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Review Article

Subversion of Grand Narratives in Trevor Noah's Story 'Run'

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Abstract: Some African scholars have repeatedly questioned the tendency to view the world from a western standpoint. Often, the subtleties of local realities are ignored when western oriented frameworks are imposed on African phenomena. This article is a critical evaluation of Trevor Noah's story 'Run' through the lenses of postmodernism. 'Run' captures the complexities that characterised South Africa as it transited from apartheid to democracy. Specifically, the article aligns itself with Lyotard's (1979) rejection of modernist's grand narratives which tend to interpret the world using single frameworks which are often based on Western experience. A close reading of 'Run' reveals that the reality of Apartheid South Africa is informed by multiplicity, fluidity, fragmentation and even contradiction, which is in keeping with postmodernism. The article thus lays bare how Noah subverts the grand narratives of colonialism, liberation, Christianity and gender in 'Run' and other stories in the collection *Born a Crime*.
Keywords: Trevor Noah, Run, postmodernism, apartheid, grand narratives.

1. INTRODUCTION

This article aims at reading Trevor Noah's story 'Run' from a postmodernist perspective. It is important to acknowledge that 'postmodernism' is a contested term. Malpas (2005), for example, observes that it is impossible to come up with a unitary and uncontested definition of the term 'postmodernism'. However, the space available in this article does not allow us to go into the polemics that have characterised most postmodernist work. Though we shall make reference to various postmodernist writings, the thrust of the analysis is informed by Jean Francoise Lyotard's idea of postmodernism. Why Lyotard? Stuart (2001, p. 3) has correctly observed that "Jean-Francois Lyotard's book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) is widely regarded as the most powerful theoretical expression of postmodernism." Lyotard defines postmodernism as "incredulity to metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1979: xxiv). His idea of postmodernism is rooted in a rejection of what he calls modernism's metanarratives or grand narratives. As Hauerwas (2001) argues, grand narratives tend to interpret the world using single frameworks invoking the idea of objectivity and universal progress. The notion of universality has been questioned by many postcolonial writers who observe that the term

'universal' is conflated with 'West' (Wa Thiong'o, 1993; Said, 1979). In particular, Ngugi wa Thiong'o is incisive in his criticism as he observes that the West generalises "its experience of history as the universal experience of the world" (Wa Thiong'o, 1993, p. 25). George (2006) argues that in the colonial world, the European experience is presented as the universal world view while non-European culture and philosophy is shunted to the periphery. Similarly, grand narratives, according to Lyotard, fail to capture the dynamisms, flux and plurality of local realities. On the other hand, he theorises that local narratives are the most effective way of creating knowledge, and that they go a long way to challenging and demolishing the dominance of grand narratives (Lyotard, 1979). This is especially so in Africa where reality is seen through the prisms of Western oriented grand narratives.

This article therefore is a critical evaluation of how Trevor Noah in the story 'Run' subverts grand narratives related to colonialism, liberation, Christianity, and gender. Stuart (2001), for example, observes that Marxism's representation of world history is fixed and unchangeable. It is presented as a narrative that is above revision or change. Therefore, it fails to capture the sociocultural and economic realities that

continue to change and reconfigure the world. Some liberation narratives, like in the case of South Africa, were firmly anchored on the principles of Marxism, and as we argue in this article local differences were played down for the purpose of political mobilisation. This gives credence to Butler's (2002, p. 14) observation that colonised societies create "masterful political narratives about the history of nationalist struggle." On the question of gender Thornham (2001, p. 43) correctly notes that under enlightenment modernism, the universal subject was gendered and "specific: a Western, bourgeois, white, heterosexual man". She also argues that mainstream Western feminist theories talk of the category 'woman' in universalist terms. As we argue in this article, such paradigms ignore salient differences in women which include race, ethnicity, and age among others.

2. Autobiography And Postmodernism

This article looks at the story 'Run' as an autobiography and posits that a postmodernist reading of the genre is rewarding because autobiographies tend to be defined by multiplicity, fluidity and hybridity. As we argue, boundaries between fiction and reality, canonical and popular, public and private, historical and personal are blurred in autobiographies. Gudmundsdottir (2003, p. 2) has correctly observed that "texts where the author writes on the life of his or her parent(s)" should be categorised under autobiography, "as these types of text constitute a large part of current life writing". This is the case in 'Run' where Noah bases his narrative on the experiences of himself and his mother. In fact, we argue that 'Run' and the other stories in the collection are a fusion of autobiography and biography since Noah is writing about himself and also about his mother. In these stories, Noah and his mother are the protagonists in a world that is defined by repressive apartheid laws. Though each story is unique in many ways, the common thread of apartheid that runs in all of them gives them unity, therefore, reference is made to the other stories wherever necessary. In 'Run', the narrator, Noah, presents the intricacies that characterised South Africa as it transited from apartheid to democracy.

