Chapter 6

Varieties of Multiple Narration (II)
Embedded Narration, Focalization, and Collective Voicing in Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's Petals of Blood and Born of the Sun by Joseph Diescho (with Celeste Wallin)

Again, multiple narration may be parallel, embedded, or group-based. This chapter begins with embedded narration and some related issues in focalization. It first considers the topic in general, theoretical terms, then turns to a Kenyan novel that takes up narrational embedding to treat political themes. One central thematic concern of this novel is the unification of diverse individuals into a national or class-based movement. This concern has narrational consequences in that it poses the problem of reconciling individual voices with group expression. This leads to the third form of narrational multiplicity—group narration—as well as group focalization and a Namibian novel in part concerned with discourse, collectivity, and political solidarity.

Embedded Narration

Perhaps the most important distinction in embedded narration is between psychological and rhetorical embedding. Psychological embedding preserves the epistemic and other constraints of both the embedding and embedded narrators. For example, suppose Jones is explaining what Smith said about his (Smith's) experiences on the day of a murder. Jones clearly does not have access to Smith's thoughts. Thus he cannot report those thoughts. This is a limitation of the embedding or
“primary” narrator. Conversely, Jones may know about events occurring far away from Smith. However, Jones cannot report those as part of Smith’s testimony, because they were unknown to Smith. In psychological embedding, the embedded narration would not include any information unavailable to the embedding or embedded narrator.

Note that there are two sorts of limitation here. One sort comes from the embedding story narrator. The other comes from the embedded story narrator. When the primary narrator is omniscient, however, there is only one sort of limitation. That is the limitation of the embedded narrator. However much the primary narrator knows, that will not affect what the embedded narrator can say, if there is strict psychological embedding. Put simply, Adam’s story is the same, with the same limitations, whether Adam is telling it himself or it is being reported by God.

However, not all embedding is psychological, and these constraints are often not preserved. Thus a film may be framed as a recollection by one of the characters involved in the main action. However, in the course of the film, the viewer may be given information that should not have been available to that embedded narrator. Take, for example, James Cameron’s Titanic. The central narrative of the film is framed as a recollection by Rose. But the viewer is shown a number of scenes in which Jack is alone, doing things that Rose would not have known about. Thus they could not be part of her recollection.

When the embedded narrative is wholly unconstrained by the limitations of the embedded narrator, one may refer to this as “rhetorical embedding.” But this is not the usual case. For example, it is not the case in Titanic. First, for many scenes where Jack is alone, Rose may have had “factual” knowledge of the events even though she lacked perceptual knowledge. A film does not have to confine embedded narration to a verbal statement, but may show the event to the viewer in its perceptual detail. That is different from showing a scene that would not be known at all to the narrator. In addition, a narrator may draw inferences about events. For example, Rose can infer that Jack had to board the ship at some point, even if she did not see that event or hear Jack recount it. A narrative may present these directly as perceptions. In these and related cases, there is a partial deviation from the constraints of the narrator, but not a complete deviation.

More importantly, perhaps, the embedded narration typically follows the contours of the story that would be told by the embedded narrator, if he or she had all the relevant information and experience. Put differently, it typically follows the embedded narrator’s interests. For instance,
Rose has an interest in how a piece of jewelry got into Jack’s possession. Even if she does not know how that occurred, it is a topic of importance to her. Thus the narration might convey that information even if it was not available to Rose. In doing so, it is violating many constraints of the embedded narrator, but not all of them. It is still constrained by, so to speak, the story that narrator would like to be able to tell. Put differently, a primary narrator (e.g., the encompassing, nonpersonified narrator of *Titanic*) may freely add information unavailable to the embedded narrator, while following the basic narrative orientation of that embedded narrator. This may be termed *idealized embedded narration*.

More technically, the defining features of a narrator may be divided into two groups—emotional and epistemic. Psychologically embedded narratives are both epistemically constrained and emotionally oriented by the embedded narrator. Purely rhetorically embedded narratives are unaffected by either. Between these extremes, there are, first, embeddings that are partially epistemically constrained; specifically, there are embeddings that are *informationally constrained*, but not *perceptually constrained*. Second, there are *emotionally constrained embeddings*, which is to say, embeddings that are oriented by the emotional interests of the narrator, but not epistemically constrained. Emotionally constrained embeddings commonly appear in the form of idealized embedded narration.

The same situation arises in cases that do not technically involve embedding, but where a nonpersonified narration is oriented by reference to a character, almost as if this character were the narrator. This is, of course, focalization. In parallel with the forms of embedded narration, one may distinguish psychological, informational, and emotional focalization. Psychological focalization is a strict limitation of narration to the knowledge and interests of the focalizer. Informational focalization is a strict limitation of narration to the knowledge and interests of the focalizer. Informational focalization honors the general informational constraints of the focalizer, but not the precise sources and detail of that information (e.g., inference versus perception). Emotional focalization is constrained only by the emotional orientation and interests of the focalizer. (Focalization does not occur without any constraint from the focalizer. Therefore, there does not appear to be a parallel for rhetorical embedding.)

As this indicates, a focalized narration may present detailed perceptual and other information not available to the focalizer. This may be termed *guided omniscience*, in parallel with idealized embedded narration. Despite great similarity, there are some differences between guided omniscience and idealized embedding. Perhaps most obviously, when reading a work that appears to involve idealized embedding, one may
always question whether the excess information—the information that should not be available to the narrator—is evidence of the narrator’s potentially unreliable inference or even misrepresentation. That is typically not the case with guided omniscience. There are presumably differences in the reader’s emotional response to voice and related matters as well.

Finally, idealized embedding or guided omniscience may suggest another narrative that more narrowly conforms to the constraints of the narrator or focalizer. For example, there may be an actual narrative told by Titanic’s Rose. In most cases, this actual narrative will not be something one can reconstruct. However, there are cases where one may at least partially infer its content, and also infer that it in some degree parallels the enhanced embedded narration that is actually given in the text or film. This other narrative may be called an implicit subtextual template.

**Embedding, Guided Omniscience, and Collective Narration in *Petals of Blood***

*Petals of Blood* is arguably the most important novel to emerge from Kenya, and one of the major works of Anglophone postcolonial literature. Critics have not always been in agreement on this assessment. Indeed, many critics have greatly undervalued the novel, in part because they have not recognized its narrational subtleties, nor even fully understood its politics.¹ (For a useful overview of the criticism, see McLaren.) As to the former, a few critics have briefly noted the narrational complexity of the novel. For example, Aizenberg points to the work’s “multiple voices” (90), including “a plural, communal voice” (92).² As to the work’s politics, virtually every critic recognizes the anticolonial and anti-neocolonial nature of the work. However, fewer writers have examined the Marxist orientation of the novel (see, for example, Sharma; see also Martini on links with working-class literature), not to mention the complex dialectic that the work establishes between Marxism and nationalism.

Specifically, the novel explores the condition of newly independent Kenya. It focuses on four characters—Munira, a teacher; Wanja, a prostitute (among other things); Abdulla, a bar owner and former revolutionary; and Karega, a teacher then a union leader. There are also important secondary characters, such as Nyakinyua,³ a small farmer, repository of Gikuyu tradition, and grandmother of Wanja. There is a frame narrative involving a murder investigation. This takes place in the mid-1970s. The
main story of the work extends back about a decade earlier, to a period right after independence (in 1963). Further, embedded narratives give stories from various individual and group histories.

