MILLENNIUM
Journal of International Studies

Original Article

Disappointment's Magic: Negative Emotions, Transitional Justice and Resistance

Millennium: Journal of International Studies
1–28

DOI: 10.1177/03058298231213092
journals.sagepub.com/home/mil
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Abstract

This article explores how an existential account of emotions can enrich debates about negative emotions in transitional justice and peacebuilding scholarship. A growing literature has examined the challenge that the ex-resisters' negative emotions, including disappointment, pose to the creation of sustainable peace in post-conflict societies. It has however not sufficiently accounted for disappointment's potentially productive political value. The paper fills this gap by examining how the ex-resisters' disappointment affects their capacity for political action against the remainders of past violence and oppression, with a specific focus on the South African context. I draw on Jean-Paul Sartre's existential account of the emotions' 'magic' as a way of coping with the complexities of political action arising from our situated condition. I put Sartre's account in conversation with Nadine Gordimer's novel *No Time Like the Present* and experiences of disappointment among South African ex-resisters to show how disappointment can lead ex-resisters to different ways of confronting the complexity of political engagement in the wake of the incomplete transition. This dialogue reveals disappointment as a powerful source of resistance against the persistence of injustice, while also disclosing significant constraints upon political engagement in conditions of systemic violence.

Keywords

disappointment, transitional justice, existential accounts of emotions, Jean-Paul Sartre, South Africa

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Introduction

Sandra Adonis joined the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa at the age of 15, devoting her childhood and her youth to the fight against the injustices of the apartheid regime. In her testimony before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 1997, she expressed her sense of profound disappointment over the betrayed promise of liberation for which she had sacrificed so much. Even if we received 'our freedom and our democracy', she said, 'I do not think we have gained anything, because we are still in the same position as we used to be, unemployed, homeless, abandoned'.[1]

The widespread sense of disappointment haunting transitional societies has exposed cracks in the predominant linear visions of transition and illuminated the persistent effects of past violence in the present. In South Africa, a paradigm case of transition, profound disappointment over continued social and economic inequality has replaced the so-called 'liberation euphoria' that characterised the truth, reconciliation and nation-building project in the period following the official end of apartheid rule.[2] A powerful and widespread affect in the aftermath of transition, disappointment can act as a source of disaffection, apathy or political mobilisation and plays a crucial role in the continued pursuit of justice and conflict transformation.[3] In this paper, I concentrate on the context of South Africa and focus on the disappointment experienced by ex-resistance fighters. This is because – by virtue of their investment in the resistance ideals of freedom and justice – their disappointment will likely be most politically potent in transforming legacies of past injustice towards greater social and political equality.

Scholars of trauma and transitional justice have increasingly recognised the importance of emotions to transitional processes,[4] yet little attention has been paid to the affect of disappointment. In addition, some peacebuilding studies have examined the challenge that the ex-combatants' negative emotions, including disappointment, pose to the creation of sustainable peace in post-conflict societies.[5] However, these accounts focus primarily on evaluating negative emotions in terms of the stability of a post-conflict political

1. 'Testimony of Sandra Adonis', 22 May 1997. Available at: https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/adonis.htm.
2. Helene Strauss, 'Spectacles of Promise and Disappointment: Political Emotion and Quotidian Aesthetics in Video Installations by Berni Searle and Zanele Muholi', *Safundi* 15, no. 4 (2014): 474, https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2014.926196.
3. Adrian Little, 'Fear, Hope and Disappointment: Emotions in the Politics of Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation', *International Political Science Review* 38, no. 2 (2017): 201, https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512115590635.
4. Emma Hutchison and Roland Bleiker, 'Emotional Reconciliation: Reconstituting Identity and Community After Trauma', *European Journal of Social Theory* 11, no. 3 (2008): 385–403, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431008092569; Bronwyn Leebaw, 'Mobilizing Emotions: Shame, Victimhood, and Agency', in *Humanitarianism and Human Rights: A World of Differences?*, ed. Michael N. Barnett, Human Rights in History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 140–59, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108872485.008; Mihaela Mihai, *Negative Emotions and Transitional Justice* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2016).
5. Cheryl Lawther, 'The Truth About Loyalty: Emotions, Ex-Combatants and Transitioning from the Past', *International Journal of Transitional Justice* 11, no. 3 (2017): 484–504, https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijx019; Lætitia Bucaille, 'Armed Resistance and Self-Esteem:

order, while insufficiently accounting for the complex experience of disappointment and its potentially productive political value. What lacks sustained examination is how the experience of disappointment affects the ex-resisters' political engagement, how it discloses their embeddedness within the resilient conditions of systemic oppression and shapes their political action against the remainders of past violence.

To undertake this examination, I draw on Jean-Paul Sartre's existential understanding of emotions as a way of coping with the ambiguity of our situated condition – what Sartre calls a 'magical transformation of the world'. Sartre's account is distinct in foregrounding emotions as not simply reactive responses to an (external) event, but as ways of relating to or existing in the world, which significantly affect our sense of responsibility for the world and our capacity for acting in it. Scholarship in transitional justice, and in emotions and IR more generally, has increasingly drawn on existential understandings of emotions. Nevertheless, Sartre's account of emotions remains an untapped source. This omission can be at least partly attributed to the fact that several critics have dismissed Sartre's account as reducing emotions to a form of self-deception that clouds our rational assessment of the given situation and hinders responsible action in the world.[6] In my interpretation, however, Sartre's account of the emotions' 'magic' contributes two key insights crucial to understanding the role of disappointment in transitional contexts. First, emotions reveal the complexities of political action arising from our situatedness in an intersubjective and unpredictable world that precisely cannot be reduced to a rational, orderly environment for our projects. Second, viewing emotions as ways of coping with the complexities of political action helps us distinguish between more or less productive expressions of or responses to a given emotion, based on whether they flee or face up to this complexity.

To explore disappointment's 'magic' among ex-resisters in South Africa, I put Sartre's existential understanding of emotions in conversation with recent theoretical and practical articulations of disappointment in South Africa and a selected South African novel, Nadine Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present.* I first offer a theoretical account of how the 'magic' of disappointment in transitional contexts lies in its ability to reveal the fallacy of linear visions of the past's heroic overcoming and confront the ex-resisters with the complexities of struggling against the persistence of injustice without the guidance of pre-given models of liberation. I then draw on Gordimer's novel – one of the most well-known responses to the growing climate of political disillusion in South Africa[7] – and the experiences of disappointment among ex-resisters in South Africa for a rich account of

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Ex-Combatants in Palestine and South Africa', *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 1 (2011): 52–67, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-5687.2011.00120.x; Sasha Gear, *Wishing Us Away: Challenges Facing Ex-Combatants in the "New" South Africa* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2002).

6. R. Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999); S. Richmond, 'Magic in Sartre's Early Philosophy', in *Reading Sartre: On Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. E. Webber (London: Routledge, 2011).
7. Ileana Dimitriu, 'Then and Now: Nadine Gordimer's Burger's Daughter (1979) and No Time Like the Present (2012)', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 42, no. 6 (2016): 1045–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2016.1247553; Francine Prose, 'Future Imperfect', *The New York Times*, 6 April 2012, sec. Books, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/08/books/review/no-time-like-the-present-by-nadine-gordimer.html.

the different ways in which disappointment can shape the ex-resisters' political engagement in the wake of the incomplete transition. Reading the novel and the ex-resisters' political responses to disappointment in South Africa with Sartre's normative framework in mind helps us distinguish between more or less politically productive expressions of disappointment – based not on whether they contribute to the stability of a post-conflict political order, but on whether they lead the ex-resisters to flee the disappointing political reality or to creatively confront it.

This examination reveals disappointment as a potentially powerful source of resistance against the persistence of injustice, while also helping us understand and tackle the significant constraints upon political engagement in conditions of systemic violence. Thus, it can significantly enrich peacebuilding initiatives and disclose disappointment as a useful tool in creating futures of justice and peace that cannot be reduced to institutional, state-sponsored models of transitional justice and peacebuilding.

In my turn to the novel, I rely on the existentialist account of the political relevance of literary works, specifically as articulated by Sartre in his later work. According to Sartre, the political value of literature lies in its unique ability to reveal human lived experience in their emotional complexity and richness that cannot be grasped through concepts or ideas, but only as they are '*lived* without being *known*'.[8] Literature can do this because it portrays human beings in the totality of their situated existence, disclosing both how situational constraints shape their freedom to act *and* how they respond to these constraints, affirming the remaining margin of freedom within oppressive conditions.[9] In line with this understanding, I show how *No Time Like the Present* illuminates the complex experience of disappointment as it is lived by ex-resisters, and helps us make sense of the different political responses to disappointment among ex-resisters in South Africa. On the one hand, the novel relates how the ex-resisters' disappointment confronts them with their inability to achieve a clean break with the past, disclosing the limits of freedom within resilient conditions of systemic violence. On the other hand, it reveals how the ex-resisters grappled with their disappointment, devising different ways of confronting the circumscribed nature of political action.

Before proceeding with the argument, two qualifications are necessary. First, my understanding of disappointment follows common philosophical and psychological accounts of disappointment as a feeling we have in response to *betrayed hopes* or *expectations*.[10] In line with Sartre's account of emotions as ways of being in the world, however, I also focus on the more fundamental, existential significance of disappointment as a lived, affective sense of disjuncture or dislocation that disrupts the ex-resisters' established ways of relating to the world and their sense of the possibilities for political action.