Let us now return to the fundamental question: why postmodernism? Gudmundsdottir (2003) gives an apt answer to this question by observing that the pluralistic approach of postmodernism removes the barriers between 'high' and 'popular' culture. In 'Run', elements of both the so called high culture associated with canonical literature, and those characteristic of popular culture are evident. The thematic concerns of the story tend towards canonical literature, for example, Noah highlights issues like social justice, religion, and gender, yet, these themes are at times explored in a light hearted tone reminiscent of popular culture. We see reference to popular culture vocabulary and characters, as in "Arnold Schwarzenegger", "Boys II Men", "cheerleader", "team Jesus", "badass", "cool" and so

on. The end product is a hybrid text which is in keeping with postmodernism. Additionally, postmodernism blurs the boundary between art and real life experience therefore though 'Run' is a memoir, it has all the elements of form that define fiction. Similarly, there is a large body of literature that shows that autobiography and fiction are delicately intertwined (Heale, 2003; Harte, 2009; Kelly, 2005; Smith, 1990).

We understand 'fictional' to mean aspects of creative writing like narrative structure, poetic or literary devices and ordering of events to create certain effects (Gundmundsdottir, 2003). Thus, many commentators consider fiction to have an internal rather than an external relationship with autobiography. Hewit (1990,) has, for example, accurately pinned down this relationship by noting that in the postmodern era autobiography has mixtures of "literature in life and life in literature." (p. 1) Again, as Gudmundsdottir (2003) has argued, the autobiographer without necessarily becoming novelistic strays into the world of fiction and significantly also there is no one perfect version of the past. To paraphrase Harte (2009), in a postmodernist society, all knowledge of the past is discursively mediated. He warns that it is naïve to read an autobiography as objective historical reality. Clearly, there is no well demarcated borderline between literariness and referentiality in autobiographical writing. As Smith (1990, p. 45) has argued, "cultural tropes and metaphors which structure autobiographical narrative are themselves fictive; and narrative is driven by its own fictive conventions about beginnings, middles, and ends." Despite being a memoir, 'Run', is, for example, replete with key elements of form in fiction such as the use of figurative language, suspense and humour. Suspense is seen in the opening lines of the story where Noah tells us that he was nine years old when his mother threw him out of a moving car. Then he digresses to other concerns in the story and picks the thread of being thrown out of a moving car much later in the story. Again, as noted earlier 'Run' is a fusion of autobiography and biography since Noah also tells the story of his mother. As Marcus (1994) has noted this fictionalises the autobiography since it is difficult to give a whole account of another person in terms of their motives and biases. Our interpretation of other people's actions and motives is fraught with our own biases and subjectivities.

In 'Run', we experience a fusion of the private and the public as well as the historical and the personal. Additionally, this article argues that 'Run' has two layers or levels. There is the surface level where we see Noah relating a power struggle between himself and his mother aptly captured by the title 'Run.' He is constantly running away with his mother in hot pursuit trying to capture and punish him for his mischief. This is also aptly captured in the story 'Loopholes' where Noah compares his relationship with his mother to that of a cop and a criminal where Noah is "the criminal"

and the mother the "relentless detective" (Noah, 2016, p. 80). Their interactions are also characterised by endless power games with each trying to win an argument. The mother always brings these power games to an end by becoming dictatorial and stamping her authority through blackmail and threats. The politics between mother and son, therefore, mirrors the wider societal politics. Interpreted within the socio-political climate of apartheid, 'Run' figuratively encapsulates the tensions between black South Africans and the white administration where blacks are always on the run to escape repression and raw brute force. Indeed, 'Run' metaphorically captures the mood of all the other stories in the collection which justifies our decision to analyse the story. The theme of 'run' or 'escape' extends to the domain of gender relations where the black South African woman is pitted against not only an overwhelming racist ideology, but also a patriarchal ideology that dehumanises and brutalises women. In the story, we see Noah's mother literally forced to run away and escape from a violent male bus driver and his accomplice out to subject her and her children to violence and abuse. Noah also humorously explores religious practice in apartheid South Africa where we learn that worship is informed by racist laws. Each racial group attends its own church, thus, we see there is white, mixed and black church. As we shall argue, Noah subjects Christianity to a robust and stinging critique.

