EDUCATION	18	32
MENTAL CORROSION	36	71

From the combined set of 35 themes (tables 6; 7), seven main themes were constructed, each incorporating a number of themes from the deductive and inductive analyses. The seven themes are considered the main themes in Nakasa's work when using existentialism as explanatory framework.

TABLE 8:   SUMMARY OF MAIN THEMES

Main theme	Brief description	Existential themes	Related themes
Theme 1: Mental corrosion	The corrosion, through apartheid, of people's ability to recognise and acknowledge humanity, or the "normal human experience" – whether in themselves or in others.	Bad faith Existence precedes essence Absurdity and despair Facticity	Fitting in Visitors Giving face to story Journalism Interpreter
Theme 2:	A description of the facticity, or physical circumstances, of black people during apartheid,	Facticity Anxiety	Giving face to story

Living outside of the normal human experience	specifically during the period that Nakasa wrote about, namely 1958-1965.	Absurdity and despair Sense of belonging Temporality and finitude Historicity	Places and spaces Profiles Visitors Journalism Outsider Fitting in
Theme 3: The fringe	A description of an alternative version, or possibility, of life between the two worlds of black and white, namely the fringe. Here people tried to live normal lives during abnormal times. The fringe is characterised by interaction on all walks of life between black and white.	Authenticity Freedom and responsibility Facticity Transcendence Negation	Profiles Places and spaces Giving face to story
Theme 4: A social experiment	Nakasa's personal journey, characterised by his decision to view his circumstances as a social experiment. Aspects of his personal journey include being an outsider, anxiety and despair and the ways in which he navigated through his being-in-the-world, as well as the final steps of this journey before committing suicide.	Freedom and responsibility Temporality and finitude Anxiety Absurdity and despair Transcendence Negation	Personal journey Wanderer Outsider Journalist Interpreter
Theme 5: Tiny subversive acts	A description of acts that represents authenticity. These acts, some humorous, others more serious, represent an attitude of defiance and efforts to stave off despair.	Authenticity Freedom and responsibility Facticity	Fitting in
Theme 6: Towards a common experience	Nakasa's vision of a possible future for South Africa, characterised by a non-racial society based on common ideals, moral values, and common national aspirations.	Transcendence Negation Future-oriented Historicity Facticity Freedom and responsibility	Education Exposure to the Other Contemporary echoes Journalism Interpreter
Theme 7: The duty of the writer	Discussion of Nakasa's ontic act as an existential journalist, namely writing. It provides evidence of Nakasa practising existential journalism as well as three duties of the writer identified by Nakasa.	Being-in-the-world Sense of belonging Transcendence Negation	Be aware of bias Understand not judge Exposure to the Other Education Consequences of lack of change Journalism Interpreter

5.4.3   A discourse and a narrative

Using the results of the deductive/inductive hybrid theme analysis, an existential storyline was constructed, consisting of the main themes in Nakasa's work as these fit into the explanatory framework of existentialism. It is both a discourse and a narrative. To quote Muhlmann (2008: 16) again, in a discourse, someone speaks and their situation is the focus of the meaning. In a narrative, no one speaks in the sense that we do not need to know who is speaking in order to understand the, or a, meaning. In this study, the discourse presents the single voice of Nat Nakasa and his personal journey through circumstances not of his own making. The narrative presents one interpretation of the meaning of that single voice, namely the duty of the writer in an interregnum or, to put it more pragmatically, the role of the journalist as change agent in developing society.

Against this background, the seven themes as presented in table 8 will be discussed next. The numbering of the themes is nominal, not ordinal. All seven themes are discussed separately, but aspects of theme seven – the duty of the writer – will be discussed as part of each of the other themes as this theme refers to how Nakasa exercised his responsibility as a journalist in the various instances under discussion.

A technical note as to the citation of Nakasa's articles quoted as part of the interpretation: As mentioned in chapter 1, the pieces that form part of the sample were labelled story 1 to story 75 and appear in a list included as Appendix A. However, as part of the interpretation of the results, reference will be made to "story 37", etc. in order to avoid unnecessary repetition and to make reading easier. Each story's title, number and, where possible, year of publication will be indicated. The label "story" was chosen as this is common journalistic jargon and no literary or other connotations should be attached to the label.

5.5   INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

5.5.1   Theme 1: Mental corrosion

Irrespective of the cause, for most of white South Africa the experience of apartheid was an exercise in existential bad faith. This is something Nakasa refers to as "mental corrosion". In *The cruelty of closed eyes* (story 66) he describes this condition as characterised by the fact that "[m]ost white South Africans have simply never opened their eyes to the reality of there being other humans besides whites in this country. They do not 'do unto others', but unto an unidentified mass of 'natives'".

To corrode, according to the dictionary definition, is to destroy or damage metal or hard material slowly by chemical action. Nakasa's word choice here is significant. What is being corroded, is a

person's ability to recognise and acknowledge humanity, or the "normal human experience" – whether in themselves or in others (*And so the shebeen lives on …*, story 4). This material that is being corroded – a human being's ingrained ability to recognise others similar or equal to himself – has to be strong, or difficult to change, which in turn speaks to the power of the chemical action – institutionalised racism, or apartheid – that is responsible for the corrosion. As part of the discussion of this theme, a distinction is made between white mental corrosion and black mental corrosion. White mental corrosion refers to white South Africans' inability, or slowly corroded ability, to recognise and acknowledge black South Africans as equals in "the human situation" (*Writing in South Africa*, story 74) – it is directed towards others. Black mental corrosion refers to black South Africans' inability, or slowly corroded ability, to recognise and acknowledge themselves as equals in the human situation – it is directed towards the self.

Mental corrosion is an example of an inauthentic existence or bad faith, as mentioned above. Bad faith is the denial of the reality of freedom and choice, whether in an effort to avoid anxiety or as a coping strategy, perhaps with the aim of relinquishing responsibility. It is an exercise in self-distraction or self-evasion. Bad faith is only possible through the existential action of nihilation, or the ability to "decentre" oneself in relation to what you are. Sartre (1943: 44) calls it "not-being-it". However, in order to *not-be-it*, one must be aware of what *it* is. In other words, in order to evade the truth of white privilege built on racial prejudice one must be aware of white privilege built on racial prejudice. This nullifies a claim of "we weren't aware". Bad faith, as Sartre (1943: 48) explains, is not an act of self-deception as that would be impossible simply because we are unable to lie to ourselves: "The essence of the lie implies in fact that the liar actually is in complete possession of the truth which he is hiding."

5.5.1.1 *White mental corrosion*

For the most part, white South Africans appeared to have relinquished or avoided responsibility by adopting a "tendency to treat Africans as labour and not as individuals; human beings with human sentiments and desires", the result of which, writes Nakasa, "is devastating" (*Mental corrosion*, story 15). It was as if most white South Africans became incapable "of human feelings" (*Criminals without crime!*, story 10). Throughout his body of work, Nakasa provides examples of mental corrosion and the inability of those involved to recognise how illogical their behaviour is. Nakasa, in *Johannesburg, Johannesburg* (story 1), describes a conversation with a white painter who is a Nationalist and a supporter of apartheid. The two men were attending the same party and were sharing cigarettes and drinking brandy. Nakasa wanted to know why this man could vote for the National Party yet drink brandy with a black man. The painter answered, "But there's nothing wrong in drinking with you. I

would like to drink with you anywhere. At my place or yours, for that matter." Nakasa then pointed out that the ruling National Party declared this type of association illegal and in addition the NP's policies were the cause of Nakasa not having a place to stay. The painter, upon hearing that Nakasa was homeless at times, immediately offered him a room in his house:

> Now I stopped being amused. Something was wrong somewhere. 'But the party you vote for has passed laws which say that's illegal, too,' I said … 'Why are you a Nationalist if you are willing to stay with me? Don't you want the races to be separated?' Suddenly, the painter took off his glasses and looked at me appealingly: 'You see,' he said, 'I am an Afrikaner. The National Party is my people's party. That's why I vote for it.'

Nakasa had a similar discussion with a young university lecturer at the University of Pretoria (*A visit to Pretoria*, story 20):

> For me it was a thrill to hear this honest man state his beliefs honestly, in spite of world-wide opposition to what he stands for. 'Even if we want to shoot each other,' I started, 'surely we can talk about it first.' His head nodded and I knew we had found common ground.

The lecturer then proceeded to explain to Nakasa his beliefs, based on that fact that he "just want a place where my people – *waar die Boere* – will be left alone by themselves, with their own Government, their own schools, their own culture and their own ways". Despite his belief in segregation, this man believed that the two groups who had the best chance to live together were "the Afrikaners and the Bantu". Yet he dismissed this possibility because it had too many complications. The lecturer's political views got even more complicated as the conversation progressed:

> 'I don't think I've ever seen hatred against me in the eyes of a Bantu,' he said, 'but I have seen it in the Jews, American Negroes, English South Africans, Englishmen, the people of the Netherlands, Germans and others. Not in the eyes of the Bantu – perhaps I have been lucky, but then I have never met Mandela.'
> 'You'll be surprised,' I said. 'I know Mandela. He used to give me lifts in his car when he lived near my place. And I know that he has no hatred in his eyes. He has friends who are Afrikaners.'
> 'Those Afrikaners probably think like him,' he said. 'You do find Afrikaners like that.'

This attitude stretched further than the borders of South Africa. In a series of articles (stories 22, 56) written during a tour of South West Africa (today Namibia; at that stage a territory of South Africa and subject to apartheid), Nakasa (*Inside South West Africa*, story 22) describes the capital, Windhoek, as follows: "White Windhoek goes big on culture, is top-heavy with book and music

shops, has a futuristic new library and museum, even a symphony orchestra conducted by a local music shopkeeper." Nakasa, together with two *Drum* colleagues, were in South West Africa to cover the forced removal of people to the newly built Katutura township, which he describes in stark contrast with life in white Windhoek:

> It was the last night a thousand people spent under the tin cans and packing cases of Klein Windhoek Location before the trucks carried them away and the bulldozers pulped their paper homes. I was a few hundred yards away where the Koeckert String Quartet from Europe plucked and plonked through an evening of classical chamber music before a R2-a-ticket audience in a superbly modern theatre. 'It was like a good deed in a naughty world,' sighed a local paper the next day.

White locals explained to Nakasa that "things here are the same as in South Africa, only more peaceful" and was eager to show him around:

> They showed me the sickly shambles of Windhoek's old location, then swept me out to Katutura's squat little houses in regimental squares painted different colours to 'give character' … Katutura is African built, they never forgot to tell me. Four hundred raw Ovambo were now trained bricklayers … They showed me the rambling old non-white hospital and the plans for the great new one. It is part of a R2-million hospital scheme. The white section is finished, is impressive. The non-white section is still being planned. … They even pointed out petrol pump attendants. 'You see, they are laughing, they are happy. Where is the tension?'

The assertion that black people are always "happy" provides more evidence of mental corrosion in the form of the belief that especially black people do have a predetermined essence, or that they are "born" to be a certain way. In *Oh, to be an anonymous houseboy!* (story 65) Nakasa describes the views of a friend who is an executive at a mining house:

> We talked into the early hours of the morning and he convinced me that Africans on the mine were a happy lot. His point was that, regardless of what African miners earned or should earn, they were at peace with the world. They wore clothes with bright colours and played guitars and concertinas during their leisure time.

For the mining executive the African miner is *being-in-itself* – that is the only way in which he can escape the anxiety which would be caused by confronting the facticity of the miner's being, of someone whose liberty (freedom in a socio-political sense) is severely limited to that of a second-degree citizen. By seeing the African miner as just that – an African miner – the mining executive is

trying to escape anxiety through acting in bad faith. Another example of white people's rationalisation of black people's acceptance of apartheid is found in *The myth of the born musicians* (story 37):

> Then there is another myth which comes mainly from white suburbia and foreign visitors. 'Africans,' these people are always saying, 'are a remarkably patient people.' How else, they ask, can you explain the smiles of their faces in spite of the colour bar, curfew regulations, pass laws and 300 years of second-class citizenship?

5.5.1.2 *Black mental corrosion*

While it is to be expected that a black journalist writing for a magazine critical of the apartheid government would highlight the absurdity of the policies and the actions of those supporting these policies, Nakasa didn't stop there. In a manner similar to Sartre's (1948: 77-80) example of African-American author Richard Wright, who wrote for two contexts or two audiences, Nakasa also called out incidents of black mental corrosion. This is consistent with the writer's existential duty of entering into a dialectical relationship with the reader. Nakasa's efforts were not just aimed at placing an urgent demand on his white readers, but also called to action his black readers.

While the cause of black mental corrosion surely is different from that of white mental corrosion, it remains an example of an inauthentic existence; of not acknowledging your circumstances. Again Nakasa's work is characterised by numerous examples of calls to action or efforts to "awaken" his fellow oppressed, some more direct than others. Compare, for instance, this paragraph from *The myth of the born musicians* (story 37):

> My feeling is that, generally speaking, Africans in this country have not yet shown a really fervent interest in their political advancement. Perhaps the oppression we have suffered so long, and the lack of individual initiative produced by our tribalist systems, have prevented us from developing a militant spirit. And I am sure the distractions of urban life, of the bright lights and football matches and American clothes, have had a lot to do with it. But, ironically, it is also these very aspects of the good life which are whetting African appetites. Africans have tasted enough to make them realise what they are being deprived of by apartheid, and it is this which in the long run will make them transcend their present preoccupations and awaken their political fervour.

In this instance it is perhaps pertinent to refer again to Sartre's (1948: 78) use of Baudelaire's concept of "a double simultaneous postulation" where each word refers to two contexts; "two forces are applied simultaneously to each phrase". In the above example from *The myth of the born musicians* black readers could understand the meaning to be a call to action, to "awaken their political fervour".

Simultaneously, for white readers, it could serve as a warning as to this imminent awakening and the circumstances that would in all probability lead to this.

In terms of black mental corrosion, the "representation" (Heidegger 1927: II.I#47) often takes on the form of the "myth" of typical Africans as perpetuated through white mental corrosion, namely the subservient, happy-go-lucky black man. Sartre (1943: 59) describes this as "playing with his condition in order to realize it":

> This obligation is not different from that which is imposed on all tradesmen. Their condition is wholly one of ceremony. The public demands of them that they realize it as a ceremony; there is the dance of the grocer, of the tailor, of the auctioneer, by which they endeavour to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor. A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer. Society demands that he limits himself to his function as a grocer … There are indeed many precautions to imprison a man in what he is, as if we lived in perpetual fear that he might escape from it, that he might break away and suddenly elude his condition.

This inauthentic existence, or "playing the role" of what an individual thinks is expected of him ("hell is other people"), is often the result of efforts to fit in for whatever reason, as the businessman in *Trying to avoid bitterness* (story 68):

> I am reminded of these things because, early this week, I listened to a prosperous businessman speak at a send-off party given for Chief Kaiser Matanzima in Soweto. The man told us that he had gone a long way in business because he had always humbled himself before the white man. He always saluted white people and did not protest if they called him '*kaffertjie*.' [sic] In other words, this man tells the white people only those things which he thinks they would be pleased to know. There is really not much communication between him and the people he meets. The businessman is unlikely to speak his mind openly for fear of disturbing the peace which now prevails between himself and the men he salutes.

Another example of black mental corrosion, discussed extensively by Nakasa (stories 17, 18, 19, 21), is found in the attitude of "visitors" from the Bantustan, or homeland, of the Transkei. The Bantustans were created by the apartheid government in order to prevent black people from moving to urban areas. The ten Bantustans purportedly had independent governments but, as Nakasa writes in *The isolated visitors* (story 17), "we all know that [they were] still really governed from Pretoria". Tongue-in-cheek, Nakasa writes of his excitement about meeting the visiting "heads of state" from the Transkei: "It is not often that black journalists get an opportunity to interview a head of

government in this country. It has always been my ambition to attend a conference of this sort and fire questions the way American journalists do at the White House." Underneath the humour, however, remains the awareness of what black people were forced to be, and often accepted:

> I am constantly amazed to see what people can adapt themselves to when under pressure. It seems that just being alive preoccupies some minds to the point when little else matters … The Transkeians left me with the impression that they have come to accept oppressive laws as being simply part of the hazard of living, the way people do who live in volcanic countries. Few of the people living next to Etna would wish to stay anywhere else. The possibility of sudden death from volcanic eruptions has been accommodated in their minds, not as a terrifying thought, but as just another sad reality (*The contented Transkeians*, story 18).

Even chiefs from sovereign African countries fell prey to mental corrosion. The 29 visiting chiefs from Southern Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe) were reported to be "very impressed" with South Africa after also visiting Kenya, Italy and England (*So they were impressed*, story 19). Southern Rhodesia supported apartheid, and according to Nakasa's description, it appears the chiefs were treated like children, even being issued with letters saying "I am lost, please take me to such-and-such an address." While "free to leave the official party" none of the chiefs did so although "some of them were dying to leave the official party and move about on their own". They were afraid, writes Nakasa, that they would lose their jobs as chiefs back in Rhodesia, or worse, if they said anything "that would be out of step with the official policies of the Rhodesian Government".

Even more farcical was the Transkeian Legislative Assembly, from where Nakasa reported in 1964 (*Meeting the new MPs*, story 21):

> In spite of all the pomp and ceremony which attended the arrival of dignitaries like the State President, Mr Swart, the whole affair looked like an odd wedding instead of an event of great historical moment. A number of school children in uniform stood outside the House together with the local workers and some astonished peasants in tribal wear … Some of us, white and black journalists, discovered with surprise that the House has white and non-white Press galleries. But there is only one Press room, and that is reserved for whites only. The Press room is equipped with numerous chairs, desks and two telephones. To accommodate the African journalists two tables were provided on the balcony. There was one telephone, and there were no chairs.

The rest of this story describes the members who formed part of this "expensively furnished façade" that was the legislative assembly. Some of the MPs were illiterate or semi-literate, another was facing

maintenance charges in the magistrate's court, one confessed to Nakasa that he had not read a newspaper in three years, yet another did not know what his party's policy entailed. Some "turned up in long American cars, while some seemed to have been off-loaded from the back of a lorry". Despite the obvious shortcomings of the alleged "self-rule", the mental corrosion regarding the success of this endeavour persisted. The Transkeian whites considered themselves in the same position as white people in South West Africa, an attitude underlined by the words of the white mayor of Umtata (the capital of the Transkei), a Mr Nelson:

> 'We have accepted that eventually the Transkei will go black, but that will take some time. Meanwhile, relations are very easy here between whites and Africans … We may not invite non-whites into our homes, naturally, but we have very good human relations with them.'