Needless to say, Petals is as interpretively complex and ambiguous as any work. But it seems clear that the novel centrally involves national allegory, a point only partially explored in criticism on the novel. Perhaps most crucially, Wanja represents the nation. Though underdeveloped, the connection is recognized by some critics. For example, Sharma characterizes her as “the spirit and earth of Kenya, humiliated, exploited and ill-used by the Kimerias, Chuis and Mzigos” (302). Though he does not explore the allegorical status of Wanja, Eustace Palmer does characterize her in such a way as to illuminate that status. As he explains, “Far from wishing to enslave men, Wanja’s ruling passion throughout is the need to preserve her independence” (278–79). The point applies at least as straightforwardly to the nation (in contrast with its enslaving leaders) as to an individual. One may extend these general connections first by noting that Wanja allegorically represents both the land and the people of Kenya. As the land, she is a “garden” (34), a woman with “valleys, rivers, streams, hills, ridges, mountains” (315). As the people, she is “myriad selves” (64), someone in whom Karega sees “countless other faces in many other places all over the republic” (294). As the last quotation suggests, she often represents Kenya, though she may also represent the Gikuyu. More precisely, she is either Kenya today or the Gikuyu people today. In keeping with this, her grandmother represents traditional Kenya or traditional Gikuyu society. These alternative interpretations are not mutually exclusive. Traditional Kenya is the collection of Gikuyu, Masai, and other local traditions. Contemporary Kenya is itself manifest in its various modernized ethnicities. Like Wanja, these groups have connections with traditions in the countryside and with the cosmopolitan world of the cities.

As a young girl, Wanja is seduced and abandoned by Hawkins Kimeria, a member of the nascent capitalist class. Kimeria subsequently turns out to have been a collaborationist with the British counterinsurgency forces as well. The affair results in a pregnancy. Wanja gives birth to the child, but abandons it. In national allegories generally, the birth of a child points toward the birth of the nation. The suggestion here is that independent Kenya was the child of the nascent capitalist and collaborationist class. This is in keeping with Ngũgĩ’s view of the new nation.

After this, Wanja becomes a prostitute. The allegorical point is, of course, that the new Kenya has to prostitute itself to those with money in
order to survive. The idea is elaborated when the reader learns that she initially refused Europeans, but eventually had to succumb. Similarly, “independent” Kenya realized that it had to prostitute itself to foreign investors. For a time, Wanja is able to take refuge in the countryside. There she brews a traditional drink referred to as “[t]he spirit” (210), which is linked with memory of the Gikuyu past and with self-realization (see 209–12). The suggestion is that modern Kenya could for a time retain its integrity by relying on the traditions of the countryside and by fostering a sense of communal spirit bound up with self-realization through historical memory. But eventually capitalist developments—including industries involving Hawkins Kimeria—threaten her traditional land.

In addition, the youth of the countryside cannot afford to study. Needing money to preserve traditional lands and to send a talented orphan, Joseph, to school, Wanja is forced to prostitute herself again. Here the point seems to be that, in order to give some minimal protection to cultivators and to give at least a few poor children a chance at education, the prostitution of modern Kenya had to be extended to the traditional countryside.

Ultimately, Wanja is almost killed when three Kenyan capitalists—including Kimeria—are burned in an arson attack on her brothel. She is saved by Abdulla, a former revolutionary who is now a destitute street vendor. At the end of the novel, Wanja is pregnant again. Thus independent Kenya is preparing to give birth to a new nation (a point recognized by several critics; see Stratton 120). But this time, it will not be the child of the capitalists and colonial collaborationists. It will, rather, be the child of the revolutionary poor.

The other two main characters—Karega and Munira—represent a sort of class allegory. Karega is the child of the disenfranchised and dispossessed peasantry, the generation after Nyakinyua. His mother’s devotion allows him to earn an education. For a time, this makes him a member of the petite bourgeoisie, as he has a job teaching school in rural Kenya. However, his class origins and ties to the landless peasantry, as well as his experience of unemployment, petty trading, and wage labor, orient his class stance toward the masses and away from the elite. Eventually, he becomes a union organizer. The novel in fact ends, not with Wanja and the new nation, but with Karega and the growing union movement. The workers are coming to recognize their own strength and their possibilities for collective action. Indeed, there is considerable tension between Karega and Wanja. At one point, they are lovers. But he eventually becomes disgusted with her prostitution. The allegorical point would
appear to be that the workers’ and the peasants’ movement is repelled by the prostitution of the modern nation. The novel ends with an unresolved tension between nationalism, on the one hand, and the class-based struggles of the workers and peasants, on the other.

Perhaps surprisingly, the main character in the novel is the final character mentioned above—Godfrey Munira. He is the son of Ezekiel, “a wealthy landowner and a respected elder in the hierarchy of the Presbyterian Church” (13). Like Karega, Munira is educated and becomes a petit bourgeois intellectual. Also like Karega, and the petite bourgeoisie generally, Munira’s “class stance” or feeling of class solidarity is malleable (cf. Ngũgĩ on “the vacillating mentality and world outlook of the petite bourgeoisie” [in Sicherman 25]). What is curious is that his class origins do not influence him toward an identification with the wealthy. He is initially a sort of individualist, largely lacking in class solidarity. He does not necessarily pursue his own private gain. But, with some limited exceptions, he does pursue his goals largely in isolation from others. Eventually, he becomes involved in an apocalyptic Christian sect that works to divert the revolutionary energies of the poor away from material struggles (of class or nation) and toward individual spiritual salvation. In this respect, he seems to be a good example of religion as an opiate. The point is connected with petit bourgeois indifference to class, and with the moral intolerance and righteousness often associated with the petite bourgeoisie. Such intolerance and righteousness are found in both Karega and Munira. The result is that they both feel disgust for Wanja. Munira, however, acts. He determines to burn her brothel, first setting fire to the doors and thereby preventing escape (333). The allegory might suggest that the religious obscurantist faction of the petite bourgeoisie also aims to rid the nation of prostitution, but in a moralistic and misguided way that could potentially destroy the nation itself.

Of course, the reader does not learn about Munira’s aims and actions until the end. In good crime-story fashion, the novel begins with a series of arrests. Chapter 1 is short. It comprises five brief sections. Sections one through four recount the police going to Munira, Abdulla, Wanja, and Karega. Section five presents a newspaper account of an apparent case of arson the night before, a case in which three prominent, wealthy Kenyans have been killed.

There are already interesting elements of the discourse here. The nonpersonified narrator is clearly omniscient. The reader has access to different characters’ thoughts and feelings. However, this access seems
particularly pronounced in the case of Munira. More significantly, the special place of Munira is signaled by the fact that Abdulla, Wanja, and Karega are all named in the first sentence of their sections. However, in the opening section of the novel (treating Munira), the narrator never tells who is being discussed. From the first sentence, then, there is already a presupposed framework, signaling a nonpersonified narratee who is familiar with Munira and with the context. The first sentence reads, “They came for him that Sunday.” The reader only learns that this “him” is someone named “Munira” when one of the police officers asks if he is Munira (2).