3. Subversion Of The Grand Narratives Of Colonialism And Liberation

Colonialism and by extension apartheid as a political ideology is predicated on what Edward Said calls the western grand narrative of imperialism (Said, 1978). This narrative is justified by a large body of literature by the proponents of the empire, like Rudyard Kipling and Karen Blixen, who emphasise western superiority and the inferiority of the rest of the world thereby validating the hegemony of one group of people over another. Said, for example, observes that "the West sees the Orient as a subject race dominated by a race that knows them better than they could possibly know themselves" (Said 1978, p. 48). What he says about the oriental is not different from the African experience, thus in the Western grand narrative, the African reality is distorted. The white man is persistently represented as rational and civilised while Africans are constructed as backward, primitive and heathenish. Again, in the introduction to Okot p' Bitek's *Artist the Ruler,* we learn that according to western thinking, the world is divided into two: "the civilized West and the rest. These were savages, primitives, uncivilised, crude, rude, unprogressive etc" (Bitek, 1986, p. 7). Thus we see Africans presented as a race in urgent need of redemption which can only come from the West. This western thought is undermined in 'Run' by Noah where he shows how the west massacred large populations of indigenous Africans who attempted to oppose their rule. This exposes the hypocrisy of the colonisers and reveals the underlying motives- exploitation of Africa and her resources. The notions of rationality and civilisation are antithetical to such brute force, or avarice. This greed is well captured by Said when he notes that the colonised "must be dominated which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power" (Said, 1978, p. 44).

The self-appointed task of the European to civilise the African and deliver him from darkness is capably subverted by Noah with the words "we do need to be saved –from you" (Noah, 2016, p. 6). The system of apartheid which is predicated on the western grand narrative of civilisation and rationality is constantly deconstructed and subverted by Noah in 'Run' and the other stories in the collection. In the story 'The Mulberry Tree' the assumed superiority of the white race is for example subverted by Noah by showing that in apartheid South Africa the category 'race' is not only irrational but also arbitrary and fluid:

> The legal definition of a white person under apartheid was "one who in appearance is obviously a white person who is generally not accepted as a colored person; or is generally accepted as a white person and is not in appearance obviously a white person." It was completely arbitrary in other words… sometimes colored people became Indian. Sometimes Indian people became coloured sometimes blacks were promoted to colored, and sometimes coloured were demoted to black. And of course whites could be demoted to coloured as well. (Noah, 2016, p.119)

Again, the western view of history is shown to be radically different from that of Africans and other peoples of the world. In 'Go Hitler', Noah, for instance, subverts the Holocaust metanarrative by showing that black Africans have their local narratives of greater notoriety or magnitude:

> The name Hitler does not offend a black South African because Hitler is not the worst thing that a black South African can imagine. Every country thinks their history is the most Important and that's especially true in the West. But if black South African could go back in time and kill one person, Cecil Rhodes would come up before Hitler. If people in the Congo could kill one person, Belgium's king Leopold would come way before Hitler. If Native Americans could go back in time and kill one person, it would probably be Christopher Columbus or Andrew Jackson. I often meet people in the west who insist that the Holocaust was the worst atrocity in human history, without question yes it was horrific. But I often

wonder, with African atrocities like in the Congo, how horrific were they? (Noah, 2016, p.195)

It is clear from the above critique by Noah that as postmodernism posits, history is mediated and therefore it is not a faithful account of reality. In the above quotation atrocities committed on African soil have been downplayed or completely ignored by western chroniclers of history.

Noah also satirizes apartheid by revealing that the government discriminates blacks by denying them public transport yet whites still expect blacks to travel and work for them every day. Noah further shows that this denial of transport creates lawlessness and disorder as blacks try to create their own means of transport which operate outside the law. The white man's claim that it was his burden to civilise blacks is further undermined by these acts of discrimination. Indeed, the tendency of the apartheid system to subvert itself is persistently captured in many of the stories in this collection. In the paratext at the beginning of the text, the immorality act of 1927 refers to whites as 'Europeans' and to Africans as 'natives' thus inadvertently showing they are outsiders or invaders while Africans are the true inhabitants of the land.

