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‘Unless you were here, how could you ever understand?’

Silence, Complicity, and Storytelling in *The Memory of Love* and *The Devil That Danced on the Water*

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‘To see oneself only ever reflected through the eyes of another is to view the self through a distorting lens’ (Forna "Selective Empathy" 35).

‘Yet what use against the deceit of a state are the memoires of a child?’ (Forna *Devil* 18).

Abstract

The Sierra Leonean Civil War (1991-2002) left a population full of scars from the countless atrocities that were committed, while they continue to live in one of the poorest countries in the world. One author that dares to revisit this past, is Aminatta Forna, through a memoir, *The Devil That Danced on the Water* (2002), and a novel, *The Memory of Love* (2011). This thesis reflects upon the impact of narrativisation in the face of catastrophe and ongoing suffering. What I will demonstrate is that storytelling is always connected to a power which is distributed unequally, with some storytellers that hide their complicity in violence, while other stories remain untold. Through analysing *Memory* and *Devil* independently as well as together, I show the tension between Western humanitarian aid and local coping mechanisms, and the merits of both silence and verbalisation of traumatic memories. These two works encourage crosscultural connection through allowing culturally unfamiliar readers to access the Sierra Leonean context, prompting readers to attune to silences, and to become aware of significant storytelling processes that can, under the right circumstances, lead to healing and understanding.

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Introduction

From 1991 to 2002, Sierra Leone suffered from a brutal civil war. Some report 70,000 fatalities (Kaldor), while other estimate less (Guberek et al.), but regardless of the exact statistics, the impact of the conflict has been monumental for the population of Sierra Leone. The total number of deaths, displaced, and wounded, physically and mentally, from the Civil War, is impossible to estimate, in a war marked by widespread atrocities of amputation, rape, and use of child soldiers. How is it possible to write about this unspeakable past? Unless you were there, how could you ever understand the suffering these people have endured?

Someone who chooses to write about this past, is author Aminatta Forna. In 1975, when Forna was eleven years old, her father was executed for treason. Sixteen years before the start of the Civil War, Forna could see the developments in the country as they were taking place. Two decades later, Forna published a memoir about it. In *The Devil That Danced on the Water,* Forna writes: 'If only I were writing a novel, I would contrive a neat ending with the strands of the plot all tied up into a bow' (*Devil* 388), craving the satisfaction of an ending that novels usually provide. In 2010, Forna returned to the setting of Sierra Leone in *The Memory of Love*, a novel about a post-Civil War society struggling to come to terms with its own past.

In *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, subtitled *A Daughter's Quest*, Forna reflects upon her childhood memories, which are sometimes clear and sometimes not, from the first ten years of her life and the last ten years of her father's. The memories are interspersed with historical accounts about the country and explanations of its politics that allow the reader to understand the context. Because of her father's job in politics, Forna and her siblings moved around multiple times during her childhood, including attending boarding school in the United Kingdom, where Forna eventually moved. In the second half of the memoir, we follow Forna as an adult returning to Sierra Leone to investigate her father's death. From this research, Forna is eventually able to narrate her father's trial and execution. Forna's unique position of being both an insider and outsider in her native country means that she has insights that others lack, while also limiting her access to documents and trust from witnesses to interview. Forna describes the difficulty of going back and digging up the past after establishing a comfortable life in Britain, and the empty feeling she gets once she receives answers to some of the questions she had been asking.

The Memory of Love, in contrast to the tangle of memories in *Devil*, has a carefully constructed plot that does, like Forna wished, tie up neatly at the end. There are three main characters that we follow throughout the novel. The first is Elias Cole, who opens the novel,

an old man intent on telling his life story about how he attained the woman of his dreams, Saffia, even when it meant betraying his friend, Julius. The second is the British psychologist Adrian Lockhart, who comes to Sierra Leone for a change in his routine, hoping to help. The third main character, Kai Mansaray, is a Sierra Leonean doctor. A fourth crucial character that connect the three, is Nenebah, whose 'house name' is Mamakay, who becomes involved in a romantic relationship with Adrian. The identity of Nenebah/Mamakay is gradually made clear over the course of the narrative, as we discover that she is the daughter of Elias and Saffia, and the past lover of Kai. After Kai suffered sexual abuse in the Civil War, he was unable to stay in a relationship with Nenebah. Nenebah and her father have a strained relationship after he reported her friends who protested at the university, causing Nenebah to quit her studies. Another important character is Agnes, who Adrian encounters several times out on the streets and later in the mental hospital. Agnes dissociates into a state that the locals call being 'crossed', and wanders long distances away from her home, which she has no memory of afterwards. What Kai and the readers eventually discover, is that Agnes is attempting to escape from her home, because she is living with the killer of her husband, because her own daughter married him without knowing. At the end of the novel, Nenebah dies in childbirth with Adrian's child. In the final chapter we discover that the child has survived, and Kai has chosen to stay in Sierra Leone, raising Nenebah's daughter together with his young nephew Abass. Adrian returns to England and moves to Norfolk, where his deceased mother lived. Elias dies without reconciling with his daughter. The characters in *Memory* are haunted by a past that continues to affect their present circumstances, and a lack of communication about their struggles leads to deteriorating relationships.

In this thesis, I will explore the relations of power and trust in storytelling through both fiction and nonfiction forms. With her books *Devil* and *Memory*, Forna brings stories of Sierra Leone to the rest of the world. Sierra Leone is a country with low literacy rates, and a history of corruption and burned government documents. During the Civil War, its reporting in the West was often one-sided and oversimplified, the violence 'rendered [as] "senseless"' (Forna "Why I Write" 18). Put simply, the people of Sierra Leone were not in charge of their own history. In these two works, the decisions to speak or stay silent are significant to their lives and the way they are remembered. *Devil* and *Memory* contain narratives written from multiple perspectives of people with varying relationships to Sierra Leone, either as outsiders like Adrian, natives who have become outsiders like Aminatta, victims like Agnes, or perpetrators like Elias Cole and Morlai Salieu. Western assumptions about Africa and Sierra Leone become challenged in Forna's narratives. Through multiple perspectives, readers gain

an increased understanding of the dynamics at play in Sierra Leone in which desires to remember and desires to forget coexist.

Through an analysis of their forms, I will argue that both a memoir and a novel are constructed narratives that nonetheless have a relationship to the world outside of the text, which can convey something perceived as truthful. What *Devil* and *Memory* show is that stories have power, but this power is divided unequally—not everyone can tell their story, not everyone wants to, and some speak for their own selfish reasons. What these works highlight is how history is made up of both the stories that are told, and the absences left behind from silence. Besides, returning to and creating an accurate representation of the past is impossible, because it will always be an interpretation, and in addition, stories can never exist in isolation, as they will always relate to all the other stories that it intersects with. Therefore, it is impossible to get the full story of anything, but instead we are left with bits and pieces that we need to make sense of ourselves. Both *Devil* and *Memory* prompt the reader to become aware of the importance of perspective and the power and trust we give to storytellers, because these reconstructions of the past are not impartial. Stories have a potentially transformative effect for those that are in charge of their own narrative, which can lead to understanding, communication, and healing, but there will always be stories that remain untold for a number of reasons.

The Telling of True Stories

Readers are intrigued by true stories, found in narratives that fall anywhere on the spectrum from novels 'based on true events' to autobiographies. Julia Novak writes: 'Other people's life stories fascinate us, and we seem to have an urgent need to record these stories' (1). Through reading about other people's lives, we may learn and understand 'the meanings that people make of their experience(s), as well as the impact of this meaning-making on their lives and the lives of others' (Parsons and Chappell xiii). Because of how stories allow us to experience lives of others that might be wildly different from our own, we get the sense that we learn about the world and other people through reading. Therefore, we end up 'cherish[ing] stories and we cherish those who write them' (Forna "Selective Empathy" 34). Forna's memoir, award-winning and widely read, has been shown to spark interest among this reading population that crave realness. The fascination with real stories stems from this impression that through reading about someone else's life story, we can learn about ourselves. We read, relate, and reflect upon these life stories, wishing to attain a greater understanding of ourselves and others.

Furthermore, literature has unique capabilities of making readers reflect not just upon their own life stories, but about issues of civil war, complicity in violence, and our responsibilities as witnesses to history. At the time of writing *Devil*, Forna had attained her law degree and been a journalist for the BBC for ten years, and yet 'felt there was an urgent necessity to address what was happening in [Sierra Leone] in a way that went beyond news reporting' ("Paradox of Happiness"). Forna knew the limitations of journalism and needed a different form to synthesise this story of Sierra Leone, in which her family's story held one part of the answer ("Paradox of Happiness"). Later, when Forna published a novel, it was after an 'incremental process of realising, through the process of writing, the specific powers of fiction' ("Why I Write" 19). In Forna's own process, both fiction and nonfiction forms have served their purpose of conveying real stories. Both *Devil* and *Memory* narrate stories from Sierra Leone before and after the Civil War, a real and contemporary conflict that some readers will hear about for the first time through Forna because of the lack of representation from Sierra Leone otherwise.

Representation of marginalised characters is another important aspect of Forna's storytelling. Forna feels a responsibility as an author of writing herself and others like her back into the centre, 'in part because to be a good writer makes it unavoidable' ("Selective Empathy" 35). In a story she heard as a child, which Forna also mentions in *Devil*, white boys are punished by being made black ("Selective Empathy" 34). At the time, Forna did 'not see the world or [herself] in racial terms' and did not learn the damage that racial slurs can do before moving to London ("Selective Empathy" 34-35). Forna reflects upon the stories she read about Africans and people of colour: 'Certainly they didn't square with my own experience of growing up in West Africa. But perhaps as a child I accepted them as true in some other version of reality, unlived by me, but somehow coexisting' ("Selective Empathy" 35). Even if her younger self did not believe them consciously, perhaps she did on some unconscious level; she accepted that it might be true for others, for people she did not know. This makes it necessary for writers from 'all minority groups, and women writers, and those from colonised nations—all of us who have been spoken for, instead of listened to, have had to seize our own narratives' ("Selective Empathy" 36). Forna writes that 'For the generation of African writers who came of age at the same time as their countries, this return to the centre meant literally writing Africans into existence' ("Selective Empathy" 36). The stories that we hear about ourselves matter to how we perceive ourselves. Where previously there had only been a stereotype, a more nuanced image emerges as soon as more stories are told. This is the

responsibility that Forna feels as an author, to write these marginalised characters into the centre and giving them a voice, which in turn challenges the dominant culture.

While the stories told about Sierra Leone and its Civil War matter to the people of Sierra Leone, their significance is wider than that. Civil wars are not exclusive to only a few countries but are a part of the past and present of many places. Sierra Leone has been the setting of several of Aminatta Forna's works, and her heritage makes her a convincing authority about the country and its conflict. Because of the low literacy rates in Sierra Leone, few other writers have risen to the same international fame as Aminatta Forna. With such a small body of literature from and about the country, Forna's works might be read as symbolic and representative of the country and its history. Resisting this labelling as the singular voice about Sierra Leone, Aminatta Forna has also written a novel about civil war in Croatia, *The Hired Man*. In a review of the novel, Alfred Hickling proclaims that the 'theme of civil conflict and recent horror rings as true in a small Croatian town as it did in Sierra Leone' (Hickling). Hickling considers Forna's body of literature as having one 'overriding theme', threatening to become what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie calls the 'single story', but concludes that *The Hired Man* 'proves that the story need not always remain the same' (Hickling). Arguably, this single story, reiterated in several forms and with different characters that tell multiple stories, shows that these themes occur in several contexts and concern different kinds of people. Françoise Lionnet and Jennifer MacGregor even suggest that through choosing Croatia rather than Sierra Leone as the setting, 'Forna gives herself the right to suggest that the shared experience of trauma can bridge racial, linguistic, and national divides, creating strong commonalities' (207). Because these stories are not unique, readers from around the world are encouraged to consider how these stories of violence might be deserving of our attention, not as something distant happening elsewhere, but as concerning everyone.

Overview of Criticism

Memoirs are often avoided in literary criticism, and instead only criticised for two things: the author's truthfulness and the author's self-absorption (Atwan 10). Reviews of *Devil* typically summarise what happens in the memoir, and praise Forna for her bravery and quality of writing (Hope; McQuade; Mutebi). Ronald Mutebi muses on the father-daughter relationship represented in the memoir, and how *Devil* is a story about modern Africa (72). Victoria Brittain's review focuses on Forna's relationship to her father as well as her stepmother,

Yabome (Brittain). Yet these reviews are brief, and the analyses stay on a surface level. Reviews of Forna's memoir are interesting enough to make readers want to pick up the book, but do not offer much to engage with critically.

Otherwise, *Devil* has seen little critical engagement. In an article about post-Civil War literary fiction from Sierra Leone, Abioseh Michael Porter mentions *Devil*, but chooses to only focus on Forna's fiction (146). Although *Devil* is not as ambiguous as other works that have been labelled as both nonfiction and fiction (Novak 13), it has in fact been mistaken for a novel—in an article on *Memory*, Zoe Norridge mistakes the memoir for a novel: 'Forna knows first-hand the cost of Sierra Leone's enduring conflicts. Her first novel, [*Devil*], explores the events leading up to her father's execution when she was just eleven years old' ("Sex as Synecdoche" 20). In a subsequent article, Norridge suggests that later writing from Forna 'returns to this early trauma', but her analysis is focused on Forna's fictional works rather than the memoir ("Knowing Civil War" 100). The memoir is often mentioned in the discussion of *Memory*, establishing Forna's personal connection to the subject, but without elaborating on it. Aminatta Forna's experience of growing up in Sierra Leone as the daughter of Mohamed Forna seems to be potentially valuable information in understanding her novel, yet it is only mentioned in a footnote.

Notably, a new book chapter and a journal article about *Devil* have been published recently in 2024, perhaps due to a heightened interest in Forna's nonfiction after the publication of her new essay collection, *The Window Seat: Notes from a Life in Motion* (2021), as well as the twentieth anniversary edition of *Devil* that contains a new foreword by Forna (2024). Lena Englund explores the concept of urban mobility in *Devil* and *Window Seat*, considering the impact of Aminatta's childhood being marked by moving around between different countries, and later her travel back to Sierra Leone (Englund). Meanwhile, in "Representing the Politics of Memory", Maryline Chepngetich Kirui examines how Forna 'manipulates point of view to represent the politics of memory' in both *Devil* and *Memory* (32). Here Kirui considers the child narrator of *Devil* (35), and the multiple narrative points in *Memory* (41). This thesis aims to continue this trend of again engaging *Devil* in critical conversation.

A similar lack of criticism is found with novels like *Memory*, which are immensely popular with an international audience, but receive little attention from scholars. This might be described as a form of literary snobbery. Newer works of fiction are typically overlooked in criticism, not necessarily because of their lack of popularity, but maybe even *because* of their popularity. These popular books of literary realism, with a language that is accessible to

the general literate population, is considered to be of a different quality than the classics, which for many people have started to become unintelligible and unrelatable. This is despite the fact that the books that top lists titled 'The Greatest Books of All Time' are often the same books that are found on lists of 'The Best-Selling Books of All Time', which Isabella LeBlanc points out in an article about literary snobbery (LeBlanc). Don Quixote, the Spanish classic often cited as one of the greatest books of all time, is approximated to have sold over 500 million copies, making it possibly the best-selling book of all time ("One Good Fact About Best-Selling Novels"). Despite the hypocrisy of statements about the relation between popularity and literary quality, popular literature continues to be overlooked in criticism.

Nonetheless, *Memory* has been the subject of a few journal articles and book chapters, which I will give a brief overview of, including texts by Zoe Norridge, Stef Craps, Dave Gunning, Z'étoile Imma, Ryan Topper, and Swati Patil and Sukanya Saha. These articles are largely focused on depiction of trauma and to what extent the novel challenges a Eurocentric view of trauma.

Zoe Norridge's article "Sex as Synecdoche", published in 2012, is a comparative study on the use of sexual imagery and its connection to violence in *Memory* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Norridge refers to reviews of Forna's novel that downplay the significance of the sexual interactions, suggesting that explicit sexual descriptions are 'out of place in the representation of conflict' ("Sex as Synecdoche" 19). As Norridge highlights, Forna is focused on 'the personal cost of conflict' and the ways that 'long-term threat of violence, alongside physical and emotional wounding, reconfigures the daily lives of their characters' ("Sex as Synecdoche" 19). Norridge shows how Forna 'probe[s] the ways in which sexual encounters can increase self-awareness and a sense of (imperfect) connection with other cultures' ("Sex as Synecdoche" 22). Adrian's relationship to Nenebah ends up changing the way he perceives the country and his role there, giving the city a past and a sense that it 'exists in another dimension other than the present' (*Memory* 255). Norridge writes about the role of Adrian's character, as well as how various characters are typically received by reading groups and classes that Norridge has taught ("Sex as Synecdoche" 24). According to Norridge, the novel avoids a representation of trauma and victimhood that would reinforce Eurocentric ideas, and instead encourages crosscultural connection, as the reader is able to imagine being in someone else's position.

Stef Craps and Dave Gunning agree and disagree on certain similar points. In 'Beyond Eurocentrism', Craps discusses the usefulness of Western psychology to treat African trauma, a context where trauma and suffering is general and unending rather than event based. Craps

concludes that *Memory* 'does not derive its haunting power from the conversion of unspeakable suffering into broken, traumatised speech', but instead the novel's impact is due to 'its acknowledgement of the existence of vast silent spaces of unknown, ongoing suffering in the face of which narrative therapy (…) is an inadequate response' (57). The therapy that Adrian can provide cannot immediately cure the patients he is working with, and thereby it challenges 'trauma theory to remove its Eurocentric blinkers' (Craps 57). Gunning is more focused on the irony of Adrian's character. Even though Adrian seems keen to avoid diagnosis of his patients in the mental hospital, he becomes obsessed with diagnosing Agnes as suffering of fugue (Gunning 123). To Craps, this is the novel's clearest example of 'the inappropriateness of Western attitudes towards silence in the face of massive suffering' (55). While Craps argues that the novel ultimately challenges trauma theory, Gunning reaches a different conclusion. Gunning agrees that *Memory* 'displays some scepticism about the crosscultural application of clinical models of trauma' but claims that the novel 'ultimately returns to a fairly traditional view of traumatic experience' (Gunning 120). Here I agree with Craps, because the presence of Adrian in the novel as naïve but with potential for growth shows how an outsider can eventually gain some insight into a new culture where they have different expectations for the effects of silences and speaking. *Memory* shows situations from multiple perspectives rather than reaffirming only one way of viewing the world.

From another point of view, Z'étoile Imma argues that the male protagonists of Kai and Adrian 'find that intimate spaces are the more appropriate venue to struggle with the efficacy of silence and truth-telling in the harrowing aftermath of violence' (129). With the official Truth and Reconciliation Commission largely unsuccessful due to lack of support from the local population (Dougherty; Kelsall), people of Sierra Leone turned to other, more intimate arenas to process their trauma. Adrian's love affair with Nenebah and his attempts to connect with his patients 'are undermined by the past, the unspeakable, and the many secrets untold' (Imma 142). Because Adrian is an outsider and did not experience the Civil War, he does not know what it was like to live through it. To Imma, the novel shows how 'personal complicities and silences lead to failure in love and life' (142). Like Norridge, Imma suggests that Adrian's relationship to Nenebah opens another world to him. This relationship makes Adrian more aware of the reasons behind all the silences in the people he meets. In addition, Imma explains two scenes of truth-telling in the novel as presenting a form of storytelling that protects victims, witnesses, and perpetrators (Imma 144). I will discuss Imma's interpretations of Agnes' and Kai's storytelling scenes in Chapter 2, as she has illuminating points about the

ways in which their stories come into the light, though I will suggest a few interventions in Imma's conclusion.