Other discourse elements enter in the section on Karega, as the reader is given access to the thoughts and feelings of a group of workers. The importance of this is not so much what it tells about the knowledge of the narrator, but what it tells about the interest of both the nonpersonified narrator and the implied author. To a great extent, the novel is thematically concerned with individualist fragmentation and different sorts of group solidarity. It is unsurprising that these concerns would be manifest at the level of the discourse from early on.

The second chapter begins with a flashback to twelve years earlier, when Munira began teaching school in the village of Ilmorog. Munira is the topic of the first part of this chapter. But the focalization is not entirely clear. In the second paragraph, the nonpersonified narrator reports the views of “the elderly folk” of Ilmorog (5). After an intervening paragraph, a peculiar thing happens. The narrator begins to use “we,” thereby becoming personified and collective, presumably manifesting rather than simply reporting the group’s observations and feelings.8 This collective “we” is contrasted most obviously with Munira, who will (as already noted) turn out to suffer from petit bourgeois individualistic alienation. An obvious reading of the “we” is that it represents a communal mutuality that has been lost in the modern world. Subsequently, Nyakinyua speaks of how “Our young men and women have left us” (7, emphasis added), which would seem to reinforce this interpretation. But, in fact, the “we,” at this point, is exclusionary and closed-minded. The group clearly misunderstands Munira when they think he is “mocking” their traditions (6) and they try to drive him away. Indeed, they show similar collective hostility toward Abdulla (5).

Three pages into the chapter, the focus shifts from Munira to Abdulla, who is introduced apparently by the nonpersonified narrator. But the narrative soon returns to the collective voice, with the group expressing its ambivalence about Abdulla. Again, far from being an admirable
expression of solidarity, the collective voice here seems to express primarily suspicion and xenophobia.

Munira is eventually accepted into the village, becoming “one of us” (10). It is worth noting that he is accepted only when he proclaims that “Unity is strength” and refers to working for the new Kenya. This may appear to redeem the collectivity of the group. They only accept an outsider when the outsider demonstrates that he or she is genuinely willing to engage with them in solidarity. But, in fact, this too is undermined. Munira said “Unity is strength,” while “not believing it, but noting that the words impressed” those around him (10).

Literary works produced in the context of nation building might be expected to develop group narration in order to overcome individualistic fragmentation. This would be particularly unsurprising in a national allegory, such as *Petals of Blood*. But Ngũgĩ foils expectations. As the preceding points suggest, the traditional group definition of the village society, manifest in collective narration, is highly problematic. Initially, it is clannish and xenophobic; subsequently, it is prone to manipulation. On the other hand, the scope of the collective narration at this point is not entirely clear. There are hints that it may not be village society as a whole but only the village elders, thus a traditional elite. Moreover, in his petit bourgeois opposition to this collective, Munira is often no less closed-minded, as when he characterizes Ilmorogans as “a people opposed to light and progress” (10).

Perhaps more significantly, the representation of the group narrator is by no means invariably critical. For example, though she is the granddaughter of Nyakinyua, Wanja is a stranger to Ilmorog. Thus she needs to be accepted into the group, as did Munira, even if the initial level of distrust is much lower. This acceptance is fairly quick and is signaled by a shift to the collective voice: “Within a week she too had become of us” (31). This seems to involve a reasonable balance of open-mindedness and caution. In this case, moreover, the group appears more encompassing than the group that judged Munira. It now seems to be “the people” generally, and not simply the elders. Consistent with this, the collective voice is associated at this particular point with the song and dance that manifest and recall the cultural traditions of the people. In this section, then, the representation of the “we” is positive. Rather than stressing xenophobia, it emphasizes the shared cultural heritage that unites the villagers.

Returning to Munira’s acceptance into the community, we find that, after the shift out of collective narration, the nonpersonified narrator
proceeds more or less straightforwardly for another eight pages until a discussion begins about when young people began leaving Ilmorog, which is to say, when the village community began to come apart. Here, rather than an expression of group collectively, there is a series of fragmentary representations of individual views. In other words, the group is represented in a distributed fashion: “The movement away had started after the second Big War... No... before that... No, it was worse after Mau Mau War” (19, ellipses in the original), and so on. Interestingly, this fragmented representation of the village community is explicitly about disintegration. In addition, it is focalized through the alienated, individualistic, petit bourgeois character, Munira. Thus, here again, Ngũgĩ makes thematic use of a discourse technique.

Though it is not a matter of discourse, it is worth pointing out that Ngũgĩ’s characterization of Munira stresses his individual isolation relative to the people of Ilmorog. Sitting and observing the Ilmorogans, Munira “would vaguely feel with them” as they were united in work. But he always remained “an outsider to their activities” (20). The phrase “to their activities” is important. In Ngũgĩ’s Marxist perspective, it is the shared labor of the people that ultimately unites them—first, in the traditional village, then later in the trade union.

Such story elements are, however, enhanced by discourse techniques. For example, at times the omniscient narrator does very strikingly limit the reader’s knowledge to that of Munira. Thus when Wanja is introduced, readers learn as little about her as Munira does. They are not even told that she leaves his home after he goes to the school. They learn this only later when Munira learns it. Of course, this is what one expects with focalization. However, the novel is not consistently focalized. The strictness of constraint here tends to make Munira’s isolation more palpable.

Much of the novel is organized around explicitly marked and saliently differentiated embedded narrations by the main characters. Among other things, these narrations fill in character history and provide indirect comments on colonialism, anticolonial struggles, and neocolonialism. Soon after Wanja comes to Ilmorog (in chapter 2), Munira presents the first of these. As discourse structures, these are not particularly noteworthy. The process of embedding in these cases is straightforward, as they are narratives reported by an omniscient, nonpersonified narrator.

Chapter 2 ends after Wanja delivers one of these embedded narratives. Chapter 3 returns from the flashback of chapter 2 to the present—
that is, twelve years later, shortly after the arrests of chapter 1. Munira
is trying to “reconstruct” the scene that the reader has just read, now
for “a statement to the police” (41). This is revealing because it suggests
that there is already an implicit subtextual template here. Clearly, what
was given in chapter 2 was not the content of Munira’s statement to the
police. However, it could very well be a case of omniscience guided by
Munira’s interests, though not informationally constrained by his inabil-
ity to recall particulars. Subsequently, an inspector is introduced who
provides Munira with pen and paper and asks him to write out his state-
ment treating the events leading up to the murder. The inspector, then,
serves as the narratee of this written account. The second section of
chapter 3 clearly begins as that account. The opening lines of that sec-
tion are “How does one tell of murder in a New Town?” This announces
that the embedded narrative treats the issue just posed by the inspec-
tor. It goes on to stress “God’s law” and “God’s will,” thereby indicating
that the narration is by Munira, thus not (directly) by the nonpersonified
narrator. Subsequent paragraphs are in first person.