This article also contends that the struggle against apartheid is built on a metanarrative - the unity of blacks against white domination. Although this metanarrative was necessary, for emancipatory concerns it was however not representative as shown by a number of writers. Mandela himself in *Long Walk to Freedom* reveals that the clarion call "Free Mandela" was used to overcome the differences among these oppressed groups and therefore give focus to the struggle for emancipation (Mandela, 1994). Again, Njabulo Ndebele has also criticized protest or emancipatory literature in its overzealousness to strike a blow for freedom, he says that, "It resulted to stereotypical spectacular representations of oppressive conditions of victimizers and victims which debased the capacity of readers to recognize the subjectivity of black South Africans and its relationships to historical processes" (Attwell, 2004, p. 521). In fact, contrary to the emancipatory metanarrative, Jessica Piombo shows 'black' is not a homogenous category in apartheid south Africa, she says: "'black' can refer to the black Consciousness political definition of the term, and includes all the groups oppressed during apartheid: African, Coloured, and Indian" (Piombo, 2009, p. 49). This amalgamation of disparate and sometimes antagonistic groups subdued the historical and cultural differences among these groups. Indeed, Piombo notes that these "ethnic groups have a long history of separation as well as interaction" (Piombo, 2009, p. 49).

The liberation grand narrative which constructs blacks as a united force loses its legitimacy with the fall of apartheid. Noah shows that the end of apartheid does not bring happiness and peace to South Africa as the latent differences between different ethnic groups come to the surface. He observes that the differences between these communities were for decades held in check by a common enemy and therefore black South Africa goes to war with itself once apartheid falls. Violence breaks out between blacks and as Noah puts it:

black blood ran in the streets. As the apartheid regime fell, we knew that the black man was now going to rule. The question was, which black man? Spates of violence broke out between the Inkatha Freedom Party and the ANC, the African National Congress, as they jockeyed for power … the Inkatha was predominantly Zulu … the ANC was a broad coalition encompassing many different tribes, but its leaders at the time were primary Xhosa (Noah, 2016, p.12).

Additionally, Noah paints graphically the animosity between the Zulu and Xhosa in the confrontation between the bus driver and his mother. This confrontation not only has gender connotations but also ethnic undertones. We learn that there are deeply ingrained stereotypes about each group. According to Noah, the Zulu view Xhosa women as promiscuous and unfaithful and also consider the entire Xhosa community as their "tribal enemy". Therefore, the liberation grand narrative of binary opposition between White and Black as the sole source of conflict is again proven to be false and simplistic. The complexity of modern societies as postulated by post modernism is highlighted. The internal conflicts between blacks not only show contradiction but also instability as theorised by postmodernists. In 'Run' Noah shows that black South Africa resonates with both solidarity and difference.

4. Subversion Of The Christian Grand Narrative

In 'Run', issues of religion feature prominently where Noah's mother is portrayed as being firmly rooted in Christianity. In contrast, Noah subjects Christianity to a robust and satirical critique. As elsewhere in colonial Africa, Noah notes that Christianity was "forced" on black South Africans. We argue that this critique is a subversion of the Western Christian metanarrative. This article therefore argues that the version of Christianity brought and perpetuated by the missionaries and Afrikaners is a Western grand narrative constructed to aid Western domination. A number of African writers give credence to this argument. The late Ugandan poet, Okot p' Bitek, for example, brings this out quite eloquently:

Christianity caught cancer in its infancy, when the simple teaching of Jesus the Messiah which was addressed mainly to the poor slum dwellers crawled on all fours, from its oriental home in Palestine to its home of adoption in Europe…thus

the simple teachings of Jesus Christ became Hellenised and Europeanised (Bitek, 1986, p. 50)