Second, to reflect my focus on the disappointment of ex-resisters, I employ the term ex-resisters or ex-resistance fighters throughout the analysis, and refrain from using the

8. Jean-Paul Sartre, 'A Plea for Intellectuals', in *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (London; New York, NY: Verso, 1983), 275–6, 283.
9. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Search for a Method* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1968), 153–4.
10. Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 240–1; Kai Draper, 'Disappointment, Sadness, and Death', *The Philosophical Review* 108, no. 3 (1999): 392.

more neutral term ex-combatants, which is usually used in the peacebuilding literature and which refers to combatants belonging to both guerrilla movements and regular armies. The notion of ex-resisters denotes individuals engaged in the organised fight against oppression over a longer period of time, which involves a commitment to changing social and political structures towards greater freedom and equality and a willingness to assume the risks entailed in opposing a violent regime. In the case of South Africa, this definition includes resisters who participated in the armed liberation struggle waged against the apartheid state from the exile, and those who were involved in movements of civil resistance within South Africa.[11] But it does not include the many who were opposed to the apartheid system, who engaged in everyday, often concealed acts of defiance, who perhaps participated in marches or protests, but who did not get actively involved in the organised structures of the resistance struggle. In employing this definition, my intention is not to neglect the diversity of resistance practices, but to focus on individuals whose sense of disjuncture at the failed promise of liberation might be most pronounced and therefore most revelatory of the political significance of disappointment.

The argument proceeds as follows. The first section situates the argument within the scholarship on emotions, transitional justice and peacebuilding, as well as existing efforts to draw on existential understandings of emotions in the International Relations (IR) literature. The second section develops Sartre's account of the emotions' 'magic' as a way of coping with the ambiguity of our situated condition. On this basis, the third section explores how the ex-resisters' disappointment reveals the complexities of political engagement in the wake of the incomplete transition; and the fourth section engages with the chosen South African novel and the experiences of disappointment among ex-resisters in South Africa to distinguish between more or less politically productive expressions of disappointment. The conclusion summarises the main findings and reflects on how the existential understanding of emotions can further the emotions-oriented agenda of the recent 'aesthetic' turn in IR.

Emotions, Transitional Justice, and Disappointment

The article makes a two-fold contribution. First, it contributes to debates in transitional justice and peacebuilding by inquiring into the political significance of disappointment among ex-resisters. Second, by relying on Sartre's notion of emotions, it contributes to the literature in emotions and IR that has drawn on the social psychology of emotions and existential approaches to emotions.

Let me start with the first contribution. A rich scholarship on emotions, trauma and transitional justice has convincingly shown that emotions are central to processes of coming to terms with the painful past.[12] As Hutchison and Bleiker have argued, emotions importantly shape the human capacities of responding to world-shattering violence and can significantly affect what kind of community will emerge in the wake of trauma – whether it will be one based on mutual understanding or one that will reinforce existing patterns of hatred and exclusion.[13] Initially this literature explored how 'conciliatory'

11. Kim Wale, 'Knotted Memories of a Betrayed Sacrifice: Rethinking Trauma and Hope in South Africa', *Memory Studies* 15, no. 5 (2022): 827–41, https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211066581.
12. Hutchison and Bleiker, 'Emotional Reconciliation', 388–9.
13. Ibid., 390.

emotions, such as empathy, compassion and friendship, can facilitate social reconciliation.[14] Recent accounts, however, have increasingly focused on the significance of negative emotions, such as anger, shame, rage and resentment, for addressing the remainders of systemic oppression.[15]

Missing within this literature is a thorough analysis of the political importance of disappointment. This is surprising given that scholars have recognised disappointment as one of the most widespread affective states in the aftermath of transition. Drawing on contexts as diverse as South Africa, Australia and Northern Ireland, Little believes disappointment is inevitable given that the promise of transitional justice – to establish a harmonious future on the rubble of past suffering and division – 'is virtually unachievable'.[16] In South Africa, the anti-apartheid liberation movement's victory over the injustice of apartheid and the country's peaceful transition to democracy contained the promise of 'better life for all'. This promise, however, was tragically betrayed in the post-apartheid era as racialised inequality, poverty and political exclusion continue to structure the lived experience of the great mass of the population.[17]

The betrayal of the initial promise of freedom and equality can be traced to the circumstances of the transition. The South African 'miracle' arose from a negotiated settlement between the African National Congress (ANC) – the leading liberation movement and the ruling party since the first free elections in 1994 – and the National Party – the ruling party during the apartheid years. The nation-building project rested on the practices of truth-telling, atonement and the reconciliation of a wounded community, rather than a commitment to addressing the conditions of systemic violence that made past crimes possible. Transition came to be conceived in terms of the liberal understanding of democracy based on constitutionalism and rule of law while eschewing the need for a structural transformation of society and for continued inclusive practices of public freedom.[18] From the beginning, then, the new democracy was plagued by the deeply entrenched legacies of apartheid

14. Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Woman Confronts the Legacy of Apartheid* (Boston, MA; New York, NY: A Mariner Book: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004); Andrew Schaap, 'Political Grounds for Forgiveness', *Contemporary Political Theory* 2, no. 1 (2003): 77–87, https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300071; Naomi Head, 'Transforming Conflict: Trust, Empathy, and Dialogue', in *Emotions in International Politics: Beyond Mainstream International Relations*, eds. Yohan Ariffin, Jean-Marc Coicaud, and Vesselin Popovski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 358–79.
15. Mihai, *Negative Emotions and Transitional Justice*; Leebaw, 'Mobilizing Emotions'; Christopher J. Lebron, *The Color of Our Shame: Race and Justice in Our Time* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013); Sonali Chakravarti, *Sing the Rage: Listening to Anger After Mass Violence* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment's Virtue: Jean Amery and the Refusal to Forgive* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2008).
16. Little, 'Fear, Hope and Disappointment', 201.
17. Sean Field, 'Disappointed Remains: Trauma, Testimony, and Reconciliation in Post-Apartheid South Africa', in *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, ed. Donald A. Ritchie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195339550.013.0010; Wale, 'Knotted Memories of a Betrayed Sacrifice'.
18. Richard A. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12, 14–6; Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation* (London: Routledge, 2005), 92–4.

injustice, which were compounded by the rise of authoritarianism, corruption and impunity in the postliberation politics of the ANC.[19] The sense of profound disappointment as betrayal has since been expressed by different groups within the South African society – from ex-resisters, who felt 'excluded' from the fruits of liberation and have seen the ideals of the resistance struggle betrayed by successive ANC governments, to the younger generation of activists, who continue to suffer under the resilient conditions of structural violence.[20]

If there has been little analysis of disappointment within transitional justice, some studies in peacebuilding have recognised the importance of disappointment in transitional processes and explored the social effects of disappointment expressed by ex-combatants. Gear, Bucaille and Maringira, for instance, have examined the pervasive sense of disappointment and disaffection among the ex-combatants in South Africa.[21] They have drawn on the ex-combatants' experience to record how, without professional qualifications, means of sustenance and bonds of solidarity that once sustained them, they tend to feel out of place, isolated and undervalued in the new neoliberal post-apartheid political order.[22]

Yet this literature has focused on managing and neutralising the negative effects of the ex-resisters' disappointment to ensure the conditions for political stability, rather than exploring how the ex-resisters' disappointment shapes their continued political engagement. For instance, much attention is dedicated to Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration programmes, designed to channel ex-combatants away from armed combat and integrate them into civilian life or regular armies.[23] In addition, several scholars have argued for the need to deal with the negative personal and societal effects of the ex-combatants' shrinking horizon of hope for a better future, such as domestic violence, alcoholism, crime and societal disorder.[24] In short, the effects of ex-combatants' disappointment are engaged primarily as a lens through which to examine the construction of

19. Zakes Mda, 'Biko's Children', in *The Steve Biko Memorial Lectures 2000–2008*, ed. The Steve Biko Foundation (Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan South Africa, 2009), 22–39.
20. Wale, 'Knotted Memories of a Betrayed Sacrifice', 2.
21. Gear, *Wishing Us Away*; Bucaille, 'Armed Resistance and Self-Esteem'; Godfrey Maringira, 'Militarised Minds: The Lives of Ex-Combatants in South Africa', *Sociology* 49, no. 1 (2015): 72–87, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038514523698.
22. Sasha Gear, 'Now That the War Is Over: Ex-Combatants Transition and the Question of Violence', *Violence and Transition Series* 8 (2002): 1–163; Gear, *Wishing Us Away*; Bucaille, 'Armed Resistance and Self-Esteem', 58, 62–3; Godfrey Maringira, 'When Ex-Combatants Became Peaceful: Azania People's Liberation Army Ex-Combatants in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *African Studies* 77, no. 1 (2018): 53–66, https://doi.org/10.1080/00020184.2017.1416996.
23. Bucaille, 'Armed Resistance and Self-Esteem', 52; Jaremey McMullin, 'Reintegration of Combatants: Were the Right Lessons Learned in Mozambique?', *International Peacekeeping* 11, no. 4 (2004): 625–43, https://doi.org/10.1080/1353331042000248704; Rosemary Preston, 'Integrating Fighters After War: Reflections on the Namibian Experience, 1989–1993', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23, no. 3 (1997): 453–72, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057079708708550; Robert Muggah, 'The Anatomy of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration in the Republic of Congo: Analysis', *Conflict, Security & Development* 4, no. 1 (2004): 21–37, https://doi.org/10.1080/1467880042000206840.
24. Bucaille, 'Armed Resistance and Self-Esteem', 62, 66; Maringira, 'When Ex-Combatants Became Peaceful', 7–8; Maringira, 'Militarised Minds'.

the post-conflict political and moral order, or improve the disarmament and reintegration programmes.[25] However, if we only view disappointment as something to be managed and offset in the process of constructing the post-conflict order, we are likely to miss its multifaceted political effects and ultimately undermine the very effort to improve societal stability and well-being.