But almost immediately, it is clear that the embedded narration is
either psychological but unreliable, idealized or merely rhetorical. It
seems most likely that the narration follows Munira’s interests and the
general structure of his own narration, but draws on the omniscience
of the nonpersonified narrator. The first clear indication of this is when
Munira claims to remember a lengthy passage from one of Karega’s exer-
cise books (46).\footnote{In any case, Munira’s first-person narration does not continue. Sec-
tion four shifts to Wanja, who is recovering from the fire. Like Munira,
she too is trying to remember the past. Though this section returns to
the omniscient nonpersonified narrator, the suggestion is that this
omniscient version follows the trajectory of Wanja’s recollections. Thus
guided omniscience follows idealized embedded narration.

The fourth chapter begins with an unexpected reflection. The nar-
rator explains that anyone would be “overwhelmed and stilled by the
sight” of “shimmering moonlit mist” on a particular night. This is not
logically incompatible with nonpersonified omniscient narration. But
it seems to involve an unusual commitment to a personal emotive
response. The second paragraph refers to “recent archaeological finds
in Ilmorog.” This too is logically consistent with the omniscience of the
nonpersonified narrator. But it also seems peculiar. Up to this point, the
nonpersonified narrator has not exhibited overt emotions or interests
and has been unconcerned with expanses of time outside the experience
or attention of the characters. The following paragraph goes further still and personifies the narrator. It is yet a third version of the “we.” Specifically, the narrator begins by referring to “our history.” This could in principle suggest collective voicing (where a number of people speak together). In context, however, it apparently points toward an individual who, so to speak, instantiates the group. On the other hand, it is not an individual speaking in isolation. It is an individual recounting knowledge that is available to the entire group because it has been preserved by a network of individuals within that group, a network with cultural authority—“poets and players” (67). This is, of course, a network that includes contemporary Kenyan novelists and thus encompasses the author of *Petals of Blood*. The group history has been preserved by poets and players, and is presumably manifest in this novel. However, that does not mean the entire society is familiar with this preserved knowledge. Indeed, there would hardly be any point in having poets, players, and novelists if everyone already did share this knowledge.

This passage, then, extends the range of group narration isolated in the novel. Specifically, the novel suggests three types of group narration: 1) collective (where the group speaks together as “we”), 2) distributed (where individuals present distinct, but interrelated voices from the group), and 3) instantiated (where one speaker is presented as typifying the group). Cross-cutting this division, the novel points toward three ways in which the group may be understood: 1) as the people, 2) as the political elite, and 3) as the cultural experts or bearers of tradition. These represent different ways in which people commonly understand social groups and who is empowered to speak for a group. The suggestions of Ngũgĩ’s text are that he celebrates the collective and distributed voices of the people and the instantiated voice of the cultural experts (such as Nyakinyua), but criticizes the collective voice of the political elite (and the purely individual voices of self-seeking politicians).

It is not possible to explore the entire novel in this detail. But by this point, the main discursive techniques used by Ngũgĩ seem clear. To a great extent, the rest of the novel develops these different narrative voices in the complex interactions of their levels of knowledge and trajectories of interest. For example, chapter 5 includes an explicit return to Munira’s testimony, again suggesting that much of the novel recapitulates his testimony, but with the omniscience of the nonpersonified narrator adding knowledge. This is true even when the text is in first person. It thus continues to include both guided omniscience and idealized embedded narration, with the suggestion of an implicit subtextual
template. Indeed, the nonpersonified narrator’s omniscience leads to a presentation that goes beyond what Munira says but could not know (in idealized narration) to what he knows but would not say. Specifically, it includes what passes through his mind in interior monologue, but would undoubtedly not be included in a police statement (see, for example, 101).

A variation of particular thematic significance occurs when omniscience is connected implicitly with tradition. This is in keeping with the partial identification of the nonpersonified omniscient narrator with the cultural experts, the poets and players. However, here it occurs with character narration. Specifically, Nyakinyua recites the history of the place. As such, she functions as “the spirit that guided and held them together. And she talked as if she had been everywhere” (123). The suggestion is that the collective knowledge of tradition, as the product of countless individual points of view, is itself a sort of omniscience. This living, collective tradition is also emotionally unifying, or at least creates an emotional sense of unity. Thus, later, Nyakinyua allows them all to “relive their history” and feel “a oneness” (210, 211). In keeping with both points (regarding knowledge and feeling), it is not surprising that Nyakinyua’s significance expands even beyond Kenya. Her representative voice is the result of her being “Nyakinyua, mother of men” (123). Despite the phrasing, this extension may not be intended to encompass all humans. But it is broader than the Gikuyu or even the nation of Kenya. Two pages later, Karega interprets Nyakinyua’s story as bearing on “all Africa” (125).

On the other hand, the suggestion of a still more encompassing humanity is not irrelevant here. The trajectory of the rest of the novel suggests widening circles of “we,” expansions of the group and the sense of group solidarity. Despite Karega’s explanation of Nyakinyua’s story as relating to Africa, a larger unification is not excluded by the novel. Karega speaks of the humiliation of Wanja—thus, by allegorical implication, of the entire group—as “a collective humiliation.” Of course, that collective humiliation could be ethnic (Gikuyu), national (Kenyan), or racial (pan-African). But he goes on to explain that it is collective because “it has got to do with human beings” (161). This is, of course, in keeping with the Marxist perspective that Karega represents, since Marxism has historically been a force favoring internationalism rather than national, ethnic, or other identities.

In relation to this, it is, again, important that the novel ends, not with Wanja and Abdulla, thus nationalism, but with Karega and the workers
movement, including its struggle against “national and regional chauvinism” (305). In keeping with its discursive embedding of voices within other voices, its elaboration of collective narration, and of course its themes of solidarity and division, the novel aptly concludes with Karega thinking about the struggle of the workers and the peasants to bring about a genuine “kingdom of man and woman” (344). In direct opposition to Munira, the other petit bourgeois character, Karega realizes that such a kingdom must be made in this world, not imagined in another. As a result, he is finally able to become part of a collective—or, rather, to help form a new collective based not on false attempts to relive “glorious pasts” of a nation or ethnicity (326), but on work to create a new future. In the last words of the novel, the narrator explains that, finally, Karega “knew he was no longer alone” (345).

In short, Ngũgĩ’s novel suggests a number of points about the nature of narrator embedding and group narration. These theoretical implications, in turn, react back on one’s understanding of the novel. Specifically, there is a tight interrelation between the discourse structures and processes of the novel, on the one hand, and its thematic points and emotional norms, on the other. This is particularly noteworthy because the novel is not at all thematically or discursively simple. For example, it is critical of petit bourgeois individualism, but its representation of collective voicing is nuanced. Its different forms of group narration suggest different kinds of group formation and modes of group expression, with different values and different faults. This is a version of the profile of ambiguity and the profile of ambivalence. However, Ngũgĩ has integrated thematic and emotional ambiguity with narration in an unusually thorough manner. Moreover, he has done this in a self-consciously dialectical way, so that the different voices can interact with, correct, and complement one another in their real social complexity.

**Narrator Knowledge, Collective Experience, and Access to Other Minds**

One of the reasons Ngũgĩ’s dialectic is important is that group voicing is problematic precisely at the level of difference or diversity. The distributed mode of group narration allows for diversity of thought and feeling within the group. On the other hand, it may make the diversity—even conflict—more salient than group connectedness. This problem is solved by the other versions of group narration. But these, in turn,
readily project a degree of uniformity that is often internally oppressive and externally xenophobic, as Ngũgĩ recognized. Moreover, in the real world, groups are not at all so uniform as collective or instantiated voicing implies. In keeping with this, narration suggesting uniformity often raises issues about narrator knowledge and reliability, particularly with respect to personified narrators. As Margolin writes, “Claims about a group’s mental states or actions combine uneasily the narrator’s own immediate self-knowledge with inferences about the minds of other members” (“Perspective” 423).