Thus, just as Okot states the Christianity espoused by missionaries tended to highlight cultural expressions, events and practices from Western societies which were presented to Africans as factual and irrefutable. Most African societies, for instance, practised polygamy but this was castigated as sin by the missionaries. Monogamy was thus preached as the norm despite the fact that it was an entirely Western cultural practice. Secular music and intake of alcohol which were delicately intertwined with African life were also condemned as being incompatible with Christian life. The Christian metanarrative therefore presented to Africans a religion that can be termed as inhibiting, prescriptive, and indoctrinating. Christianity as a western concept evinces an ambivalent outlook in the African colonies and is consequently viewed with suspicion. African writers, for example, Ngugi wa Thing'o, Jomo Kenyatta, Ayandele and Chinua Achebe view Christianity as a tool for serving the interest of the colonialists. Ayandele describes what he calls "European Christianity" as a "dangerous thing." He graphically notes that it is a religion that commands you to look up for heavenly treasures, but while you are looking up it seizes "all your worldly goods" (Ayandele, 1971, p. 8). Kenyatta, in similar vein, captures the axis between Christianity and colonialism metaphorically when he says that the missionaries would ask Africans to pray, and while they were praying the settlers stole the land of the Gikuyu people (Kenyatta, 1978). Similarly, Ngugi wa Thiong'o delineates this relationship in figurative terms. He notes that imperialism both in its "colonial and neo-colonial phase" is aided by a master who wields "the bible and the sword" (Ngugi, 1986, p. 4). Ngugi constantly revisits this theme of the unholy alliance between Christianity and colonialism in both his fictional and non-fictional works as does Chinua Achebe. The Christian metanarrative with its intricate entanglement with imperialism is therefore not unique to South Africa. Indeed, Bial (2001) has correctly observed that one of the structures that is bedrock to Western culture and civilisation is Christianity.

The Christian metanarrative as presented in 'Run' is a tool used by the apartheid regime to subordinate, subjugate and passivize African subjects. According to Noah, the Whiteman insists that blacks need Jesus so that he can save them. He, however, does not specify what he wishes to save blacks from. This ignorance on the part of the white man is well captured by Okot p' Bitek:

The Christian missionaries were pathetically ignorant about the 'thing' they wished to convert the African from. They never stopped for a single moment to ask themselves, 'What is this that we want to convert the African from? Did the African

have some principles, some world view, some social philosophy on which he organised his life?' Yes! If he had, what was wrong with it? (Bitek, 1986, p. 57).

From the perspective of Christianity, it may be assumed that the white man wishes to save Black South Africans from sin but Noah undermines this biblical grand narrative of the original or biological sin with the rejoinder that blacks in South Africa need to be saved from the Whiteman's rule and not from sin. This response is amplified, again, by Bitek (1986, p. 58) when he observes that colonial subjects were "told to repent their sins and be saved, saved not from their Christian murderers and enslavers, but from sin."

Monotheism, a key pillar of the Christian metanarrative, is also subverted in 'Run'. As noted by Olson (2011), monotheistic religions like Christianity are opposed to polytheism and portray these deities as false and having no ability to compete with the power of the one God. Noah, however, informs us in 'Run' that "my grandmother balanced her Christian faith with the traditional Xhosa beliefs she'd grown up with, communicating with the spirits of our ancestors" (Noah, 2016, p. 6). It is then clear that a postmodernist society is characterised by complexities that may not be conceptualised by a modernist approach that emphasises neatly ordered categories. In this instance, the grandmother's polytheistic inclination show that the western conception of Christianity is sometimes at odds with the African one.

Noah also seeks to delegitimize the grand narrative that Christianity is superior to other religions, especially those that are far flung from the West: "If you're Native American and you pray to the wolves, you're a savage. If you're African and you pray to your ancestors, you're primitive. But when white people pray to a guy who turns water into wine, well, that's just common sense" (Noah, 2016, p. 7). From Noah's critique, the defining thread in all religions seems to be an appeal to the esoteric, but then, some Western scholars and theologians would have the rest of the world believe that Christianity is above this characterisation, and perhaps the only religion that is predicated on rationality. Yet Olson (2011, p. 148) informs us that all monotheistic religions, Christianity included, base their legitimacy on "revelation and not rational or empirical evidence". Again, Noah's reference to Jesus as 'a guy' further diminishes the assumed superiority of Christianity. We thus see that the colonialists came to Africa with preconceived ideas about what constituted African religion dismissing it as heathenish, an attitude well captured by Edward Said, in his book *orientalism*, where he criticises the West's view of the Other. Said likens this attitude to magic and mythology which have a self-containing and reinforcing character of a closed system (Said, 1977).