Nakasa did not just provide examples of mental corrosion. There is evidence of solutions as well, as is required as part of the duty of the writer. In an effort to understand not judge (one of the existential duties of the writer), Nakasa believes that mental corrosion does not wipe out the inner voice; that it is still there, waiting to be recovered. After placing an urgent demand on his audience he assists them in navigating this new territory. In *The cruelty of closed eyes* (story 66), he writes: "Some of us are still young enough and, if you wish, naïve enough, to believe that many of the smaller, unpleasant things that go on in this country might be eliminated if white South Africa could be made to give even a casual thought to them." He then proceeds to use contrast in order to help his white audience; he places the shoe on the other foot, so to speak, by using the handing out of old clothes as an example:

> Take, for instance, the people who are forever complaining that Africans do not show much gratitude for the houses and the clothes which the Government and the white public give them … Suppose I were to collect some old clothes from African businessmen and distribute them among the poorer whites of Johannesburg. How much gratitude would be shown? If I know this country, such a gesture would be more likely to cause a riot. But I cannot resist thinking about it. For this is the only way I could get some people to understand that human beings, white or black, do not like to be dependent on charity.

Other examples in the same story include restaurants in Johannesburg which, through a "whites only" policy, force black people to eat on pavements. Nakasa asks how people would react if respectable white family men were reduced to eating on the ground. Or if "white urchins [played] penny whistles in the centre of the city". He implores his readers to imagine signs such as "Dogs and Natives not Allowed" or "Hawkers and Natives use Back Entrance" but with "Whites" substituted for "Natives". In all these cases, he remarks, there would be a public outcry.

He then adds a call to action, using the case of the restaurants as example: "I wish some enterprising youths would try it [eat on the pavements] to make this town think about the other people who are compelled to eat like this." This is not the only time that Nakasa points young people towards some type of action. But he knew that the powerful chemical agent called apartheid has already corroded this section of society as well. In *Afrikaner youth get a raw deal* (story 35, written in 1964), writing about the lack of "intellectual ferment" amongst white students at the country's universities, Nakasa asks why these students are not "asking bold and vital questions":

> There are no trends which can be said to represent an advance on the thinking of our older generations. We seldom hear of young architects doing something new, or of young people writing with a new vigour and hope. We can't even produce a set of The Beatles. In fact, the youth of this country seems to be as old as the hills compared with their counterparts in Europe and England.

This story not only provides us with mental corrosion eating away at yet another section of society, it also serves as an illustration of Nakasa's use of negation as employed as journalistic tool. The youth's intellectual ferment is a *non-being* in this article – it is a possibility, but it is not present. Nakasa then posits into existence, and throws back again, various possibilities for the non-being of the youth's intellectual ferment ("Is this it? Not, it is not") until he is able to posit into existence something that is not thrown back again – a viable reason for the youth's lack of intellectual ferment: "I blame the Dutch Reformed Church, the National Party, the Broederbond, the Afrikaans Press, and all the important institutions of Afrikanerdom. These are the agents which exercise the greatest influence upon the most important section of this country's youth." In fact, in this example these institutions serve as the elements of the chemical concoction responsible for mental corrosion.

In the same article, Nakasa also addresses the black youth. While "the grip of authority on the minds of black youth is not as tight as it is on theirs [white youth]" they are also battling bad faith. They do this as a result of the fact that

> the very conditions under which we live incite us to insubordination. Just being an African in itself is almost illegal. There are too many laws which we cannot humanly obey. As a result, instead of striving to obey, we spend more time thinking about how to disobey and get away with it.

While this is more than can be said of most of the white youth in Nakasa's article, these young black people are spending their time trying to adapt to their current circumstances. In this regard, they are focused on fitting in with the laws of their present reality; not on transcending it.

Sartre (1948: 21-22) posits that writing is an act of disclosure, and that disclosure brings about change, even if that change is just to make people aware of something: "I reveal the situation by my very intention of changing it; I reveal it to myself and to others in order to change it." This represents a bi-directional relationship: If the writer wants to change something, he or she has to reveal (or disclose) it first; or, by revealing a situation the writer will, whether intentionally or not, bring about some type of change to that situation.

This existential action applies to Nakasa's efforts to point out mental corrosion. He did this by providing examples from real-life situations, a number of which are discussed above. At other times, he directly points out the fact that, during apartheid, some white people saw black people as "a mysterious mass, a labour force or nothing more than semi-human creatures" (*Writing in South Africa*, story 74), or that some black people adapted themselves because "just being alive preoccupies some minds to the point when little else matters" (*The contented Transkeians*, story 18).

Through his writing, Nakasa challenged people to reconsider their "acts of wilful forgetting (Wartenberg 2008, quoting Tolstoy) in order to live authentic lives and to overthrow what Heidegger calls the "dictatorship of the They", or that faceless "group" that determines what are acceptable social norms: "   We conform, or internalise, what we think other people wants us to be or do. We live according to social norms, often because we experience these as our own values. Through conforming, we tranquilise, or silence, our "inner voice" (Wartenberg 2008).

5.5.2   Theme 2: Living outside of the normal human experience

Living in a shared social space is the primary context of existentialism. We are forced to interact with, adapt to or otherwise engage with other beings-in-the-world. Our being-in-the-world manifests in a sense of belonging, or efforts towards such a sense. Being-in-the-world, facticity, historicity and a sense of belonging are therefore existential themes that address a more general theme focusing on an individual's place in the shared social space. As mentioned in chapter 2, space refers to physical surroundings while place is to be regarded in a metaphysical sense. Your "place" in the world can also be akin to an attitude, a calling, or even a career choice, such as being a journalist or a doctor or whatever else you decide to do with your "nothingness". More broadly speaking, to find your "place" in the world is to find your purpose or meaning, and therefore authenticity.

Disclosing the facticity, or the current concrete existence, of black people during apartheid flows from the theme of mental corrosion. Nakasa's writing takes white people *to* the townships, and black

people *out* of the townships. To his white audience Nakasa is saying "apartheid has turned black people into outlaws"; to his black audience, "apartheid has turned you into outlaws". How Nakasa explains to both these audiences the facticity of life as an outlaw is the focus of the theme of "living outside of the normal human experience" (a quote from *And so the shebeen lives on …*, story 4). While some of these descriptions are from the perspective of the "characters" in the stories, others are from Nakasa's own life, his own facticity as a black man living in apartheid South Africa and trying to transcend this facticity.

In terms of his sense of belonging, both in place and space, Nakasa viewed himself a city-dweller. In *It's difficult to decide my identity* (story 67) he writes: "I am just not a tribesman, whether I like it or not. I am, inescapably, a part of the city slums, the factory machines and our beloved shebeens." This belonging to the city is so ingrained in his being that he writes, in *Johannesburg, Johannesburg* (story 1), that, despite trying "to approach Johannesburg with the attitude of a disengaged visitor … I cannot succeed in doing this. I am a part of Johannesburg."

However, Johannesburg, similar to the rest of apartheid South Africa, was two worlds – the white world and the black world. Nakasa's "home world" – his primary physical space, was the townships of Johannesburg, Sophiatown and Soweto, and specifically the shebeens. Nakasa considered the shebeens his home away from home: "These institutions have been here for generations; they are as old as Johannesburg. They are not just money-making concerns which can be closed on instructions from a management or board of directors. They are hospitable homes, often run by solid housewives and respectable men" (*And so the shebeen lives on …*, story 4). But these shebeens are more than a space; they also represent a place, they are a manifestation of what apartheid forced black people to be: "As outsiders, excluded from the hotel lounges by law and convention, we drank our drink the shebeen way – a way outside of the normal human experience of drinking in bars, hotel lounges and clubs."

"Living outside of the normal human experience" summarises the facticity of Nakasa's and black South Africans' lives during apartheid. They were outsiders, forced to live as second-class citizens far outside city limits in areas that were "nowhere", as Nakasa notes in an article describing the forced relocation of 250 African families. In *The move out to 'nowhere'* (story 23, written in 1961 for *Drum*), Nakasa recounts how these families thought that "even God has forsaken us". This despite the fact that the Bantu Affairs Department maintained that "we are not forcing anybody to leave if they don't want to". The official from this Department's mental corrosion is obvious, but the story also includes an example of existential freedom, of a choice made and executed in authenticity. The government

official, in an effort to confirm how "voluntary" the move is, took Nakasa to the house of a former school principal and asked him "'Are you happy or aren't you happy that you're moving?' … The man hesitated, then said, 'I haven't got time to talk. I've been told to move and there's nothing I can do about it.'"

5.5.2.1 *Violence and lawlessness*

Describing the facticity of the outsiders from nowhere is a key element of Nakasa's writing. Not only have black South Africans been turned into outlaws by apartheid, they were often at the mercy of real outlaws and all manner of con men. For *Why taximen are terrified* (story 13, written in 1958 for *Drum*) Nakasa interviewed taxi owners who were fearing for their lives as a result of a "cold war" between licensed taxi drivers and so called "pirate taxis". This cold war was often characterised by violence, with Nakasa noting that "during the last few months at least 30 taximen have been beaten up, stabbed or shot" and that a number of licensed taxi owners "have left the ranks and hired other men to drive their cars. Men who are prepared to brave the knife and the gun." Black people who were reliant on taxis to get them to and from their jobs, often in white areas, were also suffering. "There are lots of stories about people who have been robbed and stabbed in pirate taxis. There 'taximen' and their cronies have a habit of throwing their passengers out when they have done with them, their faces reaching the ground before their feet."

This lawlessness in townships was discussed in chapter 2, and is a characteristic of living outside of the normal human experience. In 1958, Nakasa spent two weekends at the emergency room of the Baragwanath Hospital (today known as the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital and the third largest hospital in the world). In *Victims of the knifemen* (story 14), he recounts his experience, quoting a doctor as saying "Our casualty department is probably the busiest in all Africa. You'd think there's a war raging just outside." A nurse told Nakasa that not all the patients were victims of robberies, some were victims "of hoodlums who slash and stab and beat just for the hell of it". One logical conclusion is that this "savagery for fun" is also a symptom of mental corrosion; of people living dire, dangerous lives who eventually also can't see other people as people. Nakasa acknowledges this in the article, quoting a social worker as saying that "the pass laws, the liquor raids, unemployment worries or the shortage of gymnasiums and recreational facilities … do tend to brutalise". But he also agrees with the social worker that "we've got to take some responsibility for the acts that our people do"; an example of responsibility, or existential freedom. Nakasa asks, on behalf of the reader, whether taking responsibility can be realised, and also suggests a solution:

Only if we all mean them to be. A false idea of 'toughness' is one of the causes of the weekly influx of horror into Baragwanath. It is not 'tough' for half a dozen men to cut one man up with *sjamboks* or dig his back with knives. 'Yellow cowardice' is the better label.

Another explanation for the violence is put forward in *Criminals without crime!* (story 10, written in 1959 for *Drum*) and *Witchcraft: Little kids vanished* (story 26, written in 1959 for *Drum*), namely unequal and skewed policing. In *Criminals without crime!*, Nakasa writes about the police's "needless arrests" of people not carrying their passbooks or for the illegal possession of liquor. Arrests for minor offences caused an overcrowding of jails. Consequently, less resources were available to investigate serious crime, especially when it involved black people. An example of this is found in *Witchcraft: Little kids vanished* (story 26, written in 1959). Three young children disappeared without a trace from villages in rural Transvaal (today Gauteng): "No sign of them although the parents looked and looked, and whole villages helped. Gone." Yet when an old white man from the same area disappeared "local farmers and the people who live on the farms combed the hills. Two hundred policemen from Pretoria came into the area to help look." A white woman claimed that she has found evidence that "someone was trying to cast a spell over her". Soon afterwards, the police "swooped, dragging six medicine men into court. They were charged with murder." However, the men were found not guilty. Then, in an unrelated event, a white woman was arrested. She was found guilty of witchcraft. The murders remained unsolved. In presenting the facts of this story, Nakasa did not draw any overt conclusions; rather, it was left up to the reader, as part of the dialectical relationship, to unravel and compare the details.

Violence was not the only challenge faced by the outsiders from nowhere. Con men also took advantage of people's vulnerabilities (*Beware the swindling 'beeshops'*, story 7). Bogus priests established churches and embezzled funds in various ways, including "waylaying young couples on the pavements near the Bantu Commissioner's office. Assuming that every young couple seen around there is potential business, they outbid each other with offers to perform the marriage ceremonies at low fees." Nakasa, although providing a humorous description of a "beeshop" (bishop) who expected people to pay a fee to join his "shes" (church), was against this exploitation. He reported that the Johannesburg Bantu Commissioner was conducting a drive against these swindlers, and commented that "for this purpose I am prepared to help as far as possible, even to the extent of donating a rand to the coffers of the Government – provided they don't get my rand mixed up with the others being wasted on apartheid."

5.5.2.2 Poverty

The Bantu Education Act and other efforts by the apartheid government focused on keeping black South Africans in "a position in life which has been assigned to them – an inferior status" (Shepherd 1955: 139) did not just leave a gap for knifemen and con men to run amok. Nakasa writes about a home for disabled children in *The kids learn to live* (story 27), quoting a teacher who explained that "the simple folk at home" often did not know what to do with their disabled children. One was abandoned, another "put in one corner of the house and almost forgot about". They were the lucky ones. "There has been a case of a child put aside by her parents and chained next to a dog as protection while left alone at home. That child is dead now," the teacher told Nakasa.

Despite the overtly gloomy circumstances, this story is one of hope and "unusual human courage". And of freedom and authenticity. Nakasa writes that the children at Kutlwanong "are rapidly learning to make their own world tick". He describes the work of one of the teachers at the school, Mrs Mokhudi, as "near magic", teaching the children to read, write and use sign language. Another teacher, Mrs Khame, teaches a domestic science class, preparing the children for leaving school and entering the world. "The law of love has a long arm," writes Nakasa. He ends the story with a call to action through the school principal's plea for "people to learn to act swiftly when they suspect trouble in their families" as the younger the disabled children were taken to the school, the better their chances of "meaningful, happy lives".

Much more bleak is the outlook of especially the children in two articles about a severe drought and famine in the northern parts of the country (*I saw them starve*, story 28; *'Give them their daily bread*, story 29). Although natural phenomena such as droughts do not discriminate as to which human beings are affected, it stands to reason that those whose physical circumstances are already perilous will be affected in a more drastic manner. This was the case for Mrs Makgoahe Thobejane (*I saw them starve*, story 28):

> Mrs Thobejane spoke to me inside her mud hut, her traditional dress hanging from her shoulders. Her family possessions consisted of a few threadbare blankets, a packet of salt and two black pots. Her four children stood nearby with dry lips and bulging tummies. There should have been seven. Three others died before they were a year old … 'What will your children eat today?' I asked. Mrs Thobejane smiled sadly and remained silent. I repeated the question. 'There is no food today,' she said. 'There may be some tomorrow.' … Mrs Thobejane, I learned, often goes without food for three days or up to a whole week.

Nakasa's trip to gather information for these two stories also took him to areas that were not affected by the drought, but where severe malnutrition and starvation were still major problems (*'Give them*

their daily bread', story 29). At missionary stations, clinics and hospitals, medical staff often had to treat the same patients over and over: "Some go home cured but come back again after a few months of bad food – or no food. Doctors battle to save children from death for the second or third times." Again, Nakasa does not only provide his readers with the details of the facticity of the people, but also looks for answers as to the cause, and solutions. At the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital in Nqutu, he spoke to Dr Anthony Barker, an authority on malnutrition. Dr Barker was clear about the fact that the cause was ultimately political: "The heart of the matter is that the people just cannot live on the land they have. There are about 40 000 people in the district and the land could only carry about 12 000 of them. The problem is intimately bound up with the position in the reserves. The reserve system of living is simply cockeyed and false."

5.5.2.3 *Death*

An awareness of death is another common characteristic of the facticity of black people in apartheid South Africa. In the two stories referred to above, Nakasa reports that the mortality rate amongst children was about 50 percent. In other words, in the areas visited by Nakasa for these articles, every second child died as a result of malnutrition. A nurse bluntly told him that "children are dying like flies" (*'Give them their daily bread'*, story 29) and a doctor, explaining measles as the greatest threat to undernourished children, simply said, "it just wipes them off".

However, statistics doth not maketh the man: A characteristic throughout Nakasa's work is, to use journalistic jargon, giving a face to a story, or demonstrating the effect of an event on the life of an actual person. An example of the awareness of death at the hand of actual people's experience is found in *Little boy's story of death on a farm* (story 30, written in 1962) about a farm worker, Fios Sibisi, who was allegedly killed by three farmers, including his employers. Nakasa and photographer Peter Magubane attended the court case in the Dundee Magistrate's Court, where a 12-year-old black boy was one of the principal witnesses. The child told the court that the three accused had beaten and tortured the man for two days before he died. The story not only addresses the facticity of some farm workers during the era, but also the family's experience of their son and brother's death. In the intro, Fios Sibisi's father asks "Why did my son have to die?" His son was the family's sole breadwinner:

> 'We depended solely on Fios for our living,' said Mrs Sibisi. 'As it is, we were hoping that he would get paid soon so that we could get some mealie meal for the house. Fios only took a few pennies from his pay for tobacco. The rest of it always came to us.'

Fios' death had further repercussions as his sister had just given birth:

I was told the baby had no napkins or any clothing. 'She was born on the day we went to fetch Fios' body from the mortuary,' said Mrs Sibisi. 'The baby almost died as there was only my sister to help with the delivery. We almost had two bodies to bury at the same time.'

In contrast with two of the accused's home, a "sprawling, multi-roomed affair with white walls and a red corrugated iron roof", Fios was buried "a few yards away from the grass huts which form the family home". Inside one of the huts was Fios' sister with her infant daughter. She asked her father: "Papa, why did Fios have to die?" The story illustrates that accepting the absurdity of death, and in this case also the absurdity of the circumstances of this specific death, do not become easier as a result of it being a more regular occurrence due to circumstances.

The absurdity of a human being's lack of an "end goal", or essence, apart from death is also echoed in Nakasa's profile on Timothy Oliphant, a black evangelist whose popularity crossed the colour-bar to include "prominent Afrikaners, Indians, Coloureds and Africans from all over the Union" (*Brother Timothy, Spellbinder*, story 8). Before "giving himself to the service of God", Timothy spent his days "guzzling liquor, snatching handbags, getting arrested, and lusting after jazz, fast, fancy cars, and the women with the genius of sponging on menfolk". This was a direct result of his parents' death:

> '…my father and mother died when I was hardly seven. For me, my brother and my four sisters, it meant the end of happy days. Our parents had been fairly successful business people, running a fruit shop and a tailor shop. But when they died, all they owned and hoped seemed to die with them.'