Consider the case of an instantiated voice. Here, the first issue is to what extent anyone can reasonably be spoken of as typical of a group, in the sense of manifesting the group’s standard properties generally, in the way a sample of gold may be said to manifest the properties of gold generally. The answer is straightforward—groups are not at all like the elements; their properties are not uniform across samples. Of course, one can create a storyworld in which group thoughts are so uniform that this is unproblematic. For example, a science fiction work could include a set of identically programmed robots. But most narratives using an instantiated voice are probably not suggesting that the possibility of such a voice arises only in an unreal world. Indeed, in a case such as Petals of Blood, it is crucial to the work’s political purposes that there is a close parallel between the instantiated nature of the voice in the fiction and group connectedness in the real world. Similar points hold for the collective narrative voice.

The same issues arise with indirect forms of group narration, when a narrator reports of a group that “they” felt x or thought y. An omniscient narrator may in principle know what everyone in a group is thinking or feeling. However, here again, it usually seems implausible that a group would share a particular understanding or emotion—unless the group is very different from groups in the real world. The problem is only worsened when the narration is rigorously focalized. This is because a focalizer, like a limited narrator, cannot have access to the inner life of group members. Thus, even if there is uniformity, he or she could not know. There are, then, two dilemmas for what might be called the indirect voicing of groups by narrators, the same two as found in collective and instantiated narration. First, there is the problem of group uniformity. Second, there is the problem of narrator/focalizer knowledge.

Obviously, these problems are greatest when the group is large and, so to speak, “abstract,” as in the cases presented by Ngũgĩ. Judgments
about groups become increasingly plausible as the number of people in the group falls, the period of time decreases, and the intensity of interaction among the group members (prominently including the narrator or focalizer) increases. Thus one is or should be highly skeptical of indirect—or collective or instantiated—voicing for a race or nation. But one is or should be more open to the possibility of indirect—or collective or instantiated—voicing for, say, two close friends at a particular moment. This is because their shared experience in the past and present gives significant grounds for inferring at least partially uniform internal states and for an enhanced degree of mutual comprehension.

The point is related to some general issues about omniscience and limitation in narration. Again, there are different kinds of limitation. Consider focalization. As noted earlier, a focalized nonpersonified narrator may be rigorously epistemically restricted to a single character’s knowledge. Alternatively, however, such a narrator may be restricted only in interest. In the second case, he or she may have access to a wide range of external facts and internal character states, but may (so to speak) not care to report them. This does not mean, however, that narration is necessarily a matter of either guided, though otherwise complete, omniscience on the one hand or strict focalization on the other. Rather, the narrator may have various sorts and degrees of information not available to the focalizer.

Specifically, there seems to be a rough hierarchy according to which a focalized narrator may have “excess” knowledge. He or she may most readily have general social knowledge not available to the focalizer. An obvious case of this is language. A language may be unfamiliar to the focalizer. However, if the author wishes the reader to know the content of a particular speech, then the narrator must, at the very least, give an accurate transcription of the foreign language. Suppose, for example, that a character says something in Afrikaans, but the focalizer does not speak Afrikaans. If the author wants the content of the speech available to the reader, then the narrator must be able to transcribe the Afrikaans speech, which is something the focalizer would not be able to do.

A focalized narrator may have some knowledge of other minds as well, even when focalization is generally strict and therefore putatively involves confinement to a single perspective. Unsurprisingly, this extension of the focalized narrator’s knowledge seems to follow the same general principles that govern one’s confidence about inferences to other people’s inner states in real life. Observers feel quite confident in attributing a perception to someone else when they are in the same percep-
tual environment. If Jones and Smith are both at the celebration where a cannon is fired, Jones feels confident that Smith heard the cannon. Observers may also be relatively confident about emotion. Doe witnesses the eliciting conditions of emotion and the expressive and actional outcomes—thus he sees Jones reject Smith’s proposal of marriage; Doe then sees Smith break into sobs and run from the room. Doe or any other witness feels quite confident about Smith’s inner emotional state. People seem somewhat less confident about someone else’s expectations and inferences. Many emotional responses involve relatively automatic processes. But expectations and inferences are less automatic and are therefore more difficult to gauge. Finally, observers appear to have the least confidence about other people’s memories and extended plans. Memories require that the observer has shared or otherwise knows about the other person’s past experiences and about whether current circumstances are likely to trigger those memories. Plans require a sense of the person’s enduring interests, goals, self-understanding, and other matters.

If this hierarchy is roughly correct with respect to people’s real-life confidence, and accuracy, in evaluating other people’s mental states, one would expect something like it to appear in literature. In keeping with this, it does seem that narrators are often neither omniscient nor strictly focalized with respect to other characters’ mental states. Rather, they frequently fall somewhere within an intermediate spectrum, providing some information about the mental states of other characters. What information can be provided by the narrator appears to be broadly guided by the preceding hierarchy.

These points may be further developed by returning to theory of mind issues. Sometimes, one rationally infers someone’s inner state; at other times, one has the sense that one just knows what the person is feeling. Similarly, a focalized narrator may infer a state or may present the state as if he or she had direct access to it. In other words, he or she may rely on a theoretically based theory of mind or on simulation (as discussed in chapter 4).

Simulation appears to be particularly prominent in the understanding of other people’s emotions (see Doherty 49 and citations). In keeping with this, it is also particularly prominent in the feeling of actually experiencing other people’s inner states. In other words, perhaps the most frequent sense of having access to other people’s minds comes with the feeling of having a common emotional experience, a feeling that is usually inseparable from simulation. This feeling of common emotional
experience is enhanced by the ways in which emotions are actually shared interactively and the various inputs to simulation. When Jones and Doe are laughing and tickling one another and frolicking together in the swaying rye field, they have a strong sense not only of being happy individually but of sharing happiness. Many components of the experience contribute to this. These include joint attention (on a shared object) or mutual attention, mirroring (spontaneous imitation of one another’s expressions, gesture, posture, etc. [see Iacoboni]), smooth cooperative activity toward shared goals (including ease of mutual anticipation), and emotion contagion (where one person’s emotion expressions, such as laughter, trigger the parallel emotions in the other person; see Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson). The effects of these conditions are further enhanced if there is a relation of attachment between the people involved, since attachment promotes a feeling of intimacy and a tendency for those involved (e.g., lovers) to see themselves as in some sense a single “self” or, more technically, a “cognitive unit” (on the concept of a cognitive unit, see Ortony, Clore, and Collins 77–79).

Since these conditions enhance one’s sense of shared emotion in real life, one would expect them to enhance the sense of shared emotion in fiction. In keeping with this, one would expect these conditions to contribute to group voicing in narrative. In fact, much of the group voicing in Ngũgĩ is emotional, whether it is a matter of shared antipathy toward an outsider in the village or cultural pride.