Sartre's account of emotions as magical transformation of the world allows me to explore the political importance of ex-resisters' disappointment because it focuses attention on how emotions shape individuals' relationships to the world and affect their capacity for political action in varied, normatively significant ways. This brings me to the second main contribution of the article.

My turn to Sartre's account of emotions echoes emerging efforts in the literature on emotions and transitional justice to mine existentialists' insights into the political significance of emotions in the wake of trauma. Scholars have drawn on the existentialist thinkers' exploration of the existential sources of guilt, shame and hate in the wake of political violence to understand the obstacles to reconciliation and establish the conditions for ethical restoration.[26] For instance, Schaap, La Caze and Mrovlje have engaged Jaspers', Arendt's and Sartre's existentially informed reflections on guilt and shame to distinguish self-indulgent and evasive expressions of guilt from politically productive assumptions of responsibility.[27] In addition, La Caze and Mrovlje used Beauvoir's and Sartre's existential analysis of the feelings of hate and vengefulness in response to denials of human dignity to reveal why the acts of revenge and punishment might ultimately be unable to restore the reciprocity of human relationships denied by the atrocity.[28] Despite engagements with existentialist thinkers, however, this literature has paid less attention to the underlying existential approaches to emotions as ways of relating to the world.

Drawing on Sartre's account of the emotions' magic, I highlight this underlying existential understanding of emotions and its political significance. In this respect, my emphasis parallels recent scholarship in emotions and IR – notably scholars who have drawn on the social psychology of emotions to foreground the psychological and sociological foundations of world politics and the ontological security literature that has explicitly taken up existential approaches to emotions.

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25. Bucaille, 'Armed Resistance and Self-Esteem', 52; Maringira, 'When Ex-Combatants Became Peaceful', 13. For helpful overviews of ex-combatants' political participation see Eliane Giezendanner and Bert Ingelaere, 'What Structures Ex-Combatants' Political Participation? Exploring the Dynamics of Identification and Groupness in Rebel-to-Party Transformations', *Conflict, Security & Development* 22, no. 2 (2022): 165–189, https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2022.2056389; Guðrún Sif Friðriksdóttir, 'Ex-Combatants as Social Activists: War, Peace and Ideology in Burundi', *Conflict, Security & Development* 18, no. 1 (2018): 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2017.1420311.
26. Marguerite La Caze, *Ethical Restoration After Communal Violence: The Grieving and the Unrepentant* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*.
27. Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*; La Caze, *Ethical Restoration after Communal Violence: The Grieving and the Unrepentant*, 47–51; Maša Mrovlje, *Rethinking Political Judgement: Arendt and Existentialism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 186–200.
28. La Caze, *Ethical Restoration After Communal Violence: The Grieving and the Unrepentant*, 23–41; Mrovlje, *Rethinking Political Judgement: Arendt and Existentialism*, 190–1.

IR scholars drawing on social-psychological accounts of emotions rely on recent findings in social psychology which have validated Sartre's insights into the social or worldly character of emotions. Among social psychologists, emotions have been recognised as ways of coping with 'perceived changes, threats, or opportunities in the world' that 'structure' individuals' relationships to the world and importantly shape their actions.[29] The psychologists' experimental findings confirm Sartre's insistence that emotions are far from either unconscious 'impediments to cognition' or mental states; they 'reflect one's presence, responses to and interactions with worldly occurrences' and social contexts that involves 'discernment, judgement and evaluation'.[30] This research on the social character of emotions involves scholarship exploring the multipronged effects of specific emotions, such as shame, anxiety or compassion, on individuals' actions and their social relationships and attitudes.[31] Others have inquired into how emotions tend to be felt and managed according to the established emotional conventions in a given sociocultural context, and how a capacity to express emotions in line with prevalent emotion norms can be a powerful source of social and political capital.[32]

Utilising these insights in the context of international politics, Daniel Rothbart, for instance, introduces the notion of systemic humiliation to analyse how governments use their power to humiliate marginalised groups and diminish their sense of dignity in conflict contexts.[33] Simon Koschut, in turn, shows how the shared emotion norms can stabilise security communities, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, in the face of internal conflict.[34] My drawing on Sartre's account of emotions in the context of transitional justice echoes this focus on the psycho-sociological foundations of politics, yet does not concentrate on the level of institutional, state politics. It instead foregrounds how emotions underpin individuals' bottom-up negotiation of the dilemmas of political action, responsibility and resistance in conditions of systemic violence.

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29. Jonathan Haidt, 'The Moral Emotions', in *Handbook of Affective Sciences* , eds. Richard J. Davidson, Klaus R. Sherer, and H. Hill Goldsmith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 853, 865.
30. Daniel Rothbart, *State Domination and the Psycho-Politics of Conflict: Power, Conflict and Humiliation* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2019), 36; Rom Harré, 'An Outline of the Social Constructionist Viewpoint', in *The Social Construction of Emotions*, ed. Rom Harré (Oxford; New York, NY: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 8, 12.
31. Michael Lewis, *Shame: The Exposed Self* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1992); Daniel A. Miller, Eliot R. Smith, and Diane M. Mackie, 'Effects of Intergroup Contact and Political Predispositions on Prejudice: Role of Intergroup Emotions', *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 7, no. 3 (2004): 221–37, https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430204046109.
32. Harré, 'An Outline of the Social Constructionist Viewpoint'; Gerrod W. Parrott and Rom Harré, 'Embarrassment and the Threat to Character', in *The Emotions*, eds. Rom Harré and W. Gerrod Parrott (London: SAGE, 1996), 39–56; Jonathan G. Heaney, 'Emotion as Power: Capital and Strategy in the Field of Politics', *Journal of Political Power* 12, no. 2 (2019): 224–44, https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2019.1618485.
33. Rothbart, *State Domination and the Psycho-Politics of Conflict: Power, Conflict and Humiliation*, 43.
34. Simon Koschut, 'Emotional (Security) Communities: The Significance of Emotion Norms in Inter-Allied Conflict Management', *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 3 (2014): 533–58, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210513000375.

My turn to Sartre's existential approach to emotions also corresponds to the burgeoning literature in ontological security that has drawn on the existential understandings of anxiety to understand how subjects negotiate uncertainty and change.[35] Particularly relevant for my purposes is Rumelili's analysis of the ambivalent role of anxiety in conflict resolution processes. Rumelili shows how conflict resolution can unleash so-called 'peace anxieties' as subjects lose their 'conflict' identities, including clearly defined objects of fear and unambiguous moral standards. These peace anxieties may induce a longing to return to conflict and its established systems of meaning, yet they can also open the door to the development of new narratives about the self, other and the new social order. My analysis of the political relevance of disappointment mirrors this recognition of the multivalent role of emotions in transitional processes but focuses on the dynamics of structural oppression and resistance – a concern that has remained neglected in the ontological security literature.[36]

This focus reflects the recent engagements within the ontological security literature, such as Ty Solomon's analysis of the Arab Spring, with how public moods or affective environments can reinforce the protesters' 'feelings of agency and power' and sustain activism even in ontologically insecure situations.[37] Yet, while Solomon focuses on the positive moods of exhilaration, hope, joy and solidarity, I examine an emotion that is usually deemed to be demobilising. Thereby, I challenge the view that radical agency requires a transition to mobilising or 'heightened' moods.[38] In addition, while Solomon and much other scholarship on public moods is focused primarily on how affective environments constitute subjectivities and influence their search for ontological security,[39] Sartre's approach allows me to focus on both how individuals and groups are affected by their disappointment *and* how they respond to it. This focus provides a unique link between individuals' experience of disappointment and their negotiation of the difficulties of political engagement in conditions of systemic violence – highlighting why existential accounts of emotions are so fruitful in examining the crucial role of emotions in transitional justice contexts.

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35. C. Nicolai L. Gellwitzki, 'Stimmung and Ontological Security: Anxiety, Euphoria, and Emerging Political Subjectivities during the 2015 "Border Opening" in Germany', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 25, no. 4 (2022): 1101–25, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-022-00278-8; Bahar Rumelili, '[Our] Age of Anxiety: Existentialism and the Current State of International Relations', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 24, no. 4 (2021): 1020–36, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-021-00226-y; Karl Gustafsson and Nina C. Krickel-Choi, 'Returning to the Roots of Ontological Security: Insights from the Existentialist Anxiety Literature', *European Journal of International Relations* 26, no. 3 (2020): 875–95, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066120927073; Andrew R. Hom and Cian O'Driscoll, 'Existentialism and International Relations: In It up to Our Necks', *Review of International Studies* 49, no. 5 (2023): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210523000451.
36. Bahar Rumelili, *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties*, PRIO New Security Studies (London, UK: Routledge, 2015), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315796314.
37. Ty Solomon, 'Ontological Security, Circulations of Affect, and the Arab Spring', *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21 (2018): 950–1.
38. Cf. Gellwitzki, 'Stimmung and Ontological Security', 1121.
39. Ibid., 1109–11.