As discussed in chapter 3, we become aware of death through the death of others. This awareness of human finitude influences every aspect of our lives, whether consciously or unconsciously. This includes the repercussions of someone's death apart from making human beings aware of their own mortality. In *Who was Dr Xuma?* (story 57), Nakasa's profile on former ANC president AB Xuma, this aspect is touched upon:

> When Dr Alfred Bitini Xuma died at Baragwanath Hospital, Johannesburg, recently, the news swept through South Africa and the world like a bush telegraph, leaving a mass of gloomy grieving faces. Black Johannesburg spoke in sad, whispering tones, realising the heavy loss to the community. 'It had to come,' a mourner said. 'Even great men must go.'

This paragraph not only highlights the implications of the death of a prominent black leader – "a heavy loss to the community" – but also confirms the awareness of death as Dasein's "ownmost nonrelational possibility not-to-be-bypassed" (Heidegger 1927: II.I#53): "Even great men must go."

However, despite the facticity of most black people during the period under review, Nakasa's work provides very little evidence of people choosing death as an escape from their circumstances. The incidences of this ultimate exercise of existential freedom are discussed in themes four and five. The current discussion on references to death in Nakasa's work refers to death as a characteristic of the facticity of black people's lives.

5.5.2.4 *Similarities with other outsiders*

A final characteristic of the facticity of black people's lives under apartheid also encompasses another demonstration of Nakasa's awareness of his duty as a writer. This is found in descriptions of those outside the borders of South Africa that suffered a fate similar to that of the oppressed in South Africa. As part of the discussion on mental corrosion, mention was made of the similarities of the lives of black people in the territory of South West Africa, where apartheid was a reality (*Inside South West Africa*, story 22; *Chief Hosea Kutako*, story 56). The chiefs from Southern Rhodesia (*So they were impressed*, story 19) could just as well have been MPs from the Transkei (*Meeting the new MPs*, story 21). Despite them not being South African citizens, their facticity was so similar as to be almost indistinguishable.

In 1962, Nakasa travelled to neighbouring Mozambique (a Portuguese colony until 1975) to write about the suffering of Indians at the hand of the Portuguese in this country (*Where businessmen 'must scrub lavatories'*, story 31, written in 1962; *Freedom – to lose all*, story 32, written in 1962). Although not related to apartheid, Indian citizens in Mozambique were kept in internment camps as a result of Portugal's clash with India about Goa, a Portuguese colony on the west coast of India (*Where businessmen 'must scrub lavatories'*, story 31):

> Indian troops invaded Goa and snatched it from the Portuguese after 15 years of fruitless negotiation with Portugal. As their answer to this tough line, the Portuguese jailed Indian citizens in the remaining Portuguese colonies. Business offices, shops and factories closed down as the Portuguese, according to reports, confiscated money, homes, farms and all property by people holding Indian citizenship papers.

In Lourenco Marques (today Maputo) hundreds of Indians were arrested; their only "crime", notes Nakasa, was "that they were born in India", similar to those South Africans whose only crime was being born black (*Criminals without crime!*, story 10). The absurdity of the situation also bears similarity to the type of mental corrosion that beset some people in South Africa:

There is, for instance, the family of the 'Naidoos' (that is not their real name). Mr and Mrs Naidoo are in prison because they are India-born and bear no Portuguese citizenship papers. Their two daughters were born in Lourenco Marques and, as they are Portuguese citizens, they are not interned. All the possessions of Mr and Mrs Naidoo have been confiscated by the Government. Their home was spared because it was registered under the name of a Lourenco Marques-born relative. Thus the two daughters are left alone in a vast mansion without food and the customary supervision of their parents.

In the internment camps, as the title of the story suggests, wealthy businessmen had to "sleep in a camp and scrub floors". This is reminiscent of the respected black family men in South Africa who were forced to eat on pavements (*The cruelty of closed eyes*, story 66). In fact, mental corrosion is also prevalent here, with a Portuguese official at one of the internment camps explaining the concessions made at the camp in a manner similar to the white South West Africans singing the praises of the Katutura township: "They are allowed to receive telephone calls, too," beamed the camp official, "and the children are allowed to stay with their mothers inside the camp" (*Freedom – to lose all*, story 32).

For these interred Indians, their physical freedom – the release from the camps – brought them in confrontation with their existential freedom as they could only be released if they agreed to leave Mozambique permanently within three months of their release.

Violence and lawlessness, poverty and a constant confrontation with death are just some of the characteristics of the facticity of black South Africans during apartheid. And it put them on a metaphorical train to disaster. In *Must we ride … to disaster?* (story 12, written in 1962) Nakasa reports on congestion on the public transport system in Johannesburg. On the surface, this article is straightforward reportage, with Nakasa putting questions to the relevant authorities on behalf of his readers (this article was published in *Drum*). The story begins with a description of the average train ride on the "five-to-seven": "At one stage my feet were clearly off the floor as other passengers flung me deeper into the coach. I couldn't help wondering anxiously what would happen if a train like 'the five-to-seven' were ever to be involved in an accident," writes Nakasa. He then requests an explanation from the South African Railways. The answer includes detailed information regarding the operation of the trains, as well as an "admonishment" that places the cause of the problem in the hands of the passengers: "Pocket time-tables containing full particulars of all suburban train services are obtainable at station bookstalls. If you know when your train leaves in these peak periods and how many there are you will be able to travel in great comfort," the Railway official told Nakasa. He

then referred Nakasa to an article in the South African Railway News, were it is stated that "the non-white trains are not more crowded than European suburban trains at peak hours. Nor are the trains any worse than the London Underground or the Paris Metro during peak hours."

This story can also serve as a metaphor for the facticity of the millions of black South Africans during apartheid, having to make do with what is provided and "riding to disaster" while the apartheid government appears satisfied with what is provided. "So there we stand," is Nakasa's conclusion regarding the transport situation, a sentiment that could easily apply to the facticity of black people described throughout his work.

5.5.3   Theme 3: The fringe

While describing the facticity of his fellow black countrymen is an important part of Nakasa's work, and while some of his own facticity overlapped with theirs, his primary "place" and the source of his sense of belonging was what Nakasa refers to as the fringe. The fringe existed between the two worlds of apartheid South Africa, a "No-man's Land where anybody meets anybody, to hell with the price of their false teeth, or anything else" (*Between two worlds*, story 2, written in 1961 for *Drum*).

Living on the fringe required a certain amount of scorn, similar to the attitude that Camus ascribed to Sisyphus in *The myth of Sisyphus*, because, as Camus writes "there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (in Wartenberg 2008). On the fringe, black and white mingled freely:

> Some people call it 'crossing the colour line'. You may call it jumping the line or wiping it clean off. Whatever you please. Those who live on the fringe have no special labels. They see it simply as LIVING. Dating a girl. Inviting a friend to lunch. Arranging a party for people who are interested in writing or painting or jazz or boxing. Or even apartheid, for that matter.

The fringe was how Nakasa and other fringe-dwellers imagined life *inside* of the normal human experience. However, the fringe-dwellers were considered outsiders by both black and white, even though black people were all forced to be outsiders, as discussed previously. Nakasa writes that "some outsiders look at the fringe-dwellers and wonder 'what is the world coming to?' Others blink and twist their faces in disgust. There are those who take a look and decide, 'it is not any of my business how other people choose to live.'" But, as Nakasa's friend Henry Sono sums it up, "it's a question of having friends who are white when you are black. You've got to live with them somehow, somewhere. It's against human nature to say 'sorry, can't be friends' to a person you like, simply because your nose is longer than his, or because he is darker than you."

While the fringe encompassed more of an attitude than a specific geographical space, there were areas where fringe-dwellers found it easier to "simply live". Most of these were shebeens or clubs, including the Crescent Restaurant in Fordsburg, where Nakasa once had the somewhat absurd experience of seeing a white Afrikaans policeman in uniform play the piano to an audience of black and white jazz fans: "On the following Sunday, the man of Justice brought his sister along to sing while he played the piano." However, fringe-dwellers knew that these short bursts of normality wouldn't last; it was "like getting a bit of sunshine on a winter day – with the knowledge that soon, very soon, it would all be gone":

> Fringe men knew that soon or later officialdom would stop the sessions on the grounds – and there's a strange irony here – that 'there is bound to be trouble when blacks mix with whites'. But it was good while it lasted. Good – and quite without trouble!

It weren't just shebeens and clubs in black areas that gave fringe-dwellers a sense of belonging. Nakasa writes about an Afrikaner woman who complained that her family refused to come to her shop "because too many of my customers are black and I'm too friendly with them". "How long," asks Nakasa, "will this woman hold out against the community that says she's abnormal and insane?" He writes that fringe-life is complicated by apartheid legislation, but that fringe-dwellers choose to live with "openness and naturalness". This he places in contrast with another example of mental corrosion, namely white ministers of the Dutch Reformed Church "landing in jail for acts of 'indecency' with black women".

Exercising their existential freedom was of course required by fringe-dwellers for the fringe to exist, and to continue to act as forerunner for the "common experience" (theme six) of a democratic South Africa advocated by Nakasa. He quotes *Drum* colleague Frank Barton, who wrote an article about restaurant campaigners in Cape Town: "They are just ordinary decent people who believe that it is all very well to condemn the stupid colour barriers of South Africa, but that if things are to change, then somebody has got to start doing something about it."

Between two worlds also addresses white and black mental corrosion, and Nakasa again helps his audience to navigate a new shared social space:

> This is perhaps one of the hardest concepts to get through to Afrikaners and Africans. The idea of 'my own people' is deeply entrenched in the two groups … The fact of being born into a tribe, be it Afrikaner or African, does not matter on the fringe. These people who are neither proud nor ashamed of it, are the emergent group in South Africa.

Another fringe space described by Nakasa is Fourteenth Street in Vrededorp (*Quite a place, Fourteenth Street*, story 5):

> This street, entirely Indian-controlled, does business with people from all races, all walks of life, from Soweto to Mayfair, from Houghton to Japan, India, Europe, England and the United States. Well-known Nationalists come all the way from the *platteland* to buy in Fourteenth Street. It is possible to find members of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange or a City Councillor's wife waiting to be served after an African labourer in Fourteenth Street … [It is] certainly a showpiece of good race relations if anybody wants that sort of thing these days.

However, the normality was short-lived, as it was in all fringe areas, as Vrededorp was one of the areas proclaimed a white area, with residents being forced to move "elsewhere, out of Johannesburg". While it lasted, Nakasa presented Vrededorp to his readers as an example of what the absence of segregation might look like, and how this could be achieved:

> It is the various religions – Moslem, Christian and Hindu – which bind each element of the community together. Their common love for Vrededorp, where they have lived for the past sixty years, seems then to weld all three sections together.

It is not just certain spaces that had the unique ability to forge a common bond. Nakasa also writes about fringe-dwellers who could bring people from all walks of life together. Mention of evangelist Timothy Oliphant (*Brother Timothy, Spellbinder*, story 8) has been made previously. In reference to the fringe, Nakasa writes that one of Timothy's sermons in a township was attended by all manner of South Africans: "Though non-Africans are not generally allowed into this location, on this occasion people of all races went to hear the evangelist. Among them was Mrs Schoeman, mother of the Minister of Transport, Mr Ben Schoeman."

Nakasa also accompanied Timothy to the 50th anniversary of the Apostolic Faith Mission in South Africa, a celebration attended by about 10 000 white people:

> We were stopped by friendly people. Afrikaners came up to us and spoke enthusiastically: 'Are you Brother Timothy? Oo, *ja*! brother, I'm so glad to meet you. I've heard about you. I've heard about your good work …' Then they would shake Timothy's hand and shake mine, too, asking God to bless the two of us.

One could reasonably argue that being a fringe-dweller contributed to Nakasa's ability to write for both white and black audiences. In *Writing in South Africa* (story 74) Nakasa emphasises the point that limited or no exposure to the Others (those that are not of your race, culture or group) makes it

very difficult if not impossible for a writer to be authentic: "Without this view of life, the writer will continue to lack closeness to his subject, his work will suffer from the inadequacy of his own insight into the human situations he handles." This duty of the writer is discussed in more detail as part of theme seven. In terms of the current discussion, his fringe experiences in white and black spaces and places have enabled Nakasa to act as an interpreter for both "official" sides in apartheid South Africa. In *Johannesburg, Johannesburg* (story 1, written in 1964 for *Rand Daily Mail*) he recounts how he often slept in the night watchman's room on top of the office block that housed *Rand Daily Mail*:

> The night watchman … seemed to welcome my appearance and spoke a lot of politics with me. How long, he wanted to know once, did I think the white man would remain on top of us? Did I think the time would ever come when we would be on top? … What are the whites saying now? Answering these questions made me feel I was earning the watchman's hospitality. He saw me as an interpreter of the white man's ways because some of my friends were white. In the suburbs, over a drink, people plied me with questions about Africans.

The fringe often also appeared unexpectedly, providing those exposed to it with the opportunity to exercise their existential freedom. One such space was the library of the University of the Witwatersrand, or Wits, which Nakasa, as a journalist, was allowed to use. Although it was touted as an "open" university that provided access to all races, Nakasa notes that

> Wits has never been as 'open' as its Public Relations Office may suggest. It is predominantly white, taking a limited number of black students. Nevertheless, its non-racial character has facilitated a profound social intercourse between black and white men, people who might otherwise not have met except as master and servant or deadly enemies … Because of their common background of racial segregation the students were intrigued with their discovery of an area of life relatively free from the colour bar. There was a general eagerness, often pretentious, to rush into each other's arms. But those who transcended the superficiality of this back-slapping brotherhood managed to establish warm, unaffected friendships.

Accessing the fringe was not easy as apartheid legislation deemed almost all contact between whites and blacks an offence. However, writing about the fringe and introducing fringe-dwellers have allowed Nakasa to expand the fringe, even if just through exposure in magazines and newspapers. In turn, this enabled him to help his audiences "see individuals, human beings with human sentiments and desires" (*Mental corrosion*, story 15), thus "stirring the greatest number of people by offering them a privileged picture of common joys and suffering" (Camus 1957).

5.5.4   Theme 4: A social experiment

The fringe might have provided Nakasa with some sense of belonging, but it is evident in his work that he still struggled to find a meaning for, or understanding of, his personal journey during apartheid. He settled for viewing it as a social experiment (*Johannesburg, Johannesburg*, story 1):

> The most I can do is regard myself as someone who has, unwittingly, volunteered to become the guinea pig in some incredible experiment by a quack scientist … The idea was to regard complications of my relationship with Johannesburg as part of the incredible experiment. That way I could get on with the business of living without getting too depressed.

This deliberate choice relates directly to Sartre's view that you might not always be responsible for the cause of your circumstances nor can you necessarily change these circumstances, but you are always responsible for your attitude towards your circumstances. Nakasa chose, and thereby authenticated, his attitude towards apartheid. In so doing, he also chose "for all men … for in effect, of all the actions a man may take in order to create himself as he wills to be, there is not one which is not creative, at the same time, of an image of man such as he believes he ought to be" (Sartre 1946: 29). This view is especially relevant to journalism, as the journalist purposefully choose on behalf of his readers.

One of his first articles for *Drum*, *Look at what we drink* (story 3, written in 1958), can be interpreted as a metaphor for this view of life during apartheid as a social experiment. In this article, Nakasa calls for the liquor ban to be lifted in order to allow black people to drink "regulated, inspected liquor, in our own homes, in well-ordered pubs". The status quo at that stage, and for many years to come, was "mad drinking habits forced on us by outdated traditions". Nakasa describes some of the liquor as "hideous concoctions … hellified by adding stuff like carbide in mad chemical experiments" served in "joints" described as "urine-pools", "spit-pools" and "gangster dens". Similarly, apartheid could be seen as a "mad chemical experiment", corroding people's minds through "social injustice and spiritual domination" (*Writing in South Africa*, story 74), causing black people to live in sub-human circumstances while yearning, begging and shouting for equality in order to live as functional human beings.

Story 3 also represents the start of his personal journey; a journey that started in Johannesburg in South Africa and ended in Harlem in the United States. The irony is obvious. In one of his first articles, *Look at what we drink* (story 3, written in 1958 for *Drum*), he laments the state of how black people are forced to drink. In one of his final articles, *Mr Nakasa goes to Harlem* (story 73, written in 1965 for *The New York Times*), he goes looking for that same experience that he found so disturbing some seven years earlier:

I had visions of private homes turned into shebeens – illegal drinking clubs. Here I would find the drinking fraternity and be welcomed like a long-missed cousin. But Harlem drinks in night clubs and bars, like the white folk. In Harlem I missed the sense of danger which characterised our drinking sessions, many of which were so rudely interrupted by the Johannesburg police.

Essentially there are three aspects to his personal journey through this social experiment. The first aspect represents the vigour and purpose with which Nakasa approached his life as an outsider, wanderer and interpreter, the second aspect refers to the ever-growing anxiety and despair caused by being a guinea pig in a social experiment and the third aspect relates to Nakasa's efforts towards transcendence, including "his final, devastating act of freedom". As will become evident through this discussion, Nakasa made an effort, both personally and on behalf of his readers, to avoid bad faith and exercise his responsibility to choose.

5.5.4.1 *Outsider, wanderer, interpreter*

Nakasa was the quintessential outsider. His choice to experience his facticity as an experiment in turn allowed him the freedom to experiment. In this sense he had the *freedom* to test the limits of his facticity, but he was also *responsible* for testing these limits on behalf of his readers. Because he was a "native of nowhere" he had, in a metaphysical sense, unfettered access to "everywhere" – the ability to imagine other possibilities, made possible through the existential actions of negation and transcendence. He used his allotted "zone of influence" (Camus 1942: 151) to act as interpreter and mediator between his two audiences. Nakasa refers to this as being "on the spot", a journalistic term for being in the right place at at the right time. He uses South African author Laurens van der Post as example to illustrate this (*On the spot*, story 44):

> Laurens van der Post was on the spot in Japan during the war. Some of his descriptions of that human situation, in and out of jail, made excellent reading. It is good to read some of his insights into the human beings inside the uniforms of seemingly hard, unsympathetic prison warders.

Although access to "everywhere" in a physical sense was limited, Nakasa did test these boundaries as well, including access to the citadel of apartheid – Pretoria (*A visit to Pretoria*, story 20). It could not have been an easy reporting assignment for a black journalist. Nakasa alludes to this quite early in the story when he writes that "the more I tried to make some kind of contact with the city, the more I found it to be utterly impenetrable to me". It was the ultimate white world; a space and place he referred to in *Writing in South Africa* (story 74) as a "closed, hostile world", inaccessible to black people. In Pretoria (story 20), "the Afrikaner people … seem to be more at home than anywhere else

in the country. They seem to walk with a particular kind of dignity, confidence and sense of pride on the pavements of Pretoria." In stark contrast are the black people of Pretoria: "There is a shuffle in their walk and they carry about them an air of uncertainty, even apprehensiveness, as though they are wondering what the next day has in store for them."