But Ngũgĩ does not provide an ideal instance of this sort, since his narration is omniscient and not strictly focalized. A tighter constraint on the narrator should more clearly highlight the conditions in which group voicing occurs and how it occurs. This leads to Born of the Sun by Joseph Diescho (with Celeste Wallin).

Emotion Sharing, Other Minds, and Political Trust in Born of the Sun: A Namibian Novel

This 1988 novel concerns a young Kavango villager, Muronga, in South West Africa (Namibia) during the period of South African (Apartheid) administration. Faced with the need to earn money in order to pay taxes, Muronga goes to work in the South African mines. The novel begins with Muronga and his wife, Makena, to whom he is deeply attached. When she has a child, Muronga develops a deep bond with the baby as well. Much of the first part of the novel is concerned with establishing the strong
ties of affection that bind Muronga to his family and community. The only dissonant notes in the opening come from colonialism, prominently the South African government’s taxation system.

At the end of the first part, Muronga and his good friend, Kaye, decide to leave home in order to secure paid work. Despite his strong feelings for his family, Muronga believes that he must do this, in part for their benefit. The pain of parting is initially softened by the presence of Kaye, with whom Muronga also has strong attachment bonds. However, they too are separated and sent to different regions for work. Thus the first part of the novel establishes a clear conflict between personal attachment and colonial labor.

The very brief second part of the novel traces Muronga’s transportation from Namibia through newly independent Botswana to South Africa. Diescho (with Wallin) depicts Muronga’s new experiences of colonialism, technology, the diversity of African society, and other matters.

In part three, Muronga learns about work in the mines, about South African racism and exploitation, and about political repression. He begins to attend secret political meetings. When an important African activist is killed in prison, he participates in a strike. (The activist is modeled on Stephen Biko, though the events in the story occur much earlier.) He is arrested, imprisoned, and tortured.

In the final part of the novel, Muronga has been released from prison and returned to the mines. After attending classes, he is now literate. He continues his activism and is arrested again. This time, he is deported. However, in Botswana he and several comrades are placed under the custody of an official who sympathizes with the South West Africa People’s Organization (SWAPO, called UPO in the novel), the revolutionary organization struggling for an independent Namibia. This official offers them the opportunity to escape and join SWAPO. After a night of internal conflict, in which he longs for his wife, child, and friends, Muronga decides that he must sacrifice his own personal attachments. The novel ends with Muronga joining his comrades in escape to enter the struggle for his nation’s freedom.

As should be clear even from this brief summary, the novel is narratively, thematically, and emotionally concerned with issues of trust, solidarity, shared action, and attachment. As such, it is a novel that addresses a range of concerns that bear on the understanding of other minds. These concerns include both the theory-based inference to other minds and the simulation of other minds that gives a sense of direct access, particularly to the feelings of other people.\(^{14}\)
Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the novel is the way it recruits discourse techniques toward these ends. Specifically, the novel has a nonpersonified narrator with focalization on Muronga. This narrator has some general knowledge and skills that Muronga lacks (e.g., he or she has knowledge of several languages unknown to Muronga). Nonetheless, he or she generally does not have access to other minds. There are, however, exceptions to this restriction. The reader is sometimes given inner experiences of characters. In some cases, this is a fairly straightforward matter of the inner experience being easy to infer from perceptual experience that is available to Muronga. These reports of inner states, then, need not be viewed as violating strict focalization.

More importantly, there are cases in which the narration involves an indirect group voicing that is not a matter of simple inference. These cases are marked by precisely the sort of coordination of cooperative activity, commonly enhanced by shared attachment, that gives one the sense of shared emotion in ordinary life. These regulated violations of focalization serve at least three purposes. First, they enhance the emotional effect of Muronga’s bonds with family and friends (thus the severing of those bonds due to Apartheid). Second, they extend a parallel relation to the solidarity and trust that occurs between Muronga and his comrades in the struggle against South African colonialism and racism. Third, they highlight the alienation among different groups in Apartheid South Africa, since moments of “shared internality,” as one might call it, do not occur across the lines of group division—prominently the division between black and white.15

The first chapter begins with Muronga’s experiences (“he feels the day breaking” [3]) and thoughts (“it is all fine, he thinks to himself” [3]). These thoughts include an attempt to understand the white priest, Pater Dickmann. It is striking that he does not simulate Dickmann’s mind, but rather infers its properties or general tendencies (e.g., it is a “suspicious mind” [4]). He then calculates what the best way is to persuade or pacify the priest. The difference between Muronga’s direct subjectivity and Dickmann’s objectified, theoretically constructed mind is significant. It suggests already the distance between white and black that is central to the novel, and to life under Apartheid. Indeed, it is in effect the psychological correlate of Apartheid.

Muronga’s inner experience may not be presented with precise verbal accuracy. In other words, it may not be strict interior monologue. However, as thought and feeling, it is aptly and convincingly simulated—or, more properly, the apparent monologue gives the reader the cues
needed to engage in such simulation. For example, Muronga is thinking about his upcoming conversion and church wedding. He suddenly remembers an added benefit of the church wedding—“Oh, and another good thing is that the priest gives the marrying couples their wedding rings” (5). This memory surprises him, even though he latently had the knowledge all along. This spontaneity and seeming inconsistency in knowledge—both of which characterize real human thought processes—facilitate a reader’s simulation of Muronga as a full, subjectively self-experiencing person, in contrast with a calculated understanding of Dickmann.

Muronga’s wife, Makena, is pregnant and near to giving birth. Muronga has gone to call the midwife, Mama Rwenge. As he approaches her hut, the narrator seemingly shifts to the perspective of Rwenge. But he or she only reports that Rwenge “hears Muronga’s quick footsteps” (6), a perception that is shared by Muronga and readily attributed to Rwenge in the circumstances. In other words, by the preceding hierarchy, it is only the most minimal violation of strict epistemic focalization.

Rwenge goes to Muronga’s hut. Muronga is outside, but “His mind . . . is in the hut with Makena” (8). Here, the point is not merely that he is thinking about her. It is that he is trying to understand what her experience is and he is longing to be in physical contact with this object of very strong attachment. Muronga remembers the history of his and Makena’s relationship, showing great tenderness. He wishes he was “there to hold Makena’s shoulders” (10). This stresses the importance of attachment in the novel. It also suggests the ways in which attachment is bound up with a desire to share the other person’s pain and joy, thus with empathic engagement. When the child is born, Muronga shows the same attachment to him as to Makena.

After the birth, there is a sort of intrusion by the narrator, presenting information on Kavango taboos. Clearly, this is information that Muronga has, even if he has no occasion to think about it explicitly. In connection with this, some of the following sections are devoted to establishing the implied author’s view of Kavango tradition. Muronga’s wise uncle Ndara explains that by their tradition, a chief was supposed to be “like a father” and “rule according to the wishes of his people” or he would be “dethroned by the people” (24). The image of the chief as “like a father” here suggests the devoted attachment of a father to his children rather than the obedience of children to a paternal authority. This is particularly clear since, according to Ndara, the chief could be expelled by the people. This all serves to prepare for Muronga’s eventual
decision to join SWAPO and fight for the liberation of Namibia from the very nonfatherlike rule of the South African government.