Sartre's Existential Account of Emotions

This section develops Sartre's account of the emotions' 'magic' with a view to outlining how it can contribute to understanding the role of disappointment in transitional contexts. In particular, I show how emotions' 'magic' uncovers the complexity of political engagement in an intersubjective and unpredictable world that eludes our transparent grasp and helps us distinguish between more or less politically productive responses to this complexity.

Sartre's account of emotions is grounded in his phenomenological-existential approach to reality. Emotions, for Sartre, are intentional acts of consciousness,[40] which means that they are consciousness's mode of existing in or comportment towards the world.[41] Sartre framed his contribution to thinking emotions as a critique of at that time dominant theories of emotions (such as William James's and Sigmund Freud's), which, in his view, regarded emotions as something passive or unconscious that we undergo.[42] According to these theories, Sartre argued, conscious effects of emotions are mere 'epiphenomena' of physiological, visceral processes, acting as disturbances in rational behavioural patterns.[43] For Sartre, in contrast, emotions are not passive disturbances, acting upon our consciousness from the outside;[44] they are something we *do*, 'a manner of apprehending the world'.[45] Further, emotions' intentionality carries significance, is meaningful; emotions are a way 'of caring, of evaluating, of appraising, even of bestowing values'.[46]

To say that emotions are intentional, meaningful acts of consciousness is not to say that they are deliberate, a result of a rational calculation, or even reflective. An emotion's intentionality means that it is not 'absorbed in itself' but refers to (or *intends*) an object or event in the world.[47] The word *intend* here is used in its existential-phenomenological meaning to indicate that all consciousness is consciousness of something, that all experience is experience of something. For existentialists, we are always-already being in the world, oriented towards the world as a meaningful context for our perceptions and actions, and emotions are one way in which humans relate to the world. Moreover, as acts of intending the world, emotions are both conscious, in that we are (at least implicitly) aware of experiencing an emotion, and bodily, involving a sense of affectedness or feeling.[48]

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40. For the existentialists, consciousness is what enables humans to reflect on their existence – to care about the kind of beings they are, shape their aspirations, and transcend their being as mere objects in the world. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York, NY; London: Routledge, 2003), 41–53.
41. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions* (London: Methuen & Co., 1962), 91.
42. Robert C. Solomon, 'Sartre on Emotions: A Reading of His "Sketch" of 1939', in *Dark Feelings, Grim Thoughts: Experience and Reflection in Camus and Sartre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 97.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 100.
45. Sartre, Sketch for a Theory of Emotions, 57.
46. Solomon, 'Sartre on Emotions: A Reading of His "Sketch" of 1939', 101.
47. Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*, 51. For Sartre, emotions are pre-reflective acts of consciousness, which means they involve an implicit awareness of ourselves as the subject experiencing an emotion, but do not require that we explicitly take ourselves experiencing an emotion as an object of consciousness.
48. Solomon, 'Sartre on Emotions: A Reading of His "Sketch" of 1939', 106; Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*, 68, 76–7.

But what is key is that emotions are not simply projections of isolated affective valuations upon the external world, perceived to be separate from consciousness.[49] They reflect a broader attitude towards or a way of relating to the world – what Sartre calls an 'existential structure of the world', which the consciousness '*lives*'.[50] In other words, emotions are not simply reactive responses to an event; they *constitute* or, in Sartre's words, *transform* the human world and our social relationships, and are 'a form human existence takes' in the world.[51] This means that an emotion does not just denote a change in any specific attitude we adopt towards some particular thing or person within our world. Emotions shape our practical rootedness in the world – our sense of our intersubjective, socio-political context, which significantly affects what it is possible for us to do or say. Our emotional being in the world can thus importantly (re)orient our commitments, and significantly affect our sense of the possibilities for political action.[52]

As a mode of relating to the world, emotions have a distinct purpose, and that is, as Sartre (in)famously claims, a *magical* transformation of the world.[53] Sartre argues that emotions help us cope with the world that is anything but an orderly environment for human projects[54]: it is absurd, plural, unpredictable. In Sartre's existential outlook, human beings are situated freedoms, which means they are both free, capable of acting in the world and transcending themselves towards not yet existent goals, and situated, deeply embedded in a given context, which acts as a powerful constraint upon their freedom and shapes what it is possible for them to do.[55] Given the complexities of action in our situated condition, emotions are crucial, Sartre says, because they can help us 'change the world'. Even if we cannot actually transform a given situation in accordance with our desires, emotions can help us live 'as if the connection between things and their potentialities were not ruled by deterministic processes, but by magic'.[56] Emotions' 'magic' here is not 'effectual': it refers to our ability to shift our perspective on the world or reform our intentions, even if we cannot change the world itself.[57] Sartre's example of this magical transformation of the world is the case of 'green grapes'. I try to pick a bunch of grapes, but I cannot reach them. I mutter 'they are too green', thus magically transforming the quality of grapes 'as a substitute for the action I cannot complete'.[58]

These claims about emotions' 'magic' have led critics to dismiss Sartre's account of emotions as a form of self-deception[59] or criticised Sartre for focusing too much on

49. Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*, 77–8.
50. Ibid., 78, 84.
51. Larissa Z. Tiedens and Colin Wayne Leach, eds., *The Social Life of Emotions*, Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 6.
52. Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*; Solomon, 'Sartre on Emotions: A Reading of His "Sketch" of 1939', 104.
53. Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*, 63.
54. Ibid., 62.
55. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*.
56. Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*, 63.
57. Sartre, 64–65; Solomon, 'Sartre on Emotions: A Reading of His "Sketch" of 1939', 102.
58. Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*, 65.
59. S. Gardner, *Sartre's Being And Nothingness: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2009).

'malformed'[60] emotions.[61] There is sufficient evidence to justify these criticisms in Sartre's writings. For instance, Sartre writes that when, 'all ways out being barred, the consciousness leaps into the magical world of emotion, plunges wholly into it by debasing itself'.[62] In this and similar passages, Sartre indeed seems to be falling back into the same attitudes about emotions as irrational that he sought to refute.[63]

Other interpretations, however, have departed from this reading and pointed to the hitherto unexplored possibilities that Sartre's account of emotions' magic offers.[64] They have taken their cue from Sartre's claim that magic, far from being an irrational escape from the world, reveals the human, intersubjective and unpredictable character of the world.[65] Emotions, then, may indeed portray the world as being magical, but this is also what the human world is like. Sartre's example of this 'magic' is our experiencing terror when we see 'a grimacing face' at the window.[66] Unlike in the case of sour grapes, where we 'constitute the magic of the world', here the world 'reveals itself suddenly as a magical environment'.[67] The claim that emotions' magic affects 'merely' how reality appears to the subject, rather than the 'material constitution of reality',[68] on this account, upholds a problematic distinction between the 'true' material world and the subjective, 'emotionally generated appearance' of the world.[69] It is rather that our being in the world always-already encompasses an emotional component, because 'there is no reality fully independent of emotions'.[70]

On this reading, Sartre's insights into the emotions' 'magic' refer to emotions' unique ability to confront us with the ambiguity of our situated existence. As Mazis notes, 'any understanding that does not include our emotional apprehension' is bound to collapse 'from its lack of ground in the situation'.[71] As in Sartre's example of feeling terror at the sight of a face at the window, in emotions we are affected by an aspect of the world that jerks us away from our familiar, everyday engagement with the world as an ordered environment of instruments.[72] In this way, emotions uncover our situatedness in the uncontrollable world which lacks a pre-given purpose and which routinely confounds our expectations. Emotions' 'magic', in other words, corresponds to their ability to

60. Wollheim, *On the Emotions*, 82.
61. Richmond, 'Magic in Sartre's Early Philosophy', 155. Hartmann has recently helpfully shown how these criticisms rest on a rationalistic view of emotions, which is geared to evaluating the appropriateness of a given emotion in terms of its 'epistemic or representational powers'. See Martin Hartmann, 'A Comedy We Believe In: A Further Look at Sartre's Theory of Emotions: Comedy We Believe In', *European Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 1 (2017): 168, https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12160.
62. Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*, 78.
63. Solomon, 'Sartre on Emotions: A Reading of His "Sketch" of 1939', 109.
64. Glen A. Mazis, 'A New Approach to Sartre's Theory of Emotions', *Philosophy Today* 27, no. 3 (1983): 183–99; Hartmann, 'A Comedy We Believe In'.
65. Sartre, *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*, 84–5.
66. Ibid., 84.
67. Ibid., 86.
68. Hatzimoysis, *The Philosophy of Sartre* (Durham: Acumen, 2011), 68.
69. Hartmann, 'A Comedy We Believe In', 151.
70. Ibid., 152.
71. Mazis, 'A New Approach to Sartre's Theory of Emotions', 190.
72. Ibid., 189.

displace the traditional Cartesian understanding of the subject as rational cogito, capable of knowing the whole of the world from a detached, objective position and managing it according to one's ends. Rather, emotions reveal the subject as always-already situated in the world, suffused by meanings, relationships and structures that it has not created and that lie beyond its (full) control.[73]