In 'Run', we see Noah creating his own local narratives which run against the grain of the imposed Christian metanarrative. Noah's mother aligns herself with the Western Christian metanarrative that teaches its followers that popular culture is sin. Thus, Noah (2016) says "Boyz II Men were not allowed in my mother's house. Songs about some guy grinding on a girl all night long were forbidden" (p. 7). He subverts the Christian metanarrative by secularising biblical narratives to capture his own world. He deconstructs the Bible to fit in with the popular culture he has been denied by his mother. To the conventional Christian, the Bible is a sacred text, but to Noah it is secular or fictional. Butler (2002) notes that the ability of deconstruction to make us lose faith in what is considered ethical makes it revolutionally and typical of postmodernism. Jacques Derrida is, for instance, critical of the practice of privileging some narratives as sacred or transcendental. Thus, in keeping with Derrida, Noah declares: "My mom didn't want my mind polluted by movies with sex and violence. So the Bible was my action movie" (Noah, 2016, p.8). He deconstructs the Bible by rereading it using his own schema and his terminology is reorganised and restructured accordingly. The Bible becomes "action movie" and some of its stories are described as "cool", Samson becomes "my superhero" and "my He-Man" (p. 8). The term "He-Man", for instance, is borrowed from a series of comic books. It describes a character with superhuman strength. Samson is also termed "badass" for killing a thousand people with a jawbone. "Badass" is an informal or vulgar word, similarly, borrowed from the discourse of popular culture. The Online Collins Dictionary defines "badass" as a person who is "very tough or violent" (Collins English Dictionary, 2019). In the discourse of popular culture this kind of individual is admired for his uncompromising and intimidating personality. In sum, what catches the imagination of Noah is not the spiritual dimension of characters like Samson in the Bible, but their resonance with popular culture.

Noah (2016), additionally, subverts the grand narrative that Christianity is founded on the pillars of peace and harmony. He satirizes Black Church by graphically describing the violence and drama that characterises its service. The word "violence' dominates this rather humorous portrayal which leaves out altogether any spiritual detail. He, for example, says that ushers would "tackle" (p. 8) those possessed by demons "like bouncers at a club" (p. 8). He further tells us that "the pastor would grab their heads and violently shake them back and forth" (p. 8). Again, some pastors are said to be "more violent than others" (p. 8). Ironically, it is this violence and drama that Noah loves about Black Church as attested by his conclusion that "Christian karaoke, badass action stories, and violent faith healers- man I loved church" (p. 8). Once again, the spiritual is submerged in the mundane. He also seems to see Christianity as characterised by artificiality

and hypocrisy. He says that there was no church on Friday and Saturday so it was time to sin. It is said on a light note but it still conveys Noah's sceptical attitude towards Christianity.

Apartheid South Africa is also portrayed as an extremely complex arena which is typical of a postmodern society. Unlike in Western societies where an individual belongs to one church, this is not the case in South Africa as depicted by Noah's mother in 'Run". We have already seen how Noah's grandmother straddles between Christianity and ancestral worship. The grand narrative of single frameworks that explain social phenomenon is again subverted by the pluralism manifested by Noah's mother in her practice of Christianity. In her religious overzealousness, she attends three different church services every Sunday. This behaviour is well explained by Timmer (2010) who reports that in a postmodern society an individual experiences an apparent freedom from tradition. This in turn shifts the responsibility of decision-making from society to the individual. To compound the situation, the individual is faced with a plethora of choices none of which are easy to make, thus, leading to fragmentation. In the mother's case, this fragmentation creates a crisis in her life. By attending three different church services, she not only inconveniences and endangers her own life, but also that of her children. We see her stranded at night desperately hoping to get transport home. Eventually, she leaves her children at the mercy of violent and dangerous men.

In spite of this zealousness, the mother exhibits a lot of flexibility when it comes to determining what is right and wrong as seen in the story 'The Cheese Boys' where we see her buying a burger at the reduced price of twenty rand despite apparently knowing that it was stolen. This is clear from the following conversation between Noah and his mother:

"But where did he get it from?"
"I don't know. He said he knew somebody who-"
"Mom, he stole it."
"We don't know that."
"We do know that. Where the hell is some guy going to get all of this burger patties from, randomly?" (Noah, 2016, p. 213)

As we have argued this flexibility and apparent contradiction is a hallmark of postmodernism.