While the previously mentioned articles about *Memory* deal to some extent with trauma theory, Ryan Topper argues for an alternative approach to the novel. Topper suggests that while a 'critique of Eurocentrism is immanent to [*Memory*], at this time the articulation of such a critique does little more than point out a problem almost universally recognised within literary and cultural studies' (96-7). Instead, Topper focuses on alternative configurations of trauma. Drawing on Susan Shepler, Topper explains the approach of the United Nations and other nongovernmental organisations in post-Civil War Sierra Leone as fostering recovery in a process of 'sensitisation', which operates 'top-down' and assumes that Sierra Leoneans are ignorant and need more knowledge, which are tied to 'Western ideas of psychological health' (Topper 90). *Memory* 'critique[s] humanitarian discourse in post-civil war Sierra Leone', with the character of Agnes as someone 'harbouring forms of consciousness that gesture toward alternative modes of spiritual community' that 'theorise trauma beyond the memory ideology of humanitarian discourse' (Topper 90). Topper argues that Forna 'uses both the realist consciousness of the novel's narration and the animist consciousness of a subaltern character' to transform Agnes' trauma 'into a logic of survival' (93). I will draw on Topper's approach of focusing on the novel's unique representation of trauma, rather than critiquing Eurocentrism or trauma theory.

In an article from 2022, Swati Patil and Sukanya Saha use intertextuality as a lens to compare *Devil* and *Memory*, as well as Forna's novel *Happiness*. What ties the three works together is Forna's exploration of 'displacement, trauma, associated memories, and how individuals and communities cope with their traumatic experiences through her characters and her own experiences' (Patil and Saha 80). As Patil and Saha show, 'Reticence is acknowledged to be the norm of enduring the suffering inflicted by war' (86). An avoidance of speaking about their suffering is necessary for the survivors to continue their regular lives. When Patil and Saha use intertextual theory to understand the texts, they see texts as always being in the context of other texts, so that it is natural to include Forna's memoir when talking about her novels. The authors describe Elias Cole and Morlai Salieu's similarities (93), as well as the connection between Forna and Adrian as Brits coming to Sierra Leone (94), as intertextual links between *Devil* and *Memory*. In their conclusion, Patil and Saha emphasise the 'strong interconnectedness with the real situations [the narratives] portray' and that through 'narrativising various faces of trauma through extensive research and mirroring actual people and instances, Forna paves the way from epistemological theories of trauma to fiction'

(95). The connections between Forna's memoir and her novels, seen in the context of each other, all add to the conversation about trauma and moving on from it in postcolonial countries. Inspired by Patil and Saha, I will myself apply intertextual theory to my reading of *Devil* and *Memory* together in Chapter 3.

What this thesis will contribute to the conversation is the focus on narrative and its power, and how awareness of the constructedness of narrative helps us read both fiction and nonfiction. Rather than attempt to tease out the truth in fiction and the lies in nonfiction, I will show that both fiction and nonfiction contain invented stories. If this is established as our starting point, we are ready to consider the effect of this construction of stories, in which manipulated narratives and silent lies both influence the storyteller and the people in the story.

I chose these two books by Forna not because of a personal connection to the country, but because of the way they show that telling stories is not inconsequential. I have always believed in the power of stories, and mostly in the positive powers they contain with the ability to increase empathy and understanding for others. *Devil* and *Memory* show a society in which truth is subjective, but the official narrative depends on who has the power to tell it. Even if we do not believe the stories that Elias Cole or Morlai Salieu tell, we can imagine ourselves into their point of view, in which they have convinced themselves that this is what happened, and at least that this is what they want others to believe. But the second that these stories are recorded and go uncontested, they are not simply stories told by one man, but history. The winners and losers in history are always decided according to who tells it.

Structure of the Thesis

The structure of this thesis includes three chapters that each have three to four subsections, followed by a conclusion. Because most existing criticism is about *Memory*, this is going to be explored first in Chapter 2, while Chapter 3 includes my analysis of *Devil*, as well as their intertextual links.

In Chapter 1 I begin by outlining theory about classification and authorship, as well as the concept of forms by Caroline Levine. Here I will describe the autobiographical pact by Philippe Lejeune and the author function according to theory from Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. From there, I draw on Hanna Meretoja, Wolfgang Iser, Tonya Blowers, and others, to explore the interconnectedness between storytelling and our perception of reality. In the final section, I consider a few concepts from memory studies to describe reconstructions of the past.

In Chapter 2 I delve into the analysis of *Memory*, beginning by outlining the form and affordances of the novel. In the three following sections I will discuss silence and storytelling in *Memory*, first considering Adrian's initial perspective as an outsider, to gradually adding nuance to the depictions of local coping mechanisms and Western therapeutic methods. In this chapter I will show how both silence and storytelling can be appropriate responses, depending on the circumstances of the individual.

Finally, in Chapter 3 I give my analysis of *Devil*. Here I will again go through the form and affordances of the memoir, as it causes the work to be subject to tests of verification, but also a relationship of trust is formed between the reader and the author. In the next section I show the memoir's portrayal of the past and the obstacles to finding out the truth of her father's story. I will also discuss ethics of storytelling, as some stories will go untold because Forna does not have access to them. Finally, in the final section of Chapter 3, I explore intertextual links between *Devil* and *Memory*, as they contain parallels that can potentially change the meaning or impact of each of the works.

At last, in the Conclusion, I will summarise my findings from the three different chapters and make links to how this subject appears in the world beyond the books. The aim of my thesis is to show a way of thinking of all narratives, both fiction and nonfiction, as constructed as well as powerful. There are similarities between the two forms that, when noticed, encourage us to become aware of storytelling processes both in literature and in our own lives.

Chapter 1: Stories of Life and Life as Stories

As Forna's works about Sierra Leone feature a post-colonial setting whose population has endured immense trauma, the obvious choice of theory to support my reading might have been trauma theory and postcolonial theory. The view of postcolonialism as 'caution[ing] against any kind of homogenisation of cultures and people' (Nayar 17) is tangentially related to my discussion of Forna's works, but it will not be a focus of my analysis. In addition, most existing criticism about *Memory* rely on trauma theory as their theoretical background, but due to its weak applicability in contexts beyond its conception (Kansteiner and Weilnböck), I have chosen to follow an alternative theoretical pathway focused on narrative hermeneutics. Storytelling is an integral aspect of our life experience, and the 'interpretive study of human lives' can be seen as 'a vehicle for exploring foundational theoretical and philosophical issues tied to the human condition' (Freeman). Reading and interpreting narratives of other life stories can be a way to access and understand, or at least to begin a conversation about, issues in the world, such as violence and civil war.

To begin, I will explore authorship and classification, as I am analysing both fictional and nonfictional works of literature. Here I will outline my theoretical stance on the role of the author in determining the meaning of a work, and what makes a work fit into one category or another. Next, I will explore the nature of textual representation of reality in literature, since both memoirs and realistic novels are representations of reality. Finally, I will consider a few concepts from memory studies and how it connects to meaning-making and interpretation.

The most important takeaway from this chapter is to understand the view of stories as constructed, yet able to represent reality, and there is a possibility that stories can impact the way we think and live, which is why it is worthwhile to pay attention to how we read them.

1.1 Classification and Authorship

In this section, I will explore a few ideas from theorists that write about classification of texts and the issue of authorship. While I wish to disregard the author so as not to cloud my own judgement as a reader, I find it important to analyse the function and effect of having an author to the text. Aminatta Forna, in addition to having the role of author to *Memory* and *Devil*, is a private and public person, who has written numerous works of fiction and nonfiction, and frequently spoken in interviews—the author is not literally dead, and she is not silent. Authors being identified with names are a fact of our cultural reality, which

influences the reading experience, so therefore my work is to figure out how we should read this signature of the author in the text.

Rather than thinking in terms of genres, I will apply the concept of forms to describe the similarities and differences between *Memory* and *Devil* as texts. In *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, Levine uses the idea of forms to describe organisations and hierarchies in the world, which can be applied to anything, from text to social conventions. 'Forms matter,' Levine writes, 'because they shape what it is possible to think, say, and do in a given context' (5). Levine introduces the concept of affordances, which describes how materials or tools have strengths, weaknesses, and intended purposes, but importantly '[d]esigned things may also have unexpected affordances generated by imaginative users: we may hang signs or clothes on a doorknob (…) or use a fork to pry open a lid, and so expand the intended affordances of an object' (6). Because forms constrain, each form has a limited range of potential, and '[e]ach form can only do so much' (6). However, when forms meet and collide, this can produce unexpected consequences, like to 'activate latent affordances' or 'foreclose otherwise dominant ones' (7). Applying the concept of forms to Forna's two works gives me a perspective that acknowledges that a memoir and a novel are different and affect readers differently, and one form can only do so much. Yet, the author's connection to the subject makes the two works more similar than we might expect, and both memoir and novel are attributed a dimension of truthfulness. Because the two works overlap in terms of content, a reader who has visited both is likely to compare Forna's use of perspective, characters, silence, and more.

Furthermore, strict classification is not necessarily productive in a conversation about texts that push at the boundaries of their forms. Because literary nonfiction, like Forna's memoir, has been avoided in criticism, there has been a difficulty in developing a theory of it. Daniel Lehman is more concerned with 'the heft and shape of nonfiction, its ability to alter space and make noise' rather than 'the business of arranging neat piles', while acknowledging the necessity of categorising texts (335). Lehman makes broad claims about how all literary texts, 'whether fiction or nonfiction, even one's own memory of events' are 'arbitrated or "crafted" in important ways', which complicates the idea of 'actuality' in nonfiction (335). Still, the decision by the writer or publisher to label a narrative as nonfiction 'remains an important key to how it is written and read' (Lehman 336). To Lehman, the label of nonfiction is 'more socially constructed and negotiated by both author and reader' rather than something 'derived from some empirical standard of truth' (336). Lehman urges readers to study nonfiction seriously, and to 'bring everything [they] can to the sorts of texts that we associate

with historical assertions and events and to read those texts both inside and out for the way they create the world in the text and interact with the world outside the text' (341). Lehman's encouragements align well with my own approach to reading both *Devil* and *Memory*, as I will be considering the relationship between the author and reader in these works that portray a real-world context and historical events. Viewing both fiction and nonfiction as constructed texts free me as a writer to consider *Devil* as a representation of reality, and the author-narrator as a character, rather than worrying about truth claims made in the memoir.

In his seminal theory of the autobiographical pact, Philippe Lejeune describes how the classification of texts as fiction or nonfiction is not determined by their accuracy of portrayal, but rather an understanding between the author and the reader. The important factor that differentiates autobiographies from fiction, which can imitate everything about an autobiography, is when the narrator is identified as the same person as the author.[1] The author of an autobiography is 'the only mark in the text of an unquestionable world-beyond-the-text, referring to a real person' who holds 'the responsibility for the production of the whole written text' (Lejeune 11). In fiction, there can be doubt or ambiguity about who the narrator is, whereas in autobiography this doubt is removed. On the level of the text, an autobiographical novel and an autobiography can be the same. That being said, this is true only if we take away the title page (Lejeune 13). If we can see that the name of the author is the same as the name of the narrator/protagonist, the identity is affirmed, and we have the autobiographical pact (Lejeune 14). Importantly, the author is only a function, as the person who writes and publishes the text. Unless the reader knows the author personally, the author is only imagined from the text (Lejeune 11). When reading *Devil*, the reader knows that Forna is the narrator because of the use of I: 'I am ten years old. It is 30 July 1974' (*Devil* 3). The name of the narrator is confirmed when other characters call her 'Am' (*Devil* 13). The name of the narrator being the same as the name on the front cover of the book signals to the reader that this is autobiographical writing. The reader does not need to know anything except what is in the memoir to imagine the author behind it, or to analyse the text. When Roland Barthes famously kills the author, he proclaims that the 'Author-God' that we praise does not assign one 'theological' meaning to the text. (146). Luckily, the act of acknowledging there is an author, and an origin of the text, does not have to mean imposing a final meaning on the text.

[1] Although Lejeune excludes memoir from his classification of autobiography, I find his theory illuminating about several aspects of the reading experience of *Devil*, which is why I decided to use the theory.

In this thesis, I will view the author as a function in the text, rather than an authority of meaning. In 'What is an Author?', Michel Foucault discusses the challenges, or implications, of the author's death. Writing today has 'freed itself from the theme of expression' and become more concerned with the signifier than the signified itself (Foucault 206). In the history of authorship, it was previously only scientific texts that required an author in order to be valued, while literary texts were circulated anonymously without a problem (Foucault 212). This changed, however, so that now we always ask of a fictional text who wrote it and where it came from. Instances where the author has been kept anonymous turns into a 'game [of] rediscovering the author' (Foucault 213). A recent example of this is how Elena Ferrante, an Italian author writing under a pseudonym, was the subject of extensive investigations to reveal her identity (Gatti). Like Barthes, Foucault explains the view we have typically made of authors as geniuses, 'so transcendent with regard to all languages that, as soon as he speaks, meaning begins to proliferate, to proliferate indefinitely' (Foucault 221). Because of this excessive admiration of authors, there is a tendency to turn to the authors for them to explain the meanings of the texts. Nonetheless, this does not have to dominate how we read texts. Imagining a world in which fiction could 'operate in a free state', Foucault sees a rising indifference: 'What difference does it make who is speaking?' (222). If the meaning of *Devil* and *Memory* was determined by Forna herself, my analysis of these two works would be useless—it would already be determined and expressed in interviews and articles where Forna talks about and promotes her own works. Although Forna is well-spoken and chooses important topics to discuss, my analysis benefits from reducing Forna to a mark within the text, a character imagined from her writings, as if we do not know anything else about her.

The act of reducing Forna to only her function does, of course, come with its challenges, and I have already referred to other articles and interviews from Forna that comments upon her authorship. Throughout the next chapters I will occasionally refer to other writing by Forna, as well. However, the focus of my work is not to allow any singular utterance from Forna outside of *Devil* and *Memory* to fully make up the meaning of those works, but rather to interpret their multiple possible meanings through how they connect to each other and with other works, including theory. According to theories of intertextuality, texts exist in a space where all texts interact and influence each other, whether this is intentional or not, and meaning is found through interpretations of intertexts rather than decided by an author. When 'the text becomes the intertext', the meaning of the work is found between the text and all other texts it relates to, and it lacks an independent meaning (Allen 1). Julia Kristeva, the first to articulate the theory, combined theories from Ferdinand de

Saussure and M. M. Bakhtin (Allen 3). To Kristeva, a text is a 'mosaic of quotations: any text is the absorption and transformation of another' (Kristeva 37). Similarly, Barthes refers to a text as a 'tissue of quotations' (146). While I believe that the meaning of a text changes based on how much we know about other texts it relates to, I will not make any attempts to trace all texts that *Memory* and *Devil* relate to. What I find most illuminating about intertextuality as a theory is that it establishes how the meaning of the text is not an inherent, constant quality of it, but an ever-changing interpretation. In this thesis, intertextuality will be used throughout the third chapter, where I make connections between *Devil* and *Memory* as the reading of one informs the other.

Wolfgang Iser also addresses the relationship between the author and the reader, providing some useful terms in a discussion that regards the author as a function rather than an authority. Iser distinguishes, using terms from Wayne Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction*, between the person who writes the book (author), the implied author, and the narrator (Iser 765). The implied author is 'always distinct from the "real man"', as the author has created a 'second self' (Booth quoted in Iser 765). Furthermore, the narrator is often a character of its own, moving far away from the implied author: 'It is almost as if the implied author, who devised the story, has to bow to the narrator, who has deeper insight into all situations' (Iser 765). In *Memory*, the perspective shifts between several characters, so that the narrator moves away from the implied author, whose perspective would be limited to only that of one person. In *Devil*, the implied author and narrator are the same, using the same name, writing in the first person. Yet, what I take from this theory is that through the act of writing, Aminatta, the implied author and narrator, has become a separate self from Forna, the woman behind the memoir. Even readers with little knowledge about Forna will likely know that she has a personal connection to the material, taken that they have read the acknowledgements of *Memory* or know about her previous memoir. This knowledge might tempt readers to analyse *Memory* searching for connections between the novel and the author.

Depending on what they are reading, readers look for different things; in an autobiographical novel the reader looks for what is true despite of the author's denial, while in an autobiography the reader is likely to look for errors. Lejeune writes: 'Confronted with what looks like an autobiographical narrative, the reader often tends to think of himself as a detective, that is to say, to look for breaches of contract' (14). This leads Lejeune to reflect on the widespread idea that fiction is truer than nonfiction, because 'when we think we have discovered something through the text, in spite of the author, we always accord it more truth and more profundity' (14). When the protagonist of the book does not have the same name as

the author, or fictitiousness is affirmed in another way, such as with the subtitle 'novel', there is a fictional pact instead (14-15). Because the modern novel can imitate autobiography and all forms of personal literature, nothing is stopping anyone from writing an autobiography about another person or a fictional character and publishing it. Yet these cases of literary fraud are rare, because as Lejeune puts it, 'few authors are capable of renouncing *their own name*' (15). Therefore we are safe to assume that authors of autobiography do not set out to deceive the reader, but rather they intend to convey their personal truths. Nonetheless, the view that fiction is truer than nonfiction persists because of the joy readers experience when they believe they have discovered something despite the author's intent.

The combination of both a memoir and a novel about Sierra Leone contribute to a nuanced conversation, and it is unnecessary to privilege either fiction or nonfiction when it comes to the ability to convey truthfulness. Forna mentions a quote that claims that '[n]onfiction reveals the lies, but only metaphor can tell the truth' ("Why I Write" 19), which suggests that fiction can reveal some truth that nonfiction cannot. Yet, like Lejeune points out, even the authors who say novels are truer than autobiography, have written autobiographies: 'if they had not *also* written and published autobiographical texts, even "inadequate" ones, no one would ever have seen the nature of the truth that it was necessary to look for in their novels' (27). Because of Forna's memoir that explain her roots in Sierra Leone, she is seen as an authority on the topic when she later publishes a novel set in Sierra Leone. Then again, it is not necessary to decide which of the two forms are truer, because '[i]t is neither one nor the other; autobiography will lack complexity, ambiguity, etc.; the novel, accuracy' (Lejeune 27). Rather than favouring one over the other, or evaluating which one is truer, we as readers can focus on the existence of both, as able to contribute with something the other form cannot. Both *Devil* and *Memory* together contribute to an understanding of Sierra Leone as a country. Thereby we benefit from an analysis that considers both works as seen in relation to each other, as forms with different affordances that can reveal something about the other.

1.2 Textual Representation of Reality

Moving on from authorship and classification, in this section I will explore a few ideas about a textual representation of reality, as *Devil* is a nonfictional memoir and *Memory* is a realistic novel. What the following concepts will show is that the way we perceive reality is tightly bound with processes of storytelling and interpretation, which in turn affects how we read, write, and interpret both our lives and literature.