In Johannesburg, Nakasa found it somewhat easier to test the physical boundaries imposed upon him. While apartheid legislation imposed upon him the boundary of living outside the city limits in a hostel, here he could choose, instead, to become a "wanderer". And he could get away with it: "For roughly eighteen months, on and off, I wandered about without a fixed home address. I was determined to make the best of it" (*Johannesburg, Johannesburg*, story 1). He used his small amount of liberty in order to exercise his exponentially bigger amount of existential freedom – he chose to live an authentic life. Yet he was still an outsider who depended on friends, both black and white: "Friends who invited me to their flats soon got used to me turning up for a bath in addition to dinner and a drink." At other times, he slept on a desk at the office. While choosing not to have a permanent residence probably made an already difficult life even more difficult, it allowed Nakasa the time and space to expose himself to variety of people and places many of his readers on both sides of the colour bar could never access. As mentioned before, this "closeness" to his subject matter allowed Nakasa to be a more authentic writer.

His decision to become a wanderer inadvertently followed him throughout his life. After accepting an exit permit in order to be allowed to travel to America to take up his scholarship at Harvard University in the Unites States, Nakasa lost his South African citizenship: "Once out I shall apparently become a stateless person, a wanderer, unless I can find a country to take me in" (*A native of nowhere*, story 71, written in 1964 for *Rand Daily Mail*).

Even after securing a visa to enter the United States, Nakasa remained an outsider. It is evident in *Met with smiles and questions* (story 72, written in 1964 for *Rand Daily Mail*) about his first weeks in America, and it became more pronounced in his account of his visit to Harlem (*Mr Nakasa goes to Harlem*, story 73). Initially, Nakasa chose to "correct many impressions about South Africa" but soon realised "that it is hardly my job". The Americans he spoke to could not understand "the circumstances under which I could remain on speaking terms with Afrikaners in view of their attitudes to black men" (story 72). And Harlem, which he likened to Sophiatown based on his reading of Langston Hughes and James Baldwin, turned out to have more in common with South Africa's white suburbs (story 73):

Harlem has a façade of respectability, the kind I associate with white suburbia. Many people here chew cigars, while others read newspapers on the back seats of licensed taxis. I am more accustomed to the overloaded pirate taxis which used to find their way into Johannesburg through devious routes. None of these was driven by whites. Harlem even has its banks in the community, despite all the talk of how rough it is. Now, nobody ever risked opening a bank in Sophiatown or Edenvale. Those were outfits of the more sedate, more secure white world.

In terms of the physical space, Harlem was far removed from Sophiatown, but Nakasa does acknowledge that "a lot of Harlem's battles and preoccupations are no different from mine. The people here are still fighting for a place in the sun, just like me." Yet despite the similarities in terms of metaphysical place, Nakasa struggled to gain access to the heart of Harlem, his struggle reminiscent of his efforts to gain access to Pretoria: "I got the feeling in Harlem that people are not always amused by outsiders coming to write about the community." When he eventually did manage to be invited to a party, Nakasa realised that Harlem was also not the fringe he was part of in South Africa:

A bearded Negro actor – I'll call him Vos … welcomed me into his studio with the warm greetings of a Negro-African brotherhood. Vos answered my questions diligently until I told him I was writing for the *New York Times*. 'Give me that notebook,' he said, suddenly, firmly. 'I don't want to have anything to do with white papers.' … Vos and the others invited me and a friend to a party, adding bitterly, 'But please don't bring any white folks with you.'

Despite the "realignment" of his views of Harlem, Nakasa was not swayed in his duty as a writer. In this article, written for the mainly white audience of the *New York Times*, he addresses the misperceptions of both white and black Americans about Africa by asking readers to imagine the shoe on the other foot:

For years now, white cartoonists have been churning out stereotypes of Africans putting white hunters into black pots and boiling them … I wonder how London or Rome or New York would feel if Africans began producing caricatures, based on true stories, of whites lynching black men or cutting their hands off as was done by the Belgians.

Nakasa was not only a wanderer with no fixed abode and a "native of nowhere" who did not align himself with any one culture or tribe, he was also a mental outsider. In this regard he tried to keep an open mind; he made an effort to understand, not judge, whatever the subject-matter of his writing. Keeping an open mind, however, does not imply not having any views of your own. Nakasa is quite emphatic in this regard:

It is possible to be scared and yet retain one's views. Because of this, people who want me to adopt their ideas simply must first earn my respect. Nothing else can get me to change my thinking … It also applies to people who make laws by force and not majority will, and then try to sell me the story that I would be better off in the Transkei instead of Johannesburg. Nothing but proper argument, rooted firmly in commonsense, would change my mind on this subject (*Living with my private thoughts*, story 63, written in 1964 for *Rand Daily Mail*).

An open mind – a willingness to listen to an argument or idea without necessarily agreeing with it – and a healthy dose of scepticism – an inclination to question accepted opinions or beliefs – are key elements of an analytical ability. As described in chapter 4, placing trust in his or her intuition and analytical abilities is a characteristic of the existential journalist. This analytical ability includes the capacity to self-analyse, or the "power to face unpleasant facts" (Orwell 1946; cf. Muhlmann 2008: 198). In a humorous analysis of his fears (*Living with my private thoughts*, story 63) Nakasa writes about his fear of cats, horses and cattle as well as "tough fellows and fat men". Being physically small in stature (Nakasa likens his physique to that of a body-builder's "before" picture) added to these fears. On a more serious note, he confesses that he is scared of 90-day-detention: "If I were to be locked up for 90 days I would probably have a nervous breakdown from fear more than anything else."

His self-analysis of his somewhat fearful disposition brings Nakasa to new insight; a journey of self-discovery on which he is joined by his readers:

I tell myself that there is nothing bright or intelligent in frightening other fellows. If an ordinary bee can frighten and even kill man with his sting, then surely it is natural to be scared sometimes … Rather than be ashamed of myself, I now tend to lose respect for bullies who frighten me.

When referring to bullies, Nakasa is not only writing about "a hooligan with muscles all over his brain" but about apartheid as well, "laws, backed by force". Beneath the light-hearted and self-deprecating analysis of his physical fears lies a deeper existential anxiety:

I may shut up for some time because of fear. Yet even this will not make me feel ashamed. For I know that as long as the ideas remain unchanged within me, there will always be the possibility that, one day, I shall burst out and say everything I wish to say – in a loud and thunderous voice. And this is true of many people, too.

5.5.4.2 *Anxiety and despair*

The anxiety alluded to in the final paragraph above refers to the ever-present existential struggle between anxiety and authenticity, which Sartre (1946: 35-38) refers to as a "hesitation between morality". The relentless pressure between these two opposites manifests in fear and despair, both feelings that can be related to a specific cause. If that cause is removed the fear or despair will disappear. Anxiety, on the other hand, is the unease that comes from uncertainty. It is a permanent condition which will present itself over and over as each new possibility and its related responsibility presents itself. One hesitates between morality when you are presented with an almost impossible choice: getting rid of anxiety or gaining authenticity.

Nakasa faced a "hesitation between morality" of which he writes in *Oh, to be an anonymous houseboy* (story 65). In this article, his struggle between settling for a comfortable job in the suburbs and fighting for freedom against apartheid becomes clear:

> On my side of the colour line, the easiest thing to do is to sink into despair. This country has laid on all the facilities for that sort of thing. In my case, I could do it by disappearing into oblivion quietly, cheerfully. I could stop writing for newspapers … I'm sure some 'madam' would declare me intelligent and give me one of those incredible 'kitchen boy' suits … I could bathe poodles and take fox terriers for walks in white suburbia. Nobody would know me.

Nakasa goes on to describe a conversation with a "pipe boy" from a mine who "seemed to be at peace with the world" despite the fact that he left his native Mozambique when his daughter was only one month old and despite the fact that he left school before being able to write his own name. "I could become anonymous like this man," writes Nakasa. However, he realises that for him "that would be sinking to the depths of despair". On the other side of this "hesitation between morality" there is the option of doing something about the situation, in this instance by leaving. Nakasa describes how many of his white friends left South Africa:

> Like me today, they felt disillusioned and sick at heart. They were bored with the conversation about apartheid. But being white, they found no difficulty in getting away from it all. The facilities were laid on for them to quit. For me, the facilities laid on are of a different kind. They are designed to lead me into despair. To that extent, the powers that be have won a battle over me.

Nakasa's hesitation between two types of morality – choosing to accept the situation and becoming an anonymous houseboy, thereby relieving the pressure of fighting for freedom or quitting the situation altogether by leaving the country – both ended in despair. However, irrespective of his choice there remains the fact that the choice is solely his responsibility. Even if he was to consult

someone for advice, Sartre (1946: 37) writes that "at the bottom you already knew, more or less, what he [any advisor] would advise. In other words, to choose an adviser is nevertheless to commit oneself by that choice."

While caught in this hesitation between morality, Nakasa also admits to occasions of self-pity. He wrote *Yes, there is too much self-pity* (story 69, written in 1964 for *Rand Daily Mail*) in response to a letter from a reader who, under the pseudonym "Group Loyalty", accused Nakasa of being "overcome by self-pity at being a second-class citizen". Nakasa agrees with the reader, acknowledging that "I do in fact suffer from self-pity. This is a weakness I have constantly tried to escape without, I'm afraid, complete success. It is a weakness that affects a lot of people in situations similar to mine – Negroes, for example, and the rest of the non-white world." Given the circumstances Nakasa and "the rest of the non-white world" were living in, acknowledging self-pity and saying "I am being ill-treated; the world owes me a living" might have been the expected and probably accepted response. Instead Nakasa turns the tables on his critic by complimenting him, agreeing that

> I think there is something wrong with people who spend their time mourning about how they are arrested and jailed for petty offences, instead of doing something about it … I am free to say that civilised men like 'Group Loyalty' would not react with self-pity to some of the laws which this country has passed for Africans – they would do better than that.

Here we see again this call to action that has been mentioned before as part of the other themes discussed, and it crops up with some regularity.

To end off this article, however, Nakasa reacts with his usual humour and a fair amount of sarcasm to Group Loyalty's diagnosis of the cause of Nakasa's self-pity, namely "association with the wrong type of white". Group Loyalty suggests that "if Mr Nakasa took a positive view of the situation, he would move to his tribal area and use his undoubted gifts to uplift his primitive compatriots". Nakasa, after reminding Group Loyalty that Johannesburg would come to a standstill should all black people move to their own areas, then writes:

> However, 'Group Loyalty' will be pleased to hear that, though I have not moved to my own tribal area, I have done something about keeping in touch with the ways of my people. This week, for instance, I was refused a passport to go to take up a scholarship in America. As usual, no reasons were given … While I was self-pitying myself about all this, one of the office drivers came up with the suggestion that I should see an African witchdoctor who would explain it all to me. And that's what I did. In fact, I went to see two witchdoctors.

After a humorous account of his (real or imagined) visit to the witchdoctors, Nakasa ends with the following: "As a solution, the witchdoctor suggested that I slaughter a white goat and things will be fine."

The figurative slaughter of the white goat, however, was a much larger undertaking than the tongue-in-cheek solution of Nakasa's witchdoctor. Yet it was still an undertaking with an end-goal, which separated it from the apparent lack of purpose of human being. In this regard, despair resulted from the possibility that slaughtering the white goat might never happen, and that things will never be fine. However, we have to keep in mind that despair differs from anxiety in that "despair is a feeling, a not a permanent condition" (Camus 1942: 149). It is therefore something that can be analysed, interpreted and addressed, similar to what Nakasa did with his fear. For despair, as a feeling, leads to other feelings, such as bitterness. And bitterness, Nakasa knew, would prevent him from being an authentic writer (*Trying to avoid bitterness*, story 68, written in 1964 for *Rand Daily Mail*):

> If I should leave this country and decide not to come back, it will be because of a desire to avoid perishing in my own bitterness – a bitterness born of being reduced to a second-class citizen. Now I do not wish to despise or hate anyone. For in my business, the writing business, nothing could be more disastrous. I could not write feelingly about anyone if I allowed bitterness to run away with my head. For I want to write about people, not enemies.

While self-awareness and analysis may assist in understanding despair and its cause it will not necessarily remove it. At times despair threatened to overwhelm Nakasa:

> The business of expecting war each time I go to buy a stamp has ceased to be a game. There are too many moments when I feel like giving in and letting this country go the way of its choice. It is during such moments that bitterness threatens to swallow me and I lie awake considering the possibility of leaving for good.

"… leaving for good". The logical conclusion is that Nakasa is referring to leaving South Africa permanently as part of the stipulations of the exit permit. At this stage, most of his friends and *Drum* colleagues were already out of the country, living in exile. However, with the assistance of hindsight and given the circumstances of his death about a year after writing *Trying to avoid bitterness*, the possibility of Nakasa having considered suicide before even leaving for America cannot be negated completely. In the months and weeks leading up to his death, Nakasa in all probability did consider "the possibility of leaving for good".

The only way to conquer despair, writes Sartre (1946: 39-41), is found in the definition of despair:

As for 'despair', the meaning of this expression is extremely simple. It merely means that we limit ourselves to a reliance upon that which is within our wills, or within the sum of the probabilities which render our action feasible … When Descartes said, 'Conquer yourself rather than the world,' what he meant was, at bottom, the same – that we should act without hope … First I ought to commit myself and then act my commitment, according to the time-honoured formula that 'one need not hope in order to undertake one's world.'

"Acting without hope" therefore implies choosing a probability of which we *do not* "render our action feasible", or acting *outside* of our "wills", or that which we deem achievable. Simply put, despair is the complete absence of hope, and the only way to conquer that despair is to act in spite of not having hope, i.e. "acting without hope". It means deliberately choosing that which appears hopeless. Camus (1942: 151-152) underlines this responsibility in his *Letter to a man in despair*: "Understand this: we can despair of the meaning of life in general, but not of the particular forms that it takes; we can despair of existence, for we have no power over it, but not of history, where the individual can do everything." Camus, similar to Sartre, confirms that the individual is ultimately responsible for his circumstances (the "particular form" of his life).

Nakasa's writing bears evidence of his struggle in this regard. While agonising over whether he should accept an exit permit and take up his scholarship, or stay in South Africa and accept the possibility of never again being allowed to leave, Nakasa entertained the possibility that he might not like – or survive – life in exile (*Castles in the air*, story 70):

> Life abroad lacks the challenge that faces us in South Africa. After a lifetime of illegal living in the Republic's shebeens, the exiles are suddenly called upon to become respectable, law-abiding citizens. Not a law to break in sight. For my part, it would be an act of providence if I survived under such circumstances. I have broken too many curfew laws and permit regulations to change so easily. Even if I did change, I would miss the experience of illegal living.

As with his words in *Trying to avoid bitterness* (story 68), namely "considering the possibility of leaving for good", his statement in *Castles in the air* (story 70) now seems prophetic: "…it would be an act of providence if I survived under such circumstances". But here we also see what could be evidence of efforts on Nakasa's part to conquer his despair in a Sartrean manner: If he considered the possibility that living in exile might kill him, leaving the country becomes an "action without hope", or choosing that which appears hopeless.

In the same vein, one can argue that despair eventually had the upper hand. Nakasa committed suicide after realising that life in America took away that which probably made him the happiest – the challenges and the thrill of his life on the fringe in South Africa. What he feared became his reality: He was forced to be a law-abiding citizen, he found only limited favour with his American counterparts and what could have been "home", namely Harlem, turned out to be a "closed, hostile world" similar to white South Africa. He was still a "native of nowhere".

The challenge here is to decide whether Nakasa's action to take his own life was an action *with* hope or an action *without* hope. Zaretsky (2013: 25), in reference to Camus' Meursault, writes that "with life yoked so tightly to the present that no space remains for what precedes or follows, nothing changes". If we take into account that temporality requires awareness of past, present and future, it means that any circumstances which rob someone of their ability to keep sight of both past and future also rob them of their ability to transcend these circumstances, as transcendence requires temporality. Nakasa was therefore caught in a situation where no action could be rendered feasible. He thus chose an unfeasible action – and therefore acted without hope – to take his own life, and in so doing chose to conquer despair. Sartre writes about "undertaking one's world", or our responsibility to continue to make choices, and that we do not need hope in order to do this. Nakasa, in choosing to commit suicide, continued to make choices, and therefore continued to "undertake his world" one final time, which clearly makes it an act without hope and at the same time the ultimate nothingness, the ultimate project and the ultimate transcendence.

5.5.4.3 *Transcendence*

A final aspect of Nakasa's personal journey as a main theme in his writing is that of transcendence and the accompanying act of negation. While especially theme six provides evidence of Nakasa engaging in negation on behalf of his readers, there is evidence of negation and transcendence as it pertains to his own life as well.

Transcendence, as described in chapter 3, can take two forms: transcendence of your physical circumstances or transcendence of your attitude towards your physical circumstances. Nakasa's writing provides evidence of both in regard of his personal journey. Mention of some of these have already been made. In terms of transcendence of his attitude towards his personal circumstances, two are of particular significance. The first significant transcendence is Nakasa's decision to regard his experience of apartheid as being part of an experiment, as already discussed. The second is his decision not to hate, evidence of which is found in *Trying to avoid bitterness* (story 68, written in 1964 for *Rand Daily Mail*): "Now I do not wish to despise or hate anyone. For in my business, the

writing business, nothing could be more disastrous. I could not write feelingly about anyone if I allowed bitterness to run away with my head. For I want to write about people, not enemies." This was also discussed in the previous section on anxiety and despair as an aspect of Nakasa's personal journey.

Both these instances are significant as a direct influence in terms of his facticity (his physical circumstances) and decisions made in effort to transcendence this facticity. Choosing to view his circumstances as an experiment has allowed Nakasa to become a wanderer, which in turn provided him with an outsider's perspective on both the white and the black worlds of apartheid South Africa. One could then argue that his "outsider's exposure" has allowed him to see black and white South Africans as individuals, which in turn allowed him to choose not to hate. This attitude is a contributing factor to Nakasa's ability to adhere to the duty of the writer to understand, not judge. Reference has already been made of a number of instances where Nakasa demonstrated this ability. In *Breaking down the old Superman image* (story 64) it becomes clear how the above-mentioned efforts towards transcendence has allowed Nakasa to develop a more realistic view of white people as individuals instead of "the white man" as a faceless group. He starts out by explaining how his school days were spent earning money by doing garden work for white families in Durban and carrying washing for flat-dwellers:

> It was in those days that I came face-to-face with the material and social superiority of what I knew superficially as "the white man". The white man I knew then was something of a Superman. Telephones, ships and aeroplanes were known to me as 'the white man's magic'. Everybody around me seemed to share this image of whites … There was no end to the white man's wisdom.