The second chapter takes up some of the same points. For example, Muronga is faced with the clear irrationality of the white priest, and the priest’s bizarre assumption that Africans will automatically believe that white angels are good and black angels are bad. He thinks, “The missionaries do not think beyond their long funny hair” (29). The point of the passage is to make readers—perhaps particularly white readers—recognize three things. First, Christian theology is no more rational than that of any other group. Second, European appearance is no more intrinsically beautiful than that of any other group. Finally, whites have historically had a tendency not to think outside their own heads in the sense that they often have made no effort to imagine themselves into the place of nonwhite people, thus no effort to simulate their experience. The remainder of the chapter is replete with instances of resultant misunderstanding.

More in line with the concerns of the present analysis, chapter 3 includes some instances of collective focalization. Muronga and Makena sit “silently.” The narrator reports that “Neither of them can forget the hectic ceremony of yesterday” and “they feel as if every villager thinks they are fanatics of Christendom” (60). Readers know that the narrator has access to Muronga’s thoughts. But the narrator does not generally have access to Makena’s thoughts. Here, however, the narrator’s knowledge goes further than usual. At least one reason is that Muronga and Makena are bound by strong mutual attachment and have engaged in shared work together. That attachment and shared work—in this case, work actually bound up with the attachment—enable the mutual simulation that can lead to collective focalization.

Shortly after this, there are scenes of male–male attachment and sharing. For example, one man successfully finishes a proverbial sentence begun by another (63). Two men eat from the same pots and their “fingers touch in the plate” (64). They contrast this sense of interpersonal connection with the loneliness of white people (64). This helps to prepare the reader for further developments of attachment-based mutual simulation—thus collective focalization—particularly among comrades in the struggle against Apartheid. In keeping with the last concern, this chapter also introduces SWAPO, though from the perspective of the white South African government.

SWAPO and taxation are addressed at a large meeting, where an Afrikaans-speaking white man gives a talk that is translated by a self-
serving African collaborationist. Here, the narrator evidences general social knowledge beyond Muronga, in this case knowledge of Afrikaans. He or she presents the discrepancies between the original speech and the translation, discrepancies that cannot be available to Muronga. Here, then, there is another violation of strict focalization, but one that readers are unlikely to notice due to its high place in the hierarchy of such violations.

The fourth and fifth chapters continue to stress Muronga’s attachment to his wife and child. In the fifth chapter, he and his friend Kaye leave home to go work in South Africa. Just before they leave, the narrator shifts briefly to the perspective of Makena. In keeping with the general principles set out above, however, the narrator gains access to a particular aspect of Makena’s mind—her sharing of emotion with Muronga and Kaye. As they are all engaged in separating, she gains a “sense” of their “uncertainty” and “need” for “courage” (107).

At this point, familial attachment bonds are again extended to men who share experiences and solidarity. The reader learns that Muronga and Kaye have “grown closer to each other” through their shared “undertaking.” This is not simply familiarity, but also attachment. As the narrator explains, “To be next to each other is one of the things they always wish for” and they “lie quietly side by side” at night (119). The discursive result of this is that they come to be collectively focalized. “Muronga and Kaye are amazed to see. . . . They are astonished. . . . They are fascinated. . . . They have never seen. . . . they watch,” and so on (125). As soon as this mutuality develops, however, they are separated. The oppressive domination of the South African government first led to Muronga’s departure from his wife and son. It now leads to his close friend’s departure. Thematically, then, Apartheid is genuinely a system of separation, of breaking apart people who should be together. Once Kaye goes off in a bus, Muronga and the narrator no longer have access to Kaye’s thoughts or feelings. Thus the narrator must leave the reader, like Muronga, “unsure” about whether Kaye can even see him (129). Once more, the discourse mirrors the thematic and emotional concerns of the work while following the usual hierarchy of simulative access to other minds.

The seventh chapter presents a positive interlude in newly independent Botswana. This points toward the importance of national liberation that becomes central later in the book. It also highlights the brutality of South Africa that immediately follows.
After the men arrive at the mines, group-based inhibitions of simulation appear again in Muronga’s relationship with his white supervisor. When Muronga works with a black man—and shares bonds of attachment—they frequently share emotions. This is often signaled in the focalization. But neither the narrator nor Muronga shares the emotions of the white supervisor. Thus Muronga reflects that the supervisor “seems to think that a black man like me does not . . . feel what a white man does” (181). The absence of even ordinary empathy is striking. Subsequently, Muronga generalizes the point. Sharing emotion is a human tendency. But “Whites are more ‘white’ than they are human” (182). They allow their in-group racial definition to inhibit their “heart” (182), thus blocking the ordinary sorts of (simulative) access humans have to one another’s emotions. (This is a standard result of in-group/out-group division, as discussed in chapter 5.) The same point applies to black collaborationists. Just as the whites have “a dead heart” (182), these collaborationists “are dead inside” (188). Muronga becomes “more aware than ever that he simply does not understand how these white people think” (189). Inference to emotion is not impossible across races. But it is not a true sharing, based on simulation. Thus Muronga “can see . . . the white man’s . . . anger and hatred.” But he “does not understand” (236).

In contrast with collaborationist blacks, “Muronga and his friends” may be collectively focalized as they “are stunned” and “do not know what to say or do” (188). Sometimes they are so attuned to one another that they seem to communicate without speaking. Muronga “muses” to himself, wondering why there is “broken glass atop the concrete wall.” As if he had uttered the question out loud, he “is surprised when [his fellow-worker] Ndango answers his question” (189).

As he experiences oppression and humiliation at the mines and witnesses the experiences of others, Muronga finds himself drawn to the resistance movement. At a SWAPO meeting, Ndango, one of the activists, explains to Muronga that all the men there are “brothers” (202). This serves to suggest the possibility of a very broad attachment relation among these co-workers. Muronga is initially troubled by his own more local affinities and identifications. However, he prays to the “God of Our Forefathers” to make “us . . . one people” (206). Like Karega at the end of *Petals*, this sense of cooperative group interconnection leads Muronga to “realize that he is not alone” (207).

From here on, Diescho (with Wallin) continues to develop the relation between personal attachment and collective solidarity, as well as
collective focalization. Thus, as Muronga sits with a group of comrades, “his mind flashes back and forth between the meeting . . . and his family” (217). When he takes part in a strike, the common aim is for everyone to “speak with one voice” (218). When the strikers come together, the point is recapitulated at the level of discourse. The men, undertaking this joint endeavor, spontaneously share their feelings, without directly communicating them. Moreover, all this is bound up with attachment. As the narrator explains, “There is fear and uncertainty, but no disagreement” regarding the commitment to the strike, a strike that is connected with the well-being of “our own families” (218–19). Due to their imprisonment, Muronga and his comrades sometimes share the same sensations and emotions, narrated collectively (“They are made to feel even more uncomfortable” [244]; “the prisoners are euphoric and fearless” [245]; “all the . . . men feel the same” [248]). This is linked with Muronga’s attachment to one comrade in particular, Ndango; thus he “prays repeatedly . . . that he and Ndango will not be split up” (243).