In Western tradition, a dichotomy of the actual and the possible has often been used to distinguish between history and literature. Hanna Meretoja suggests that this dichotomy 'has led to a dismissal of how a sense of the possible is integral to who are' and hinders our understanding of literature as capable of expanding our sense possibility in the world (14-15). Most theorists of fiction share the view that fiction 'lacks truth value' and does not refer to 'the actual world' (Meretoja 15). They acknowledge that 'even though fiction belongs to the realm of the possible, it can still affect our conceptions of [reality]' (Meretoja 15). In "Can Fictional Narratives Be True?", Paul Ricoeur says that 'both history and fiction refer to human action, although they do so on the basis of two different referential claims' (11). The way we see the relationship between the real and the possible 'depends on one's assumptions concerning the basic nature of reality and history' (Meretoja 15). These assumptions are mostly implicit because they are often seen as self-evident (Meretoja 15). The dominant theory of factuality is based on the assumption that the real refers to 'what can be objectively observed: to actions, events, and facts that can be verified with observations and documents' (Meretoja 15-16). However, reality is also based on things we cannot see, such as 'patterns of experience, affect, and meaning-giving' (Meretoja 16). Therefore, the historian needs the 'capacity to imagine' (Meretoja 16). Meretoja suggests that both fictional and nonfictional narratives contribute to our sense of the possible, which also affects how we act—we can only think, imagine, and do what we regard as possible to think, imagine, and do (16). In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur develops his thought on referentiality, claiming that 'thinking based on referentiality is insufficient for understanding the relationship between fiction and reality' (Meretoja 17). Rather than wonder about the truthfulness of narratives, we can switch our focus to see how both fiction and nonfiction contribute to this sense of what is possible. In both fiction and nonfiction, Meretoja writes, 'the actual and the possible constantly interpenetrate one another (…) and in the different modes of engagement they invite' (17). As reading expands our sense of the possible, our possible actions expand too, and this is work that both fiction and nonfiction can perform.

Showing multiple perspectives and the influence of perspective is significant in both *Memory* and *Devil*. According to Jerome Bruner, the way we interpret and narrate our own lives is based on our idea of possible lives, as a 'stock of canonical life narratives' decides how we perceive ourselves (Bruner quoted in Meretoja 9). This interpretation of our identities is under constant mediation, and is not a solitary activity, but 'something we do together with others and through which we take part in shaping social reality' (Meretoja 10). This aligns with Levine's idea of forms as providing structure and limiting what is possible to think and

do within a specific context, as our idea of possible lives affect our possible actions. We can only think within this framework of what we perceive as possible, which is unique to individuals, but the process of interpreting our own lives is always in relation to other people. Through relating this theory to read Elias Cole we might see how his views of his own actions are influenced by his upbringing and his strategy of keeping up with appearances. The way that Cole acts and interprets his own life is according to his idea of possible actions.

The dichotomy between living and telling is another concept relevant to both reading and how we experience and act in the world. Narrativity is an integral part of our lives. This is the topic of Jonathan Gottschall's book *The Storytelling Animal*, in which he argues that we are addicted to story—even when the body goes to sleep, the mind stays awake, 'telling itself stories' (Gottschall xiv). Most approaches to narrative, Meretoja argues, focus on a hierarchical dichotomy between living and telling, which is 'based on the assumption that there is a pure or raw experience on which narrative retrospectively imposes order', so that experience comes first, and narrative is imposed on it afterwards (8). Thereby narrative can appear as 'a projection of false order' or as 'a distortion of the original experience' (Meretoja 8). According to narrative hermeneutics, experience is 'continuously mediated' (Meretoja 9). Both the acts of reading and the act of living in the world involves processes of imagination and interpretation, which are ongoing. Therefore storytelling and narrativisation are integral to the way we live, and they help us to understand the different storytellers that Forna portrays in her works. The rejection of this dichotomy allows us to understand the reasons why some people can retell an event in a different way from another person who also experienced it. Rather than intentionally manipulating and changing the story, these people might have experienced the situation differently, and their retelling will reinforce that view of the situation.

The separation of the narrator and the implied author in the realistic novel, 'which is supposed to represent reality as it is', allows the reader distance to take up the position of a critic in judging the events presented (Iser 765). Iser agrees with the theory of factuality that Meretoja supports—that reality is made up of the observable and material, but also abstract concepts, and thereby Iser establishes that it is 'impossible to try to transcribe complete reality' and only a fraction of this reality can be presented (765). Iser outlines how the novel is not meant to represent reality itself, 'but aims rather at producing an idea of how reality can be experienced' (766). The implied author presents a 'social reality' within the novel, but the reader can only access it through the 'adjustments of perspectives made by the narrator', who mediates the distance between the reader and the events presented in the novel (Iser 766). The

gap between the actions of the characters and the comments from the narrator 'stimulates the reader into forming judgements of his own' and 'gradually adopting the position of the critic himself' (Iser 768). In novels that have an omniscient narrator or several characters that narrate the story, the reader is kept at a 'variable distance from the events' and thereby 'the text gives him the illusion that he can judge the proceedings in accordance with his own point of view' (Iser 775). In the process the reader is encouraged to 'assume a critical attitude toward the reality portrayed', where the reader is given the alterative of 'adopting one of the views offered him, or of developing one of his own' (Iser 775). In *Memory*, readers are encouraged to make up their own minds about which characters to believe and to support, when it is revealed that Elias, one of the main voices heard in the novel, is not being truthful. In *Devil*, Aminatta appears as both character, narrator, as well as identified as the implied author. In the memoir, readers are still able to make independent judgements based on what they read, but in addition they will often experience or imagine the judgement from Aminatta, too, because the perspective is narrower.

An intervention in the autobiographical pact, the textual contract suggested by Tonya Blowers, encourages the critic to take into consideration the text's relationship to the external world. While a novel can be based on aspects of the author's life 'it makes no claims to correspond in any direct way to the author's life' in the way that an autobiography does (Blowers 105). To Lejeune, the distinction between a novel and an autobiography is that in autobiographies the narrator is the same person as the author, whereas in a novel these are two different people, giving the reader a simple means of categorisation of the two forms. The problem is that 'many novels read like autobiography and, indeed, much of the *frisson* of the writing depends on this close but unaffirmed identification' (Blowers 105). Blowers' claims that Lejeune's pact 'encourages the critic to ignore the fascinating points of intersection between the two genres' (105). To Blowers, the connection to the world beyond the text is the most interesting part of both autobiographies and novels. In *Memory*, Forna does not affirm direct references to real people and places, but the reader is left to imagine and speculate about the realness of the story.

The structures of human time and narrative bind fiction and nonfiction together, as they are both acts of imagination. Drawing from Ricoeur, who writes about the relationship between history and fiction, Blowers argues that 'the tendency to force history and fiction into separate categories belies their fundamental interdependence on each other' (105-6). While it is necessary to keep history and fiction as separate categories 'in order that we can talk meaningfully about them', they cannot be defined in opposition to each other, 'to describe

history as what fiction is not, or vice versa' (Blowers 106). What is common to history and fiction, are the structures of narrative, and that 'thinking historically requires a high degree of inventiveness' (Blowers 106). Hayden White argues that historical stories and fictional stories are similar because regardless of whether they retell real or imaginary events, 'their ultimate content is the same: the structures of human time. Their shared form, narrative, is a function of this shared content. There is nothing more real for human beings than the experience of temporality' (Hayden White quoted in Blowers 106). As Blowers makes clear, the 'past is evidently not transparently and unproblematically available', because we 'cannot remember everything that has ever happened, not even to ourselves' (109). Even if we have documents and eyewitness accounts about what happened in a given time, it is still necessary to 'imagine ourselves into the past. It does not just exist out there for us to tell' (Blowers 110). In this way fiction and history are connected, both basing themselves on an imagined version of the past. Viewing fiction and nonfiction as connected through the structures of human time further allows me to make comparisons between a memoir and a novel, despite their different forms.

Besides, the experience of time as progressing forward is constructed using temporal devices. Blowers explains the invention of 'historical time', i.e. hours, days, and dates, as meditating between universal time and our experience of 'lived time' (107). 'Universal time is predictable,' Blowers writes, 'we know that it is a repeated pattern, that every day the sun will set, but if we have no watch or sundial, we do not experience this passing of time in any objectively measurable, quantifiable way' (107). Blowers refers to how 'temporal devices' such as calendars, documents, and archives constructs a 'sense of progression, of time passing and time past' (108). Because of our invention of historical time, of dates on calendars, and axial moments that 'changed the course of history', we get a sense that we are moving forward, and we place ourselves on a 'historical continuum' (108). Blowers compares these narrative structures that refigure time and places us on the historical continuum, to the structures we use to refigure time in fictional narratives (108). Through his storytelling, Elias Cole narrates a convincing story that moves generally from a beginning, through a middle and an end, in which he highlights his virtues and omit his mistakes. The sense of progression of time is not inherent to time itself, but something that we construct in the same way narratives are constructed.

Because of these similarities between fiction and nonfiction forms, Blowers' textual contract encourages readers to hold onto the sense of 'the real' outside of the text while being aware of the 'representative nature of reality within the text' (Blowers 115). In autobiographies, 'reading the signature that is common to author, narrator and protagonist'

signals to the reader a 'specific mode of reading: autobiography, not fiction' (Blowers 115). Blowers suggests that we can read this signature as 'a flourish that applies to no person, no thing, no history, other than that which it creates for the complicit reader in the text' (Blowers 115). The realities that authors present in fiction and nonfiction are only textual representations. It is impossible to capture the entirety of reality within text—neither the most accurate description of what everything looks like, nor the most accurate description of what reality is experienced like will be able to fully write down reality. Because neither form can succeed in that impossible task, the reader should keep in mind that even in nonfiction the text is only a representation of reality, and not an authoritative account of what happened.

Sometimes narratives acknowledge its constructed nature, while others do not. Two different logics of narratives, either neutralising or self-reflexive, influence how texts will be met. According to Meretoja, neutralising narratives 'hide their own mediating and interpretative role' while self-reflexive narratives 'openly present themselves as *narratives*, that is, as selective, perspectival interpretations that can always be contested and told otherwise' (12). Forna's memoir is a self-reflexive narrative, open about its constructedness and the unreliability of memory. Because the work makes claims about reality and history as Forna experienced it, it is open to being contested and denied. *Memory* does not acknowledge its own narrativity, making it more of a neutralising narrative. However, *Memory* does present situations in which narrative perspective and interpretation influences how the characters perceive themselves, others around them, and the world. Meanwhile, *Devil* has long sequences in which the reader can be immersed, but the reader is continuously reminded of the presence of the author as someone who is writing the story, as well as the one having experienced the memories she narrates. This difference is an important reason for why we read the two works differently.

1.3 Memory, Interpretation, and Meaning

In this third section I will consider memory and storytelling in the face of a violent past such as Sierra Leone's Civil War, briefly considering some work on Holocaust discourse and memory studies and how they can be applied to *Devil* and *Memory*.

Rather than the superficial and brief responses memoirs usually receive, Robert Atwan suggests that memoirs would be better understood through the perspective of memory, from psychological, philosophical, and scientific perspectives (11). Michael Rothberg, using Richard Terdiman's minimalist definition of memory, describes memory as 'the past made

present' (3). Making memory present means that 'memory is a contemporary phenomenon, something that, while concerned with the past, happens in the present; and second, that memory is a form of work, working through, labour, or action' (Rothberg 3-4). Memory is not a simple image of the past as it happened, but it is influenced by our present and our thoughts about the future, and thereby links together these three modes of time. Rothberg describes a popular view of memory as a 'scarce resource' and that remembrance of one history will erase others, which often involves the belief that 'a direct line runs between remembrance of the past and the formation of identity in the present' (2-3). Instead, Rothberg suggests that rather than viewing memory as competitive, 'a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources', that memory is considered 'as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative' (3). Both memoirs and novels can be considered through this view of narrative as multidirectional memory, as the past is invoked, and the future imagined in a continuous process of interpretation.

Identity is influenced by memory, which affects how we interpret characters, but the relationship is not straightforward. According to Rothberg, '[o]ur relationship to the past does partially determine who we are in the present, but never straightforwardly and directly, and never without unexpected or even unwanted consequences that bind us to those whom we consider other' (5). Furthermore, '[m]emories are not owned by groups—nor are groups 'owned' by memories," Rothberg writes, '[r]ather, the borders of memory and identity are jagged: what looks at first like my own property often turns out to be a borrowing or adaptation from a history that initially might seem foreign or distant' (5). It is important to remember that a group does not have the same, cohesive memory of an event. As we see in both *Memory* and *Devil*, everyone in Sierra Leone has a unique relationship to the memory of the Civil War, depending on whose side they were on, the atrocities they experienced, if they emigrated or if they stayed behind. While these are unique memories, they may still be shared with other groups. There is no competition for who suffered the most or who deserves to be remembered, but memories of several events coexist. In my analysis of a novel and a memoir concerning Sierra Leone's recent history, I keep the multidirectional view of memory in mind, and make sure not value one storyteller over another in a competition for presenting the best or most accurate version of events to be remembered.

The different levels of memory explain how memory presented in media must be actualised by individuals. Theories of memory and remembrance are typically connected to Holocaust discourse, but also usefully applied to the context of the Sierra Leonean Civil War. The first level of cultural memory is biological memory 'shaped in collective contexts' where

memories are triggered by external factors (Erll 5). The second level of cultural memory 'refers to the symbolic order, the media, institutions, and practices by which social groups construct a shared past' (Erll 5). Rather than biological and individual memory, memory is used in a metaphoric sense, because '[s]ocieties do not remember literally' (Erll 5). The process of reconstructing a shared past shares similarity to individual memory processes, 'such as the selectivity and perspectivity inherent in the creation of the past according to present knowledge and needs' (Erll 5). The two levels of cultural memory can easily be distinguished on an analytical level, but in practice they interact continuously (Erll 5). A memory that is represented in media must be actualised by individuals, because otherwise 'monuments, rituals and books are nothing but dead material' (Erll 5). These ideas about the ways that memory operates can help us to understand the conceptualisations of the past we find in Forna's works. Forna and her characters are constantly undergoing processes of imagining the past, which is constantly influenced by the versions of the past being remembered by others, and presented in media, books, and memorials. Furthermore, *Devil* is a memoir that demonstrates that it is necessary to engage with historical documents in order for the memories to be actualised. Aminatta's intervention with official national narratives of Sierra Leonean history is only made possible through her use of letters, transcripts, and interviews to reveal the flaws in the existing narratives about her father.

In relation to the discussion of characters in *Devil* and *Memory* who are unwilling to discuss past matters, I will describe the concept of irreconcilable mourning, such as witness and testimony, as articulated by Jill Peterson Adams (228). Adams explains Freud's conception of mourning as 'a healthy way of responding to loss (…) that ends in a resolution of feelings toward the lost object', after which the 'the mourner moves on from loss and re-enters "normal" society' (230). This view of mourning in response to loss is reflected in Adrian's attitudes in *Memory*, as he expects his patients to work through their traumas and then return to normality. Irreconcilable mourning, in contrast, 'founds action' through testimony and witness, which is concerned with 'denying any totalising closure of loss but also with avoiding the disabling pathology of melancholy' (Adams 230). As time passes and the 'historical and generational distance' from catastrophes increase, several generations will need to 'find their own small closures that allow them to continue to contend with the catastrophe and to *have* something to transmit to subsequent generations' (Adams 229). The characters in *Devil* and *Memory* struggle with this work of dealing with the war they have lived through, and of choosing what to remember for later generations. Because of their closeness to the events, and how they must continue to live with victims, witnesses, and

perpetrators in the same society, this work is complicated, and thereby the most common response to the catastrophe is silence, and only talking about their losses in intimate relations. Later, I will consider how Kai's storytelling in *Memory* and Aminatta's storytelling in *Devil* can be seen as acts of irreconcilable mourning.

The question of the goodness of stories have been up for debate for centuries, but it became foregrounded once again after the two world wars and the Holocaust, after which many became sceptical to the act of storytelling (Meretoja 1). Meretoja points out that the attack on storytelling was mainly aimed at the type of narratives that 'present themselves as the discourse of truth' (12). Meretoja writes: 'Narratives can become dangerous weapons for political ideologies when they are not presented *as narratives* but as neutral, perspectiveless statements of how things are' (12). Both *Devil* and *Memory* resist representation of narratives as neutral and perspectiveless, but rather focus instead on perspectivism, the idea that our view of any situation is limited to our own unique perspective (Meretoja 9). Furthermore, the inclusion of characters like Elias Cole and Morlai Salieu, who are revealed to manipulate their narrative, show the importance of having more than only one story and one perspective about the past. In both *Memory* and *Devil*, Forna resists this representation of narratives as neutral through using multiple perspectives and self-reflexivity, and problematise the act of narrativisation and truth-telling as themes in her works.

Critics disagree about the extent that reading can increase empathy, where some scholars praise stories for their capabilities, while others warn against the damage they can do. Empirical studies have been conducted about to what extent reading fiction increased empathy in the participants, some of which found a strong connection between reading and empathy, and others that could not replicate the same results (Meretoja 3-4). Importantly, Meretoja points out that 'there is a significant difference between embracing the perspectives of others— or imagining what one might do in hypothetical scenarios— and actually carrying out concrete actions in the real world' (4). Meretoja cites several critics that show how fiction provides a space to empathise with characters without changing one's behaviour in the real world (4). That being said, Meretoja suggests that perspective-awareness could be a necessary condition for moral agency (4). Even if there is no direct, established scientific link between readers empathy and their actions in the world, it seems likely that we benefit from becoming more aware of others' perspectives. In *Devil*, the perspective is mostly from Forna's point of view, but to a large part of her readership, this will be a unique perspective that is different from one's own. Furthermore, the multiple main characters of *Memory*, navigated between with an omniscient narrator, show that individuals have different perspectives about the same

situations, and we do not necessarily know what anyone is going through unless they tell us about it, allowing us to imagine ourselves into the situation.

1.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the theoretical background for my discussion of Forna's works, including the concept of forms and affordances, the author as a function rather than an authority on meaning, and how storytelling is an integral part of how reality is produced. I also outlined concepts from memory studies and some thoughts about the role literature and storytelling can play in empathy and perspective-awareness, which I will discuss in the context of Forna's works. In the following chapters I will apply these theoretical concepts to my analyses of *Memory* and *Devil*.

Chapter 2: The Power of Silence in *The Memory of Love*

This chapter will provide an analysis of *Memory* together with theoretical concepts explored in Chapter 1, as well as some existing literary criticism, to consider how the realistic novel treats narrativisation, memory, and silence. Forna's novel grants culturally unfamiliar readers access to stories from Sierra Leone and the population's complicated relationship to the past, and therefore its representation of the past and the stories that are told is important to analyse.

The chapter is divided into three subsections that deal with separate but connected issues. First, I will address the form of the novel, including some of its affordances and the fictional pact, which describes how readers are likely to react to the work. Here I will examine the narration style, how multiple main characters provide perspectives on the same story, and how it matters who is speaking. In the following sections I will explore storytelling and silence in the novel. First, silence is presented as hindering connection, while storytelling is a positive, transformative act. Later, I illustrate how both silence and storytelling become nuanced through the development of Adrian's character, as well as the depiction of other storytellers, like Elias Cole, Kai, and the community that tells Agnes' story.

While the realistic novel is formed and limited by an expectation to tell a story that appears real, without a direct claim to reality, it does have the affordance of allowing authors to use their imagination to create characters and situations that demonstrate a point. *Memory* represents perpetrators, victims, and witnesses, and shows who gets to tell their story, why, and in what way. The representation of storytelling and silence in *Memory* compels the reader to become aware of the power that is found in telling one story, and in not telling another.

2.1 Form and Affordances

In this subsection, I will discuss the form of the novel and investigate the influence the labels 'fiction' and 'novel' have on the reading experience. Additionally, I will describe the affordances that come with writing *Memory* as a work of fiction.