A consequence of this view was that Nakasa "together with many of my contemporaries … learned to despise blackness and look up to those who were white". However, over time this view changed and in his analysis of the reasons as to why this happened, Nakasa highlights two points. The first is that "I can no longer really speak of 'the white man'. I have come to know a lot of people who are white; I know them as friends or strangers, mothers and sons. To speak of the white man today means less than little to me." Exposure, through his wanderings, outsider's perspective and keeping an open mind, has allowed Nakasa to form a more realistic view of white people. The second point, which in turned allowed him to change his opinion on blackness as something to despise, comes from exposure to black people who are successful individuals in a manner similar to "the white man":

> For some of us, it began when Joe Louis knocked out Max Schmelling in the late 'thirties. In one blow, Joe Louis proved that the black man can also make the grade if allowed to compete

on the basis of fair play. So did Louis Armstrong and Nat King Cole. Not very far from the borders of our Republic, dozens of African countries have emerged as independent states. Admittedly, they are weak and even clumsily governed in many cases. But they are also training pilots, scientists and engineers.

In this regard, Nakasa, through his work as a journalist, also met a number of black people within the borders of South Africa who have transcended the generally accepted image of "the black man". His writing includes numerous examples in the form of profiles of black people both prominent and lesser known. Given his explanation in *Breaking down the old Superman image* (story 64) that exposure to white individuals have taught him to see the person and not their skin colour, it stands to reason that meeting and interviewing successful black people would have had the same effect. The range of profiles included in the sample for this study stretches from local township legends to royals from neighbouring Lesotho and even Nelson Mandela and his then-wife, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

In *The team that came from nowhere* (story16, written in 1961 for *Drum*) Nakasa writes about the rise of the Moroka Swallows soccer team. Not only does he tell the team's story, but the article is also an example of transcendence. The team members grew up in "slummy Moroka Township" and "they'd turn out against any team that wanted a game – even if they had to play in bare feet". However, they persisted and eventually, over the course of some 15 years, Moroka Swallows were playing big clubs from all over the country, with some team members offered contracts with professional soccer clubs in Europe. Nakasa then provides a kicker close to the article: "Who trains the Swallows? 'Nobody,' says their secretary. 'We manage without a coach.'"

Two other characters who also transcended their circumstances were private detective Edward Majola and pennywhistle musician Spokes Mashiane. Majola (*Eye behind the bed post*, story 48) not only knew all the secrets of Johannesburg, but also investigated, together with white colleagues, incidents across South Africa's borders, including arson cases in the forestry industry in neighbouring Swaziland. His clients were black and white, and from all walks of life. Nakasa tracks Majola's career, which started as a mine detective, and provides evidence of negation and transcendence in Majola's dream "to have his own private detective agency".

Mashiane (*The magic piper*, story 49) also overcame dire circumstances, leaving home as a young boy "with nothing but a pennywhistle that produced cheerless, slum noises that nobody cared for. Back home everybody mourned him like he was dead. They saw in him a lost child with the darkest, bleakest future ahead." However, Mashiane managed to transcend his facticity, "floating on a flood

of international fame, much to the surprise of his family. His pennywhistle rings in high-society parties in some of the country's big towns, and plenty of his discs are the craze of London and other overseas cities." While detective Majola's story is one of the few articles in the sample that makes no mention of the facticity of apartheid life, Mashiane told Nakasa how he had to navigate the intricacies of the Group Areas Act and other apartheid laws. Mashiane actively avoided "mixed shindigs with white kids as it might land him in a political pot, 'and that is not in my line.'"

Nakasa was also exposed to black people from neighbouring African countries where apartheid had far less influence. In Lesotho, he covered the wedding of Princess Masentla Mojela and Prince Bereng of Basutoland (*The Number One Bachelor and his bride-to-be*, story 54, written in 1962 for *Drum*). Both Princess Masentla and Prince Bereng studied in England and their wedding was attended by several international dignitaries, including ambassadors from France and America. While in Lesotho for the royal wedding, Nakasa also interviewed the then Paramount Chieftainess of the Mountain Kingdom, Emelia Ma-Ntsebo Seeiso (*Granny who ruled a nation*, story 55, written in 1962 for *Drum*). Ma-Ntsebo was a modest woman who believed in hard work, forcing even *Drum* photographer Peter Magubane, who accompanied Nakasa, to help her with gardening before agreeing to be interviewed. Nakasa remarks that "Ma-Ntsebo despises all men who do not like hard work":

> During her days as Chieftainess, Ma-Ntsebo made her advisers – fat Basuto chiefs – work in her garden before settling down to the business of the nation. 'Once she even refused to give me meat,' heavyweight Chief Samuel Matete told me with a sad shake of his head, 'all because I wouldn't work in her garden.'

In the face of often stinging criticism ("What could an illiterate woman do for us?"), Ma-Ntsebo went about her duties, meeting, amongst others, the British Royal Family and the Pope. Nakasa came across a similar work ethos in his interview with Madie-Hall Xuma, the African-American wife of former ANC president AB Xuma. Soon after arriving in South Africa, "Mummy", as she was affectionately known, "made up her mind to do something about the local women – 'something to encourage them to stand on their own feet instead of depending on other people too much'" (*'Mummy' goes home – but her job's not done*, story 58). Nakasa interviewed her just before she left South Africa to go back to the United States after her husband's death:

> As I left her, standing grey-haired and matronly I realised that, that was what she was – 'Mummy' to the new type of woman we are seeing in our townships now; 'Mummy' to the smart social workers and new feminine intelligentsia, who will take over the leadership from her.

One of these social workers was Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, wife of Nelson Mandela (*My Man by Winnie Mandela*, story 61) of whom Nakasa writes that "it seems nothing can kill her smile". She told Nakasa about her life as public figure, how police are "like members of my family now" and how her daughters adapted to life with their father facing charges of high treason: "It's amazing how the children have adapted themselves to the idea of leading a daddyless life with policemen milling about in the house … They now regard it as the normal thing." About Mandela, known as the "Black Pimpernel", Nakasa writes how he, despite members of the police's Special Branch following him around, attended illegal conventions of the ANC (*The Black Pimpernel*, story 62). Despite his national and international fame, Nakasa also recounts how Mandela, by then "the most sought-after man" in South Africa, was actually stopped at a road block but "was released because the police officer on duty did not know who he was".

A final reference to transcendence, of particular relevance to Nakasa's personal journey, is found in one of his earliest stories, *The life and death of King Kong* (story 50, written in 1959 for *Drum*). It tells the story of boxer Ezekiel "King Kong" Dhlamini, who left school at age 14 and went to work "herding a white family's milk cow and keeping their little garden in a lookable condition" in order to escape "his father's whip in the family fields". King Kong eventually made his way to Johannesburg, where he was introduced to boxing while hanging around the Johannesburg Bantu Men's Social Centre. While shooting to fame as an amateur boxer, stubborn King Kong also kept a side-line of illegal bare-fisted fights going. This eventually led to his downfall as a boxer, forcing him to become a bouncer at "gangster-infested dance halls". One night, he stabbed to death his girlfriend after suspecting her of being unfaithful. Nakasa describes the ensuring stand-off with the police as follows:

> The police came to find the giant standing in the hall, a knife in his hand. 'Drop the knife,' the police ordered. King refused. They warned that they would take action if he did not drop the knife. King still said 'No'. With the hall all tensed up, the police opened fire on King Marshal. Three bullets went through his body and hit two policemen behind him. Everybody thought his end had come – but the King lived on.

King Kong was sentenced to 12 years in prison. Of the trial, Nakasa writes: "Even the trial of King Kong was not to be without its touch of the fantastic: he begged the judge to give him a death sentence instead of jail." While life in prison was not a problem for King Kong due to his intimidating size, "it was the dull, disciplined life of jail he must have hated". This is why he begged for a death sentence, and why he "threw himself into a dam rather than face the grey sameness of prison life". Of King Kong's suicide, Nakasa writes: "The King had himself granted his death plea to the judge."

Nakasa and King Kong are exact opposites: King Kong a physically intimidating, brawny boxer who lived on a diet of violence; Nakasa a physically small, brainy writer who abhorred violence. Yet underneath these obvious differences there are some similarities to their personal journeys: Both of them followed a lesser travelled road for black people of their generation, one becoming a renowned boxer, the other a journalist who was awarded an international scholarship. And both, at the end of their lives, found themselves in circumstances to which they could not adapt. While King Kong had to fit in with the discipline of prison, Nakasa had to adapt to being a law-abiding citizen in a country where his life was not characterised by a daily struggle for survival. It was the "grey sameness" and the lack of challenges that brought both King Kong and Nat Nakasa before the ultimate existential choice. Both chose to transcend their facticity one final time.

5.5.5   Theme 5: Tiny subversive acts

Before despair set in and he could no longer pretend that he was part of an experiment, Nakasa's life was a series of what Brown (2013a: 39-40) refers to as "tiny subversive acts". His writing in this regard is also characterised by humorous and tongue-in-cheek descriptions. Nakasa, Lewis Nkosi and a number of other *Drum* writers were often involved in pranks or incidents where they pushed against the boundaries of their facticity. Many of these they wrote about in a manner that creates the idea that they were entertaining themselves at the expense of apartheid.

These tiny subversive acts relate to the existential concepts of authenticity and freedom and responsibility. Through these subversive, often humorous acts, the *Drum* writers found at least one way to *determine* their existence irrespective of their circumstances. Nakasa (in *Johannesburg, Johannesburg*, story 1) writes about the time he went with a friend to a white coffee bar called The Texan, run by an American from Texas. He had the American flag in the bar as well as a portrait of President Eisenhower, wearing his famous grin. Nakasa and his friend sat down at the counter and ordered two coffees. While the proprietor's son went to fetch their order, they started talking loudly about a portrait of American President Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower:

> By the time the Texan's son brought our coffee, his father was embroiled in violent argument with us, all about Ike. The Texan confessed that he didn't know much about politics but he knew a man of God when he saw one. The argument was still raging when we finished drinking the coffee and left. Nobody seemed to remember the colour bar.

Sometimes these actions were the result of another South African unexpectedly flouting the colour bar. In *Shopping can be a bruising business* (story 6), Nakasa writes about shopping for clothes at a

Johannesburg department store. He explains that he usually avoids shopping as "most of the time it makes me feel like a Negro student braving fire hoses and public opinion to enrol at an all-white university". However, at this store he was "promptly treated to what must surely be the best service Johannesburg can offer". The white shop assistant did not bat an eye when Nakasa requested to fit some pants – "a short while later the man was holding jackets for me to try on … Then, while the assistant prepared the receipt, I decided to press my luck a little and went to sit on one of the four or five expensive chairs provided for customers. But even this did not ruffle the man's politeness."

As explained earlier, transcendence rests on temporality. We can only move forward if we hold information regarding the past, present and future. In this case, Nakasa's decision to sit on a chair in the store is related to an experience from his childhood: "Always, at the back of my mind, is the memory of my father warning me 'never to do that again' when, as a child, I sat on a stool in the restaurant of a department store". While his account of a seemingly trivial incident might appear to be insignificant and merely part of a humorous piece about a shopping trip, the underlying meaning that could be attached to this is another illustration of Sartre's statement that our freedom sometimes lie in the smallest amount of space around us and what we do with that.

Of course not all business people who demanded their staff to treat all customers with equal dignity did this because of an inherent desire to enact positive social change. Some were in it for the money, like the white garage owner where Nakasa went to buy a new tyre for his car (*Something unusual*, story 41):

> [The owner] called to his African assistant: 'George, please go with this boss to his car and bring his old tyre from the boot.' I looked around to see if a white customer had perhaps appeared behind me. There was nobody else in the place. This was it! For once in my life, I was being elevated to the status of a boss. I heard later that this garage is doing a roaring business with Africans, especially taxi-drivers, who call regularly for their soothing ration of 'sir' and 'boss'.

It weren't just the *Drum* writers who exercised their existential responsibility to choose whenever the opportunity arose. *Are you bilingual?* (story 43) is the story about a "very fair coloured girl … so fair that everyone mistook her for white". Eventually, when applying for jobs and asked whether she was bilingual, she simply answered "yes" and invariably got the job: "Little did her employers know that when Mary said 'yes' she meant she spoke English and Zulu, the latter being her mother tongue. She knew no Afrikaans."

Another township "game" developed as a result of the forced removal of families from their homes. After a white family moved into the house of former ANC President AB Xuma, some Sophiatown youngsters chose to assert themselves:

> To the embarrassment of the new tenants, these youngsters often came to the house at the oddest hours of the day. 'We've come to see our uncle, Dr Xuma,' they announced. Others presented themselves as patients – 'We've come to see the doctor, please.' The news of this game became entertainment material for many social gatherings in the African townships.

Apart from treating his life under apartheid as a social experiment, Nakasa seems to have found some solace in the humorous side of life in a segregated society: "I shudder to think what would happen to us if apartheid did not have some comical aspects to it," he writes in *Are you bilingual?* His tongue-in-cheek comments regarding the South African police is in a similar vein (*They're down to earth*, story 45). Here he writes about British police officers' use of Her Majesty's English to the extent that no one understands them:

> Give me the South African Police any day. They're down to earth in everything they do. If you swear in the street you are likely to be charged with using 'obscene language – *aanstootlike taal*.' No nonsense. If you make a noise in a police station, you are likely to be told, 'Shut up man – *hou jou bek jong!*'

As part of the discussion of theme three (The fringe), mention was made of Camus' suggestion that "there is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn" (in Wartenberg 2008). This attitude is found in Nakasa's writing in, for example, *Kissing a banned girl may be ...?* (story 46), which explains the new "status symbols" of township life. These include:

> * If you were 'in' during the State of Emergency you are sure to get a free drink from the boys in a shebeen.
> * If you are back from 90-day detention, you can hold the floor for hours without interruption from respectful audiences all over Soweto.
> * If you know a friend of a friend of a banned man, you aren't doing badly.
> * If you are actually banned yourself it becomes your privilege to jump into your neighbour's car and order him to rush you to the police station whenever you are late for reporting at the specified time.

In *Writing in South Africa* (story 74), Nakasa remarks that "it is by sharpening his wits instead of resigning himself to dumb humility that the African has learned to live with his predicament." Combined with theme three (The fringe) and theme four (Social experiment) this theme serves as

evidence for efforts towards authenticity by exercising existential freedom. In all the examples cited above, the participants chose to determine their lives, even if it was in the smallest way possible. Nakasa refers to these as "moments of life" – little chunks of time during which life was not outside of the normal human experience. In *Snatching at the good life* (story 11), Nakasa describes these moments in Soweto, a township resented by most of its residents due to being forced to live in a place that looks "like an emergency camp". On behalf of his readers, Nakasa, who lived primarily in Sophiatown, turned his outsider's gaze to Soweto, and found these "moments of life":

> Yet, in spite of all this, Soweto lives. It lives precariously, sometimes dangerously, but with relentless will to survive and make the best of what I think is an impossible job. Soweto lives fitfully, mainly at the weekend, but it also lives for a few hours during the week … For this is the way of things in Soweto; a pattern of uneventful, austere living occasionally interrupted by 'great moments'.

He writes of "the number of large American cars which never fails to amaze outsiders". Most of these cars weren't in working order, but served another purpose: "The man of the house is able to say, 'You can't miss my place, there's a black Chev in the yard.'" Other people would use an entire week's pay to treat their friends at a shebeen: "'Fill the table and count the empties,' he would say to the shebeen queen. The idea seems to be to live well while you can and face the troubles of tomorrow when they come." Nakasa also writes about "girls … who begin to live when they get into their Sunday best and got to a wedding". Even spending too much money on a black shawl for a celebrity's funeral allowed someone a small window of opportunity to be just a normal person: "People live haphazardly, in snatches of a life they can never afford to lead for long, let alone for ever." A number of these acts can also qualify as "actions without hope", those hopeless choices that, even just for a while, lifts the maker of the decision out of despair. They were "raging against the dying of the light" (Thomas 1951).

5.5.6   Theme 6: Towards a common experience

One of the duties of the writer put forward by Orwell (1946) is political purpose, or "the desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after". For Nakasa, this desire was a "common experience" – a non-racial society where it is not "abnormal and insane" (story 2) to treat a person from another race as an equal. This message is intertwined through all the themes identified in this thesis. In fact, most of the other themes act as building blocks to enable Nakasa to present his view of a common experience. In order to show his audience one possible future, he first has to show them the present. Themes one to five serve this purpose by providing a description of the facticity of South Africans, both black and white, from

1958-1965. As we know from existentialism, transcendence is only possible through temporality. Change is only possible if you know what you are changing from, i.e. a contrast is necessary in order to determine what a possible future could look like compared to the present and the past. In a broader sense, the existential themes in Nakasa's work therefore also serve as evidence of temporality, with Nakasa building his vision of the future (what we can be) on the facticity of the present (what we are). To do this requires the existential action of negation – the ability to *imagine* a future.

5.5.6.1 *Shared nationhood*

Theme six presents this imagined or possible future as described by Nakasa. His vision of a common experience for all South Africans is based on his personal journey as a "native of nowhere", or his quest to determine his own identity. By taking his readers along on his personal journey, he creates an opportunity for them to challenge their own perceptions of who they are. *It's difficult to decide my identity* (story 67, written in 1964 for *Rand Daily Mail*) is perhaps the best summary of his struggle: "To my mind, the importance of this discussion is that all the questions asked relate to the question of my identity. Who am I? Where do I belong in the South African scheme of things? Who are my people?" As part of his journey of self-analysis, Nakasa looks at possible identities available to him. He was born a Pondo, "but I don't even know the language of that tribe". His mother was a Zulu, but "I can nog longer think in Zulu because that language cannot cope with the demands of our day". He is not a rural tribesman, but a city-dweller. Even in the broader scheme of things, an identity remains elusive:

> I'm not even sure that I could claim to be African. For if I were, then I should surely share my identity with West Africans and other Africans in Kenya or Tanganyika. Yet it happens to be true that I am more at home with an Afrikaner than with a West African. Some of my friends who have been abroad say they got on best with Afrikaners they met in Europe instead of Englishmen or West Africans.

Equally difficult for Nakasa is determining who qualifies as African. In *Writing in South Africa* (story 74) he considers this problem after finding an agent in New York to distribute *The Classic*. The agent told him that "almost anything African sells like hot cakes here". Nakasa is then faced with this conundrum:

> I knew that some of the white writers who have offered their contributions already regard themselves as Africans, white Africans. Would I then write to New York and say the magazine is to carry the work of the black and white Africans? How would that affect their image of the African? What assurance could I have that white Africans would also sell like hot cakes?