In disclosing the ambiguity of our situated condition, then, emotions also dispense with the illusion of self-mastery and reveal freedom as only possible within a given situation.[74] Thus, emotions offer a crucial insight into the complexities of political action in our unpredictable world and shape how we confront these complexities. Emotions can drive us to either maintain a position separate from the world, fleeing our situated condition and the ensuing difficulty of political action, or to confront the ambiguity of our situated condition and reveal the world as a field of previously unseen possibilities for action.[75]

I refrain from reducing this distinction to an ideological divide that Solomon draws between 'good' and 'bad' emotions. On the one hand, 'good' emotions, such as anger or moral indignation, are those that have positive political effects and possess 'revolutionary power', for instance, inspiring us to fight injustice. On the other hand, 'bad' emotions, such as guilt, envy or resentment, are those that are 'reactionary', likely to lead to a self-indulgent change of attitude as a stand-in for effective political action.[76] My reading of emotions' magic as revealing the ambiguities of our situated condition allows for no such easy binaries. On this account, anger can likewise lead to a flight from the complexities of political action, if it, for instance, simplifies a complex analysis of oppression and directs oppositional action against a wrong target. Guilt, in contrast, may reflect an awareness of one's implication in structural injustice and eventually lead one to assume responsibility for it. Further, even if an emotion encourages the subject to flee a complex reality, it cannot be reduced to a politically ineffective attitude but offers a crucial insight into the difficulties of facing up to the weight of the world. Rather than distinguishing between 'good' and 'bad' emotions, then, my reading of emotions' magic focuses on differentiating between politically more or less productive *ways of expressing* or *responding* to our emotions – based on whether our responses assume or disregard our situated freedom that has been revealed by an emotion.

The ability of emotions to confront us with the ambiguity of our situated freedom is especially important in transitional contexts, when the world appears as anything but an orderly environment for human projects and when attempts at rational, means-and-ends calculation are likely to lose their ground in the complex reality composed of legacies of violence, suffering and division. In these contexts, it is emotions', and in particular disappointment's, 'magic' that can ground ex-resisters in the political reality of betrayed hopes and help us distinguish between different – more or less politically productive – ways of facing up to the continued existence of past violence in the present.

73. Ibid., 190.
74. Ibid., 93.
75. Ibid., 194–5.
76. Solomon, 'Sartre on Emotions: A Reading of His "Sketch" of 1939', 111.

Ex-resisters' Disappointment as Magical Transformation of Reality

Ex-resisters' disappointment as an intentional act of consciousness corresponds to a sense that reality has betrayed their hopes for a better future. It does not just evaluate particular events – such as the lack of a revolutionary transformation of society, continued social and economic inequality, gradual narrowing of opportunities for political participation or the corruption among the new leaders – as disappointing. It also reflects a *lived reality* of enduring something 'other' than what they had hoped, disrupting their habitual ways of being in the world and reframing their sense of worldly possibility.[77] Writing with reference to South Africa, Worby and Ally have aptly described this lived reality of disappointment as an experience of spatial and temporal dislocation or 'disjuncture' – the sense that things 'are not occurring at their appointed times' and 'are not in their appointed places'.[78]

This experiential understanding accounts for disappointment as a collective experience, shared among (different groups of) ex-resisters whose hopes for liberation have been betrayed. Even though Sartre does not explicitly delve into the collective dimension of emotions, his understanding of emotions as ways of relating to the world underlines how disappointment necessarily involves a way of inhabiting the world 'with' others and works to align individuals with collectives.[79] As a shared emotional experience, namely, disappointment can importantly shape collectives' political realities, forming collective ways of viewing and acting in the world.[80]

Accounting for disappointment as a collective experience is important, because, as Strauss writes, disappointment in the wake of the incomplete transition in South Africa has assumed the form of a collective comportment towards the world that can drive not

77. Andrew van der Vlies, *Present Imperfect: Contemporary South African Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 15.

78. Eric Worby and Shireen Ally, 'The Disappointment of Nostalgia: Conceptualising Cultures of Memory in Contemporary South Africa', *Social Dynamics* 39, no. 3 (2013): 459–60, 474.

79. Sara Ahmed, 'Collective Feelings: Or, the Impressions Left by Others', *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 2 (2004): 26–8, https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276404042133. Thinkers working in the existential-phenomenological tradition have described how emotions can become shared through a process called emotional sharing. In this process, several distinct individuals who feel the same emotion can start mutually apprehending each other's emotions, gradually transforming the feeling into a shared experience that is not mine or yours but ours. See Gerhard Thonhauser, 'From Collectives to Groups – Sartre and Stein on Joint Action and Emotional Sharing', in *Women Phenomenologists on Social Ontology, eds. Sebastian Luft and Ruth Hagengruber* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 190. The process of sharing emotions has also been analysed in social psychology. Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson, for instance, have discussed how people 'feel themselves into' or 'catch' other people's emotions through a nonconscious process of 'emotional contagion'. See Elaine Hatfield, John T. Cacioppo, and Richard L. Rapson, 'Emotional Contagion', *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2, no. 3 (1993): 96–9.

80. Tiedens and Leach, *The Social Life of Emotions*, 9.

only individual but also collective political action.[81] Thus, when discussing disappointment's magic with reference to selected novel and the experiences of ex-resisters in South Africa, I address the political effects of disappointment as both an individual and collective way of relating to the world. However, given that ex-resisters will be differently positioned in relation to the disappointing political reality, I refrain from assuming that a shared experience of disappointment will necessarily lead to a collective response or that all ex-resisters will respond to it in the same way.[82]

Further, I acknowledge the fact that political subjects in transitional and posttransitional societies can, and most often do, hold multiple emotions simultaneously. I therefore approach ex-resisters' disappointment as an emotion that can lead to or be experienced in conjunction with other emotions – such as anger, resentment, nostalgia, despair, guilt, hopelessness or renewed hope – to generate different kinds of political responses.

How does the ex-resisters' disappointment magically transform reality? As an experience of disjuncture, disappointment disrupts the ex-resisters' investment in grand narratives of the pasts' heroic overcoming. In the case of ex-resisters in South Africa, their disappointment carries an embodied awareness of the 'stalled' narrative of revolutionary transformation.[83] This means that their present is no longer an end-point or a step forward in a teleological progression from past oppression to future freedom.[84] In the disappointed present, past violence continues to hold its grip over the future, and the uncertain future emits the air of 'immobility', 'pain' and 'ruin'.[85] Disappointment's magic thus lies in breaking the illusion of sovereign agency. It embodies the awareness that linear visions of heroic overcoming are ill-suited to address the complex reality of posttransitional politics. They not only are bound to fail to take sufficient account of the resilient dynamics of systemic violence but risk reproducing them. Moreover, disappointment brings ex-resisters face to face with the limits of freedom within oppressive structures, encouraging them to recognise the experiences of complexity and failure as inherent aspects of political action.

As an experience of disjuncture, then, disappointment resituates ex-resisters in the gap between past and future, driving them to re-examine their resistance ideals in light of the complexities of posttransitional politics and renegotiate viable courses of action without the guidance of grand narratives of liberation and transition.[86] As I explore in my analysis of Gordimer's novel and the South African ex-resisters' experiences of disappointment below, the ex-resisters' response to disappointment will depend on

81. Strauss, 'Spectacles of Promise and Disappointment', 473–4.
82. Bill E. Lawson, 'Social Disappointment and the Black Sense of Self', in *Existence in Black*, ed. Lewis Gordon (New York; London: Routledge, 1996), 154–6.
83. Vlies, *Present Imperfect*, 4.
84. Ibid., 6.
85. Vlies, *Present Imperfect*, 7, 102; David Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2014), 6.
86. Maša Mrovlje, 'The Political Value of Disappointment among Ex-Resistance Fighters: Confronting the Grey Zone of Founding', *Political Theory* 48, no. 3 (2020): 303–29, https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591719880626.

how they will negotiate the gap between the ideals of the liberation struggle and the disappointing present.

Disappointment and the Complexities of Political Engagement Among Ex-resisters in South Africa

Nadine Gordimer was a white South African, who was active in the anti-apartheid movement as a member of the ANC and herself experienced the deep disappointment of the post-apartheid era. She described the experience with the metaphor of 'the morning after':

> The [Berlin] wall came down, everyone was pouring across and hugging each other [. . .]. We had the same reaction when the apartheid walls came down. Then comes the morning after. Then comes the hangover.[87]

While she has devoted most of her writing to the fight against apartheid, her novel *No Time Like the Present* constitutes her most significant attempt to reckon with the post-apartheid disappointment, and how it affects the ex-resisters' political engagement in the aftermath of transition.