The final chapters further develop the theme of group unity (“we must stand, united, against the whites” [274]). The culmination is marked by the same sorts of individual mental division and union that are seen throughout the novel. For example, Muronga finds that his supervisor does not return his greeting, but this “doesn’t tell him much” (279). This is presumably because the stark group oppositions make theory of mind simulation impossible. In addition, Muronga does not have adequate information to draw theoretical inferences. In consequence, he can understand very little from any gesture or expression of the supervisor.

Eventually, Muronga is arrested again and isolated. Once more, his greatest fear is being alone. Once more, Apartheid is represented as dividing those whose bonds of attachment should keep them together. In prison, he tries to remember his wife lying by his side (288). When he is finally released, to be deported, he finds a letter from her. She too is suffering terribly from the separation and begs him to return. The last page of the letter has his child’s footprint (293). It seems for a moment as if the crimes of Apartheid might, in a perverse way, cancel each other out. The unjust economic system drove Muronga away from his family. Now the unjust legal system will send him back.

But in fact there is another choice. In Botswana, he learns that he can escape to work with SWAPO, which means abandoning his family. He is with his comrades Ndango and Nakare. If he joins SWAPO, he will escape with them—perhaps only to be separated again. Unsurprisingly, they
share each other’s emotions; also unsurprisingly, the narrator is able to report this: “Muronga, Ndango and Nakare still do not speak . . . but they hardly need to . . . they can communicate their feelings without words. Each one knows what the others are going through” (300).

The night before the escape, Muronga is tortured by a conflict between love and duty “for his family” and “love and duty to his people and country” (306). Ultimately, he chooses the latter. He leaves with Ndango and Nakare for an uncertain future. Of course, in doing this, Muronga is placing himself in a cognitive unit founded on shared activity and attachment, thus a unit not unlike his family. That is what makes the choice emotionally possible in the context of the novel.

But there is something of a problem here. The ending of the novel points toward an abstract and generalized identification, an identification with Namibia. Muronga’s choice is thematically presented as a choice in favor of the nation over more local affiliations. But the discursive development of the novel actually values particularizing trust and practical interaction, as with Ndango. In this way, the alternatives presented in the novel are always local. They are choices among different sorts of attachment bond and their associated forms of concrete shared experience, mirroring, and particularized simulation. At the end, Muronga does not choose abstract allegiance. He in effect chooses a set of local relations of trust, relations based on cooperative work, attachment, and associated empathic simulation—the relations with Ndango and Nakare. This may be the best choice because Muronga’s relations with his wife and child may be practically unworkable in a colonialist and Apartheid state. In this sense, Muronga chooses what is best for both sets of attachment relations. But this all remains local. It is never clear that the novel really can support something like national identification, rather than more personalized loyalties with their particular attachment bonds, their mutual mirroring in cooperative activity, and so on. Then again, given the brutal behaviors that are regularly underwritten by national identification, perhaps that is not a bad thing.

**Conclusion**

There are two prominent types of limitation on embedded narrators—epistemic and emotional. Psychological embedding completely limits the primary narrator to the knowledge and emotional orientation of the
embedded narrator. Merely rhetorical embedding involves no limitation of either sort. In intermediate cases, the embedded narrative may include perceptual or other details not available to the embedded narrator. Nonetheless, the embedded narrative may be confined to topics or situations about which the embedded narrator has indirect (reported or inferred) knowledge. In a still more minimal case, the embedded narrative is oriented by the emotional interests of the embedded narrator. When the narration extends beyond the experience of the embedded narrator, but remains guided by (at minimum) that narrator’s interests, this may be called “idealized embedded narration.” That idealization may be informationally constrained, but not perceptually constrained, or it may simply be emotionally constrained. There are parallel types of focalization. When the narration fills in information not available to an emotionally focalized character, this may be called “guided omniscience.” Idealized embedded narration and guided omniscience may point toward an “implicit subtextual template,” an actual narrative produced by the embedded narrator or focalizer.

Group narration, the presentation of narrative from some group, in a sense combines singular and multiple narration. It has three basic forms. Instantiated group narration involves an individual speaking as an instantiation of the entire group, either as somehow representative of the group or as allegorically personifying the group. Distributed group narration involves a range of group members speaking as distinct parts of the group. These individual voices may be complementary (thus completing one another) or contradictory (thus challenging one another, perhaps in the service of a social dialectic). Finally, collective voicing presents a group speaking with a single voice (thus it typically involves the use of the pronoun “we,” rather than “I”). These different forms of group narration may also express different versions of who defines the group. Here, too, there seem to be three prominent options: 1) the people as a whole, 2) the political elite (i.e., those with social power), and 3) the cultural authorities (i.e., those who have knowledge of the group).

Ngũgĩ’s *Petals of Blood* is thematically focused on nationalism, colonialism, and class. For the most part, Ngũgĩ pursues his political project in this novel through story elements, prominently allegory. However, in presenting these story elements, he draws on complex discourse techniques. Some of these may operate primarily to enhance readers’ aesthetic engagement with the work. Others have thematic resonances as well. Specifically, he often uses idealized embedded narration or guided omniscience, following the emotional interests and general knowledge
of one character. This enhanced narration often suggests a subtextual template. In each case, the technique arguably serves to present adequate information to the reader while simultaneously foregrounding the particularity of those involved in experiencing, enacting, and interpreting the events. Of course, in keeping with his Marxist orientation, Ngũgĩ does not stress particularity only. He also takes up various types of group narration, largely setting them up in parallel with one another. This parallelism is part of Ngũgĩ’s attempt to place different groups and ideologies—prominently those bearing on nation and class—in dialectical interaction with one another. Indeed, the group narration and individual narrations themselves point to a further dialectic—of group and individual—that is also thematically central to his novel.

A key issue in the relation of groups and individuals concerns the possibility of genuinely sharing ideas, understandings, and emotions. The cultivation of such sharing—or at least an aspiration toward it—is important for a range of authors trying to create a sense of national or other social unity. The use of group narration is clearly a possible discourse correlate of such shared mentalities. There are, however, two significant problems with “we” narration. First, individuals simply do not have access to other minds in the relevant way. Second, there is rarely if ever profound uniformity in a large group, the sort of uniformity presupposed by most collective and instantiated narration.

On the other hand, there are circumstances in real life where people feel that they are more attuned to other people’s thoughts and emotions, not entirely without reason. The most extreme case of this occurs when one has an attachment relation with someone, shares experiences with him or her, and has mirroring responses during a current experience. All this enables simulation. In contrast, one’s sense of unity with someone else is most thoroughly blocked by alienating, identity-group divisions (in effect, the opposite of attachment), with distinct or segregated experiences, and no opportunities for mirroring.

Born of the Sun takes up these conditions to explore the ways in which social groups are put in antagonistic relations and the ways in which individuals may begin to share a sense of unity and solidarity. For the most part, the novel is strictly focalized. Nonetheless, it develops a growing sense of black Namibians not merely deciding to join together for practical gains, but actually sharing feelings (and, to a lesser extent, thoughts), due precisely to mutual attachment, common experience, and mirroring. This in turn enables the localized use of collective internal focalization where the encompassing, nonpersonified narrator has
access to the mental states shared by two or more characters. The narrational development of this mutuality may help to create a feeling of sharing in the reader as well. The difficulty with this approach—or, from another point of view, a benefit—is that such sharing applies to only a small number of individuals at a time and cannot be extended to a national group.