5. Subversion Of The Gender Grand Narrative

We argue in this article that the gender metanarrative is informed by an attempt by a section of Western feminists to 'universalize' the experiences of women in the world. Indeed, various feminist theories which largely fall under the broad umbrella of modernism assume that the category 'woman' is a given. This assumption has been challenged by both

black feminists and postmodernists who oppose the Eurocentric conceptualisation of the category 'woman'. Black feminists argue that white feminists are elitist in their definition of 'woman'. "Such perspectives forget that the vast majority of women are not white and do not live in the west, and that, even in western nations, women's experiences are far from uniform" (Bryson, 2003, p. 227). Furthermore, white feminists are accused of mapping western experiences onto the rest of the world and their liberal standards are used as a yardstick for progress everywhere else. Black feminists also accuse white feminists of being ignorant of the intricate interconnectedness between race, gender and class (George, 2006). In 'Run', for example, Noah's mother belongs to the working class by virtue of being black and is consequently exposed to all the disadvantages of being in such a class. If we take the case of race, the apartheid government discriminates blacks by denying them any form of transport which leads to chaos and insecurity. As Noah shows, black women suffer more than their male counterparts in a racist society. Unable to find transport, Noah's mother is stranded at night with two children. She also faces ethnic stereotypes which a white woman is unlikely to face. Additionally, Zartov has noted that in societies where conflict takes the form of racism, ethnicity and nationalism, rape can be used as a weapon to degrade the opponent (Zartov, 1995, as cited by Bryson, 2003). This is witnessed in 'Run' when the bus driver uses ethnic stereotypes to justify the abuse he intends to perpetrate on Noah's mother. He for example wonders why she is out at night and elects himself to lecture her about the dangers of this. When he hears her speak in Xhosa, he calls her a whore and vows to teach her a lesson. As Noah informs us, being from a rival ethnic group it is plausible that the bus driver could have raped his mother. It is clear that a white woman is sheltered from this kind of danger in apartheid South Africa. Thus, Noah subverts the universalist white feminist narrative by showing that the set of circumstances that confront a black woman in a racist environment are radically different from what a white woman encounters.

On their part, postmodernists claim that the categories 'woman' and 'man' are meaningless (Bryson, 2003). Importantly, postmodernists insist that reality, gender included, is linguistically and experientially mediated which makes it impossible to talk of objective truth. In accordance with this argument, Lacan, views the notion of sexual identity as elusive while the terms 'woman' and 'man' are neither unified nor stable categories. Moreover, Lacan and other like-minded commentators claim that "all women and men have different (and ever-changing) subjectivities and that the categories are linguistically constructed rather than biologically given" (Bryson, 2003, p. 325). The dualistic conception of gender is further contested by postmodernists as it implies a hierarchical dimension. Lacan, for instance, argues that from a psychoanalytic perspective, gender discourse is centred on the notion of phallus. Since 'woman' is conceptualised in terms of lack of phallus, women are consequently locked out of phallic discourse and thus subordinated and seen as other (Bryson, 2003, p. 235). This is similar to de Beauvoir's observation that man "has assigned to himself the category of Self, and constructed woman as Other" (Thornham, 2001, p. 43).

Judith Butler in her ground-breaking work, *Gender Trouble*, moves the gender debate to a whole new level by arguing that it is not only gender but also sex that is socially and linguistically constructed. She cautions feminists against conceptualising the body as if it was acultural or apolitical. She therefore criticises any attempt to view the female body as "static", "eternal" or "immaterial" (Butler, 1999). Butler questions the tendency to talk about gender as if it was neutral noting that "one is a woman according to this framework, to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame" where female is subordinated to male. (Butler, 1999, p. xi). She particularly criticises feminism for remaining stuck in this binarism that is evidently hierarchical and unequal. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler claims that gender is not something we have but something we do, thus bringing in the idea of gender as performance. She argues that oppressive gender structures can be overhauled by "transgressive forms of behaviour" (Bryson, p. 239). In 'Run', we can see this when Noah's mother aggressively and assertively stands her ground against the bus driver who projects a highly paternalistic and chauvinistic attitude as he admonishes her. She resists this imposition by telling him to mind his own business. Clearly, this is an act of transgression as the patriarchal world that the bus driver inhabits does not allow a woman to talk back to a man. This subverts the grand narrative of male domination and female subordination.