If it was not already obvious from the back cover and the numerous sources praising *Memory* as a wonderful *novel*, the author herself classifies the book as 'a work of fiction' in the first line of the Acknowledgements. Because of this label, and because none of the protagonists are named Aminatta, there can be little doubt that *Memory* is a novel; thereby, the reading of the book falls into the fictional pact (Lejeune 14). While *Memory*, as a realistic novel, aims to present a kind of reality, or at least how 'reality can be experienced' (Iser 766),

this is not explicitly based on the author's own life. Yet, because *Memory* is set in Sierra Leone shortly after the end of the Civil War, a recent historical context, readers are likely to be interested in finding the 'truth' that is hidden within the narrative, despite its claim to fictionality. This is what Forna anticipates and addresses in the Acknowledgements, asserting the text's category as fiction, but also proceeding to state her sources, people 'upon whom [she has] relied to research certain aspects of the background, setting and factual detail of the story' (*Memory*). As Blowers suggests, one of the most interesting aspects of reading certain novels is wondering how much of it is 'true' and what is not (105). Whilst *Memory* is a novel, the setting of Sierra Leone in a post-Civil War context make references to the world beyond the text.

Rightly, there are several aspects of *Memory* that do seem to be inspired by real places and events. For example, there is currently, and historically has been, only one in-patient mental health facility in Sierra Leone, previously called Kissy Lunatic Asylum, now named Sierra Leone Psychiatric Hospital. According to a report, the hospital suffers from 'chronic underfunding, limited human resources, a lack of basic facilities and frequent interruptions to medication supplies [which] often results in restricted treatment options and the chaining of patients' (Harris et al. 15). This description is comparable to the mental hospital in *Memory*, in which Adrian is shocked to see patients in restraints (*Memory* 84). The novel's implicit references to real places, though not necessarily meant to be an accurate representation, draw readers in and prompts them to consider how what happens in the novel, might also have happened, or could happen in real life. Because *Memory* is classified as fiction, the reader is more likely to look for what is true despite its fictionality than to try to pick it apart for its flaws in representing reality. Thereby one of the affordances of a realistic novel is the ability to represent a kind of reality, without the author having to risk being criticised too heavily for the novel's (in)accuracy of portrayal.

Another affordance of the novel form is the ability to provide the reader with a satisfying reading experience where multiple subplots are woven together and wrapped up in the end. The obviously constructed plot might have been seen as unrealistic in a nonfictional text but is often part of the design of the novel form. Novels do not necessarily provide satisfying reading experiences to all readers, but the ending of *Memory* meets some of the criteria for a satisfying ending that provides closure. The cast of characters and storylines that are introduced in the beginning of the novel seem disconnected, but soon their connections are revealed bit by bit. Characters become connected, such as learning that Saffia and Elias are Nenebah's parents (*Memory* 281), and that Mamakay's actual name is Nenebah, which

identifies her as Kai's former lover. At the culmination of the novel, Nenebah dies in childbirth with Adrian's child (*Memory* 420), and Adrian and Kai bond over shared grief, eventually leading to Kai asking Adrian for psychological treatment (*Memory* 426). Rather than leaving the reader hanging at this climax, the novel rounds off with a final chapter set two years later, in which the readers find out what happened to Kai and Adrian (*Memory* 437-45). The reader does not have to be happy about the events that take place at the end of the novel, and in fact they might not approve of the outcomes for some of the characters; either way, the reader is provided with closure. At the end of the novel, most, if not all, loose ends have been tied up. This type of neat ending is made possible by the affordances of the novel, in which the author decides the fate of each character and has no ethical obligation to hold back from telling their stories to completion.

The ability to focus on several characters is another affordance of the novel, giving readers multiple points of view to see the story from. When the story is narrated from different perspectives, fictional plotting at the level of character is juxtaposed with historical facts about the nation's story. The shift from a distanced to a close perspective allows readers to experience how perspective changes their perception of a situation. Considering how the population of Sierra Leone consists of people who played different roles during the Civil War, it is crucial to realise that there is no singular story or singular experience of the Civil War, even if there is one official narrative. Nenebah, as far as the readers know, did not experience any singular traumatic event during the civil war, but she was a witness to atrocities. In a picture from the Civil War, Nenebah and her friends are wearing jeans underneath their dresses, because it would make it more difficult for rapists to take off their clothes (*Memory* 279). Her father, Elias Cole, was in an entirely different position, as he experiences no difficulty in following orders if it can benefit himself, which we can see in how he agrees to inform on Julius even before the war breaks out (*Memory* 9). Adrian, who was not there, tells the reader what he knows about the war from a distanced perspective: 'He knew how the war had begun (…) And he knew how it ended' (*Memory* 21). This gives a general basis of historical facts of the conflict, but without involving the reader's empathy too much. Characterisation and plots at the level of the character give readers something to relate to emotionally to a greater extent than seemingly objective accounts of what happened. Individual character perspectives as opposed to a distanced perspective allows readers to get emotionally invested in the situation.

Furthermore, the omniscient narration of *Memory* allows the author to explore both internal and external perspectives. The narrator is not locked to one person's perspective, or

only to describe what is visible from the outside, but the omniscient narrator has the affordance of entering the minds of several characters. At the very beginning of the novel, a narrator presents the atmosphere in the room, what Elias Cole looks like, and signals that his story is beginning with 'Elias Cole speaks', before it changes to first person narration: 'I heard a song' (*Memory* 1). In a later scene with Adrian, his actions are described, such as 'Adrian wakes, sweating', but also his thoughts: 'Adrian wonders if perhaps the scream belonged in his sleep' (*Memory* 24). It is significant that we are not only in the mind of one character, and that the perspective shifts. Through having three main characters, the reader is presented with multiple perspectives to view the story from, realising that although their lives are connected, they each experience this in different ways, and that there is no *one* story, but several that intersect.

Fiction that draws readers in, like *Memory*, typically become neutralising narratives that do not acknowledge their own narrativity (Meretoja 12). Still, *Memory* does show many possible effects of storytelling and narrativisation. At the end of the third chapter, Elias Cole refers to the structure of his own story: 'Beginnings are hard to trace. Perhaps we three would each put the beginning in a different place (…) Three different beginnings. Three different endings, one for each of us' (*Memory* 38). Here Cole is referring to Julius and Saffia, but the statement would also apply to the three main characters in the novel: Cole, Adrian, and Kai. Julius, Saffia, and Cole's life stories are tangled together, making it difficult to say where one begins and ends; this is the case for Cole, Adrian, and Kai too. In addition, Cole shows that he is aware that he is only speaking his side of the story, and that others would place the beginning in a different place. Toward the end of the novel, Cole refers to this again: 'I told you once there were two endings to this story: we are but waiting for the third' (*Memory* 328). Unlike Saffia and Julius, Cole is not dead yet, so it is unsure how his story will end. Here Cole draws attention to his narrative choices and creates an awareness of the narrative levels in *Memory*. There is an overarching plot and story in the novel, but within this narrative there are more narratives, including the longer life narrative of Cole. In the following section, I will explore more in depth the ways storytelling appears in the novel.

Because of the explicit ways the novel intersects with historical discourse, another affordance of the novel form is the sense that we can learn about the world through reading it. This access to an unfamiliar culture is given through a range of perspectives, from insiders that had different positions during the Civil Wars, and outsiders who did not experience it. Zoe Norridge touches upon this when she questions why Adrian is a character in *Memory*, when it could have been 'peopled only by African actors' ("Sex as Synecdoche" 24). Like

Norridge points out, the novel is indeed read within Sierra Leone, but 'the largest commercial markets for the publishers exist in the US, the UK, and other developed anglophone countries' as well as the international translation market ("Sex as Synecdoche" 23). Adrian is given the position as a cultural outsider, which 'provides the narrative opportunity to give historical information, to explain the context of the conflict, to show how the visitor moves from puzzlement to something resembling understanding over the course of the novel' (Norridge "Sex as Synecdoche" 24). Through Adrian, the culturally unfamiliar reader is given the opportunity to learn about Sierra Leone's history and political background, and to hopefully experience the same understanding that Adrian achieves. The use of a real historical event as a backdrop, with which the author has a personal connection, encourages the reader to reflect upon what it would be like to experience it. At the same time, the novel form allows the author to write from multiple perspectives without the reader being concerned about truth claims. Through these techniques, novels allow writers and readers to immerse themselves in situations they might never experience.

2.2 Silent Nation

In this section, I will examine the initial conceptions of silence and storytelling in Sierra Leone as seen mainly from Adrian's perspective. Here I will consider how silence is seen as challenging and hindering connection, as well as show the potential merits of telling one's story. I will go through Adrian's reaction to silence, the resistance he meets from both patients and colleagues, and the challenges that silence presents in romantic relations.

As a cultural outsider, Adrian discovers a widespread silence in Sierra Leone that is manifest both in casual conversations and a heavier silence about the past. To Adrian, 'the notion that a conversation is a continuous act is bred into his bones and silence like nudity should be covered up lest they offend' (*Memory* 48). Thereby '[c]onversation here can be challenging, language is a blunter instrument, each word a heavy black strike with a single meaning' (*Memory* 47). Not used to 'the silences between people', Adrian is unsure how to act (*Memory* 28). In addition, Adrian is trained to encourage his patients to 'verbalise their trauma, to speak about their suffering', believing that through 'turning it into a story' they will have closure (Craps 55). Adrian is used to examine silences for being 'tinted with shame, or anger', but in Sierra Leone the silences were of 'a different quality, are entirely devoid of expectation' (*Memory* 28-29). The patients that are referred to Adrian describe, at his insistence, 'in dampened voices what they had endured, as though the events described belonged to somebody else' (*Memory* 21). The patients talk about pains that started

‘[s]ometime after the trouble’, ask for medicine that Adrian cannot give them, and never come back (*Memory* 21). In Sierra Leone, silence is the norm, and conversations do not need to be held just for the sake of it. These silences are foreign to Adrian and challenge his work, as his previous methods are no longer effective. To Adrian, silence is disadvantageous, making it difficult for him to communicate with the people he meets. Adrian finds himself in an unfamiliar culture, having to adjust his expectations.

In the beginning, Adrian misunderstands the nature of silence in the country. Before Elias Cole’s betrayals have been fully revealed, Adrian thinks that the reason Cole is the only one choosing to speak about his past, is education: ‘The more education a person has received, the more capable of articulating their experiences they are. (…) It isn’t acceptable to talk about these differences outside psychiatric circles, but this is the fact of the matter’ (*Memory* 327). Adrian’s theory is that because of Cole’s education, he is able to verbalise and intellectualise his experiences, and thereby relay them to him, whereas his poor patients who have less education ‘express their conflicts physically through violence or psychosomatically’ (*Memory* 327). Here we see one of Adrian’s prejudices about the Sierra Leonean population, assuming that the widespread silence about the past is due to lack of education and being unable to articulate their experiences. As it turns out, this is not necessarily the case—Kai and Nenebah, well-spoken and educated, also stay silent about the past. Even if they are capable, they choose not to revisit the past. Elias Cole is the only one of Adrian’s patients to seek him out personally, eager to revisit the past. At first, this seems like a successful use of Freudian talking therapy, in which the patient can move past their trauma through verbalising it. However, Elias Cole’s version of talking therapy is revealed to be a mere parody, as Cole uses Adrian to construct a narrative of omissions and lies (Craps 55). Adrian attempts to explain a reason for the cultural differences about silence, but he will later understand that he was mistaken. These reflections, quite late in the novel, reveal how deep Adrian’s prejudices and assumptions lie, and how difficult it is for him to let go of them. It is necessary to note here that Kai does eventually tell his story to Adrian, but under special circumstances, which I will return to later in the chapter.

The implicit assumptions of Adrian in his profession are challenged by both Kai and Attila, the Sierra Leonean psychiatrist at the mental hospital. Dave Gunning draws attention Adrian’s double standard with regards to Agnes, as he is reluctant to diagnose his other patients, and yet he is adamant on figuring out if he can diagnose Agnes with fugue, a rare psychological disorder (123). Kai is critical of Adrian and compares his search of Agnes’ diagnosis as his own ‘Holy Grail’, as foreigners coming to Sierra Leone always have their

own agenda: ‘They came to get their newspaper stories, to save black babies, to spread the word, to make money, to fuck black bodies’ (Forna *Memory* 219). Attila shows Adrian a slum and challenges him about what he wants to achieve there: ‘When I ask you what you expect to achieve for these men, you say you want to return them to normality,’ Attila says, ‘So then I must ask you, whose normality? Yours? Mine? So they can put on a suit and sit in an air-conditioned office? You think that will ever happen?’ (*Memory* 319). When Kai rejects Adrian’s initial offer of help, he says: ‘I could tell you, but it wouldn’t make any difference. You can’t undo it. And how could you ever understand? Unless you were here how could you ever understand?’ (*Memory* 423). Because Adrian did not experience the war, and his background is so different from that of most people in Sierra Leone, Kai doubts how he could ever understand what they have gone through. Both Kai and Attila question the point of psychological treatment since Adrian’s vision for the result is not even possible in Sierra Leone. Readers with similar cultural backgrounds as Adrian have their assumptions challenged, too, and prompted to reflect upon what it takes to help someone who is bound to return to poverty after receiving treatment at a mental hospital.

As further adding to the adverse image of silence in the novel, silence is shown to cause friction in the romantic relationships between Adrian and Nenebah, and Kai and Nenebah. Imma describes how ‘personal complicities and silences lead to failure in love and life’ (142). Because Kai is ‘undermined by the past’ and ‘the unspeakable’, he is unable to maintain his relationship to Nenebah after the war (Imma 142). Kai never told Nenebah about the bridge or Balia, and it places a strain on their relationship that he is unable to have sex with her when he is bothered by persistent flashbacks, which he does not communicate (*Memory* 286-87). While Nenebah encourages Adrian to become attuned to people’s silences and to see that everyone is silent about the war, she does not talk a lot about her own past. Adrian is reluctant to tell Nenebah about his relationship to her father, and Nenebah is reluctant to tell Adrian about why she quit her studies (*Memory* 298-99). The unspoken between them bothers Adrian: ‘He realises too that she asks him almost nothing about himself, not even when they will next meet’ (*Memory* 299). Adrian asks Nenebah questions and yearns for some kind of confirmation that their love is real, and while Nenebah responds to his questions, she asks him nothing in return about his love life. Even though Adrian is in love with Nenebah, and it is a love that endures even after her death, he is bothered by the distance between them and everything she chooses not to say. Thereby silences complicates and undermines relationships in *Memory*.

In contrast to the widespread silence in Sierra Leone, storytelling is sometimes shown as a potentially transformative act. Agnes' story comes to light through a complicated course of events where Kai is able to gather villagers who know Agnes, who are eventually willing to tell him her story collectively. Imma describes the scene where her story is told as 'an alternative truth and reconciliation session' (144). Like I mentioned in the Introduction, the official Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Ceremony lacked support from the local population; instead of believing that public testimonies would help them move forward, 'many felt that the public verbal recounting of violence, abuse, and torture would reignite conflict and could potentially lead to an eruption of violence yet again' (Imma 130). Thereby they chose to process their experiences through their own rituals. While the way that the villagers tell Agnes' story to Kai resembles a TRC, this way of telling her story 'protects the victims, perpetuators, and the storytellers themselves from the very truth they share' (Imma 144). Agnes' past is full of violence, and her present situation makes it too dangerous for her to speak the truth to anyone, as she lives with the killer of her husband. It is only through a series of perfect coincidences that her story becomes known to anyone outside of the village. The telling of Agnes' story is idealistic, an unlikely but perfect way of her story becoming known despite all the forces that obstruct the truth. Despite the improbability of the act, the telling of Agnes' story is a significant moment in the story. Agnes, who never speaks for herself, is an elusive character, impossible to understand until the point in which her story becomes known to Kai and the readers. In the face of all the untold stories in Sierra Leone from women like Agnes, at least this one story can be told through fiction.

In contrast to Elias Cole, Kai and Nenebah are reluctant to revisit and narrate the past. Adrian thinks Kai and Nenebah are similar, in the way they 'both resolutely occupied only the present, kept doors locked, showing only what they chose to reveal' (*Memory* 391). Adrian worries that 'in those closed-off places is something the two of them share from their past, some arc of emotion, incomplete, requiring an ending' (*Memory* 391). Their past lies unaddressed and unnarrated, and Adrian is worried that if they revisit it, the trajectory of their lives will change. In Adrian's line of work as a psychologist, they believe that articulation of traumatic memories of the past will allow the individual to recover from the symptoms of their mental illness and move forward. Nenebah and Kai's unwillingness to talk much about the past suggest that they do not believe in the forward motion that Adrian supports. Those who experienced and witnessed the atrocities of the war stay silent, while perpetrators who were complicit in acts of violence are those who decide to speak. Considering the amount of time the narrative allows for Elias Cole to speak his own version of the truth, which is

revealed to be not an accurate portrayal of what happened, the reader is prompted to question the trust we readily put into the hands of storytellers. Stories about the past are not always reliable or impartial.

2.3 Troublesome Stories, Silent Complicities

In this subsection, I will add further nuance to the depictions of silence and storytelling in the novel, which is paralleled with Adrian's arc of development. Now, I will describe the disadvantage of storytelling, as some storytellers abuse the trust they are given by their audience and manipulate the stories they tell. Furthermore, I will consider how the novel depicts silence as potentially beneficial as a coping mechanism, but with certain limitations.

What Adrian and the reader gradually become aware of, is how Elias Cole is unique in his decision to speak about the past, but also that he tells his story in a particularly controlled way. Everyone wants to avoid 'becoming implicated in the circumstance of their own lives', except for Elias Cole (*Memory* 322). In his narrative, Cole sometimes refers to the inadequacy of his own memory, about how much of the events are 'lost to [him] moments after they occurred, lost in self-pity, frustration and alcohol' (*Memory* 150). In case Cole contradicts himself or if he is proven to be mistaken, he can always say that he simply does not remember it that well. Adrian realises that Elias Cole is the kind of liar who is '[i]ntellectually-minded' and with an understanding of the 'fallibility of memory' and 'prefer to lie by omission' with a 'silent lie that can neither be proved nor disproved' (*Memory* 346). Elias Cole uses his opportunity of having a listener to tell his story the way he either experienced the events, or how he wants to present the events as having happened. Cole is aware that Adrian, the outsider, was not there, and thereby he cannot tell him otherwise. Through referring to the inadequacy of his memories, even though he proceeds to describe them confidently and without obvious inaccuracies, Cole creates narratives that are difficult to disprove.

In a novel that questions storytellers and justice, it might seem like an odd choice to only portray male storytellers. Despite there being strong female characters present in the narrative, their stories are only told through the men who love or desire them. However, the choice of storytellers in *Memory* comments upon and offers criticism about who is allowed to tell their story, and who is not. Nenebah has an illuminating monologue about the writing of history, yet she speaks little of her own history, and she only appears in scenes together with Adrian or Kai as their love interest. Saffia is the object of desire of Elias Cole from the first time they meet, even when he knows nothing about her. Even though Forna is a female author, Elias Cole is perhaps the most dominating voice in the novel. Several times, Cole

voices his opinion upon how women act or should act, such as how Saffia holds the steering wheel, 'on either side, the way women do' (*Memory* 12) and how his girlfriend Vanessa is the type of woman for whom 'sugar is still a luxury' (*Memory* 15). As his daughter, Nenebah, is aware of, there are only a few people who are given the chance to tell their story, and old men like Elias Cole fall into this category. An awareness of who speaks and why is important on a larger scale than only one person's story, but also the history of a country. Nenebah quotes Winston Churchill's famous line: 'History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it' and warns Adrian that Cole is using him to 'write his own version of history', which is what people are doing all over the country (*Memory* 351). A few powerful people are given a platform to tell the story, people like Elias Cole, who '[blot] out what happened' and '[fiddle] with the truth, creating their own version of events to fill in the blanks' (*Memory* 351). As Nenebah says, these people have a motivation behind their storytelling, to create a narrative that 'wipes out whatever they did or failed to do and makes certain none of them are blamed' (*Memory* 351). The danger of these stories is that every time it is reproduced, through papers and talks and conversations, 'you will make their version of events more real, until it becomes indelible' (*Memory* 351). What is remembered and retold is what remains of the events, and eventually it becomes history. Cole reinforces his own narrative of events by telling it to Adrian, and whatever Adrian tells the world outside of Sierra Leone about his work will contribute to what is remembered about the country. *Memory* offers a critique of allowing men like Elias Cole to speak, unchallenged, by first giving him a platform, and then revealing his faults. The novel is realistic in its depiction of dominant storytellers, prompting readers to consider the significance of only hearing a single story of an event.