While he writes that "to this day my minds remains clear on this", he is also critical of white South Africans who considered themselves European: "That is as silly as this business of South African whites who insist that they are Europeans. Some of them have never set foot in Europe. Nor did their grandfathers" (*It's difficult to decide my identity*, story 67).

The quest for an identity is a core aspect of a common experience as this experience has to be built around a common identity. In this regard, Nakasa believes that it is possible for a person to associate with more than one identity:

> It is the general idea of a shared nationhood, the idea of a common experience which I want to focus attention upon. I believe it is important for our writers to illuminate all aspects of our life from a central point in the social structure. That is, whatever their colour or views may be, they must accept their presence in the country as members of one community, the South African community. After that they can choose to be what they wish (*Writing in South Africa*, story 74).

He reiterates this idea later in the same article in reference to Gordimer's novel *World of strangers*:

> This book may very well be part of the beginning of a vital mutual recognition of the reality of our time in South Africa. That although conflict exists on many levels between black and white, we are a single community with a common destiny and, therefore, requiring common ideals, moral values, and common national aspirations.

For Nakasa it is important to identify as a South African first, irrespective of tribal, racial or cultural identifications. It is his support of a type of unified multi-racialism that prompted Gordimer (in Roberts 2005) to describe Nakasa as a "racial visionary". As was mentioned in chapter 1, South African poet Mongane Wally Serote (in Groenewald 1999) called Nakasa the original "Rainbow Man" while Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu (in Mahala 2014) described him as "a rainbow man when the rainbow was not allowed". Nakasa's belief in non-racialism sets him apart from many of his contemporaries and anti-apartheid activists such as Steven Biko, who promoted Black Consciousness, "a brand of blackmanship" which Nakasa found in Harlem and which he describes as an aspect of Harlem's many faces that "left me a little frightened" (*Mr Nakasa goes to Harlem*, story 73). Although he describes this "resilient, unapologising blackmanship" as "not all negative", he was surprised at the fact that many of the people he met in Harlem did not want anything to do with white people. This was mentioned earlier as part of the discussion on Nakasa as an outsider.

It is important to mention here that the purpose of this discussion is not to compare, for example, Nakasa's and Biko's stances but rather to discuss Nakasa's stance. One is not necessarily better than the other, nor can the different approaches necessarily exist without elements of the other. The relevant difference here is that Nakasa advocated a message that focused on being a South African first, while Biko advocated a message that focused on being black first. And even this distinction is not as clear-cut as it might appear. What is clear, though, is that Nakasa took a moderate stance towards racialism in the sense that he believed it should not be the primary defining characteristic of a South African. Referring back to the "bearded Negro actor" whom Nakasa called Vos (*Mr Nakasa goes to Harlem*, story 73), he writes:

> I got the impression that Vos belonged to a new world in Harlem, the world beyond Malcolm X, if such a thing is possible. For Malcolm now stands for brotherhood to those who offer friendship, and enmity to those who threaten the black man's cause. He has conceded, time and again, publicly, that not all whites are the same. But Vos and his fellow nationalists want no truck with whites, however good they may be.

Nakasa's vision of a common experience is in essence the formalisation of the fringe, the space and place he chose to live in during apartheid. "The fact of being born into a tribe, be it Afrikaner or African, does not matter on the fringe. These people who are neither proud nor ashamed of it, are the emergent group in South Africa," he writes in *Between two worlds* (story 2). It is here, in the space between two worlds, that Nakasa found the elements necessary to build a "new South Africa".

In terms of the phrase "new South Africa", the following: Although no evidence could be found as to the origin of this phrase, it is important to note that Nakasa used this phrase in 1961, more than 30 years before this term was actively employed as part of the build-up to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994. Nakasa's version of a "new South Africa" was a non-racial society and it is also important to note that more or less this version is the possibility that was eventually realised through the Constitution of South Africa. As was mentioned in chapter 1, former colleague Joe Thloloe (in Mahala 2014) is of the opinion that "Nat was ahead of his time, believing in the ideals that we now espouse, a non-racial, non-sexist democratic South Africa in which all are equal before the law."

Nakasa not only introduces his readers to the idea of a common experience and the common identity needed as foundation, he also provides clues as to what this new shared social space should look like. For Nakasa, it is not simply a matter of the white world becoming the new shared world. He refers to this in *And so the shebeen lives on …* (story 4):

> It is a mistake to think all these years non-whites have been dreaming about the day they would be allowed to graduate to the status of the white drinker and be welcomed into the lounge. Instead, a different way of drinking has evolved and it cannot suddenly disappear from the face of the Earth.

Similar to how a combination of Western and traditional African approaches have combined to allow a "different way of drinking" to evolve, Nakasa wanted South Africa, through the combined elements of its history, to evolve into a "different", "new" South Africa. The foundation of this new common experience could not be the history of just one group (*It's difficult to decide my identity*, story 67):

> The Africa of today is simply not the product of *assegais* and rain queens. Johannesburg was built by the white technical know-how and enterprise plus the indispensable co-operation of black labour. To that extent, this city will never be black or white. Black men cannot look at the tall buildings of Johannesburg and say 'this is ours' without being fraudulent. Nor can the whites. If I am right, therein lies my identity. I am a South African … 'My people' are South Africans. Mine is the history of the Great Trek, Gandhi's passive resistance in Johannesburg, the wars of Cetewayo and the dawn raids which gave us the treason trials in 1956. All these are South African things. They are part of me.

Nakasa, as part of his duty as a writer, guides his readers towards his ideal of "a single community with a common destiny and, therefore, requiring common ideals, moral values, and common national aspirations" (*Writing in South Africa*, story 74) through two actions, namely education and exposure to the Other.

5.5.6.2 *Education and exposure to the Other*

In terms of education, Nakasa's writing serves two purposes. The first is that he mentions formal education or the value of education in 18 of the 75 stories in the sample. These references are some just in passing, while others are more in-depth. The second purpose is more indirect, with Nakasa writing serving as a form of education on various topics. It could be seen as a "practice what you preach" approach. For example, in almost all the profiles of successful black people, discussed earlier, reference is made to their education. These include Winnie Madikizela, a trained social worker who, during her spare time, "studied for a social science degree with the University of South Africa" (story 61) and Nelson Mandela, a lawyer and "and Arts graduate of Fort Hare" (story 62), as well as the royals from Lesotho (story 54), who were both educated in England. The value of education for any subject is even underlined in more humorous, off-hand remarks, for instance his profile of Peter Makhubo, a well-known bouncer as various clubs in Johannesburg includes this biographical detail:

"He is one of the few men I know who have made a special study of love. He took 37 courses on love when he was in Egypt during the war" (*The bouncer*, story 47).

However, it is in his reference to the consequences of a lack of education that Nakasa manages to underscores the real value of education, both formal and in terms of life. One example that has already been mentioned is the "pipe boy" from Mozambique (*Oh, to be an anonymous houseboy!*, story 65). This man left school before he could write his name and Nakasa uses him as an example of not only black mental corrosion, but also of how mental corrosion is so much more effective when people are uneducated. Soon after arriving in the Unites States, Nakasa met South African singer Miriam Makeba's daughter, who told Nakasa about her longing for home (*Met with smiles and questions*, story 72, written in 1964 for *Rand Daily Mail*):

> I wonder if she knew that Bantu Education would have taught her how to weave grass mats instead of learning about the 20th century. She might have grown up into another washerwoman. 'I'm going to be a lawyer,' she said, and I knew there was nothing to stop her.

Apartheid's policies made it not only close to impossible for black people to obtain an education, but for those who had a proper education it was often a burden (*The hazards of too much education*, story 36, written in 1964 for *Rand Daily Mail*):

> Many of us on this side of the colour line know that education is a useful thing. We also know that to be educated can become a liability if you are black in South Africa. For there is a growing number of us whose education has become the cause of constant frustration.

On the one hand, educated black people found it difficult to obtain jobs as "their blackness creates problems which few employers are willing to put up with". On the other hand, should they settle for the "employment normally set aside for blacks", they were subject to the constant frustration that would accompany the life of "a trained psychologist … stamping passes in a Bantu Affairs office". A friend who had, amongst others, a Master's degree in psychology told Nakasa that "in spite of his degrees, he earned less than some white tram drivers" and that his appointments were always just "permanently temporary". On two occasions when his employers wanted to send him overseas on business he was denied a passport. The explanation from the Ministry of the Interior was that "we do not want our educated Bantus to leave the country". Nakasa writes that he wryly told his friend "he should never have allowed himself to become so highly educated". With his customary wit Nakasa writes: "Without all these degrees he could skip quietly into a pass office job and have himself a ball stamping reference books."

While these references mostly refer to education in the sense of formal schooling the powerful effect of education as enlightenment is also demonstrated. This power can be positive or negative. Mention of Bantu Education has already been made. Another example, this time focusing on the effect of the South African education system of the era on white people, is found in *Between two worlds* (story 2):

> An advocate spoke of his early days in the Orange Free State. 'I grew up with African boys and girls,' he says. 'But when I went to boarding school, there were only white children around me. So that when I came back home I couldn't even shake the hands of my childhood playmates. I had been taught it was wrong. I had been ordered to live by the values of separation.'

Education is similar to journalism in the sense that it discloses information to the recipient – it makes aware and, once aware, makes change possible. Nakasa's references to education and efforts to educate should be seen in the broader sense of awareness of a person's own and others' reality and exposure to people, especially the Other, as individuals. Evidence of exposure to the Other has already been pointed out in themes one to five. Especially theme two (Living outside of the normal human experience) serves this purpose, exposing Nakasa's audience to the living conditions and circumstances of black people during apartheid. By giving a face to a story those who are strangers to us can be separated from a mass of faces into individuals with hopes and dreams, and also worries and despair.

The consequences of a lack of exposure to the Other is highlighted by Nakasa in *Writing in South Africa* (story 74). On the topic of Sarah Gertrude Millin's novel *God's Step Children*, Nakasa writes about Millin's portrayal of the mixed-race children of a white reverend and his coloured wife. "Her point," he writes, "runs through the story like a sermon decrying the evils of mixed-blood unions." Millin writes about the guilt that the reverend's children carry with them and which force one of them to abandon his own mixed-race child in order to punish himself for his sins. Nakasa comes to the following conclusion:

> This is the sort of thing which, I think, only estrangement can make possible. Nobody who has known well those of our community who are Coloured could be responsible for such a misleading portrayal. Having read Mrs Millin's book I was left with the feeling that, if she had been close to Coloureds at all, then she failed to see the human beings beneath the skin … What is worse is that she attempts to leave the reader with the feeling that this is the Coloured man's view of himself. Not just her caricature.

Through educating his audience on the Other – the lives of those different from us – Nakasa attempted to erase the mental corrosion that beset so many South Africans. Because he knew that only by getting people to "stop and think" would he be able to introduce to them a new call to action, in his case a common experience.

5.5.7 Theme 7: The duty of the writer

Theme seven addresses the duty of the existential writer (see table 5 in chapter 4). As explained at the outset of the interpretation of the results, some aspects of this theme are discussed as part of the other six themes as these aspects pertain to how Nakasa exercised his responsibility as a journalist in the various instances under discussion. As a result, only some final general points will be included as part of this discussion.

As indicated throughout the previous discussions, there are substantial evidence of Nakasa exercising his duty as an existential writer. These include entering into a dialectical relationship with his reader, presenting his reader with a call to action and thereby placing an urgent demand on these readers, helping his readers to navigate a new shared social space, acting as an interpreter and mediator, stirring the greatest number of people by offering them a privileged picture of common joys and suffering and serving those who suffer history. Evidence was also presented of Nakasa being aware of bias and making effort to understand, not judge and being socially responsible.

The incidences of Nakasa exercising his responsibility as a journalist that were discussed as part of themes one to six all represent Nakasa practising as a journalist. However, in *Writing in South Africa* (story 74) he also writes about writing. This article, originally a speech delivered by Nakasa at the University of the Witwatersrand, was later published in *The Classic*. Given the evidence of existentialist thought in Nakasa's work, this article can be analysed in a manner similar to the other four existentialist writers analysed in chapter 4 as part of the section on the duty of the writer, namely essays by Sartre, Gordimer, Orwell and Camus.

Against the backdrop of Nakasa's efforts to act as an interpreter between two worlds and his vision of a common experience, the first duty that can be identified in this article is the writer's responsibility to find common ground. He uses the example of the increasing use of English amongst black people:

> Without much persuasion from outsiders, black men have chosen English as a means for the expression of their national aspirations; they have chosen English as the most powerful single instrument of communication with the world and with themselves. In their joint use of

English, Africans reach with greater ease the various levels of common ground which are of importance in the process of eliminating tribal division with all its unwelcome consequences.

In existential terms, an individual's being-in-the-world is characterised by the presence of others' being-in-the-world. Through various forms of communication we learn about others, and ourselves, which in turn allows us to navigate this shared social space. It is one of a writer's duties to assist his or her audience in navigating this shared social space (Gordimer 1975; 1982; 1984), and Nakasa suggests achieving this by finding common ground between the worlds that the writer is trying to introduce to one another. On a practical level, using a shared language such as English might be a useful tool. Similarly, other shared symbols or references might also assist in helping the writer to communicate with two audiences at the same time. In addition, the use of any shared communicative tools, including language and cultural references, might serve the additional purpose of not only indicating common ground, but also being common ground.

The second duty of the writer found in Nakasa's *Writing in South Africa* is a warning similar to Gordimer's plea made in 1975 that the writer should guard against "conforming to an orthodoxy of opposition". In other words, writing what is expected of someone in opposition to a specific stance, policy or ideology but also using that as the standard for evaluating the quality of opposition writing. Nakasa writes that the writers of the Sophiatown generation were often not critical enough of themselves and their own writing. He uses himself as an example:

> Thus when I first came across the writings of Peter Abrahams, I swallowed them up in rapid succession, permitting no criticism to take shape within me. He was a black writer, one of us. Even his most glaringly naïve and parochial assertions went unopposed. Peter Abrahams had lifted our squalor from the gutter and placed it on a higher level where it looked different, something of literary value. This was obviously not good enough as I have since painfully realised.

So, while it is the duty of the writer to disclose, that should not be an excuse for substandard writing, unchallenged assumptions and gross generalisations. As Camus (1957) proposes, it is the duty of the writer "to reconcile the double existence of creator and socially responsible member of society".

The third and final responsibility placed upon the existential writer in terms of *Writing in South Africa* is the writer's duty to have first-hand experience of the circumstances that form the focus of his or her writing. Nakasa quotes Indian journalist Bennie Bunsee, who observed that "Dostoyevsky once said that if a writer wants to write about pimps and prostitutes, he must live with them, sleep with

them". Nakasa's own body of work presents numerous examples of him acting as both interpreter and mediator between the white and black worlds of his era. However, this experience of living on the fringe has also taught him that this might not be as easy as Bunsee suggested:

> The general merits of this argument would be conceded, I presume, anywhere in the world except in South Africa. We are all fully aware of the legal implications as well as the social crisis that would ensue if white writers elected to heed Dostoyevsky's advice in a country which legislates against black-white sex, black-white boxing and black-white tea drinking.

Here Nakasa refers specifically to the circumstances of black people, who lived the life of outlaws because apartheid legislation turned "human decency" into a crime. "How does the white writer come close enough to his black fellowman?" Nakasa asks. His answer is not only applicable to white writers during apartheid, but to any existential writer. It also serves as the final piece of evidence in support of the argument put forward in this thesis, namely that Nat Nakasa could be considered an existential journalist. The responsibility he places on the writer is that of personal choice, or existential freedom:

> This is a simple matter which, I believe, calls for personal treatment by each individual. It concerns one's personal and private experience. The writer can take his choice. Bow to the social conventions and the letter of the law and keep within the confines of the white world, or refuse to let officialdom regulate his personal life, face the consequences and be damned.

For Sartre, Camus, Orwell, Gordimer and Nakasa this implied consequences that infringed on their liberty and in some instances also included physical danger. There are many contemporary journalists facing similar circumstances and consequences. For others, these consequences might not include physical harm, but professional damage to their image or the danger of being labelled or grouped or judged. Irrespective of the consequences, the value lies in choosing – choosing to write about a topic that might result in any or all of the above, but also choosing to disclose and thereby bringing about change. This action represents authenticity and it is the primary characteristic of the existential journalist.

5.6   THE WRITING OF NAT NAKASA: AN EXISTENTIAL STORYLINE

This study set out to determine whether Nat Nakasa could be considered an existential journalist at the hand of two primary research questions, namely:

- Research question 1: Which evidence is there of the main existentialist themes in Nat Nakasa's journalism?
- Research question 2: Which main themes would emerge through analysing Nat Nakasa's writing as example of existential journalism?

The imperative of the existential journalist is described by Merrill (1977: 93) as follows:

> Gain as much freedom, be as original and as creative, write as intensively and vigorously as possible; relate to the journalistic problems courageously, and exercise the maximum autonomy or self-determination: this is the imperative of the existential journalist. Instead of retiring from the struggle because of the danger of it, or because of the meaninglessness of it all, or because of the gloomy future that lies ahead, the existential journalist takes all of this as an inspiration and a stimulus to live a more intensive life.

Characteristics of the existential journalist include practicing journalism in an intuitive, participatory and analytical manner with a focus on the public and human experience. The existential journalist is required to take a certain viewpoint, position, or stand, and in making this choice he or she also has to accept responsibility for their decisions.

By first identifying incidences of relevant existentialist themes and concepts in Nakasa's writing, and then looking for main themes in his work that are supported by these existentialist themes, seven main themes were identified in order to construct an existential storyline of Nakasa's work.

The first theme, *mental corrosion*, refers to the corrosion, through apartheid, of people's ability to recognise and acknowledge humanity, or the "normal human experience" – whether in themselves or in others. It is an example of existential bad faith. Through his writing, Nakasa not only made his audience aware of what mental corrosion is, but also provided numerous examples of the presence of mental corrosion in both the black and white worlds of apartheid. He used humour, contrast and direct and indirect calls to action to get his audience to "stop and think" instead of mindlessly continuing along the same path of wilful ignorance.

In line with the first theme is theme two, namely *living outside of the normal human experience*. Here Nakasa set out to describe – to *disclose* – the facticity of black South Africans during apartheid in an effort to slow down, stop and reverse the mental corrosion brought on through the "spiritual domination" of white by black. By giving faces to stories he exposed his audience to the Others. At the same time, he also addressed his fellow black South Africans, urging them not to become "anonymous" and succumb to despair, but to continue to take actions without hope.