If Noah's mother authoritative and bullish response to the bus driver's chauvinism is an act of transgression, her passionate embrace of Christianity resonates more with normative femininity. As Eckart and McConnell (2003) observe, essentialist accounts of gender view women as emotional and passive, thus Noah's mother uncritical and dogmatic embrace of Christianity can be interpreted from a feminine perspective. This, marks a shift in the performance of her gender roles from apparently masculine to feminine. Viewing gender as performance erases the binary divide and allows us to see it, not in terms of stability or fixedness, but in terms of multiplicity, fluidity and instability. Further evidence that her gender roles are in constant flux can be gleaned from the way she sometimes relates with her son, Noah. She is extremely aggressive and strict with him which leans more towards our traditional expectations of the father figure. This authoritarian and macho style of dealing with her son again defies normative gender expectations. Noah, for example informs us that the phrase 'sun'qela' in Xhosa is "a command and a threat" at the same time

and "any time I heard it I knew it meant the conversation was over, and if I uttered another word I was in for a hiding-what we call spanking" (Noah, 2016, p. 10). Noah further describes his mother's aggressive nature by noting that "she was always chasing me to kick my ass…she was a thrower too…whatever was next to her was coming at you" (Noah, 2016, p. 10). This dictatorial approach is alternated by moments of tenderness and sentimentality. When Noah, for instance, indirectly criticises her for placing them at risk due to her inflexibility towards religion, instead of being aggressive, "she broke out in a huge smile and started laughing (Noah, 2016, p. 17).

Noah also questions the grand narrative of male superiority in other stories in the collection. Feminists have persistently challenged an inherently patriarchal world that is constructed to subordinate the woman to the man. In keeping with this feminist critique, Noah subverts this assumed male dominance by presenting to us men who are largely emasculated. Conversely, Noah's mother and other women tower like A colossus over all the men they relate with in the text. This juxtaposition is well captured by Noah in the following observation from the story 'Noah, Pray':

I grew up in a world run by women. My father was loving and devoted, but I could only see him when and where apartheid allowed. My uncle Velile, my mom's younger brother, lived with my grandmother, but he spent most of his time at the local tavern getting into fights. (Noah, 2016, p.35)

In the same story, the grandfather, Temperance Noah, is presented as a peripheral male figure in Noah's life as he is described as a 'semi regular male figure'. He is also a divorcee, a ladies man, an absentee father and generally irresponsible. On the contrary, the grandmother, Frances Noah, is described as the one who 'ran the house, looked after the kids, did the cooking and the cleaning' (Noah, 2016, p. 37). Again, she is the custodian of the family history and as Noah informs us she could tell you about the family history dating to the 1930's firmly cementing her place as the head of the family. A similar relationship obtains between Noah's aunt, Sibongile, and her husband Dinky where Noah graphically emasculates Dinky in the following terms: "Sibongile was a power house, a strong woman in every sense, big chested, the mother hen. Dinky, as his name implies, was dinky. He was a small man… Dinky was trying to masquerade as this patriarch that he wasn't" (Noah, 2016, p. 37).

With respect to his father, Robert, Noah shows that he was largely absent from his life and the few contacts he had with him were marked by indifference. Noah, for example, informs us that he didn't know what he did, where he went to university, which part of Switzerland he came from, or even how he ended up in South Africa. At some point, Robert completely disappears mysteriously from Noah's life. While Noah and his mother are reluctant to dismiss him as irresponsible, it is clear that he is far from fulfilling the role of the ideal father.

The other central male figure in Noah's life is his step father, Abel, who is portrayed as a habitual drunk, violent, insecure and unwise. He persistently brutalises the family culminating in his attempted murder of Noah's mother.

6. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of form, this article argues that Trevor Noah's 'Run' is a memoir, and as is characteristic of autobiographical writings, it fuses real life experiences with fiction. The author attempts to capture his childhood days in apartheid South Africa using literary techniques that are typical of fiction. Thus, the story's narrative structure which consists of exposition, conflict and resolution resonates with our expectations of plots of literary works. Noah also embellishes his narrative with humour, metaphors, symbolism, suspense and other literary tropes. The article has also shown the linkages that exist between postmodernism and autobiography with particular reference to 'Run'.

With respect to content, this article was motivated by two questions: what are the metanarratives brought out in 'Run', and what are the hidden local narratives in the story, and how do they undermine the aforementioned grand narratives? We have argued in this article that 'Run' is a subversion of modernism's metanarratives which inform western thought. The article has highlighted the unease shared by postcolonial writers concerning Western notions of universality and rationality. We then critically analysed how the grand narratives of colonialism, liberation, religion and gender have been subverted by Noah in the story. The tyranny and oppressive nature of these grand narratives has been laid bare in our analysis. Western notions of race, liberation, religion and gender have all been shown to be misleading. Thus, our examination of 'Run' reveals that Western frameworks may not be well suited to interpret African reality. It is, however, frameworks like postmodernism, which acknowledge multiplicity and fluidity that aptly capture and explain the African experience.

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