Elias Cole's narration of his life story demonstrate the power a storyteller has over an audience, and the potential of abusing this power. In the climax of Elias Cole's story, the moment he has been building up to, Elias and Julius are arrested and held by policemen, but in separate rooms. In the night after Elias is arrested, he can hear Julius on the other side of the wall, and coughing (*Memory* 408). The next day, Elias hears Julius wheezing, and even though he knows that Julius suffers from asthma, Elias does not call for help (*Memory* 409). Later, it becomes known that Elias kept in contact with Johnson and helped their investigation by giving them his notebooks, which contained detailed descriptions of Julius and Saffia's whereabouts, and allowed them to keep Julius contained for longer. At the end of Cole's story, he says: 'I did nothing. Johnson was the one who let Julius die' (*Memory* 410). Furthermore, Cole says that it was Julius who brought it upon himself for having 'presumed too much' (*Memory* 410). Afterwards, Adrian reflects: 'So this is how the entire course of a life, of

history, is changed. (…) A life, a history, whole patterns of existence altered, simply by doing nothing. The silent lie. The act of omission' (*Memory* 410). Like Adrian observes, Elias Cole absolves himself of the responsibility of Julius' fate, 'and yet it could not have occurred without him. There are millions of Elias Coles the world over' (*Memory* 410). In Elias Cole's case, silence is complicity. Cole claims that his actions made no difference in the end. When Adrian tries to ask him about it, Cole says: 'I made my peace with power. I had no other choice' (*Memory* 405). In Cole's mind he was doing what he had to do, with no other choice. What the novel shows, though, is that Cole's actions, which mostly are to refrain from acting and speaking only when it benefited him, are choices. Adrian makes this judgement only by the end of the novel, when Cole has already told his whole story. In his unconscious, perhaps Cole knows that he has wrongdoings; this is what Adrian thinks: 'Somewhere in the place he calls a soul, Elias Cole knows. Adrian has been his last attempt at absolution, his last attempt to convince himself of his own cleanliness' (*Memory* 410). Like I discussed in Chapter 1, the stories that we tell about ourselves influence to a great extent how we experience reality. Therefore, Cole's attempt to absolve himself of guilt might indeed be successful, as he gets to construct his life story in his own image where he did nothing wrong.

While Cole can almost convince Adrian and the reader to believe in his innocence, there are details that betray his character and show Cole's history of jealousy and silent complicity in violence. As a child, Cole envied his brother so much that when he fell ill, he 'would go into his room with the sole purpose of taunting him' by leaving things he wanted just out of his reach (*Memory* 53). At times his brother displayed 'something like pity for [Elias], though it was he who lay there with limbs as useless as a straw doll's' (*Memory* 53). Cole claims his actions made no difference, but we have not heard the story from his brother's point of view. In fact, the description of 'pity' from Cole's brother hints at a complicated relationship between the two, in which the brother found it necessary to forgive Elias' actions in order to not become as bitter as him. Cole himself attributes the event no bigger meaning in his larger story. Later, as an adult, Cole displays signs of jealousy of Julius, too. At one point, Cole says that he lay awake 'thinking of Julius almost as much as of Saffia' (*Memory* 38). Cole describes Cole as the sun, and 'you were drawn into his orbit' (*Memory* 69). Later, Adrian theorises that Cole betrays Julius out of jealousy, not only of having Saffia as his wife, but also because of his confidence that Cole does not possess, and that he does not involve him in his secret business. Cole's complicity in violence is not only coincidental or determined by whose perspective we are viewing the situation from, but it is hinted at through his actions earlier in life and his tendency to be jealous. Cole himself does not comment

further upon these instances, and presents them as only something that he did, which does not reflect anything about his character; but through refraining from commenting on these scenes, Cole attempts to draw the listener's attention away from the events, to avoid interpretation.

Because Cole has regrets about his past, he constructs a life narrative that will allow him to continue moving forward, and to leave the past behind. At the beginning of Elias Cole's story, he explains his present context and describes his body which has become old. Cole refers to 'so many lost years' (*Memory* 3) and reacts to finding a note from his friend Julius (*Memory* 7), suggesting that the reminders of the past bother him. While Cole sometimes moves between his close to present context and the past, the story is generally told in chronological order, through a beginning, middle, and end. In the same way temporal devices such as calendars and documents lead to a constructed sense of progression forward in time (Blowers 108), Cole tells his story in which he moves from the past to the present, gradually leaving the past behind. These aspects of Cole's narration remind the reader that Cole is a storyteller who is in full control of what he chooses to include or to omit from his story, and that the forward motion he promotes in his story might be in Cole's best interest. These references to the act of storytelling makes the novel itself somewhat self-aware, and prompts readers to reflect upon what it means to let someone tell their story. Because storytelling processes are related to how we produce and perceive reality, the way stories are told matters.

The famous Prisoner's Dilemma is used by Adrian to challenge Elias in his complicity in Julius' death and may to some extent work as an allegory of the situation in Sierra Leone around the Civil War. While altruism would be the best course of action, it is usually the case that a few people will abuse the power available to them. In the Prisoner's Dilemma, two men are arrested for the same crime, but the police do not have enough evidence to charge them, so they offer each of them a deal if they inform on the other man (*Memory* 375). If both men stay silent, they both become convicted of a lesser charge, whereas if only one informs on the other, the informant goes free whilst the other is convicted of a greater charge (*Memory* 375). It is 'a non-zero-sum game as opposed to a zero-sum game' which 'allows for the possibility of cooperation' (*Memory* 375). Despite his history of informing on Julius even before he was arrested, Cole claims that he does not see why Adrian would compare his situation to the game (*Memory* 375). According to the Prisoner's Dilemma, both Cole and Julius would have been better off if Cole has kept his notebooks and information to himself. Even though Cole claims it was 'the only recourse there was', Adrian suggests that his actions served to punish Julius (*Memory* 375-76). In the Prisoner's Dilemma, like Cole's situation, there are more than

one possible course of action, and thereby the individual must make a choice—either staying silent or informing on a friend. The game presents a way of thinking about Cole's situation which highlights the presence of choices, which makes Cole complicit rather than powerless.

2.4 The Right Circumstances

In the final section of this chapter, I will consider how the novel weighs the merits of both Western therapeutic methods and local coping mechanisms and show how their appropriateness depends on the circumstances of the individual. Sometimes, silence is not beneficial in the long-term, although it might be necessary in certain situations. Similarly, Western therapy may have its place in improving mental health in Sierra Leone, but it is not decidedly the only solution to their situation.

A local coping mechanism introduced in the novel, is the creation of an alternative state in the mind. Kai recounts a day during the war when they had been brought victims from the provinces with severed limbs, some of which had survived several days in the bush: 'And afterwards, if you had asked any of the survivors how they had managed it, they would not have been able to tell you. It was as if those days in the forest, the escape to the city, had passed in a trance. *The mind creates an alternative state*' (*Memory* 326). The mind does what it must in order to survive and get through impossible circumstances, which is the only option possible to them at the time. After Kai was subjected to sexual violence in the war, he did what he found possible to get through it and to continue living afterwards. For most of the novel, Kai uses the silence of survival as a coping mechanism. Through refusing to revisit the memory voluntarily, neither mentally nor verbally, Kai protects himself from the full strength of these traumatic memories. The issue for Kai is that the memories haunt him in his dreams, so he can never fully escape them, even if he does not talk about it. The alternative state of mind and the silence afterwards are coping mechanisms and forms of survival, but they are only just enough to get through the experience and survive.

Furthermore, references to the concept of the 'fragmentation of the conscience' add to a general commentary about perpetrators, complicity, and their relationship to their crimes. While Adrian, who is the one who makes the reference, does not elaborate on the meaning of the term, the origin of the quote is explained in the Acknowledgements. The reference is from a work by M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie*, suggesting that 'any group will remain potentially conscienceless and evil' until the point every individual holds themselves responsible for the behaviour of the group, which we have yet to reach (*Memory*). Therefore any group has the

potential of being conscienceless and evil unless everyone in the group feels responsible for the actions of the group. After Adrian hears Elias Cole's story and realises that Cole is to blame, he reflects: 'The fragmentation of the conscience. Adecali, tortured by those acts he had committed. Elias Cole unperturbed by the many he had not' (*Memory* 410). The conscience, a person's 'sense of right and wrong as regards things for which one is responsible' ("Conscience, N., Sense I.1.A."), is broken into fragments, allowing the person to feel responsible only for their own actions, but not the actions of the group. These references to the fragmentation of the conscience, and the comparison between Elias Cole and Adecali, make readers reflect upon different ways of being complicit in violence, and the different ways that people relate to their own actions. While some individuals are undisturbed by the result of either their orders or their inaction, others are haunted by what they did when they were following orders.

The tension between local coping mechanisms and Western humanitarian aid in Sierra Leone is recurring theme of *Memory*. Patil and Saha, Gunning, and Craps agree with Attila's sentiment that Adrian's view of therapy is inadequate to treat people in Sierra Leone, because it fails to take into account the real conditions that people there continue to live in. The 'continual suffering' of the people due to colonisation and the Civil War has caused the trauma to become accepted as intrinsic (Patil and Saha 86), rather than event-based and easily treatable. When an entire population is traumatised, 'a model developed to identify and treat trauma as an abnormality seems to have little use' (Gunning 121). Previously in Adrian's career, it has been enough to talk to the patient and make them speak about their past, but in Sierra Leone the conditions are different. Because of the widespread psychological damage due to these conditions, it can hardly be characterised as abnormal, but rather as a sensible response to their experiences. I agree that Adrian's initial idea of traditional therapy to help his patients is inadequate. Nonetheless, that does not mean that all of Adrian's methods are without any merits, because he *is* eventually able to help Kai overcome some of his symptoms. Arriving in Sierra Leone with one idea of what he is doing there, Adrian does eventually grow a more nuanced understanding of the trauma in the country. Adrian is naïve in the beginning, but he does not stay like that for the entirety of the novel.

A popular question in trauma studies is whether trauma *should* be verbalised, and to what extent talking about it will help the individual move on from it. On this matter, the novel is ambivalent. Although silence is an appropriate response, and sometimes useful in surviving traumatic experiences, the novel also questions who the silence benefits and protects. While Norridge uses the treatment of Kai as an example to suggest the novel is, 'in some ways, an

elegy to the persistent appeal of Western-style narrative therapy' ("Sex as Synecdoche" 175), I would point out that it is important to consider that one successful treatment among several unsuccessful treatments does not mean the novel supports a superiority of Western psychology. Kai's treatment is successful, suggesting that had Adrian not given up his work in Sierra Leone, he might have been able to help others too, after building deeper relations of trust with his patients—however, this is only speculation, and the novel does not comment upon this. Here I agree with Craps, who writes that *Memory* has 'an unresolved ambivalence about the applicability and visibility of Western treatment methods in post-Civil War Sierra Leone', because even though there is one success story with Kai, there are other characters in the novel that are not presented as having recovered (Craps 57). Rather than favouring speaking or silence as responses and ways to deal with trauma, the novel shows that both have their reasons.

For Agnes, one of the prominent female characters in the novel, it is necessary to stay silent about the past, but her character represents the alternative state of mind as explained by Kai, embodied in her dissociations and wanderings. Ryan Topper argues that through Agnes' state of 'fugue' or being 'crossed', depending on the perspective, 'she dissociates herself from her constitutive dissociation from her nation-state, creating an alternative state' (93). This 'seeming paradoxical agential double dissociation' turns 'this character's trauma into a logic of survival' (Topper 93). According to Dave Gunning, 'Forna's conclusions in fact seem to endorse a rather conversative Western model of the trauma', in which the '"local" explanation that insists on spirit worlds is in practice dismissed and the medicalised model instead prevails' through the articulation of Kai's story (123). What Topper suggests is that *Memory* does not offer a 'script to counter the humanitarian development narrative in post-civil war Sierra Leone', but that the author 'propose[s] that indigenous modes of thought must be creatively (re)invented for the strategic purpose of a socially focused response to trauma' (96). Agnes' silence is not directly beneficial to herself or anyone around her, except for keeping her relatively safe from violence. Agnes' daughter, Naasu, would not be happy to find out who she has married, and neither about having it kept from her for so long. However, because Naasu's husband has a history of violence, he could hurt or even kill Naasu and Agnes if he knew that they had found out the truth. Agnes knows this fact, and it would have been easier to live had she not known that she must keep the secret. Therefore Agnes will not talk about it, and her story is only told through several other people in an anonymous truth telling ritual. After hearing Agnes' story, Abass asks Kai if they would have had to stay quiet if they lived in the town, and Kai responds that he does not know (*Memory* 314). The collective decision to

'elect muteness' is 'the only way of complying and resisting at the same time' (*Memory* 322). Breaking the silence is too dangerous, even if it allows a killer to go loose, protected by an entire village of people that know. Protecting a killer is a form of complicity in violence, too, but as long as Agnes and Naasu live with a perpetrator, knowing his crimes, they are in danger. Agnes and her daughter must consider if the risks of staying are greater than the risks of leaving. Even while keeping the silence protects Agnes from some harm, she is not completely safe. Agnes' silence does not resolve the situation she is in, but her dissociation and wandering presents a mode of survival, allowing her to keep the silence and stay as safe as she can.

Another male perpetrator from the Civil War, Adecali, is silent and powerless, unlike Cole. Several of Adrian's patients at the mental hospital that he encourages to speak, were perpetrators during the Civil War. Adecali worked for the Sensitisation Unit, and his 'particular job' was to burn families alive in their houses (*Memory* 372). The methods of the Sensitisation Unit are described as 'meticulous', 'merciless', and 'effective' (*Memory* 372). As Adrian observes, 'the men seem incapable of acting' without his prompts: 'Now, without the gang, the drugs and the drink, the spur of violence, out beyond the triumph of survival, the desolation steals up and surrounds them' (*Memory* 372). During the war, they had motivators that made their job easier to do, such as drugs and alcohol, orders to fulfil and a desire to stay alive, as they were most likely threatened to act if they did not cooperate. Afterwards, the 'triumph of survival' did not last long, because they must live with their actions during the war (*Memory* 372). Adecali suffers from memories of the war that manifest as a fear of fire, and sometimes smelling roasted meat (*Memory* 317). Adecali is tortured and powerless, a contrast to the soldier he was during the war. It is necessary to note that Adecali acted as part of a group, but there are only a few patients like Adecali in Adrian's care. Many of the perpetrators from the war go free, perhaps having absolved themselves of guilt like Elias. Unlike Elias, who claims he did nothing, Adecali acted. Even if it was upon orders, under the influence of drugs and alcohol, and motivated by a desire to stay alive, Adecali is haunted by these actions. Adecali takes on responsibility of the actions of the group, while it is likely that the men who gave him orders are untroubled, knowing that they themselves did 'nothing'.

After the loss of Nenebah, the novel portrays Kai and Adrian as reversing roles and adopting the other culture's coping mechanism, highlighting the potential of both. When Kai opens up to Adrian, reflecting upon the misery of his country's condition, 'The dying, the killing', Adrian responds with silence, having finally learned that it can be an appropriate response (*Memory* 421). Kai and Adrian create a 'safe yet fragile intimate space' in the

apartment that they end up sharing, often sitting in silence, in which it becomes 'possible to [grapple] with memories of love and violence' (Imma 132). Even though Kai and Adrian have their differences, having come from different countries and levels of privilege, they are able to learn from each other. When Kai finally breaks the silence about the past, it is after a long process of struggling with memories and realising that he needs to confront them. Because the past is not readily available to us, it is a difficult process of reconstructing it. It is Kai's connection to his loved ones that 'propel him to accept his past and claim a future beyond violence and loss' (Imma 132). While Kai is adamant on forgetting and not bringing up the past, he is also 'consumed with a desire to remember (…) as the central route to connect with the most significant people and places in his life' (Imma 132). Experiencing loss influences Adrian to appreciate the local coping mechanisms of using silence, while it influences Kai to consider speaking about his experiences. Perhaps the loss of Nenebah, who Adrian loved too, makes Kai reconsider the extent to which Adrian would understand his past. Both characters are prompted to deal with the loss in one way or another, as they develop in a direction that brings them closer together, despite their differences. What this change in dynamic shows is that the novel does not endorse or condemn any of the coping mechanisms that are presented in the novel, either keeping or breaking the silence.

Because the present is influenced by our imagined future ahead, Attila suggests that people in Sierra Leone need hope more than they need therapy. With so many atrocities in the past, hope for the future would make the present more bearable, but importantly, 'the hope has to be real' (*Memory* 320). Because of the enduring poverty in Sierra Leone, having hope for the future is not a given, and thereby many people have adopted a fatalistic view of life. The problem for Adrian is that by the time he understands to some extent the struggles of his patients, he has lost his conviction of being able to help anyone. By the end of the novel, Adrian admits that he was never sure why he came there: 'Times he has come close to touching a kind of conviction, only to lose it again' (*Memory* 425). Adrian is under the impression that all his work there was 'worthless' (*Memory* 424). After losing Nenebah, Adrian realises that Attila and Kai were right—what people need are hope, and now Adrian has learned what it is like to lose it (*Memory* 425). The novel presents hope as an option, or a suggestion, of what would help the population move through the traumatic past, but it does not suggest explicitly *how* this hope can be spread.

For Kai the reconstruction of the past does lead to healing, as his narrative functions as a work of irreconcilable mourning (Adams). When Kai starts narrating the past, the tense stays in present tense rather than to change to past tense: 'He forces his mind to return to the

past. He is walking down the corridor' (*Memory* 427). Kai retells a day from the Civil War when he and the nurse Balia are taken by rebels from the hospital and made to treat the wounded in their camp. In the night, Kai and Balia are sexually assaulted before they are taken to a bridge, shot, and they fall off the bridge. In the final sentence of the penultimate chapter, 'The sting of the water to tell him he is alive' (*Memory* 434), there is a sense of a beginning to life again. In the memory, Kai is falling into the water, signalling danger, followed by a sting of pain. Yet, we know that these are memories from the past and Kai survived, and thereby the symbolism of water as a representation of life comes through. Despite the sting, Kai is happy to be alive. Kai's experience of sexual abuse is told with enough detail for readers to understand why it continues to haunt him, and yet it ends on a somewhat optimistic note, that Kai acknowledges that he is happy to have survived.

When Kai finally recounts his story, he seizes his narrative and claims back control of his life. Earlier, when Kai explains why he enjoys his work as a surgeon, he claims that 'Operating affords him a privacy, an escape from the world into a place which has its own narratives, its own emergencies, but which is a less random world, one he can control with his skills' (123). Throughout the novel, Kai has lacked a sense of control of his own life, frustrated with the ongoing atrocities of his country. Kai is shown to be avoidant of his own past, yet unable to escape it. Throughout the novel, Kai struggles with recurring nightmares, to the extent that he intentionally avoids going to sleep. When the past is made present, even done with force, Kai makes the active decision to confront the memories, and begins a process of mourning. The mourning is irreconcilable, without becoming full or complete, but it begins a process of regaining the control that Kai has lacked and provides some soft closures (Adams 229).