To both audiences, Nakasa presented, through the third theme, an alternative version, or possibility, of life between the two worlds of black and white, namely *the fringe*. Here people tried to live normal

lives during abnormal times. The fringe is characterised by interaction on all walks of life between black and white, something that was considered "abnormal and insane" during the era. In choosing to be normal when it was considered abnormal, fringe-dwellers exercised their existential freedom.

On a personal level, Nakasa also exercised his existential freedom by making a deliberate choice about his attitude towards his circumstances. Theme four describes his approach to apartheid as a *social experiment*. This theme also represents Nakasa's personal journey, enabled by negation and transcendence, through both his facticity (his physical circumstances) and his attitude towards these circumstances. His audience joined him on his personal journey through being an outsider, anxiety and despair and the ways in which he navigated through his being-in-the-world, as well as the final steps of this journey before committing suicide.

Theme five, *tiny subversive acts*, describes how Nakasa and his fellow *Drum* writers as well as numerous other characters in his writing continued to make choices that represent authenticity. While many of these acts were small and often inconsequential, the circumstances under which they took place rendered them far more powerful. These acts, some humorous, others more serious, represent an attitude of defiance. By finding ways to laugh at officialdom or push back against the restrictions placed upon black people, Nakasa managed to stave off the despair which threatened to overwhelm him.

A writer needs to produce an essential gesture. In Nakasa's case, and in terms of this thesis, his essential gesture could be paraphrased as his existential gesture, and it is found in theme six, which describes Nakasa's vision *towards a common experience*. Arguably one of the first writers to refer to a "new South Africa" Nakasa presented his audience with a possible future characterised by a non-racial society. For Nakasa, in contrast with some of his contemporaries and other anti-apartheid activists, it was important to be a South African first and to find "common ideals, moral values, and common national aspirations". Again he assisted his readers through his vision by taking them with him on his personal quest to find his identity. In doing so, he challenged is readers to look at themselves and to try and answer the question "Who are my people?". This theme represents the future-oriented nature of existentialism, the ability to look at the past and the present and, through negation, to imagine a new future.

The final theme, *the duty of the writer*, represents Nakasa's ontic act as an existential journalist, namely writing. It provides evidence of Nakasa practising existential journalism and taking responsibility for his choice of subject matter and audience (knowing why he chose a topic and

knowing why he chose to write in a certain way about this topic). It also describes three duties of the writer identified by Nakasa, namely finding common ground, being as critical of your own and your compatriots' writing as you are of the writing of your opponents and, most importantly for Nakasa, getting close enough to your subject matter in order to write in an authentic manner about it.

These themes, when interpreted against the framework of existentialism, serve as evidence for this study's primary claim, namely that Nat Nakasa could be considered an existential journalist. Merrill wrote that being an existential journalist is to choose to be an existential journalist and to continue to be responsible for this choice. Sartre wrote that we are condemned to be free, in other words we are relentlessly forced to make choices and take responsibility for these choices over the course of our lives. Nakasa's final piece of advice to writers in South Africa confirms that he made this choice "to refuse to let officialdom regulate his personal life, face the consequences and be damned", thus making him an existential journalist.

Human life is a repetitive process involving facticity, nihilation, projects, transcendence, and starting again with facticity, nihilation, projects, transcendence – Sartre refers to this cycle as our "restless existence". While Nakasa's personal journey as an individual human being is characterised by this "restless existence" this process can also be applied to his writing. It suggests how existentialism could provide the journalist with a practical approach to writing about our "restless existence" by mimicking the cycle of facticity, nihilation, projects, transcendence. The first phase in the process involves describing the facticity, or the current situation. During the second phase, nihilation takes place – negating the facticity by "taking away" aspects of the current situation and "adding" other aspects in order to imagine other possibilities. Then, as part of the third phase, the journalist identifies his or her project – a series of actions and decisions to undertake in the current conditions in order to move to new conditions. The fourth and final phase involves transcendence – change from one condition to another as a result of the writer's projects. Figure 5 visualises the combination of the "restless existence" process and the practice of unconventional journalism:

FIGURE 5:   THE PROCESS OF 'RESTLESS EXISTENCE' JOURNALISM

Facticity (Phase 1)	Nihilation (Phase 2)
• Theme 1 • Theme 2 • Theme 7	• Theme 4 • Theme 5 • Theme 7
Transcendence (Phase 4)	Projects (Phase 3)
• Theme 6 • Theme 7 • Contemporary echoes	• Theme 3 • Theme 6 • Theme 7
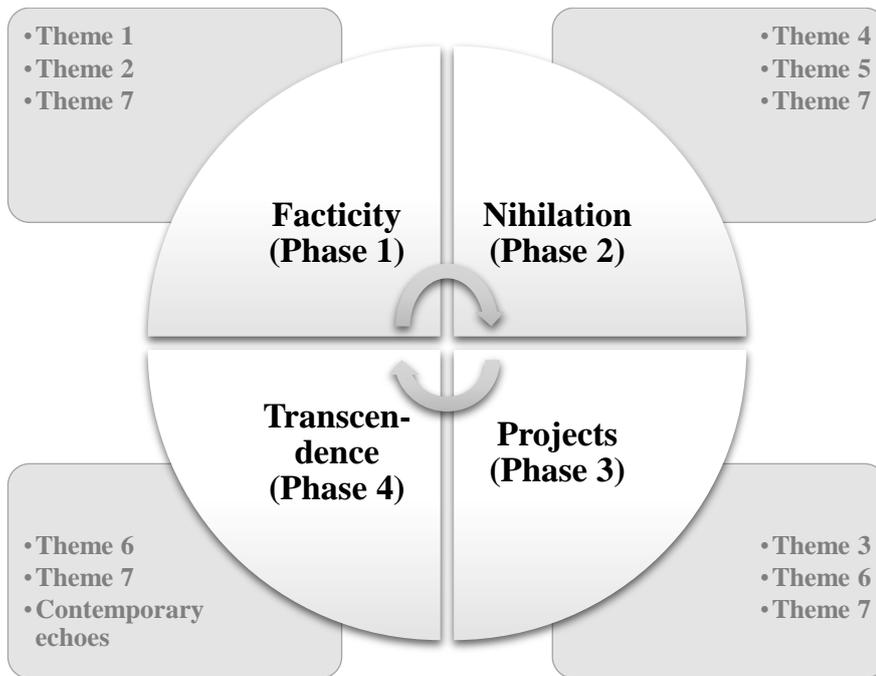
5.7   CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

If we require the past to project ourselves into the future, as we've learned from Heidegger in chapter 3, what can we, existentially speaking, appropriate from the above interpretation? How is Nakasa's practice of existential journalism relevant to the journalist today or tomorrow? Or the South Africa, or the world, of today or tomorrow? The relevance lies in the fact that there will always be an interregnum, particularly if an interregnum is taken to mean, as Gordimer (1982) describes, not only the period "between two social orders" but also broader, to include any circumstances of being "between two identities, one known and discarded, the other unknown and undetermined".

One such interregnum is the developing world, slowly discarding a known identity and moving towards an identity as yet unknown and undetermined. South Africa has been on this road since 1994. While still a functioning constitutional democracy, there are a number of challenges, some of which are discussed below. In some other developing countries, progress has halted and in some instances is sliding backwards. Norris and Odugbemi (2010: 3) write that although about two-thirds of all current independent nation-states are electoral democracies, there are indications that "the further advancement of democratic governance has stagnated or even reversed":

> Contemporary challenges facing all democracies, old and new, include expanding opportunities for more inclusive voices in civil society. Reforms are urgently needed to improve the responsiveness, transparency, effectiveness, and accountability of governance institutions so that democracy works for the poor as well as the rich. Moreover, respect for

international standards of universal human rights needs to be further strengthened in all parts of the world.

In South Africa, for example, the initial "political honeymoon" following the first democratic elections in 1994 did not last as long as in similar transitional societies. Ballard *et al.* (2006: 2) write that "new social struggles in South Africa emerged surprisingly quickly". Some of these include formal movements such as the Treatment Action Campaign that campaigns for affordable treatment for people living with HIV and Aids since its launch in 1998, and which has been an active participant in the public sphere ever since (Friedman & Mottiar 2006: 23). Others, such as the Environmental Justice Networking Forum, Groundwork and Earthlife Africa, have been participating in the environmental justice movement for a number of decades (Cock 2006: 203). There are women's movements, refugee campaigns, land reform movements and economic movements, to name a view. A more recent and less formal movement in the public sphere is the #FeesMustFall campaign. The movement gained momentum in the latter half of 2015 when students from universities across South Africa started to protest against proposed fee hikes and others challenges that prevent access to tertiary education (Maluleke 2015).

On the one hand the presence of these various social movements and campaigns speaks to the health of the public sphere in South Africa; on the other hand it highlights the number and variety of socio-political issues that need to be addressed. News media play an important role in addressing these challenges and in establishing and maintaining a modern public sphere (Norris & Odugbemi 2010: 4). The existence of independent news media can be regarded as a necessary, although not sufficient, condition to guarantee a lively and effective public sphere (Norris & Odugbemi 2010: 12). These authors suggest that such a modern public sphere that strengthens contemporary forms of democratic governance requires at least three minimal conditions, namely 1) a constitutional and legal framework protecting civil liberties; 2) widespread public access to multiple pluralistic sources of information and communication; and 3) equal opportunities for inclusive participation and voice within civil society (Norris & Odugbemi 2010: 8). In addition, they suggest the following characteristics of a democratic public sphere (Norris & Odugbemi 2010: 10):

- A constitutional and legal framework protects and guarantees civil liberties and political rights, especially the fundamental freedoms of expression, opinion, information, and assembly, as well as rights of access to information. The media are independent from state control, official censorship, and legal restrictions.
- All people enjoy widespread access to pluralistic sources of information in the public sphere, enabling equal opportunities for expression and participation and, especially, providing access

to information for marginalised sectors within society, including women, young people, minorities, the poor, and the illiterate.

- A rich, robust, and inclusive civil society flourishes, with multiple organisations and diverse associations facilitating unrestricted deliberation, cooperation, and collaboration on issues of common concern. Civil society is strengthened where diverse perspectives, social sectors, interests, parties, and political persuasions are reflected in the mass media.

Combined with the general discussion in chapter 4, and specifically the journalist as change agent, it becomes clear that pluralism, or access to information from a variety of voices or perspective, is the key to establishing and maintaining a modern public sphere within a democratic society. In terms of journalism this would require a media sphere where there is space for both conventional, mainstream journalism as well as unconventional, alternative journalism. As became clear throughout this study, conventional journalism, despite some challenges, is firmly entrenched as the preferred or accepted manner for providing at least some of the information required by people to function within a democracy. However, this study, through demonstrating the practice of existential journalism, argues for unconventional journalism as a vital element to a pluralistic media environment.

Once a journalist has decided to choose the existential orientation towards journalism, finding a focus point for practising decentring journalism would not prove to be too difficult. There are a number of contemporary echoes found in Nakasa's work, topics that are not only broadly applicable to the current South African landscape but in some instances almost factually similar. Of these, the topic that stands out the most is labour unrest. In two articles, *Pay riot at Rand factory* (story 24, written in 1958 for *Drum*) and *Factory workers after the riot* (story 25, written in 1958 for *Drum*), Nakasa describes an incident that is eerily similar to the Marikana massacre on 16 August 2012, when 34 striking mineworkers of the Lonmin platinum mine were shot and killed by the South African Police Service (Ledwaba 2012; Marikana Commission of Inquiry 2012).

In February 1958, wage negotiations between the Amato Textile Factory and the African Textile Workers' Industrial Union (ATWIU) broke down and some 3700 workers downed tools at Amato's textile mills. When the ATWIU urged its members to return to work, they found the doors locked and a notice with the message "Come back Friday afternoon to get your pay. You're fired." On Friday, they found about 150 policemen at the factory. At around 16:00 there was still no sign of Amato's management. When the workers were finally allowed to enter, there were some pushing and shoving and "the Mill three men and the Mill Four men were caught in a mix-up" (*Pay riot at Rand factory*, story 24):

Then the police charged. Edmund Cindi, chairman of the works committee, was facing the wrong way when the charge started. Suddenly he felt the rush from behind. Shouting people were running past him, jumping over others, shouting: 'Yeow, get out!' He heard the rattle of batons on bare heads … The workers ran like mad, and there was another cordon of policemen flailing out with sticks. Behind in the square, hats and coats, and bundles, and bicycles were lying where they had fallen. And the cops were chasing the last workers.

The riot ended with 73 people injured. All the workers were fired, but some 3000 were later reinstated at the factory. In *Factory workers after the riot* (story 25) Nakasa describes the lives of those who were not reinstated and the resultant socio-economic consequences for the area. He quotes a Benoni business man, Fikile Nobadula, as saying, "this Amato thing affects us all here in Benoni. These people who are jobless in the streets might be forced to become a menace to us and our children. They might be tempted to do things they don't want to do." The workers who were fired, called for negotiations to be reopened:

> There are some people who feel that maybe this whole business can be settled soon if somebody could only pave the way for talks, for sitting down and thrashing things out. Things like how did the trouble start, why, and what's going to happen to the men on the streets, on the run?

Some 45 years later, on 13 August 2013, South African journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner Greg Marinovich wrote the following in his article *Marikana, one year later: the hell above and below ground*:

> In air-conditioned comfort above ground, wealthy servants of the people and their learned counsel squabble interminably about their right to earn many tens of thousands of Rands a day. Yet the people the law and the state are meant to serve continue to toil in hellish subterranean wage bondage. Such is the almost unbearable injustice of mining in South Africa. One year on, the dead of Marikana are still looking for closure. It is on us, the people of South Africa, to help find this closure and never, ever let Marikana happen again.

Nakasa could easily have added that last sentence to his article as well. And yet Amato did happen again – at Marikana. The underlying causes of these events have therefore not been disclosed to the extent that change could take place – a challenge, perhaps, to contemporary journalists?

5.8   CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the results of both the deductive theme analysis and the inductive theme analysis. These results were then combined to construct an existential storyline as evidence for the argument put forward in this thesis: that Nat Nakasa's work, whether intended by him or not, serves as an example of applied existentialism, i.e. explaining existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts). Seven themes were identified as part of this process, namely mental corrosion (theme 1), living outside of the normal human experience (theme 2), the fringe (theme 3), social experiment (theme 4), tiny subversive acts (theme 5), towards a common experience (theme 6) and the duty of the writer (theme 7).

According to existentialism, human life is a repetitive process involving facticity, nihilation, projects and transcendence, a cycle Sartre refers to as our "restless existence". The themes discussed in this chapter are combined with this cycle as a suggestion of how existentialism could provide the journalist with a practical approach to writing about our "restless existence" by mimicking the cycle of facticity, nihilation, projects, transcendence.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the value of this study beyond the single-case, i.e. some contemporary applications of the study's findings. Here references are made to contemporary echoes found in Nakasa's writing that are still issues in South Africa today. This final section also describes how the process of "restless existence" journalism remains relevant in terms of any interregnum, such as a developing country.

The final chapter of this thesis presents an overview of the entire thesis, as well as final words from the researcher.

Chapter 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION
Nat Nakasa as existential journalist

6.1   BACKGROUND

South African journalist Nat Nakasa's short career in journalism started at *Drum* magazine in Johannesburg in 1958. It ended in New York City when he committed suicide in 1965. Arguably, Nakasa was not the most prolific and well-known journalist of the so-called *Drum* generation, which also include, amongst others, Lewis Nkosi, Es'kia Mphahlele and Richard Rive. Nakasa's body of work is quite small and consists of about 100 pieces, mostly journalism, and one short story. In terms of professional milestones he was an assistant editor at *Drum*, the first black columnist for *Rand Daily Mail*, the founder and editor of *The Classic*, a literary magazine, and a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. However, Patel (2005: vii) writes that Nakasa's "reportage of events and personality profile of a time gone by opens a window for us to look into the past and thereby enrich our understanding of intensely human episodes he witnessed". Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer, Nakasa's friend and mentor, describes Nakasa as a "racial visionary" (in Roberts 2005), while referring to his work as "journalism, yes, but journalism of a highly personal kind" (in Patel 2005). Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu (in Mahala 2014) views Nakasa as "a rainbow man when the rainbow was not allowed".

Nakasa's approach to and practice of journalism places him in the realm of Merrill's existential journalism (1977). Merrill (1977: 19) describes the existential journalist as someone who "pushes, straining constantly against the encompassing institutional restrictions which are closing in on him... He takes stands; he chooses; and he is willing to take the consequences of these choices." It also relates directly to what Muhlmann (2008; 2010) describes as decentring journalism, where the journalist takes on the role of the outsider in an effort to disrupt the status quo, or "decentre" it. These orientations to journalism forms part of what can be described as unconventional forms of journalism.

Unconventional forms of journalism are characterised, amongst others, by the constructivist idea that there is no absolute truth and that journalists inescapably create their own realities (Hanitzsch 2007) that they then share with their audiences. This practice represents an ontic act of existentialism, which represents an individualistic, interpretive world-view. From the Western existential perspective, life can only be experienced, described and made sense of from an individual perspective; it is inherently subjective and there is no universal truth "out there".

It is at the hand of this line of thought that the researcher sought to investigate whether Nakasa's journalism can be considered unconventional (representative of a *practice*) and whether Nakasa could be considered an existential journalist (representative of an *orientation*).

6.2   RECAPITULATION OF RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

6.2.1   Research purpose and research questions

This study set out to consider how South African journalist Nat Nakasa's writing, irrespective of his intention in this regard, serves as an example of applied existentialism, i.e. explaining existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts) as it manifests in his journalism.

To achieve the purpose of the study as set out above, the research was guided by two primary research questions:

- Research question 1: Which evidence is there of the main existentialist themes in Nat Nakasa's journalism?
- Research question 2: Which main themes would emerge through analysing Nat Nakasa's writing as example of existential journalism?

In addition to the primary research questions, the following secondary research questions were addressed:

- Secondary research question 1: Which existentialist themes are relevant to develop a framework for analysing a body of journalism at the hand of existentialism?
- Secondary research question 2: What are the existential duties of the writer or existential journalist?
- Secondary research question 3: What is the role of the existential journalist in a developing society?

6.2.2   Research context

Conceptually, this study is situated within the philosophy of Western existentialism. According to existentialism, life can only be experienced, described and made sense of from an individual perspective; it is inherently subjective and there is no universal truth "out there". In addition to the importance placed on the individual experience, existentialism also stresses the fact that this individual experience coincides with other individual experiences – we share a social space. The third

important element is that, as human beings, our existence precedes our essence (Sartre 1946: 34), in other words we do not have a predetermined, definite nature (or essence); instead, we have the ability to be or become anything.