The characters' disappointment over the betrayed promise of liberation corresponds to a sense of profound disjuncture, rupturing their established patterns of relating to the world. It situates them within the disappointing realities of posttransitional politics that elude the clear black and white judgements of the Struggle period and that can no longer be understood within pre-given models of liberation and transition.[88] This sense of dislocation is embodied in the title of the book which on the one hand gestures towards the pressing need to continue the struggle against the persistence of past violence, and on the other hand captures the growing confusion about the flawed character of political engagement in the present. The resulting disorientation is conveyed not only through the content of the novel, but also through its formal style. The narrative does not indicate clearly who is speaking and whether a sentence is spoken out or merely thought. The sentences are connected by hyphens, giving the text an air of disjointedness and incompleteness. The novel's 'stylistic "irascability"', as Dimitriu writes, takes us on the 'protagonists' journey of disillusionment'.[89]

The discussion below analyses the novel within Sartre's framework. I first trace the novel's insights into disappointment's magic, illuminating how disappointment can occasion or coexist with other emotions and lead to various ways of escaping the

87. Hermione Lee, 'Nadine Gordimer in Conversation', *Wasafiri* 18, no. 39 (2003): 5, https://doi.org/10.1080/02690050308589835.
88. Dominic Davies, 'Simple as the Black Letters on this White Page: Nadine Gordimer's Grey Politics in No Time Like the Present', *Études littéraires africaines* 38 (2014): 91, https://doi.org/10.7202/1028676ar.
89. Dimitriu, 'Then and Now', 1054.

disappointing political reality or to a discovery of previously unseen possibilities for confronting it. These range from a sense of hopelessness, despair or helpless anger given the overwhelming conditions of systemic oppression to a resigned, angry or resentful acceptance of violence as the only means of progressive change; from a nostalgic embrace of the past certainty of the resistance struggle to a renewed hope and commitment to fighting injustice that confronts the complexities of political action in a new democracy. I then tease out how these insights mirror the experiences of disappointment among ex-resisters in South Africa and how these experiences have translated into a variety of political responses. The aim is to develop the debates in peacebuilding and transitional justice scholarship by showing both how disappointment can become a powerful source of resistance against the persistence of injustice *and* how we can tackle its less politically productive expressions.

Disappointment's Magic in No Time Like the Present

The story follows Javu and Steve, former resistance fighters and a racially mixed couple, whose faith in the new freedom and democracy is quickly overshadowed by a profound disappointment over what they perceive to be the betrayal of the liberation struggle. Their disappointment stems from a recognition that 'what had been believed, fought for hasn't begun to be followed [. . .] and right now, every day degenerates'.[90] It is experienced as a disjuncture between the ideals of the resistance struggle and the deepening inequality and corruption, the rising levels of racial tensions, crime and xenophobia, the pervasive culture of impunity, the government's inadequate response to AIDS and gender violence engulfing the country. As such, it shatters their ideals of liberation and transition, and leads them to different ways of dealing with the complexity of political action in the new democracy.

After the transition, both remain politically engaged, continuing the struggle for freedom and justice in their everyday lives. Javu is working at the Justice Centre providing legal support to victims of injustice who could otherwise not afford legal representation. Steve assumes the post of a university professor, campaigning the government to address the huge inequalities of opportunity that frustrate the promise of free and equal education for all. Nevertheless, they are haunted by a sense of inadequacy, struggling to fit into the changing character of the struggle for justice in the new democracy. They share this sense of disjuncture with the broader group of ex-resistance fighters, who discuss their disappointments with each other and express it through collective outbursts of anger over the failures of the new government. Yet they do not know how to translate their disappointment and anger into an effective political response and doubt whether they are in a position to do anything at all.[91] They feel helpless because of the lack of avenues for action outside of the government institutions: they have sacrificed so much, yet 'have no say unless they are city councillors or sitting in parliament, in the conduct of the free country'.[92]

90. Nadine Gordimer, *No Time Like the Present* (London; New Delhi; New York, NY; Sydney, NSW: Bloomsbury, 2013), 351.
91. Ibid., 112.
92. Ibid., 204.

While there is a shared sense that the promise of the struggle has been betrayed, disappointment leads them down different paths. Steve gets easily discouraged in his activism, while Javu encourages him to carry on in the face of obstacles.[93] She thinks his tendency to quit after the first defeat stems from his privileged upbringing: 'You only decide it's hopeless if you're used to having everything. If you've been white'.[94] Indeed, Steve's disappointment congeals in an all-or-nothing attitude. He is overwhelmed by the resilient legacies of systemic violence, despairingly proclaiming that nothing changed, while sheltering himself from and failing to face up to the piecemeal, complex and uncertain nature of political action.

His disappointment coexists with an overpowering sense of guilt. He is haunted by the realisation that the transition had endowed them with opportunities that are still not available to the broadest masses of the population. He experiences the improvement in their material conditions and their advancement among the ranks of the middle class as a betrayal of their principles, specifically of the classless society they were fighting for.[95] Similarly, during the student protests against tuition fees, he finds himself trapped in a contradiction, torn between his unease in the face of the destruction of university property, and his support for the students' legitimate rebellion against the lingering injustice in the higher education system.[96] His efforts to critically assess the student protests, and specifically the use of violence, end with a futile reflection on his privileged positionality: 'Who the hell do you think you are'.[97] Considering his own failure to organise a campaign on behalf of the underfunded educational sector, he resignedly asks: 'What choice is there for them?'[98] His disappointed retreat into despair, hopelessness and guilt, however, is not a mere escape from the responsibility of political action in the present. His disappointment also incites him to reckon anew with his situatedness, specifically with the stickiness of privilege that his whiteness accorded him under apartheid and that he tried to shed through his involvement with the anti-apartheid struggle.

Javu's disappointment, in turn, leads her to recognise that the promise of freedom and justice was never supposed to be easy, and to embrace the flawed nature of political engagement in the aftermath of transition.[99] While she is aware of the remaining challenges, she also points to areas where progress has been made – for example, in legalising interracial marriages or offering opportunities for Black economic empowerment – and draws the strength to maintain hope and persist in the struggle from these achievements. Her resilience comes from her being used to everyday struggles against the injustices of apartheid: 'If you're used to rejection, you just go on for what you need, working at it'.[100]

Nevertheless, her disappointment with the growing corruption in the new government – which she experiences as 'the betrayal of blacks by themselves' – is profoundly disorienting'.[101] Like other ex-comrades, she is outraged to see former resistance fighters,

93. Ibid., 68, 69, 90.
94. Ibid., 69.
95. Ibid., 71, 228.
96. Ibid., 77, 106.
97. Ibid., 77.
98. Ibid., 79.
99. Ibid., 252.
100. Ibid., 252, 69.
101. Ibid., 127–8.

most notably Jacob Zuma,[102] squandering public money for 'palaces' and 'Mercedes' cars.[103] But in the end, Javu is the only one who votes for a splinter party, the Congress of the People or COPE, even though she does not necessarily share its (neo-)liberal vision.[104] Others vote for the ANC and, when Zuma's (and ANC's) victory is declared, they assuage their doubts over Zuma's moral credentials by celebrating the fact that 'the party of liberation, Mandela's, Tambo's and Sisulu's – is still in change'.[105] Rather than organising opposition against clear antidemocratic tendencies, their sense of disappointment translates into a longing for the past 'clarity of cadres' in the anti-apartheid struggle, when 'you were for or against', without ambivalence.[106] Their continued investment in the ideals of resistance solidarity makes voting for a party other than the ANC seem like a betrayal.[107]

Eventually, Steve's disappointment leads him to start planning their move to Australia, thus attempting to flee the terrifying realities of the South African present altogether.[108] Yet Steve also ironically reflects on the lingering racism as well as the deeply flawed reconciliation efforts in Australia, questioning whether it is ever possible to extricate oneself completely from injustice and avoid disappointment. Moreover, fleeing the disappointing present by moving to another country is represented as the most explicit expression of privilege, a route that is not available to the great majority of the population.[109]

On the very last page of the novel, however, Steve has a change of heart: 'I'm not going'.[110] The change happens during one of his comrades' tirades about how the venerable principle of ubuntu has come to signify growing corruption and inequality and how lucky he, Steve, can be to be 'out of it'.[111] It is as if the very disjuncture between the promise of the resistance struggle and the disappointing political reality has inspired him to persist in the struggle for a new democracy – convinced him that he *does not* want to be out of it and apart from others. As Steve wonders at a different moment: if they had managed to defeat apartheid, is it 'not possible, real, that the same will must be found

102. During the fight against apartheid, Jacob Zuma was a high-ranking member of the ANC's military wing and became the fourth president of the democratic South Africa in 2009. His stay in power was plagued by allegations of wrongdoing, including rape, corruption, and state capture. See Martin Legassick, Jacob Zuma. Britannica. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jacob-Zuma. Last accessed October 27, 2022.
103. Gordimer, *No Time Like the Present*, 111.
104. COPE is a South African political party formed in 2008 by Mbhazima Shilowa, Mluleki George, and Mosiuoa Lekota, former high-ranking members of the ANC, who disagreed with the direction ANC was taking. The party was formed in opposition to the outcome of the ANC's 52nd National Conference, where Zuma was elected party president over the incumbent party president (and president of the country) Thabo Mbeki. See Amy McKenna, Congress of the People. Britannica. Available at: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Congress-of-the-People-political-party-South-Africa. Last accessed October 27, 2022.
105. Gordimer, *No Time Like the Present*, 344.
106. Gordimer, 346.
107. Gordimer, 227, 331–34, 368.
108. Gordimer, 328.
109. Gordimer, 316.
110. Gordimer, 421.
111. Gordimer, 420–1.

[. . .] to take up and get on with the job, freedom. Some must have the – crazy – faith to struggle on'.[112]

Disappointment and the 'Struggle Nostalgia'

The disappointment of Steve – and of the broader group of ex-resisters – mirrors an exercise in 'struggle nostalgia', a magical retreat into an idealised picture of the resisters' heroism, solidarity and self-sacrifice, as consolation for the betrayed promise of freedom in the present.[113] In this vision of struggle nostalgia, an idealistic image of resistance glosses over the grey zones, tragic complicities and painful betrayals that characterised the fight against apartheid – an idealised backdrop against which the present will appear to be irredeemably deficient, a failure.[114] Such nostalgic longing is prone to remain caught in an impulse to bemoan the incommensurability between the resistance ideals and present realities. Thus, it may rouse the sense of being struck 'out of time', failing to respond to the changed political circumstances and refusing to face the threatening legacies of past violence.[115] It is easier to proclaim things to be hopeless than maintain hope in the face of disillusion and take the difficult path of fighting against injustice that will necessarily be incomplete.