The final chapter of the novel demonstrates the significance of Kai's recounting. To Imma, 'therapy is not seen as holistically curative of his trauma' and points out that Kai's story is told through the third person, suggesting that Kai remains unwilling to claim the experience (Imma 143). That being said, after this episode of recalling the memories, we see that Kai two years later is no longer struggling with his previous symptoms of trauma. Throughout the novel, Kai has done everything to avoid the peninsula bridge, but in the final chapter this is the ending image: 'the peninsula bridge unfurls, straight and true' (Forna *Memory* 444). Kai is not able to see the bigger picture of how everything connects, such as the initials of Julius on the bridge, but the narrator can, and this is what is shown to the reader. We do not get to see the whole process from Kai's first confession to driving across the bridge in the final chapter, but it is likely that it was the beginning of a longer process of dealing with

his memories. With time and work, Kai has overcome some of the obstacles that he faced in his daily life. Kai is no longer escaping and avoiding triggers, but he can drive over the bridge without problems. Of course, Kai is unable to achieve full closure, and neither should he, but being able to sleep and to drive where he wants, without limitations, allows him to deal with the past in a way that he can then transmit to the next generation.

Memory acknowledges that storytelling does not necessarily lead to healing, as Agnes' story remains unresolved by the end of the novel. To Norridge, 'narrating an impossible and enduring situation does not necessarily lead to resolution' ("Sex as Synecdoche" 187). Regardless, it is worth noting that Agnes never told her own story. When the villagers tell Agnes' story to Kai, it is described that 'in telling another's story, they told their own' (*Memory* 306). If telling the story to an outsider helped anyone, it was the storytellers, not Agnes. Craps is careful to consider that despite the novel's conclusion offering closure for some of the characters, there is also a theme of showcasing 'the chronic, ongoing suffering endured in silence by whole swathes of the population, with which Western psychology is ill-equipped to deal' (57). What the novel is able to do, is to make these silences audible (Craps 57). Both Kai's and Agnes' stories are told at length so that the reader can understand it, but the fact that someone knows your story does not necessarily lead to healing for the subject of the story. What this suggests is that telling stories of traumatic experiences can be helpful to create understanding from outsiders, but it does not necessarily resolve difficult circumstances.

Agnes is an appropriate example to demonstrate the possibility of storytelling under the right circumstances. Like Adrian suggests, education might have an influence on how an individual is able to articulate their struggles, and yet Kai and Nenebah are educated and articulate, and they choose not to tell their story. When Kai does tell his story, he does it under special circumstances. Kai has built a relationship of trust with Adrian, who is a mental health professional. Despite Kai's scepticism about Western therapeutic methods, he decides to give it a try after his own coping mechanism is no longer serving him. Several other individuals in *Memory*, either referred to or intentionally not written about, are never given these opportunities to tell their stories. Adrian's other patients are not given the opportunity to continue to build trust with him, because he leaves after his own experience of loss. The people who tell Agnes' story indirectly tell their own, but their way of telling her story avoids stating their implication in the story. Agnes is lucky that she has an interesting diagnosis, which allows her to dissociate and survive, as well as sparking the interest of Adrian to find out her story. In addition, Agnes has a community that is willing to come together to tell her

story, which not everyone would have. Perhaps Agnes' story is told because it is interesting to a man like Adrian, which can be seen as a selfish desire, but nonetheless, this interest from Adrian does lead to Agnes' story becoming known, when it otherwise would have gone untold and later forgotten. In addition, the story is told to Kai, who is more readily accepted as someone to confide in, as he is a doctor and a fellow insider, in contrast to Adrian. Even though Agnes' story is unresolved at the end, and that there might not be a happy ending for Agnes, this does not mean that there is no point in telling her story. Afterwards there is at least one more person out there that understands why she does what she does. There are likely to be thousands of women like Agnes in Sierra Leone, whose stories never become known. Literary storytelling, both fictional and nonfictional, have this ability of allowing outsiders to develop an understanding of people and situations that are unfamiliar to them, but this form of storytelling is only possible under special circumstances that for many individuals never happen.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter about *Memory* I explored several aspects of the novel, starting with a consideration of its form and affordances and how this affects the reading experience, before exploring in depth the ways storytelling and silence are represented.

What I find the most important aspect of *Memory* to take into consideration, is how it represents storytelling as related to power. It matters how a story is told, who tells it, and who has not told their side. *Memory*'s multiple characters make the reader aware of the importance of perspective, as the dominant voices of the novel create a nuanced picture of the Sierra Leonean context post-Civil War. Elias Cole represents the kind of manipulative storyteller who wants to clear his name through telling his story his way, while Adrian is the naïve foreigner who gradually understands the dynamics at play. Kai challenges Adrian's assumptions about the country and the past that the population has endured, while he himself eventually accepts help from Western therapy. *Memory* does not present the reader with a decided opinion about the 'goodness' of storytelling or Western concepts of verbalisation of trauma, but it shows how it depends on how storytelling is used. Furthermore, *Memory* shows how the various silences in the novel, either of complicity or survival, have their reasons.

In the following chapter I will explore *Devil,* examining the ways it differs from *Memory* and how the reading experience is influenced by its nonfiction form. In addition, I will discuss similarities between the two, and how they inform each other back and forth

through intertextuality. The focus of the chapter will be on the search for meaning when discovering a true story, the obstacles to accessing the past and telling the truth, as well as the role of silence and the implications of breaking silence through literature.

Chapter 3: The Search for Truth and Meaning in *The Devil That Danced on the Water*

In this chapter, I will move onto applying the theoretical concepts outlined in Chapter 1 to my reading of *Devil*, as well as some criticism. The memoir will be analysed independently for the first three sections, before I will do comparative readings of *Memory* and *Devil* in the final section. Because the author and narrator of *Devil* are the same person, and she also appears as a character in the work, I will refer to this author-narrator and character as Aminatta, a separate figure from Forna. Even though *Devil* is a memoir that vows to represent reality, only a fraction of this reality can be represented (Iser 765), and in the act of writing a story down, the author-narrator becomes separated from the real person. Separating Aminatta and Forna reminds me not to speculate on the intentions of the author, but rather to analyse the text itself.

Throughout the chapter, I will cover several aspects of the memoir, starting with a discussion of its form and its affordances, such as the autobiographical pact, its self-reflexivity, and the narration that sometimes moves beyond the perspective of Aminatta herself. Next, I will analyse sections of the memoir in more detail using close reading and structural analysis of the way memories are represented, and the search and desire for meaning in stories. In the final section of the chapter I will explore intertextuality between *Devil* and *Memory*, as the reading of one informs the other. Here I will discuss the role of documents in history, silence about the past, as well as similarities between characters in the two works, and the implications of such similarities.

The main objective of this chapter is to show that the memoir form imposes limitations on the author-narrator and causes the work to be subject to tests of verification, which affects with what expectations a reader approaches the work. Yet the memoir is a constructed work and a textual representation of reality, rather than a clear, uncomplicated window into the past. By comparing *Devil* to Forna's later novel *Memory*, discussions emerge about the impact of stories and speaking or not speaking, and the ways people in Sierra Leone must live together, as insiders, outsiders, perpetrators, victims, and witnesses. Both works by Forna highlight the discussion of how history is written and the difficulty of finding and telling the truth about past atrocities.

3.1 Form and Affordances

In this section, I will explore the form of the memoir and the affordances that come with it, such as the autobiographical pact, which describes possible responses and expectations to the work according to the form. In addition, I will explore the narration of the memoir, the use of perspective, and fragmented narrative temporality.

In a memoir, the author is limited by the promise to the reader to tell the truth, 'such as it appears to me, inasmuch as I can know it' (Lejeune 22). In the Acknowledgements, Forna dedicates the book to her father, and cites her many sources in discovering her father's story: 'The extraordinary story of my family's past came to me through the collective memory of my uncles and aunts' (*Devil* viii). In addition, Forna states: 'Any opinions expressed in this book are entirely my own' (*Devil* viii). Like I mentioned in Chapter 1, Aminatta affirms the identity of the narrator as herself through the use of first-person narration and the name 'Am', so that the readers know they are involved in the autobiographical pact and asked to place their trust in Aminatta as author-narrator. The memoir form has the affordance of telling the truth about something that happened, as far as the author knows, but this also limits what the author can talk about in the work. As Forna states in the Acknowledgements, she needed to spend a lot of time doing research to tell the story in the best way, rather than simply imagining her way into this past of her family history.

The nonfiction label of a memoir means readers have expectations about the truthfulness of the story. Biography and autobiography, as opposed to fiction, 'claim to provide information about a "reality" exterior to the text, and so to submit to a test of *verification*' (Lejeune 22). Although Forna has done research and spends considerable time explaining the history and politics of Sierra Leone, she can only tell the story and the 'truth' from her own point of view and from what she knows. A trust in the author is necessary for the reader to believe what is being narrated in the work. One of the obstacles to establishing the trust needed for a reader to believe in the truthfulness of a nonfictional narrative, is that there is a general scepticism about texts that make claims about the 'real world'. Readers tend to look for flaws and what is untrue about a narrative that is open about representing reality, whereas in fiction readers like to look for what is 'real' despite the text being labelled as fiction (Lejeune 14). That leads to a common impression that fiction is truer than autobiography, because discovering what we see as true in fiction feels more profound (Lejeune 14). What many people mean when they applaud the 'truth' that is found in novels, is 'the personal, individual, intimate truth of the author', which is precisely the kind of truth

that autobiographies aspire to reach (Lejeune 27). As Forna points out in her own article about the afterlife of her memoir, 'the true memoir trumps the fictional novel' for readers who are 'in constant search of "authenticity"' ("Afterlife"). For those who have experienced little adversity in their lives, reading a memoir can convey to them experiences they have not had, whilst for those who can relate to it, the memoir may act 'as testimony; it confirms the reality of her or his own experience, and offers courage and the possibility of comfort' ("Afterlife"). Thereby reading memoir and autobiography is different from reading fiction, not necessarily because the contents of the books themselves are so different, but because readers have different expectations and requirements to the two forms. In both memoir and novels, many readers are in search of what is experienced as authenticity, although there is no objective way of establishing what that involves.

In order to negotiate expectations and potential scepticism from readers, *Devil* is a self-reflexive work that has a self-awareness of its narrative levels. *Devil* presents itself as a narrative, 'as selective, perspectival interpretations that can always be contested and told otherwise' (Meretoja 12). Although Aminatta appears as a character in the story when she narrates her childhood memories, there are also moments of insight from her present self: 'Many years later I will discover they are called Prince Ba and Newlove, names as surreal as stage names—or aliases' (*Devil* 14). After this, there is a jump to a more present context, in which Aminatta wakes and sees she is in a flat in London, and on the bedside table is pen and paper, suggesting that she is writing (*Devil* 17). Because *Devil* displays its own construction, the reader is reminded that the work is a textual representation of reality. Aminatta describes her childhood using the metaphor of a sphere: 'Over and over the delicate membrane of my sphere would be broken and I tumbled out of my cocoon into the outside world' (*Devil* 18). This membrane of the sphere can be used to describe the narrative levels of the story and the experience of reading it. There is a young Aminatta in action in the memories she narrates, the adult Aminatta as narrator and later also a character, and then the author behind the work itself. The narration with young Aminatta as a character in the story allows the reader to be immersed, wrapped in a sphere of story. Just like the sphere of Aminatta's childhood, the protective bubble is burst time and time again for the reader, who is reminded the story has an author, and that this is someone the story has a personal impact on. Instead of being fully immersed in one story, readers are encouraged to consider the bigger picture of a life and several people who are affected by the events Aminatta narrates. We are given two reminders—a reminder that the text represents reality, but also a reminder that this is through text, and not a clear, uncomplicated view of exactly what happened.

One of the themes of the memoir is that the past is not constant, but subject to change because of what happens in the present, which shows how remembering and writing down memories are transformative acts. Blowers' textual contract, an alternative to Lejeune's autobiographical pact, is a way of reading in which we acknowledge the work's 'claim to "truth"', while keeping in mind 'the transformative process' involved in 'recollecting and representing such truth' (Blowers 113). Furthermore, using Rothberg's view of multidirectional memory establishes how our view of the past is coloured by our present experiences, 'subject to ongoing negotiation', meaning we can never become completely removed from our present context (3). All literary texts, both fictional and nonfictional, as well as memories, are all 'arbitrated or "crafted"' despite being based on reality (Lehman 335). In the process of transforming experience into words, concepts like truth and actuality become complicated; there is no way of knowing if what is written is completely accurate. Luckily, being a complete and accurate representation of the past does not have to be the objective of a memoir, as one of the themes of *Devil* is that collecting and telling the truth about the past can be difficult, which I will explore further in the next section.

Fragmented narrative temporality is a key feature throughout the memoir, as the narrator jumps back and forth between different moments in time. One of the affordances of a memoir is a freedom in structure and chronology. Although a novel has the same potential freedom, and there are some expectations of memoirs too to start at the beginning and end at the ending, a memoir has the unique perspective of having an adult, more knowledgeable narrator looking back at her past experiences. The ability of the memoir narrator to jump back and forth in time and between significant and less significant happenings is an important affordance of the form. This is paralleled with what Aminatta describes as storytelling in the African oral tradition, in which 'great events and insignificant moments (…) are notches on the same wheel' (*Devil* 18). This is reflected in the memoir as the story moves along by association, jumping back and forth over the years, from young Aminatta and adult Aminatta, from a naïve character to a knowledgeable narrator. Even if the author has control over which memories and stories to narrate, the author is still limited by the promise to the reader to tell the truth. Rather than simply telling everything in the order she experienced it, Aminatta moves the story along by mixing significant events from the past with memories that seem to be less important in the big picture, but that nonetheless were a part of her life. In general terms, the first half of the memoir features the childhood memories of Aminatta, whereas the second half features the adult Aminatta travelling back to Sierra Leone. There are jumps in time to different contexts throughout both halves of the memoir, so that the narrative is not

chronologically moving in one direction, but instead the presentation of reality involves associations from various points in time. Thereby fragmented narrative temporality acknowledges that our life stories are constructed, and our experience of the present is influenced by the past and our ideas of the future.

Sometimes Aminatta explores perspectives beyond her own, for example when she tells a story from her mother when she herself was a baby (*Devil* 19). While she uses the words 'we', 'our', and 'my', Aminatta considers her mother's point of view too, as '[s]he ran to fetch her husband' (*Devil* 20). Although Aminatta was there, she was too young to remember anything from it, and yet she incorporates the story as it relates to her family. From this story Aminatta goes into several stories of her father's childhood, long before she herself was born. The author-narrator can draw connections between events far from each other in time, like how Mohamed Forna's mother died, after which no one could keep him from going to school, which led to him attaining an education (*Devil* 21). Another example is when Aminatta narrates the scene of her father and grandfather meeting for the first and only time before Aminatta was born, and then relates it to her own meeting with her grandfather forty years later (*Devil* 30-31). The author-narrator of a memoir is bound by the promise to tell the truth, and writing scenes from experiences she did not have personally may seem to go against this promise. However, as Julie Novak suggests in "Lifewriting", truthfulness does not have to involve complete realism (4). What the inclusion of these scenes suggest is that Aminatta is considering the larger picture of her life and what is happening around her beyond her own limited perspective. These parts of the story where Aminatta sees from other perspectives suggest to the reader that her story is not simply made up of what she experienced and remembers, but also of other life stories that are related to hers. Understanding a life story involves imagining other points of view, too.

Although writing from other perspectives are more typical to novels than memoirs, these scenes do not make the work into a novel, because the use of inventiveness is an affordance of both fictional and nonfictional forms, rather than a distinguishing force. Blowers writes that 'the structures of narrative (the sense of a story, of something to be told) underpin both fiction and history' (106). Considering the fallibility of memory, imagining a scene that Aminatta did not experience but has been told about, is not too different from recalling a lived past. Ricoeur explains the relationship between fiction and history as interdependent on the basis of narrative and refiguration of time (Blowers 106). Importantly, Ricoeur says that 'while we are inclined to discuss "history" as something real and transparent, the paradox is that the past no longer is—it has vanished—and so to describe it is

to narrate something that is no more' (Blowers 110). Recalling memories from twenty years ago involves the same process of imagination as imagining oneself into a situation one was not present in. Memory is the past made present through acts of imagination, and thereby *Devil* is decidedly within the memoir category. A memoir involves memory work, in which the past is recalled, not through perfect remembering, but through active recalling and reconstructing based on several sources.

3.2 The Reconstruction of a Past

In this section I will explore the reluctance to revisit the past in Sierra Leone, including from Aminatta herself, and the methods she employs in order to successfully conduct research about it. I will discuss the unreliability of memory, and the use of documents that allow Aminatta to access this long-buried piece of the past.

The disinclination to talk about past matters creates a challenge for Aminatta in her research. Lena England points out how Aminatta's childhood is affected by a 'back-and-forth movement' and her departure from Sierra Leone as a child was abrupt (171). To find out the details of her father's story, Aminatta is required to return to Sierra Leone, a trip 'marred by broken airplanes, massive delays, and spending time at airports with few amenities' (Englund 171). Thereby mobility is 'often connected with escape, and return happens somewhat reluctantly' (Englund 171). When contacted by a man from her past, Aminatta is worried that he will expect her to be able to provide him with answers that she herself does not possess (*Devil* 113). Although she 'feigned confidence', Aminatta describes a 'sensation of walking back into [her] dark past, the geography of which was both familiar and confused' (*Devil* 112). Returning to what is unresolved in the past is not guaranteed to satisfy Aminatta's search for answers. Other people she attempts to contact for information are reluctant to revisit the past; one man, Stephen Olver, returns her letter with a note that says, 'these matters belonged to the past and he had no desire to discuss them' (*Devil* 185). Aminatta worries that she will cause more harm than good for herself, saying it would have been better to stay in London, 'to leave matters undisturbed as they had lain for decades" (*Devil* 308). After having found a way to live with her past, Aminatta worries about jeopardising it. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the people Aminatta need to talk to in order to get answers about the past are going to cooperate, or that they will be truthful. It would be easier to leave the past undisturbed and to go on living her life in London, yet Aminatta has chosen to make the difficult journey back to Sierra Leone to revisit the past. The reluctance to return is related to an anxiety that the resulting narrative will be unsatisfying, leading to a dead end.

To distance herself from the information she is gathering about her father's story, Aminatta takes on the persona of a professional journalist while conducting interviews. Aminatta refers to her father as 'Dr Forna', instead of 'my father', in order to 'impose [a] façade of control', because it 'unnerved [her] to delve into the past' and to ask questions without knowing if she would like to hear the answers (*Devil* 308). The story of Mohamed Forna is of great personal importance to Aminatta, but it is one that involves blatant injustice, and a few powerful people who want to change the narrative of what happened. If Aminatta reminds the witnesses about her connection to Mohamed Forna, they might change their narrative to make their own involvement even less apparent. At the same time, the use of 'Dr Forna' protects Aminatta herself from getting too emotionally involved in the accounts of the witnesses that she is attempting to access. If Aminatta can treat her father as a man somewhat separate from his role in her life, she might avoid unnecessary frustration and hurt about past injustice. Using distance, Aminatta is given a façade of control, even if it is a front.