The emphasis that the existentialism places on the individual requires this study to employ an interpretive research paradigm. Within this position, humans construct knowledge out of their somewhat subjective engagement with objects in their world (Caelli *et al*. 2003: 3). The interpretive paradigm situates the study methodologically within the qualitative approach to research. Whittemore *et al*. (2001: 524) describe qualitative research as seeking "depth over breadth" and attempting "to learn subtle nuances of life experiences as opposed to aggregate evidence".

6.2.3   Research method

This study made use of an adapted deductive/inductive hybrid theme analysis consisting of three general phases:

- Phase 1: Data generation
- Phase 2: Data analysis
- Phase 3: Data interpretation

The sample consisted of 75 objects as included in the anthology *The world of Nat Nakasa* (Patel 1975; 1985; 2005). The anthology contains 73 newspaper and magazine articles, one speech and one short story.

Data was analysed at the hand of a deductive/inductive hybrid theme analysis, executed on two levels:

- The **first level** was a **deductive theme analysis** using a priori themes and concepts identified through the construction of a general framework of existentialism.
- The **second level** was an **inductive theme analysis** informed by the deductive theme analysis. The purpose of the inductive theme analysis was to identify themes specific to Nakasa's work that are based on existential themes. Coding for the inductive analysis was done *in vivo*. It is important to keep in mind that these themes were identified against an existential framework, and the analysis is not a general analysis of all themes in Nakasa's work.

The results of both the deductive theme analysis and the inductive theme analysis were then used to construct an existential storyline as evidence for the argument put forward in this thesis: that Nat Nakasa's work, whether intended by him or not, serves as an example of applied existentialism, i.e.

explaining existentialist thought, themes and structure through descriptions of *real-life* situations (ontic acts).

6.3   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From the combined results of the deductive and inductive analyses, seven main themes were constructed. The seven themes are considered the main themes in Nakasa's work when using existentialism as explanatory framework.

6.3.1   Theme 1: Mental corrosion

This theme is supported by the existential themes and concepts of bad faith, existence precedes essence, absurdity and despair, and facticity.

The first theme, *mental corrosion*, refers to the corrosion, through apartheid, of people's ability to recognise and acknowledge humanity, or the "normal human experience" – whether in themselves or in others. It is an example of existential bad faith. Through his writing, Nakasa not only made his audience aware of what mental corrosion is, but also provided numerous examples of the presence of mental corrosion in both the black and white worlds of apartheid. He used humour, contrast and direct and indirect calls to action to get his audience to "stop and think" instead of mindlessly continuing along the same path of wilful ignorance.

6.3.2   Theme 2: Living outside of the normal human experience

This theme is supported by the existential themes and concepts of facticity, anxiety, absurdity and despair, sense of belonging, temporality and finitude, and historicity.

In line with the first theme is theme two, namely *living outside of the normal human experience*. Here Nakasa set out to describe – to *disclose* – the facticity of black South Africans during apartheid in an effort to slow down, stop and reverse the mental corrosion brought on through the "spiritual domination" of white by black. By giving faces to stories he exposed his audience to the Other. At the same time, he also addressed his fellow black South Africans, urging them not to become "anonymous" and succumb to despair, but to continue to take actions without hope.

6.3.3   Theme 3: The fringe

This theme is supported by the existential themes and concepts of authenticity, freedom and responsibility, facticity, transcendence, and negation.

To both his audiences, black and white, Nakasa presented, through the third theme, an alternative version, or possibility, of life between the two worlds of black and white, namely *the fringe*. Here people tried to live normal lives during abnormal times. The fringe is characterised by interaction on all walks of life between black and white, something that was considered "abnormal and insane" during the era. In choosing to be normal when it was considered abnormal, fringe-dwellers exercised their existential freedom.

6.3.4 Theme 4: Social experiment

This theme is supported by the existential themes and concepts of freedom and responsibility, temporality and finitude, anxiety, absurdity and despair, transcendence, and negation.

On a personal level, Nakasa also exercised his existential freedom by making a deliberate choice about his attitude towards his circumstances. Theme four describes his approach to apartheid as a *social experiment*. This theme also represents Nakasa's personal journey, enabled by negation and transcendence, through both his facticity (his physical circumstances) and his attitude towards these circumstances. His audience joined him on his personal journey through being an outsider, anxiety and despair and the ways in which he navigated through his being-in-the-world, as well as the final steps of this journey before committing suicide.

6.3.5 Theme 5: Tiny subversive acts

This theme is supported by the existential themes and concepts of authenticity, freedom and responsibility, and facticity.

Theme five, *tiny subversive acts*, describes how Nakasa and his fellow *Drum* writers as well as numerous other characters in his writing continued to make choices that represent authenticity. While many of these acts were small and often inconsequential, the circumstances under which they took place rendered them far more powerful. These acts, some humorous, others more serious, represent an attitude of defiance. By finding ways to laugh at officialdom or push back against the restrictions placed upon black people, Nakasa managed to stave off the despair which threatened to overwhelm him.

6.3.6 Theme 6: Towards a common experience

This theme is supported by the existential themes and concepts of transcendence, negation, future-oriented, historicity, facticity, and freedom and responsibility.

A writer needs to produce an essential gesture. In Nakasa's case, and in terms of this thesis, his essential gesture could be paraphrased as his existential gesture, and it is found in theme six, which describes Nakasa's vision *towards a common experience*. Arguably one of the first writers to refer to a "new South Africa" Nakasa presented his audience with a possible future characterised by a non-racial society. For Nakasa, in contrast with some of his contemporaries and other anti-apartheid activists, it was important to be a South African first and to find "common ideals, moral values, and common national aspirations". Again he assisted his readers through his vision by taking them with him on his personal quest to find his identity. In doing so, he challenged is readers to look at themselves and to try and answer the question "Who are my people?". This theme represents the future-oriented nature of existentialism, the ability to look at the past and the present and, through negation, to imagine a new future.

6.3.7 Theme 7: The duty of the writer

This theme is supported by the existential themes and concepts of being-in-the-world, sense of belonging, transcendence, and negation.

Theme seven, *the duty of the writer*, represents Nakasa's ontic act as an existential journalist, namely writing. It provides evidence of Nakasa practising existential journalism and taking responsibility for his choice of subject matter and audience (knowing why he chose a topic and knowing why he chose to write in a certain way about this topic). It also describes three duties of the writer identified by Nakasa, namely finding common ground, being as critical of your own and your compatriots' writing as you are of the writing of your opponents and, most importantly for Nakasa, getting close enough to your subject matter in order to write in an authentic manner about it.

6.4 CONCLUSION

These themes, when interpreted against the framework of existentialism, serve as evidence for this study's primary claim, namely that Nat Nakasa could be considered an existential journalist. Merrill wrote that to be an existential journalist is to choose to be an existential journalist and to continue to be responsible for this choice. Sartre wrote that we are condemned to be free, in other words we are relentlessly forced to make choices and take responsibility for these choices over the course of our lives. Nakasa's final piece of advice to writers in South Africa confirms that he made this choice "to refuse to let officialdom regulate his personal life, face the consequences and be damned", thus making him an existential journalist.

Human life is a repetitive process involving facticity, nihilation, projects, transcendence, and starting again with facticity, nihilation, projects, transcendence – Sartre refers to this cycle as our "restless existence". While Nakasa's personal journey as an individual human being is characterised by this "restless existence" this process can also be applied to his writing. It suggests how existentialism could provide the journalist with a practical approach to writing about our "restless existence" by mimicking the cycle of facticity, nihilation, projects and transcendence.

The first phase in the process involves describing the facticity, or the current situation. During the second phase, nihilation takes place – negating the facticity by "taking away" aspects of the current situation and "adding" other aspects in order to imagine other possibilities. Then, as part of the third phase, the journalist identifies his or her project – a series of actions and decisions to undertake in the current conditions in order to move to new conditions. The fourth and final phase involves transcendence – change from one condition to another as a result of the writer's projects.

6.5   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

All research is limited by various boundaries set by choices about general research technicalities, such as conceptual frameworks, paradigms and methodology as well as specific limitations that result because of the nature of the specific study.

In the case of this study, the existential world-view posited the study within the interpretative research paradigm and the resultant qualitative methodology. The most important limitation this placed upon the research resulted from the integral role of the researcher in qualitative research. This individual perspective implied a subjective point-of view.

As the analytical nature of interpretive research is also seen as its primary advantage, ways had to be found to address the perceived limitation of subjectivity. In this study, such efforts included clearly stating the world-view, including the conceptual framework (existentialism), research paradigm (interpretive) and research methodology (qualitative). As a result, the reader is made aware of the boundaries within which the study should be interpreted.

In addition, various checks and balances were built into the research method in order to ensure validity. These included conducting the overall analysis on two levels, or from two perspectives. The first level was a deductive analysis that used a priori existential themes and concepts in order to investigate whether evidence of existentialism was present in Nakasa's work. This "evidence of

existentialism" then provided a framework for the identification of unique themes in Nakasa's writing that are supported by existential themes and concepts.

The purpose of the hybrid approach was to ensure rigor in identifying the themes, as the analysis was basically conducted "both ways" with the deductive analysis serving as evidence for the inductive analysis, and vice versa. This approach allowed the researcher to determine the applicability of the code to the raw data. The important point to be emphasised here is that the goal of this study was not to try and determine or "recreate" what meaning Nakasa attached to or implied with his work. Rather, the goal was to determine whether existential meaning(s) could be attached to themes in his work.

A limitation that stemmed from the specifics of this study was the lack of detailed publication data available for all the objects that formed part of the sample. While the date of publication and the title of the original publication in which some of his articles appeared are available in some instances, it is not available for all the articles. This meant that comparisons between Nakasa's earlier and later work was not possible, nor could particular themes be attached to particular periods or particular publications. However, since contemporary access to Nakasa's work is mainly possible through the 2005 edition of *The world of Nat Nakasa*, and since this study sought to interpret his body of work as a whole, this limitation was deemed not to influence the overall findings and conclusion.

6.6   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although this study has a strict single-case focus, and while generalisation is not a primary goal of qualitative research, this study can be used to shed light on some aspects of unconventional forms of journalism. Journalism is studied from a variety of perspectives, including theoretical, societal, cultural and organisational, as well as its processes, producers, practices and paradigms (cf. Löffelholz & Weaver 2008; Zelizer 2004; Sloan 1990). Existing enquiry into journalism, however, focuses mostly on what can be described as conventional journalism – mainstream, traditional or standard journalism produced by independent media companies. Within this sphere of conventional journalism, most of the research focus has been on journalism as hard news, the journalist as reporter and "those concerns about journalism that have dogged it ever since news and reporting became the core of journalistic activity" (Muhlmann 2008: 2; Zelizer 2004: 6). Zelizer (*ibid*.) refers to Dahlgren's concept of a "metonymic character" when describing existing journalism scholarship as not having produced a body of material that reflects all of journalism:

> This has created a bias that undermines scholars' capacity to embrace journalism in all its different forms, venues, and practices. In other words, what many of us study accounts for only a small part of the material that is contemporary journalism … [T]he reigning definition

of journalism may not be the most inclusive way of defining who counts as a journalist. For as the practices, forms, and technologies for news gathering and news presentation increase in variety, demeanor, and number, the existing body of scholarly material shrinks in relevance (*ibid.*).

Against this backdrop, recommendations for further research include a broader focus on the scope of unconventional forms of journalism. One suggestion in this regard is the creation of a typology for unconventional forms of journalism. Analysis of the practice of unconventional forms of journalism – starting with the basic 5Ws + H – will go a long way towards providing a scientific foundation for the practice of these forms of journalism. In addition, investigations into the effectiveness of unconventional forms of journalism, specifically in relation to how effective it is as agent of change, could provide a framework for the application of the various types of unconventional journalism.

Recognising that these unconventional forms of journalism exist and are practised is the first step in harnessing the power of the "decentring gaze". While any number of studies still grapple with the issue of whether activism, intersubjectivity and an individual point of view belong in journalism, and whether this can be called "journalism", the rest of the world is not standing still. Access to technology and social media are allowing everybody to write about what they see and how they experience the world. Research in this area will allow for guidelines for both practitioners and consumers of these forms of journalism.

Investigating the role of unconventional journalism in developing societies or any other form of "interregnum" is crucial. Any situation on the brink of change, about to move into unchartered waters, requires guides to assist people to navigate a new shared social space. Journalism is one form that this guidance can take and, given the media's immense capacity to distribute information – an act of disclosure, journalists should be equipped to fulfil the role of navigators. This also holds implications for journalism training, which is another recommended research focus based on this study. Specifically, the training of community journalists in developing societies is of importance as these journalists are often the link between the average citizen and government. This implies that a large section of society rely on community journalists for information. In South Africa, many of these journalist are untrained and unpaid volunteers. Educating these journalists would go a long way towards creating a plurality of voice that will benefit the media industry as a whole.

A final recommendation for further research that pertains specifically to the practice of unconventional forms of journalism is the growing presence of non-profit organisations producing

journalism. A well-known example in this regard is the American non-profit corporation ProPublica who operates under the slogan "Journalism in the Public Interest" (www.propublica.org). ProPublica produces independent investigative journalism and stories with "moral force". Through its independent newsroom, ProPublica, according to its website, presents "a new model … to carry forward some of the great work of journalism in the public interest that is such an integral part of self-government, and thus an important bulwark of our democracy". ProPublica has been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Investigative reporting in 2010 as well as the Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting in 2011.

Another non-profit model for journalism is presented by the Solutions Journalism Network (www.solutionsjournalism.org). The Solutions Journalism Network encourages journalism that goes further than reporting by providing solutions to social challenges, or "responses to social problems". This network not only produces journalism, but provides training and enters into partnerships with newsrooms in order to create awareness of solutions journalism.

These are just two examples of new models for journalism that move beyond corporate or commercial media. Some non-profit newsrooms state that they practice "impartial" journalism while others are open about supporting a cause, or representing a specific "voice". Irrespective of whether the approach is based on conventional or unconventional journalism, the role of these newsrooms, especially in terms of its impact in developing societies, requires further investigation. The non-profit model could provide the existential journalist with a platform for practicing decentring journalism without the constraints of commercial media – an option worth investigating.

The death of journalism is often prophesised. Instead, we should be focusing on the transcendence of journalism, on its "constant unfinished quality" (Heidegger 1927). Research provides us with the tools to describe the current facticity of journalism and then to negate that facticity in order to *imagine future possibilities* for this project we call journalism. Finding new models for practicing journalism and enabling various types of journalists are just some of these future possibilities.

6.7   FINAL WORDS

Our "restless existence" is characterised by change. It is a relentless cycle of confronting new possibilities and adapting to new realities as we propel our existence toward the future in anticipation of our death. The "existence" of journalism, as one of our projects, follows a similar arc, a repetitive process involving facticity, nihilation, actions and transcendence. New research, different viewpoints, the gaze of the Other all add to the constant re-invention of journalism. And, because of our being-

in-the-world, we are forced to adapt to changes – also to changes in what journalism is, or what it can do. Adapting to change is not confined to the bigger picture of what journalism is. From an existential perspective, as individual journalists, educators and scholars, we have to adapt to changes in our shared social space – also when this requires changes to our inner world.

On a grand scale, journalism is powerful as it utilises the media as its distribution network. But also the smallest elements, the words that the journalist use as his or her tools, affords that journalist the ability to be more than one thing at the same time. It is this almost magical property of words that allows the journalist, as Nakasa did, to speak to more than one audience at the same time. It is the power of words that allows the journalist to *show* and *do* at the same time, because to disclose is to change. Or, to use another of Sartre's (1946) examples, words can be used in the same way that abstract painter Picasso used imagery "to do a matchbox which was completely a bat without ceasing to be a matchbox".

Practising an unconventional form of journalism, and accepting individual responsibility for this decision, means the writer "acts in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it's all about" (Sartre 1946: 24). Nat Nakasa aptly described the imperative of the existential journalist when he wrote that it is the writer's duty "to refuse to let officialdom regulate his personal life, face the consequences and be damned".

Nakasa, condemned to be free, took up the challenge of this difficult choice to "face the consequences and be damned". Although he did not survive to see his essential gesture come to life with the defeat of apartheid, his writing places an imperative on the contemporary journalist. From Nakasa we stand to learn that "serving those who suffer history" (Camus 1957) is not a decision to be taken lightly as the consequences might be dire – existential journalism is not for the faint of heart. However, these actions will resonate into the future. Or, to use Plato and Heidegger's words: "All that is great stands in the storm."

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APPENDIX A

Story (sample number)	Title	Available original publication details	Page numbers in *The world of Nat Nakasa* (Patel 2005)
1	Johannesburg, Johannesburg	Rand Daily Mail, 1964	3-8
2	Between two worlds	Drum, 1961	9-13
3	Look at what we drink	Drum, Feb 1958	14-15
4	And so the shebeen lives on …		16
5	Quite a place, Fourteenth Street		17-19
6	Shopping can be a bruising business		19-21
7	Beware the swindling 'beeshops'		22-23
8	Brother Timothy, Spellbinder		24-27
9	Penny-whistle is big-time now		27-29
10	Criminals without crime!	Drum, Apr 1959	33-35
11	Snatching at the good life		36-37
12	Must we ride … to disaster?	Drum, Oct 1962	38-40
13	Why taximen are terrified	Drum, Mar 1958	41-43
14	Victims of the knifemen	Drum, Jul 1958	44-45
15	Mental corrosion		46
16	Team that came from nowhere	Drum, Sep 1961	47-49
17	The isolated visitors		53-55
18	The contented Transkeians		55-56
19	So they were impressed		57-58
20	A visit to Pretoria		61-64
21	Meeting the new MPs		64-66
22	Inside South West Africa	Drum, Sep 1961	67-72
23	The move out to 'nowhere'	Drum, 1961	73-75
24	Pay riot at Rand factory	Drum, 1958	75-77
25	Factory workers after the riot	Drum, 1958	78-81
26	Witchcraft: Little kids vanished	Drum, Jul 1959	81-84
27	The kids learn to live		84-86
28	I saw them starve		87-89
29	'Give them their daily bread'		89-94
30	Little boy's story of death on a farm	Drum, Apr 1962	95-98
31	Where businessmen 'must scrub lavatories'		99-101
32	Freedom – to lose all	Drum, Jul 1962	102-105
33	Treason trial halts	Drum, Oct 1958	106-107
34	Not one guilty in the treason trial		107-110

71	A native of nowhere	Rand Daily Mail, Sep 1964	203-205
72	Met with smiles and questions	Rand Daily Mail, Nov 1964	205-207
73	Mr Nakasa goes to Harlem	The New York Times, Feb 1965	207-216
74	Writing in South Africa	Speech given at the University of the Witwatersrand	219-225
75	My first love	Short story	229-237