The ex-resisters' disappointed retreat into the idealised vision of the struggle is an important factor explaining the difficulties of demilitarisation in South Africa posttransition. In-depth interviews with ex-resisters who participated in the ANC's armed struggle reveal that they have stuck to their militarised identities – including their loyalty to the group and the ideological commitment to the struggle – as a source of stability in the disappointing present.[116] Much like in the case of Steve's disappointment, they have recorded feeling 'stuck' in the gap between their commitment to the resistance ideals and the promise of a new South Africa, and their inability to respond meaningfully to the changed political landscape.[117] Facing 'disempowering bureaucracies' and an organisation that remains unresponsive to their grievances, they felt 'demoralised' and helpless, and have been unwilling to participate in the integration and demobilisation programmes.[118]

This desire to hold on to the heroic vision of the struggle also helps explain why the electoral support for the ANC has generally remained strong.[119] As Wale writes, ex-resisters tend to maintain a sense of loyalty towards the ANC despite feeling betrayed by it or make a clear distinction between the party as a whole and a handful of corrupt politicians within the party.[120]

However, the disappointed desire to hold on to past ideals of the struggle cannot just be seen as a threat to the establishment of stability and peace. A magical retreat into a

112. Gordimer, 407.
113. Worby and Ally, 'The Disappointment of Nostalgia', 457–61.
114. Michael Titlestad, 'No Time Like the Present: Nadine Gordimer and the Burden of Telos', *Journal of Literary Studies* 32, no. 2 (2016): 9, https://doi.org/10.1080/02564718.2016.1198152.
115. Worby and Ally, 'The Disappointment of Nostalgia', 459, 468–73.
116. Gear, 'Now That the War Is Over'; Maringira, 'Militarised Minds'; Gear, *Wishing Us Away*.
117. Gear, *Wishing Us Away*, 29.
118. Gear, *Wishing Us Away*, 28–29; Gear, 'Now That the War Is Over', 45.
119. Wale, 'Knotted Memories of a Betrayed Sacrifice', 11.
120. Ibid.

nostalgic vision of the world does not simply constitute a self-deceptive flight from the complexities of political action but can play an important political role in exposing the tragic remainders of transitional politics. As Maringira notes, it contributes to 'the politicisation of inequality'.[121] As we can observe in the case of Steve, his disappointment allows him to pose a critical mirror to the compromising politics of the present, specifically the attempts to rectify the injustice of apartheid through the policy of Black economic empowerment.[122] The magic of his disappointment lies in drawing attention to the discrepancy between this policy and the goals of equality and justice that the resisters fought for and showing how the government's attempts to address past injustice reproduces the privileges of the apartheid era.

The magic of Steve's disappointment echoes how the ex-resisters' continued commitment to the resistance ideals has translated into powerful critiques of the ANC's politics. In 2016, mainly in response to the scandals plaguing Zuma's presidency, 100 stalwarts of the anti-apartheid struggle issued a public statement, expressing their profound disappointment with the ANC's corrupt leadership and called for a return to the core values 'that have been the hallmark of the ANC for over one hundred years'.[123] The ANC stalwarts accused the ANC leadership of widespread corruption, of eroding democratic institutions and procedures, and of pursing a politics of personal economic enrichment, which has betrayed the majority of the South African people. The statement appeals to the structures of the ANC to 'allow Veterans of the organisation who have a track record of [. . .] defending the tested culture, values and traditions of the organisation' to lead the process of developing 'a turnaround strategy' for the ANC, including a 'bottom-up' approach that would allow its most marginalised members to voice their concerns and participate in the shaping of South Africa's future.[124]

The ex-resisters' disappointed desire to hold on to the betrayed ideals of the struggle then may not by itself provide clear answers about *how* to respond to the changed and

121. Maringira, 'Militarised Minds', 6.

122. When it came to power in 1994, the ANC identified Black economic empowerment as a key instrument devised to tackle continuing white control of the economy and address racial income inequalities. While the policy enabled some level of transfer of the corporate sector to Black South Africans, the government also remained wary of the negative consequences that a major deracialisation of business would have on growth and investment. In consequence, the effect of the policy in redressing historical injustice has been modest, mainly benefitting high-profile and politically well-connected Blacks rather than the majority of the disadvantaged population and leaving most of South Africa's corporate sector in the hands of the minority whites. See Roger Tangri and Roger Southall, 'The Politics of Black Economic Empowerment in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, no. 3 (2008): 699–716, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070802295856.

123. Ahmed Kathrada et al., 'ANC Stalwarts Critique of Current Leadership: The Full Text', 16 December 2016. Available at: https://www.groundup.org.za/article/anc-stalwarts-critique-current-leadership-full-text/.

124. Ibid.

compromised present. Nevertheless, as the ANC stalwarts' statement shows, it can expose 'a gap between an ideal and an experience that demands action',[125] mobilising the awareness that change is necessary.

Disappointment and the Compromises of Political Engagement

Ex-resisters' disappointment can also challenge idealised visions of the resistance struggle and instead lead to a recognition of the complexities, uncertainties and compromises of oppositional political action. In the face of disappointment, Javu reclaims her experiences of the long and tortuous struggle against apartheid and draws her hope and resilience to continue the fight in the present from these memories. Her resilient hopefulness lacks the confidence of narratives of heroic overcoming. Indeed, here, disappointment's magic lies in conclusively breaking with the narcissist illusions of human sovereignty and infallibility, which underpin linear narratives of liberation and transition as one of redemptive closure.[126] Instead, it entails an apt recognition of the difficulties of struggling against the overwhelming legacies of past violence – which cannot simply be braved by applying past certainties of the anti-apartheid struggle. From this perspective, a disenchanted withdrawal from the uncertainty of politics represents the other side of naive optimism, as it likewise stems from an unwillingness to make oneself vulnerable to experiences of disappointment and failure. What is required is an effort to creatively confront the complexities of posttransitional politics and seek alternative spaces for continuing the unfinished struggle against injustice.

In South Africa, this disappointed transformation of the ex-resisters' way of relating to the world has sometimes included an abandonment of their past 'violent' identities, leading them to embrace the future of peace or even to act as 'peace ambassadors' within their communities.[127] One former member of the armed resistance, Bongikosi, describes how a peace-building course helped him undertake a 'journey of embracing peace' and how he is trying to inspire the young people in his community to resolve conflicts without violence.[128]

But the recognition of the uncertainties of transitional politics also cannot be reduced to a binary logic that pits peace versus violence. In Javu's case, disappointment's magic encompasses a broader understanding of how the confrontation with the residues of systemic violence requires an acceptance of compromise as an inevitable part of politics. Javu is well aware that the politics of Black economic empowerment has not challenged systemic inequality and provided material betterment only for the select few. Rather than trying to flee this privilege, however, she uses it to further the fight against oppression and help victims of injustice. She also refuses to support the party of the liberation, not because she would prefer the vision of an oppositional party, but to keep democracy alive and contribute to the conditions for a 'better' party to emerge in the future.

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125. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2010), 41.
126. Field, 'Disappointed Remains', 14.
127. Maringira, 'When Ex-Combatants Became Peaceful', 11–13; Friðriksdóttir, 'Ex-Combatants as Social Activists', 9–10.
128. Maringira, 'Militarised Minds', 79.

The magic of Javu's disappointment reflects Pregs Govender's unique response to her disappointment over the unfulfilled promise of the resistance struggle. A prominent anti-apartheid activist, Govender was elected to parliament as a member of the ANC after the transition. Her disappointment followed from observing how quickly the liberators came to reproduce the unjust practices of the past. Yet, in response, Govender did not retreat into an idealised picture of the struggle or a guilt-ridden reflection on her privileged position. Rather than despairing over the compromising politics of the present, she confronted head on the complexities of oppositional action in a new democracy and fought to carve out new spaces for challenging the overwhelming legacies of past violence.

Govender led the Women's National Coalition campaign to include women's concerns in the new constitution of South Africa. Starting from the recognition of a deeply patriarchal character of the South African society, this campaign empowered women to give voice to their experiences of oppression and participate in decision-making about the shape of the future political community.[129] Moreover, Govender criticised the introduction of an increasingly neoliberal economic paradigm, which failed to address the socio-economic inequality inherited from the apartheid era.[130] She was also the only ANC member of parliament (MP) to vote against the arms deal, the 1999 Strategic Defence Package that has been plagued by repeated allegations of corruption. She was accused by her comrades of betraying 'our organisation', but she insisted that it was the organisation that neglected the pressing socio-economic concerns 'of the majority of people who had voted us into power' and betrayed the people's trust in the new government.[131] Ultimately, Govender's disappointments over the parliament's limited powers to influence the course of events led her to resign from her post as MP, but she continued fighting against injustice through writing and direct political activism.