Despite, or perhaps because of, Aminatta's limited perspective, her life story is constructed as parallel to developments in the country and her father's political life. In one scene, Aminatta goes from a memory of her as a child getting her head stuck between the bars of a bridge, from 'In time the bars were forced open. I was out', right onto 'Back home in Sierra Leone my father was released from prison' (*Devil* 111). Although these events might not have occurred simultaneously, the images are presented side by side, encouraging us to compare them, as both father and child are released. Whereas Aminatta's experience is common to children, and she was not in any real danger, her father's adult reality is different. The comparison of the two events hints at the naivete of the narrator's childhood self, as she had not experienced enough hardship yet to understand the true reality of being in prison like her father. In another memory, Aminatta recalls a bonfire night, when embers burned a hole in her boot and her mother plunged her foot in the sea (*Devil* 135). This is then compared to her father, who overslept by five minutes and was late for his morning shower, and then 'a blast tore through the empty bathroom' (*Devil* 135). Even when Mohamed Forna's story seems disconnected from Aminatta's life, she writes their lives as connected. Thereby we learn about Aminatta's childhood and her memories, whilst we gain insight about what else was going on in the country and her family at the same time, that she would be mostly unaware of at the time. Even while Aminatta was at boarding school and far away from her father, who was in prison at the time, he was a part of her: 'We were children guarding our parents' shame, hiding from the adult world secrets we barely understood ourselves' (*Devil* 223). The reader is reminded that Aminatta was a child when these events took place, and that she had a limited

understanding of the danger her father was in. Yet the very move of presenting these images together and drawing connections between her past self and her present knowledge, shows that the distance to the past has allowed Aminatta to see what she did not see at the time. In addition, the juxtaposition of scenes like these highlights how Aminatta's childhood was affected by these events, even though she did not know everything at the time.

Yet Aminatta knows that her own memories are not always reliable. Several times Aminatta compares memories to smaller pieces of a whole: 'The memories are like the discarded differently coloured squares of mosaic – meaningless fragments' (*Devil* 164). As a child, Aminatta could not make sense of everything she experienced: 'Back then, in 1970, I saw the detail, but not the whole. (…) I saw enough to sense the coming storm' (*Devil* 164). Aminatta admits to the limits of her memory: 'I remember nothing of leaving Sierra Leone or arriving at Gatwick, nothing of our journey to Scotland to my grandparents' house in Aberdeen' (*Devil* 103). Even the image of her mother's face and hairstyles 'faded and brightened through the years', although Aminatta never forgot the sound of her voice (*Devil* 23). There is a holiday that they have pictures from, and Aminatta observes that '[t]hey are happy images, there's no doubt', but that they 'exist in a vacuum with barely a corresponding memory alongside', because she did not form any memories (*Devil* 130). Meaningless fragments of missed memories or aspects of the past recall a sense of something lost, a potential meaning to the story not found. When Aminatta admits to the limits of her memory, the reader is reminded that the author-narrator is not all-knowledgeable, but someone with a limited perspective. Although Aminatta draws in stories from other people and describes scenes that did not happen to herself personally, she also admits that she does not know absolutely everything about her own story—the past is not immediately accessible even to her.

Through *Devil*, Aminatta attempts to reconcile the parallel realities that she has experienced since her childhood, as her own memories diverge from official accounts. Aminatta reflects on how she has 'harboured memories, tried to piece together scraps of truth and make sense of fragmented images' (*Devil* 18). The difference between 'the official truths' and 'propaganda of history books', and her own personal memories, has led to a world of 'parallel realities' (*Devil* 18). Aminatta is aware that her childhood memories are not valued as truth, especially not when they diverge from official accounts. As children, Aminatta and her siblings were 'encouraged to forget, dissuaded from asking' (*Devil* 18). This is what made Aminatta begin to spy on the adults, eavesdrop into conversations, and from here she got fragments of truth: 'I grew older, became a journalist and made a living using the skills I spent

my childhood honing' (*Devil* 18). In a key quote, Aminatta asks: 'Yet what use against the deceit of a state are the memories of a child?' (*Devil* 18). Here the author-narrator shows awareness that her account of the events will not be granted the attention it would have if it was someone else telling the story, because Aminatta was only a child when it happened.

At the same time, anyone's memory of the events would be constructed like Aminatta's—from bits and pieces, with a narrow perspective, combined with what they have heard and seen and spoken to people about. Aminatta recognises that even though she was a child when these events took place, her memories are valuable, and her stories are worth telling. Writing the memoir and reconstructing that past from more than her own perspective at the time reconciles the parallel realities that she lived in as a child. Furthermore, in the position that the adult Aminatta Forna has gained, there is considerably more weight attributed to her words than her childhood figure, who learned to stay silent about what she knew. Aminatta is half-British, well-established in the UK, and has an international following. Her memoir was well received and widely read. Because of Forna's fame and reputation, her memories as presented through the memoir are significant, as they break with familial, national, and international silences.

At the time of doing research, Aminatta's ability to claim to do 'family research' rather than officially conducting research as a journalist may have given her access to documents that she might not otherwise have been granted access to. The documents from her father's trial gives Aminatta a point of reference to imagine the court case, which turns out to contain a highly constructed narrative about her father's whereabouts that have no basis in reality. As Jonathan Gottschall writes, story is of high significance in court—it is not the neutral account of what happens that leads to success in court, but the most convincing story (16). Aminatta's retelling of her father's court case includes a description of the transcripts, as well as placing the reader within the court (*Devil* 320). The documents are described as 'a crude facsimile of justice' consisting of '[o]ne thousand and seven pages, typed on an old typewriter with slightly irregular keys', of a trial lasting sixty-seven days (*Devil* 320). After having read the transcripts, Aminatta reflects upon how it painted a picture different from what she had been imagining (*Devil* 327). Instead of being 'more ingenious, more inventive', the trial was 'seven volumes in which the end was written before the start, in which every word demonstrated a contempt for the truth that was brutal, undisguised and arrogant' (*Devil* 327). Now Aminatta understands why her father did not try to resist, but instead cooperated in the trial, because he was facing 'a system, an entire order, in which everyone from judge to juror knew their role' (*Devil* 327). The court scenes are described as pre-determined and blatantly unjust.

The four witness accounts against Mohamed Forna show how a story is constructed to implicate an innocent man. These witnesses 'placed him at the centre of the supposed plot to overthrow the government, claimed to have seen him at dozens of meetings inciting soldiers, proposing the assassination of the president, producing wads of cash to buy ammunition and uniforms' (*Devil* 321). The evidence given against Aminatta's father is described as a story: 'Between them they spun a story of a plot, masterminded by my father and Ibrahim Taqi' (*Devil* 321). As Aminatta notes, 'a child could have spotted it: the repetition of key phrases, the absence of detail; under pressure the witnesses buckled and declared they could not remember' (*Devil* 322). Even though the witnesses claimed Mohamed Forna was seen in two different places at the same time, and even four separate locations on another date, 'The prosecution lawyers were so confident they couldn't be bothered to take care of the details' (*Devil* 322). When the trial was reported in the daily "Treason Trial Special", they reported the accusations against Mohamed Forna, 'but not the protests of the men who had made them' (*Devil* 327). In the case of Mohamed Forna, the details of the different witnesses' statements do not add up, but it does not matter, because the outcome of the trial has been decided from the beginning. The protests of the witnesses are irrelevant when only their pre-written witness accounts are considered as evidence in court.

Another document, a letter from Mohamed Forna, written before his death but unavailable until twenty years later, enables Aminatta to imagine her way into her father's perspective at the end of his life. The execution of Mohamed Forna functions as a climax in the story, as it comes at the culmination of all the information and answers Aminatta has been gathering throughout the second half of the memoir. Aminatta does not describe what her father thought at the end or how he felt, instead she reflects: 'What must it be like, I have often wondered, to find yourself at the mercy of your enemy? (…) No one ever asks a condemned man these questions – or perhaps they do but receive no reply. For what words could describe the wait until the end?' (*Devil* 397). At last, Aminatta finds out the truth of what happened to her father's body: 'Stevens had promised a public execution; in the end he had slaughtered them in secret and displayed his trophies afterwards' (*Devil* 399). After the open casket display, they were taken away, 'doused with acid and dumped in a mass grave. Amnesty International alone protested the killings' (*Devil* 400). In his letter, Mohamed Forna wrote: 'Give my love to the children (…) and tell them that short through my life has been, they will be proud of me when the truth of the last ten years will be known to all' (*Devil* 402). After this description of the execution and the letter, Aminatta writes that 'now [she] had the knowledge' needed to write the story: 'Four months later I sat down in my London study and I

began to write. His story. My story. Our story. The first ten years of my life and the last ten years of his' (*Devil* 403). At this point, Aminatta does know the truth about the plot against her father and why he was condemned for something he did not do. It was not until Aminatta had done her research, spoken to witnesses, read documents, and found her father's twenty-year-old letter that she knew the full story of what happened, something she had been wondering ever since it happened. Through *Devil*, Aminatta fulfils the wish of her father to make the truth known to all, by challenging the official narrative, that Mohamed Forna was a traitor, with her personal truths, that he was a loving father unjustly framed. Mohamed Forna is no longer alive to tell his story and to represent himself, but his daughter allows his story to become known.

3.3 Ethics of Storytelling

In this section, I will consider further obstacles in Aminatta's reconstruction of the past. This includes the widespread silence about the past, found in the general population, in her family, and the stories that she is unable to access and cannot narrate. Here I also discuss Aminatta's struggle with the concept of truth, the desire for stories to have meaning, and finally about how she must live with the result of the search and construct the story from the information available.

The biggest obstacle Aminatta faces on her journey to discovering the story of her father, is the silence about this part of the past. In *Devil*, silence is mentioned less by name than in *Memory*, but it appears thematically. Sound and silence even open the memoir: 'Now I can hear its roar begin; at first low and deep it rises to a shrieking cacophony. And suddenly, silence' (*Devil* 3). A heavier silence is described in relation to the story of Aminatta's father: 'In the last quarter-century a silence had descended over our family' (*Devil* 279). Later, silence is described as 'smother[ing] everything about the past' (*Devil* 401). Aminatta explains how she imagined her father as 'buried in a grave with a headstone, somewhere in Magburaka, perhaps' (*Devil* 401). Aminatta did not ask Yabome until she was in her twenties about where her father was buried, and then discovered that 'the authorities had claimed the bodies of the executed men, saying they belonged to the state, denying the families even the dignity of burying their dead – and the people the possibility of a shrine' (*Devil* 402). Silence about the painful past is what Aminatta deals with throughout the memoir. In "The Afterlife of a Memoir", Forna recalls a memory of being in a London bar with her siblings, whispering about the past: 'At the time, I took it for granted that we needed to whisper, in order to keep our story private' ("Afterlife"). Later, as Forna found out more about her father and the way he

was prosecuted and watched, she realises that '[s]ilence was a habit [she] was born into' ("Afterlife"). The president's response to Mohamed Forna was to send a 'message to the nation that this was where such actions got you' ("Afterlife"). Mohamed Forna was silenced, 'and in time the silence spread to every person in the country' ("Afterlife"). This silence about the past creates a barrier for Aminatta to reach through both when doing her own memory reconstructions of that time, and when speaking to other people about it. Keeping the silence has become a norm, even within the family, which makes it increasingly difficult to ask questions about it and to confront a past full of unanswered questions.

While Aminatta gains access to lots of documents and conducts several interviews, there are still many witnesses that either do not respond, or that are no longer alive to tell their tales. Thereby there are many sides to the story that Aminatta and the reader are not able to access. One of the people that Aminatta interviews tells her 'an extraordinary story' which is impossible to verify, and she was unable to question him again, because he died three days after their interview (*Devil* 258-59). Among the people who were involved in Mohamed Forna's trial, several died gruesome deaths, leading people to comment: "*Hakeh.* Divine justice: it catches up with everyone in the end" (*Devil* 332). Furthermore, Aminatta comments on the time that has passed since these events took place, like how her father's letter resurfaces twenty years after his death, 'when Siaka Stevens was dead, the APC had been overthrown and the country was on the brink of war' (*Devil* 399). Because of these untold stories, Aminatta can only imagine what might change if she had more information about what happened. The memory of events is influenced by these dark spots of perspectives not accessed. The frustration with memory reconstruction is knowing that your own perspective is limited, and something will always be missing.

Like in *Memory*, some stories go untold in *Devil*, such as what happened to Aminatta's cousin Morlai. Even though Morlai is a visible character who seems to have an influence on Aminatta from her childhood, Aminatta chooses not to tell his full story. When Morlai returns to the narrative, Aminatta only comments upon her own ignorance of not noticing Morlai's pain: 'I had acquired a tunnel vision, nothing else mattered, I was fixated only upon my own purpose. Every day I pressed on, thinking only of what new information I had acquired, where my next goal lay' (*Devil* 366) This omission is not commented upon explicitly, but the silence in the text is literal. The reason for such a silence might be because Aminatta herself does not know Morlai's full story, and she does not take the liberty to imagine it, or to invade his privacy. In Forna's article about the afterlife of the memoir, she writes that '[t]he writer of a memoir must necessarily reveal a great deal about herself or himself, and often about other

people, too', meaning to 'sacrifice your own privacy, and you sacrifice the privacy of others to whom you may have given no choice' ("Afterlife"). In novels, characters can be so far removed from who they might be based on, that no one will recognise them, and the author can always say that it is fictional. In a memoir, the ethics of storytelling plays in to a greater extent. Forna, writing about her own family, many of whom are still alive, is bound by ethical obligations to be respectful. Even though *Devil* is partially an act of imagination, there are different expectations for an author writing about real people, than the author of fiction.

The challenge of telling a true story is paralleled with Aminatta's childish desire for stories to have a meaning. The desire for meaning is exemplified in Milik's story about a humpback, where Aminatta is frustrated that apparently the story does not have a meaning (*Devil* 133). The story features a man with a hump on his back, and some devils saying to each other: 'If a thing is on a thing, let us take it off. If it is not on, let us put it back on!' (*Devil* 132). The man is brought into the devils' dancing ring under a hump tree, and the devils sing a song (*Devil* 133). According to Milik, the devils' song is simply 'the devils' own song' and it does not mean anything (*Devil* 133). Another story, of her father's feet and how he did not own a pair of shoes until he went to secondary school, 'was a multipurpose parable with ever-extending dimensions of meaning', that could mean anything from warning against the dangers of catching hookworm, encouragement to be grateful for what you have, or the value of education (*Devil* 20-21). Aminatta is used to fairy tales such as Snow White and Cinderella, 'in which every detail has its place and purpose, driving listener and storyteller to an inevitable, moral conclusion' (*Devil* 133). The moral of the devil story, according to Milik, is that 'Nobody should thank a devil' (*Devil* 134). What the story and Aminatta's reactions shows, is that we have a desire for our lives and our stories to mean something and to make sense. The reality is that sometimes there is no greater meaning to an event, or that this depends on whether we choose to imbue an event with meaning. The meaning of a story is not an uncomplicated constant factor inherent to a story, which we see in Milik's rejection of there being a meaning to the devils' song.

This desire for stories to have a meaning is connected to Aminatta's desire to make her father's death meaningful. Aminatta questions her search for the truth, 'as though it were there to be found at all' (*Devil* 313). This leads to her doubting her own belonging to the country: 'Would I have that confidence if this had really been my country, where arrests, detentions and beatings had become as common as ant tracks in the dust?' (*Devil* 313). During one of her interviews, Aminatta describes feeling 'exhausted' and 'strangely emotionally detached, as though [she was] watching a show of this man and [herself]' (*Devil* 340). Despite having a

desire to find out the truth about what happened to her father, it is not easy to accept the answers she is given. Aminatta becomes obsessed with the idea of finding out the truth, but when she gets it, she does not experience immediate closure or satisfaction, because she knows now more than before how unfairly her father was treated. In a way it would have been much easier to stay in Britain in her comfortable present, and not bring back the painful past, but having started there is no way back to the person she was before she knew. In her childhood, Aminatta had a limited awareness of what was happening around her. Now, as an adult, Aminatta becomes consumed with the desire to find out what happened to her father, a story that has been kept hidden from her. The implicit hope of Aminatta's search is that it will lead to some closure and understanding of why it happened, which could make Aminatta's father's death more meaningful, but gradually she realises that this might not be the result.

The story of the devil that danced on the water, which appears a couple of times in the memoir, connects Aminatta's childhood and adulthood and contributes to reconciling the parallel realities she has lived with. The first time Aminatta hears the story of the devil, it is told by villagers by the Bumbuna Falls, about a woman who was fetching a jar of water (*Devil* 179). The woman had screamed and ran when she saw a devil dancing on the water (*Devil* 180). Young Aminatta who hears the story is interested in what the devil looked like, what he did, and if he spoke to her (*Devil* 180). The story activates Aminatta's imagination: 'I imagined the spirit as she had seen him: a solitary silhouette on the flat lake, turning, pirouetting, as graceful as could be on his one proud foot', and wishes that she had been the one to see him (*Devil* 180). At the very end of the memoir, Aminatta brings up this story again, as she imagines the girl she once was, 'who believed there was a place somewhere on this earth, a place where the devil came down at dusk to dance alone on the water' (*Devil* 403). According to Patil and Saha, the metaphor is used to 'compare the states of her childhood and her adult self' (90). As a child, Aminatta is fascinated by the devil, 'carefree and happy, oblivious of all the torments and hazards of the world outside the lake', and later as an adult, 'she laments over the lost happiness of her childhood' (Patil and Saha 90). While I agree that the two scenes compare the states of childhood and adulthood of Aminatta, I believe that the ending is not only about lamenting lost happiness of her childhood, but also about Aminatta obtaining clarity about her life and her past. By gaining further access to the past, Aminatta has come closer to the girl she used to be, despite the years that have passed and the time she has spent outside of Sierra Leone. After finding out more about the past, she is able to recall that girl and the feelings she had. What she had lost is not the happiness of her childhood, which was far from uncomplicated, but rather a sense of herself. Aminatta's

retelling of her childhood and her father's story can be compared to Kai's work of testimony as described in Chapter 2, which allowed him to confront the past, rather than to avoid it. Aminatta confronts her memories, allowing for soft closures to take place, so that she can tell the story on to future generations.

After discovering as much of the past as she can, Aminatta must deal with the experience of a loss of innocence and learn to live with the truth, without the power to change the past. After 'twenty-five years in ignorance and one year gradually uncovering some of the truth', Aminatta cannot recall 'what it felt like not to know' (*Devil* 379). At the other side of the truth she has found, Aminatta has changed, the country has changed, and the past is 'irrevocably altered' (*Devil* 379). Rather than finding all the answers she desired, Aminatta has gone on a personal journey that has changed her expectations and her idea of the past: 'I had shed my old past, the one filled with unanswered questions, secrets and ghosts' (*Devil* 388). Even though Aminatta has found out the truth about her father's involvement in politics, and that he was not involved in actions he was executed for, she cannot do much about the information—Mohamed Forna cannot be vindicated except in memory. Now, there is no grave to visit, and no way of knowing exactly where he lies buried. The only option Aminatta has is to deal with the information she has learned, and to tell the story on. At the end of Aminatta's journey, and the end of the memoir, she needs to make peace with what she has found and what she still does not know.

3.4 Intertextual Links Between *Devil* and *Memory*

Through intertextuality, the idea that all texts are always influenced by other texts, certain affordances of *Devil* and *Memory* arise that are otherwise not as apparent when the texts are read separately. Patil and Saha use intertextuality to compare three works by Forna, suggesting that 'Forna has juxtaposed different typographies of African and European societal, cultural, and political perspectives and formed a connecting link between her three books, making trauma a horizontal force that creates narrative dynamics' (89). By engaging with discourses on trauma and psychiatry, Forna brings in a 'self-reflexivity of the literary text, by which the text foregrounds its pre-texts and thereby reveals its process of production' (West-Pavlov quoted in Patil and Saha 89). That means that the text highlights how it refers to texts that came before it and reveals something about its own construction. As Patil and Saha describe, 'Forna's war encounters, as described in [*Devil*], lay a foundation of intertwining intertext imprints from a societal and individual viewpoint in [*Memory*]' (91-92). Traces of

Forna's experiences that were described in *Devil* appear in *Memory* and several other novels by Forna, relating to her individual experience but also providing commentary about society. Reading *Memory* and *Devil* together reveals more about both texts, as it is possible to compare the way the author deals with certain characters and themes. Therefore this section will explore intertextuality in *Devil* and *Memory* as a method to further illuminate both works.

One of the prominent ways that *Devil* and *Memory* are related, is the Sierra Leonean setting before and after the Civil War, and its commentary about possible causes and consequences of the war. Although it is not elaborated on extensively, *Devil* and *Memory* both refer to the role of documents in reconstructing the past. In "Can Fictional Narratives Be True?", Paul Ricoeur describes documents and archives as 'the "sources" of evidence for historical inquiry', while fictional narratives can 'ignore the burden of providing evidences of that kind' (4-5). In *Devil*, Aminatta refers to files in the Bertha Conton School, of which only a few survived the thirty years since they were made, despite the day in 1997 when the RUF burned documents, 'sending a nation's history up in smoke' (*Devil* 172). Documents are an important part of Aminatta's journey of discovering her father's story, and she spends time with 'thousands of documents' (*Devil* 101). *Memory* similarly refers to burned documents (*Memory* 324). Another example of documentation during the Civil War is shown in *Memory*, of how doctors 'would sometimes leave the hospital to tour the city collecting corpses, issuing death certificates, and stuffing the dead into the hospital mortuary. A vain effort at record-keeping, imposing order on the unruliness of war' (*Memory* 367). Even another example of documents in *Memory* that seems insignificant but play a big role, are Elias Cole's notebooks, which allow Johnson and his men to keep Julius for longer while looking for evidence. Documents are a way to remember the past, in a way that can be visited later. A piece of paper can contain information about orders given, crimes committed, punishments administered, and when people were born and when they died. When these documents are burned, there is no point of reference for later generations about what happened. That being said, documents are not always reliable, and 'much of our access to the past depends on fallible memory and unreliable, subjective documentation' (Blowers 109). Just because something is documented and written does not mean that the information is correct and accurate. Yet when most of the official documents of a country are burned, there is no evidence to compare with what people say. Whereas documents are an important part of the research process of *Devil*, Forna does not have to rely on historical documentation to write *Memory*, because she deals with fictional characters. Still, it is important to note that *Memory* also includes a reference to the role of documents in history, because the lack of documents allows history to be made up of only

what people choose to say, which is a problem that the novel raises—what does it mean for history when a select few individuals can say whatever they want, while others stay silent?

In both works, there is the same obstacle to finding and telling the truth: the manipulative storyteller, eager to tell his story to extricate himself from blame. Morlai Salieu in *Devil* may be considered the predecessor of *Memory*'s Elias Cole, as they are both clever storytellers, and some of the same language is used to describe them both. Patil and Saha also note this comparison (93). When Aminatta first interviews Morlai Salieu, he begins by claiming that none of his statement against her father was true (*Devil* 336). 'He seemed genuinely to expect our sympathy' Aminatta notes, about the idea that Salieu was forced to witness against her father in return for money he never got (*Devil* 336). Throughout his story, Morlai Salieu changes his role. Morlai Salieu is sometimes involved, and other times distanced from the action, and he only supplies names of people no longer alive to verify his story, so that he 'rewrote the history of the country with himself at the apex' (*Devil* 336-39). Afterwards, Aminatta realises that Morlai Salieu's motivation for the interview was to devise a 'version of events that left him blameless' (*Devil* 343). This is what Nenebah warns Adrian against in *Memory*, that Elias Cole is using him to write 'his own version of history', and all over the country people are devising a 'version of the truth which (…) makes certain none of them will be blamed' (*Memory* 351). With this similar language, *Memory*'s Elias Cole readily recalls the characterisation of Morlai Salieu of *Devil*. As a reader of both texts, our impressions of Morlai Salieu and Elias Cole are influenced by our reading of the other text. In addition, the fact there is this similar figure in both works, both in fiction and nonfiction, contributes to the impression that these storytellers are common. As Nenebah says to Adrian, the erasure and manipulation of history is happening all over Sierra Leone (*Memory* 351). Forna writes back against this through creating an awareness that there are people like Salieu and Cole, and that it is not always obvious how they are lying about what happened.

Another implication of the connection between Morlai Salieu and Elias Cole, is the connection it forms between Aminatta and Adrian as listeners. Elias Cole says to Adrian: 'As you so rightly put it, you are an outsider. This is a small country. You've never lived in a place like this' (*Memory* 405). Adrian starts out listening to Elias Cole because he came to him as a patient, while Aminatta is the one who seeks out Morlai Salieu. Aminatta and Adrian both struggle with feeling like an outsider in Sierra Leone. In the time spent outside of Sierra Leone, Aminatta has created a life for herself in London, establishing a career and making a life with her husband Simon. When Aminatta returns to Sierra Leone to continue her search for the truth about her father, she needs to travel with the UN to get to Magburaka, because

the road is too dangerous to cross on her own (*Devil* 344). On the way there, Aminatta sees the country through the eyes of an outsider: 'I saw this country of mine through the eyes of the stranger I had become' (*Devil* 346). Patil and Saha similarly note this link between Aminatta and Adrian's experiences, and comment on how they '[move] back to Britain's comfort and safety' despite their connections to Sierra Leone (94). Both Aminatta and Adrian take up the position as the outsider, which give them distance and clarity, but also limit their access to places and people's trust. In the end, they find that saying in Sierra Leone would be difficult, and decide to move back to England.

The desire to live in a fictional world is another similarity that we see in Aminatta and Adrian. In *Devil*, Aminatta uses her adult wisdom looking back at her childhood and articulates what she felt: 'I was already nostalgic and I had barely begun to live my life yet' (*Devil* 206). While she was 'not unhappy really', she knew that her childhood 'wasn't measuring up' (*Devil* 206). As a result, rather than making up an imaginary friend, she invented a whole world and 'yearned for a past [she] had never even experienced' (*Devil* 206). Instead of being where she was in November of 1970, with her father in prison, Aminatta 'longed to live in a different world, a world just like the one inhabited by the boys and girls behind the covers of [her] books' (*Devil* 206). Similarly, when Adrian looks back on his childhood, he remembers '[imagining] his adult life as one of countless adventures' (*Memory* 62). These adventures were situated 'not in the future, but in some fictional landscape of the past that could equally have been prompted by Tintin, Rider Haggard or any of the adventure books boys his age consumed' (*Memory* 63). The adventures, 'undertaken and survived (…) would somehow solve all the things that had been puzzling him', and afterwards 'a quieter life began' (*Memory* 63). The imaginary version of the past where such adventures take place are a comfort to young Adrian and are seen as a solution to what he is bothered and puzzled by. This wish from both young Aminatta and young Adrian create a metafictional nod to the role of fiction in our lives: when our real lives become tough, or simply undesirable, it is easy to wish to be somewhere else, and that place can be found in fiction. As both characters were young when they had this wish, we might imagine this is a desire they outgrew when they reached adulthood. However, considering that these reflections are selected and made in the present, it might be the case that their adult selves understand this desire now more than in their childhood. Both Aminatta's and Adrian's current struggles result in a longing for a past that did not take place.

Considering the parallels that we can see between Aminatta and Adrian, it is interesting to see how readers view Adrian as less sympathetic and relatable than other

characters in *Memory*. In Norridge's experience of working with reading groups and teaching *Memory* in classrooms, readers in the UK typically identified with Nenebah and Kai rather than Adrian ("Sex as Synecdoche" 24). The 'white British male is perceived to be steeped in a difficult history of racial and cultural prejudice', leading Norridge's readers to 'prefer to align their own identities with those of the articulate (…) Sierra Leonean elite' ("Sex as Synecdoche" 24). According to Norridge, this identification 'places the reader both as an insider within an unknown culture and, frequently, as the object of desire for a cultural outsider' ("Sex as Synecdoche" 24). Norridge's sense is that the 'identification with the desired' (like Nenebah) is 'crucial in disturbing the potential voyeurism of the images that still circulate about West Africa' as well as 'any potentially homogenising or blithely sympathetic approaches to viewing the conflict they depict' ("Sex as Synecdoche" 24). Through the identification with characters who are different from them, the reader may gain a greater appreciation for these differences, as well as the similarities that draw them into relating to them. The view of the Sierra Leonean Civil War is nuanced because the reader can view its impact from both an outsider's and insider's perspective. In this desire to identify and understand the characters in *Memory*, Norridge's readers prefer to align with Kai and Nenebah rather than Adrian, who shows problematic traits. As I have shown, however, there are many similarities between Aminatta in *Devil* and Adrian in *Memory*. Through drawing the intertextual links between *Devil* and *Memory*, Adrian may be presented in a better light.

The parallels between Aminatta and Adrian prompt readers to check their own biases and assumptions about unfamiliar cultures. Even if we reread *Memory*, Adrian's actions do not change. What can change, is our view of his actions. I do, of course, want to be cautious to speculate on the intentions of the author, and whether the writing of Adrian was a way for Forna to explore a part of her own personality and experience. That being said, there are many similarities between Aminatta and Adrian as characters in the two literary works, despite the obvious differences. Western readers choosing to identify with Nenebah and Kai can encourage crosscultural connection, but the parallels between Aminatta and Adrian do the same. The reader who reads the two works together and notices these similarities will see that individuals can have similar thoughts and desires despite differences across gender and spatial borders. Norridge's Western readers are eager to distance themselves from Adrian, while the author herself seems to compare herself to him. The comparison therefore encourages readers to not look away from Adrian in shame, but to stop and consider how his behaviour and thoughts might be more relatable than they would wish.

3.5 Conclusion

Devil shows its own construction of remembering, researching, and writing. The way Forna reconstructs the past and her own past self as the author-narrator Aminatta is not simple and straightforward, but complicated memory work. The form of the memoir limits Forna in how she can write her story and what she might include in it, as she is bound to a promise to tell the truth as far as she knows it. This is an expectation Forna manages with highlighting the constructedness of narratives through self-reflexivity and discussions about the unreliability of memory. Aminatta as author-narrator shows her research process of accessing documents and conducting interviews to find out more details about the political life of her father, to understand how he could be subject to such injustice.

In *Memory* and *Devil*, Forna uses multiple perspectives and fragmented narrative temporality to emphasise how the stories of our lives intersect with the stories of other lives, as our view of the past and the present influence each other back and forth, and the key to accessing the bigger picture of events that have taken place is to view it from several standpoints. Forna reflects upon the impossibility of ever gaining the full 'truth' about an event, as there will always be more perspectives that are not accessed and stories that remain untold. Thereby Aminatta as author-narrator of *Devil* does not impose a final meaning on the story of her memoir, but instead leaves it up for interpretation in the same way as in *Memory*.

Conclusion

My journey to writing this thesis begun with a fascination with the grey area between the actual and the invented: memoirs written like novels, semi-autobiographical novels, and essays with invented characters. I like the idea of real stories, written well, and fiction based on real events. However, when writing about 'true' events, the question of ethics comes in. Who is allowed to talk about this, and why? In what ways is it acceptable, or even possible, to write about this piece of history? The recent history of Sierra Leone is brutal, and it continues to affect the country's population. What are the obstacles to telling this story? These are the questions I have begun to provide possible answers to, which I will synthesise in this conclusion. First, I will briefly summarise the findings I have presented throughout my three chapters. Followingly, I will consider potential shortcomings in my work and indicate areas for further research. Finally, I will draw conclusions about the significance of my argument beyond the world of text.

Following from my first chapter, in which I explained my theoretical grounding, I analysed *Memory* and *Devil* independently, as well as exploring their intertextual links. What both *Devil* and *Memory* encourage readers to do is to attune to silences, to consider if storytellers have a hidden agenda, and to notice who is not speaking. In a corrupt system it is difficult to discover and to accept the truth about injustice that has taken place, but it is necessary to find a way to live despite it. This is what Aminatta must accept at the end of *Devil*, and that is further explored in *Memory* though the interactions between Elias, Adrian, and Kai. Even though Mohamed Forna cannot be vindicated, and the trial that doomed him will not be redone, Aminatta redeems the memory that remains of him through her memoir. This shows that the way we write and read stories matter to the memory and history that remains. In both *Memory* and *Devil*, Forna is aware of her limitations, and that there are various untold stories that she does not have access to. Even if literature cannot answer all the questions related to worldwide humanitarian crises, it can make us think about our actions and how we view and treat other people. The interconnected life stories of both *Devil* and *Memory* suggest that there is not an inherent meaning to our stories, but instead multiple possible meanings are subject to interpretation and change.

As with any project with a limited number of pages, I have had to limit the scope of my analysis and make cuts where necessary. For example, I could have further discussed the role of gender in both the memoir and the novel, but I have only touched upon the subject in this thesis. In addition, an greater focus on the history and politics of Sierra Leone might have

been illuminating, or it could have led to slightly different answers to the questions I have asked. There are more articles and book chapters about other works by Forna, or about similar themes that Forna addresses, that could have been useful to further support the points I have made here, but that I have not chosen to prioritise in my reading. A further discussion of trauma studies, and not just its criticism, might have been useful. I could have elaborated on narrative therapy, narrative identity, the danger of the single story, post-colonialism, or the idea of learning from history. Nonetheless, my thesis has contributed to filling a gap in secondary criticism of works by Aminatta Forna, which does not focus on trauma theory, and extends further than a footnote. My analysis of *Devil* and *Memory* shows how storytelling is an integral part of our lives because the stories we tell from our lives, make a difference to how we live. Even though there are other aspects of *Devil* and *Memory* that I could have explored, this is an important conversation to open. Theories like intertextuality and multidirectional memory can be applied usefully to many works of literature to understand how stories and narrativisation work in our lives.

While scholars continue to analyse classical works of literature like those from William Shakespeare or Mary Shelley, authors like Aminatta Forna, though internationally read and praised, receive little literary criticism. There is a lot more to be said about *Memory* and *Devil* that I could not include within the scope of my analysis. Further work could include analysing *Devil* together with other memoirs from authors with violent family histories to consider how they reconstruct the past and deal with generational trauma. An even bigger work could be to compare Forna's works and their intertextual links to other authors who have written both memoirs and novels, to see if there are any tendencies or trends in storytelling in the two forms from the same author. In general, popular novels receive too little attention in the world of literary criticism. The same goes for memoirs, even if their writing is as literary and poetic as a novel. What I have shown in my analysis of these two works from Forna is that there is not necessarily a good reason for why scholars stay away from such works. There are characters on developmental arcs, plots that unfold, and prose with metaphors and images, that when analysed are revealed to connect to processes of storytelling, and construction and reconstruction of past, present, and future. Popular literature from authors like Forna who deal with violent conflict and other cultures with nuance and sensitivity allow readers from other parts of the world to begin to understand people and cultures that are unfamiliar to them. The reader who consumes novels and memoirs for pleasure can experience the immersive qualities of literature, whilst also being encouraged to consider how these kinds of stories play out in the world beyond the books. The popularity of books like *Memory* and *Devil* should not make

scholars avoid them, but rather to seek them out and understand their effect in the world of readers.

In our present context where social media is given an increasingly significant role in our lives, discussions arise about who should be given a platform to speak their opinions. Through social media, anyone can have a platform, and anyone can become 'viral'. Therefore, what is posted on the internet can have a considerable impact. With algorithms that are designed to compel you to keep scrolling, users are recommended content similar to what they have already consumed, often creating echo chambers, in which the individual is 'only surrounded by opinions similar to their own' (Al Atiqi 5). When only shown opinions that reinforce their own, the individual is not asked to consider opposing perspectives. Like literature, social media is full of stories and information that influences the individual. A significant difference is the slowness of literature. Reading requires you to slow down and imagine yourself into potentially unfamiliar worlds. Reading and thinking about literature is a way to raise awareness of processes of storytelling in real life, and to practise our understanding of others in a slower format where we allow ourselves to be influenced.

In a recent twenty-year anniversary edition of *Devil*, Forna writes in the new foreword that early in her research, 'a Sierra Leonean psychiatrist had remarked to [her], "These people will be alright, you know"' ("What Fiction Can Reveal"). Although it is easy to get lost in the seemingly hopeless situation in Sierra Leone, where people live in poverty, dealing with painful memories, that does not mean that their situation is entirely helpless. Trauma diagnoses are 'applied too widely and too quickly' by Western aid workers' ("What Fiction Can Reveal"). We can remind ourselves of the words of Attila in *Memory*—what the people need are hope, not therapy. So where can this hope come from?

Breaking the silence about a brutal past and countering official narratives is not a task that Aminatta Forna takes lightly. In "The Afterlife of a Memoir", Forna describes some of responses she received to her work. Having broken the silence about her father's story, Forna must endure having 'unwrapped what had previously been concealed: the skinned inner self dragged out and, shrinking in the light, placed beneath the bright hot gaze of strangers' ("Afterlife"). The responses Forna received to the memoir were sometimes critical, but also loving. In "Why I Write", Forna tells the story of Ezekiel, who along with three other men were accused of overthrowing the government, and in prison they were given *Devil* and asked to read it ("Why I Write" 22). Ezekiel understood that the book was given to them as a warning that their fates would be like Mohamed Forna's, but instead it gave the men hope and reminded them of freedom ("Why I Write" 22). After the trial against the men collapsed and

they were set free, they contacted Forna to tell her their story about how her book helped them, which is why Forna ends the article by saying: ‘Ask me why I write, and if I told you nothing else, I would tell you the story of Ezekiel’ ("Why I Write" 22). This example shows how narratives have a power to provide the hope needed for someone to prevail in a difficult situation, even though the story of Mohamed Forna did not have a happy ending. Finding hope lies in having faith that the future might be better than the present moment, rather than worse. Hope is knowing that suffering will end, rather than continue. Hope is having someone who believes in recovery and healing, in time, rather than labels that categorise someone as sick and beyond help. *Devil* was able to give hope to Ezekiel, and I believe that it can do the same for others.

Throughout the three chapters I have touched upon the idea of what the purpose of storytelling is. If anyone can say whatever they like, regardless of whether it is true, why should we listen to anyone’s story? When certain storytellers are given a platform and the free range to tell their tales, and we discover their deceit, we might be tempted to condemn storytelling altogether. These storytellers might have power, but they are few in numbers. We should not discourage people from speaking up; instead, if everyone could tell their story, we would get a more nuanced picture of events, cultures, and people. A relationship of trust is formed between the listener and the storyteller. The storyteller always has the option, the power, to abuse this trust, but that does not mean that they will.

There are many reasons to stay silent. There are many reasons why reconstructing the past and making painful memories resurface might not necessarily be good for the one who suffers. There are reasons to be vary of those who tell stories that no one else can verify or dispute. What this shows is that storytelling is a powerful tool, and it matters to how we live and perceive our own lives. That does not mean that we need to stay away and to avoid telling life stories. We tell stories of our lives all the time, to ourselves, to others, in our dreams. It is a continual process that cannot be stopped. What we should do, is to become aware of these processes, both in others and in ourselves.

Books and storytelling will not end perpetual violence and bring world peace—this is not the purpose of literature. But reading can help one understand one’s neighbour, or a distant family member, and people in distant countries far away from us. Listening to others allow us to understand them, and telling our own stories allow others to understand and become near us, too. This understanding and nearness is not insignificant, but potentially life changing for those involved. To become emotionally involved in people and conflicts in faraway countries counters the superficial tendency of news or social media, where we read

headlines and watch five seconds of a video before moving on. For some, reading literature like *Memory* and *Devil* forces them to slow down and spend time in an unfamiliar culture and to understand that poverty and war do exist, even if it does not affect them right now. For other readers, *Memory* and *Devil* provide familiar representation and function as testimony of their own experiences. These two books encourage both groups to come together and start a conversation about how we might help each other to create hope and healing.

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