Mirroring the literary case of Javu, Govender's story shows how the ex-resisters' disappointment can translate into a kind of resilient hope – one that is not discouraged by the inability to transcend past violence but draws its strength from an awareness of the difficulty of political action within conditions of systemic violence.[132]

Disappointment and Violent Protest

Finally, the ex-resisters' experiences of disappointment disclose the lack of spaces for political action, where their disappointment could be voiced and mobilised into collective struggles against injustice. We have seen how ex-resisters' disappointment can lead them to collective outbursts of anger and/or to a nostalgic longing for the narratives of simplified antagonisms, heroic suffering and ultimate victory that characterised their just fight against apartheid. In both of these iterations, disappointment can pose a critical mirror to the compromising politics of the present. Yet the novel also shows how such

129. Pregs Govender, *Love and Courage: A Story of Insubordination* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2007), 127.
130. Ibid., 172.
131. Ibid., 193–7, 203, 209–10.
132. Vlies, *Present Imperfect*, 14–15; Joseph R. Winters, *Hope Draped in Black: Race, Melancholy and the Agony of Progress* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016); Mrovlje, 'The Political Value of Disappointment Among Ex-Resistance Fighters'.

disappointed and angry appeals to the just anti-apartheid struggle coupled with a lack of spaces for political action can affirm violence as the only means of progressive change.

We can observe this difficulty in the contemporary reappraisal of resistance fighters, such as the controversial figure of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, whose disappointment challenged the hypocrisies of the negotiated transition and pushed for a more radical redistribution of economic and political power. This reappraisal is evident in both academic discourse and practical politics. Sisonke Msimang, a prominent South African political analyst relates how, during and after the transition, Madikizela-Mandela was seen as a fallen hero of the struggle, ostracised for her adoption of violent tactics and her refusal to adopt the discourse of forgiveness propounded by the TRC.[133] The younger generation of South Africans, however, understand themselves as inheritors of her disappointment, anger and resentment over the politics of reconciliation that 'had disallowed retribution against whites' and that left the majority of South Africans 'trapped in cycles of poverty and continuing racism'.[134]

The disappointed and angry return to Madikizela-Mandela as a symbol of the justified struggle against the legacies of past violence is evident in the discourse of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). The EFF are a radical left party formed in 2013 by the former ANC member Julius Malema. Malema often refers to the EFF as the 'daughters and sons' of 'Mama Winnie' and protectors of her 'defiant spirit'.[135] He draws on her heroic, uncompromising stance against apartheid to justify their fight for 'expropriation of land without compensation' and for 'economic freedom in our lifetime', while also calling upon her spirit to tell them how to deal with those who betrayed her legacy and the struggle against apartheid.[136] The EFF's appeal to continue the struggle against the apartheid injustice therefore has troubling undertones, and they have often been accused of incitement to violence, anti-White and anti-Indian racism and intimidation of journalists.[137]

Further, a study on insurgent citizenship in South Africa found that protest movements tend to evoke the just anti-apartheid struggle lineage and evince 'a mental model where violence is the only language that is heard'.[138] Indeed, the contemporary inheritance of ex-resisters' disappointment, anger and resentment among the younger generation coupled with a thwarted desire for action helps explain the growing tendency among protesters in South Africa – from outbreaks of xenophobic violence to protests against poor service delivery, corruption and neoliberal reforms of the educational sector – to resort to violence to articulate their grievances.[139]

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133. Sisonke Msimang, *The Resurrection Winnie Mandela* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2018).
134. Ibid., 3.
135. *Full Speech at the Funeral of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela*, 2018. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddZdiIYqOAg.
136. Ibid.
137. Amy McKenna, 'Economic Freedom Fighters' (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023), https://www.britannica.com/topic/Economic-Freedom-Fighters.
138. Karl von Holdt et al., *The Smoke That Calls: Insurgent Citizenship, Collective Violence and the Struggle for a Place in the New South Africa. Eight Case Studies of Community Protest and Xenophobic Violence* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2011), 124.
139. Ibid.

Yet, here too, the novel refuses to reduce such instances of violent protest to a politically unproductive expression of disappointment. Rather, it discloses how they stem from the inability to find alternative means of expressing their disappointment over the liberation's betrayed promise. Akin to his attentiveness to the structural causes of student protests, for instance, Steve repeatedly warns against simplified explanations of violence against refugees from other parts of Africa in terms of xenophobia. As he states: 'Isn't it taking the way out, a denial, the country usefully finding diagnosis that doesn't admit the facts [. . .] everyone's been letting themselves off the hook with the distancing of a catch-all term'.[140] The true cause of violent attacks, for Steve, is that 'those with nothing', 'are desperately defending the means, scraps of subsistence, their own survival'.[141] Moreover, the novel highlights how violent expressions of disappointment are likely to reproduce the practices of systemic violence, ultimately contributing to 'an authoritarian, chauvinist social order presiding over the continuous brutality of the market'.[142]

National programmes of demilitarisation and reintegration of ex-combatants that pay too little attention to the varied effects of disappointment, thus, will likely not suffice to upturn oppressive patterns of interaction. As Maringira notes: 'What does it mean to take away guns from the combatants and return them to the same inequality which motivated them to join the struggle?'[143] But neither can the appropriate response to disappointment be reduced to 'demilitarising the combatant mind', tracing how 'the past continues to haunt their subjective minds' and changing the social expectations on the individual and the community level.[144]

What is needed in addition is to carve out alternative spaces for political action against the remainders of past injustice that do not simply replicate the anti-apartheid struggle, and this is where disappointment can play the most productive, if previously unacknowledged, role. Given significant constraints upon concerted political action within conditions of systemic violence, certainly, it cannot be guaranteed that disappointment will translate into a force for positive social and political change.[145] However – as evident in the literary case of Javu and the real-world case of Govender – the ex-resisters' disappointment can inspire a creative confrontation with the complexities of political engagement posttransition and lead to alternative ways of acting against the oppressive residues of the past.

Conclusion

The paper shed light on the political significance of ex-resisters' disappointment in the aftermath of the incomplete transition. It has drawn on Sartre's existential account of the

140. Gordimer, *No Time Like the Present*, 206–7.
141. Ibid., 206.
142. Franco Barchiesi, 'That Melancholic Object of Desire: Work and Official Discourse Before and After Polokwane', *The Johannesburg Salon* 30, no. 1 (2009): 54.
143. Maringira, 'Militarised Minds', 10.
144. Ibid., 9–10.
145. Strauss, 'Spectacles of Promise and Disappointment', 480.

emotions' magic to delve into the lived reality of disappointment and explore how it affects the ex-resisters' capacity for political action against the remainders of past violence. Thus, it has sought to contribute to the rich debates in the transitional justice and peacebuilding literature, which have mainly approached disappointment as a threat to the creation of sustainable peace. My inquiry into disappointment's magic revealed disappointment as a potentially powerful source of resistance against the persistence of injustice, while also helping us understand and tackle the significant constraints upon political engagement in conditions of systemic violence. Understanding the ways in which disappointment can both inspire and obstruct individual and collective political action in the wake of violence, I argued, can help us leverage it in ways that are politically creative, rather than politically destructive.

In highlighting the varied political effects of disappointment, the paper points to the complex temporal dynamic of transitional processes and emphasises the need to provide spaces for citizens' political engagement and ongoing resistance against the lingering legacies of violence – alongside institutional responses to past wrongs. This focus speaks to critical approaches within the transitional justice literature that challenge liberal, state-based visions of transcending past violence and expose how the resilient structures of systemic oppression continue to affect the present.[146] In this context, an exploration of disappointment's magic is important in showing not only how disappointment can inspire continued struggles for justice, but also how the legacies of past conflict might derail such struggles, complicating any too easy assumption of freedom in the wake of violence.

The existential exploration of disappointment's magic participates in the 'aesthetic turn' in IR, which has focused on the role of emotions, meaning, visual perception and aesthetic representation.[147] The aesthetic turn furthers 'a form of resistance' to mainstream IR, moving beyond the focus on states, war and the politics of power and towards an agential, pluralist and interdisciplinary approach to global politics – significantly expanding our sense of what constitutes IR.[148] Drawing on the potentials of existentialism to understand the political effects of emotions can importantly contribute to this endeavour. This is because it provides a unique insight into the complexities of political action in the unpredictable world of global politics, as well as how it might be possible to confront these complexities in politically productive ways. As such, the existential approach to emotions is especially apt for understanding how emotions can enhance or impede the intricate processes of responding to legacies of systemic violence. But it also importantly speaks to the ways in which emotions shape individual and collective involvement in

146. Leebaw, 'Mobilizing Emotions'; Mihaela Mihai, *Political Memory and the Aesthetics of Care: The Art of Complicity and Resistance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022).

147. K. M. Fierke, *Political Self-Sacrifice: Agency, Body and Emotion in International Relations*, Cambridge Studies in International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 22, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139248853.

148. Cerwyn Moore and Laura J. Shepherd, 'Aesthetics and International Relations: Towards a Global Politics', *Global Society* 24, no. 3 (2010): 299–309, https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2010.485564; Roland Bleiker, 'Seeing Beyond Disciplines: Aesthetic Creativity in International Theory', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 75, no. 6 (2021): 573–90, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2021.1992129.

activism and social movements more generally. Here the existential insights into emotions' magic can kindle the human potentials for facing up to the weight of oppression and assuming the complex, uncertain and fallible character of resistant action.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Gisli Vogler, Andy Hom, Cian O'Driscoll and Astrid Jamar for their helpful and encouraging comments. I am most grateful to the four anonymous reviewers and the editors of *Millennium* for their valuable suggestions and exemplary guidance.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 847693.

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