

**THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE WORKS OF THREE
SOUTH AFRICAN NOVELISTS OF THE TRANSITION**

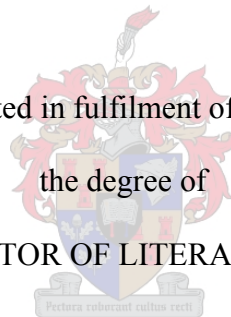
by

STEPHANE SERGE IBINGA

Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of

DOCTOR OF LITERATURE



in

English

at the

UNIVERSITY OF STELLENBOSCH

Promotor: Prof. Annie. H. Gagiano

December 2007

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

.....
Signature

.....
Date

ABSTRACT:

The dissertation focuses on literary representation of female characters in selected novels by three particular South African writers working within the transitional phase (from the formal ending of apartheid up to the present) of South African history. By means of textual analysis, the study investigates how the representation of numerous female characters in these texts reflects on and reflects the sector of South African society that forms the social setting of each text. This thesis explores the portrayal of female characters in selected fictional works by examining the ways in which the novelists Mandla Langa, Zakes Mda (both of them black and male writers) and Nadine Gordimer (a white and female novelist) characterise women in novels depicting this adapting society. In scrutinising these texts of the transition period, the thesis writer employs detailed individual delineation of female characters, to some extent by means of a comparative approach, with emphasis on parallels between as well as differences among the abovementioned authors' ways of describing South African women's circumstances and responses to their social predicaments.

In this study literary representations of women are examined in order to evaluate the effects of social and cultural transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. This is done by analysing these authors' portrayals of women's circumstances both in the private and public spheres. The thesis therefore contributes to the movement towards a greater recognition of women's crucial, catalytic function in the achievement of social development and delineates these authors' expressed awareness of many women's actual direct involvement in the struggle against all forms of discrimination in society.

This research project has been undertaken as an opportunity to investigate the different qualities and types of conduct attributed to female characters in ten selected novels of the transition, on the assumption that the texts reflect something of the way women are perceived and are playing new roles in a changing society. In studying how three significant ‘post-apartheid’ authors depict women affecting and affected by the social conditions of this period, the thesis traces the way the focus of more recent South African writing has shifted from an apartheid-era preoccupation with racial-political issues towards the depiction of private and public, rural and urban social and gender roles available to some contemporary South African women – and of those factors still constraining some other women. Taking in these authors’ portrayals of female political activism and leadership, the thesis also balances previous preoccupation (in South African English literature) with depictions of male political activity.

OPSOMMING:

Die proefskrif fokus op die literêre uitbeelding van vroue-karakters in uitgesoekte romans deur drie besondere Suid-Afrikaanse skrywers van die sogenaamde oorgangsfase (vanaf die formele beeindiging van apartheid tot die huidige periode) in die Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenis. Deur middel van tekstuele analise ondersoek hierdie studie hoe die uitbeelding van ‘n aantal vroulike karakters in hierdie tekste die partikuliere Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing wat die agtergrond van elke teks vorm, reflekteer en daaroor besin. Die tesis bestudeer die uitbeelding van vroue-karakters in geselekteerde fiksie-tekste deur die metodes waarmee die romanskrywers Mandla Langa en Zakes Mda (albei manlike en swart skrywers) en Nadine Gordimer (‘n wit, vroulike skrywer) vroue uitbeeld (in romans van die oorgangsfase), na te vors. Deur die bestudering van hierdie oorgangsfase se tekste gebruik die skrywer van die proefskrif gedetailleerde individuele karakter-beskrywings, tot ‘n mate deur die gebruik van ‘n vergelykende metode en met beklemtoning van parallelle sowel as verskille

tussen bogenoemde skrywers se maniere om Suid-Afrikaanse vroue se omstandighede en hul reaksies op hul sosiale probleme uit te beeld.

In hierdie studie word literêre uitbeeldings van vroue geeksamineer ten einde die gevolge van sosiale en kulturele veranderings in post-apartheid Suid-Afrika na te spoor. Dit word vermag deur middel van die analise van hierdie drie skrywers se voorstellings van vroue in beide die private en die openbare sfeer. Derhalwe dra die tesis by tot die beweging na groter erkenning van vroue se krities-belangrike, katalitiese funksie in die bereiking van sosiale ontwikkeling, en omlin dit die gekose skrywers se bewustheid van vroue se werklike, direkte betrokkenheid in die stryd teen alle vorms van diskriminasie in die samelewing.

Hierdie navorsingsprojek is onderneem as 'n geleentheid om ondersoek te doen na die verskillende tipes en voorbeelde van gedrag wat aan vroulike karakters toegeskryf word in tien uitgesoekte oorgangs-romans – berustend op die aanname dat hierdie tekste iets reflekteer van die maniere waarop vroue gesien word, asook hoe hulle nuwe rolle vervul, in 'n veranderende samelewing. Deur te bestudeer hoe drie belangwekkende 'post-apartheid' skrywers vroue beskryf wat geaffekteer word deur sosiale omstandighede (en dit ook op hul beurt affekteer), omlin die tesis hoe die fokuspunt in meer onlangse Suid-Afrikaanse skryfkuns verskuif het van die apartheids-era begaanheid met rassies-politiese sake na die private en openbare, plattelandse en stedelike sosiale en gender-rolle wat tans beskikbaar geword het vir Suid-Afrikaanse vroue – asook na die soort omstandighede wat nog steeds sommige vroue kortwiek. Deur aandag te gee aan hierdie skrywers se uitbeeldings van vroulike politieke aktivisme en leierskap balanseer die proefskrif ook die voormalige fokus (in die Engels-Suid-Afrikaanse letterkunde) op die uitbeelding van manlike politieke aktiwiteite.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this scientific achievement to my mother, **Agathe Koumba**, my father, **Vincent Ibinga** and grandmother, **Rosalie Koumba** because they taught me capital values: about hard work and the meaning of making one's parents proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I express my heartfelt gratitude to my promotor Prof A.-H. Gagiano for being not only my own role model regarding her diligence but also for being a sincere friend showing her sympathy and compassion whenever I needed her support.

I also would like to convey appreciative words towards Prof Frank Schulze-Engler for giving me the opportunity to work for the NELK Institute at the University of Frankfurt in 2006. My German experience has contributed a great deal to the achievement of this work.

I wish to thank the Government of Gabon for funding my entire education and especially this laudable undertaking. My debt of gratitude also goes to the DAAD (German Institution) for granting me a scholarship to do research at the University of Frankfurt for a period of six months.

Eventually, I would like thank the following people for their encouragements, generosity and affection:

Gaëlle Mve, Dr Karen Pawlish, Dr Sabrina Brancato, Achille-Mayel Bivigou, Isabel Haamel, Jeanne Ellis, Sarah Drici, Gilles Saphou-Bivigat, Sabine Paul, Julie Ntorintsiayi, Léandre Serge Soami, Habib Patrick Yoba Ngoma, Hugues-Steve Koumba Binza, Emmelie Arelette Legnouo, René Lakissi Mackosso, Jean Pierre Moudouma, Annie Mipimbou and Thierry Mouyouma.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: General Introduction	1-20
Chapter 2: Women and Political Activism	21-79
1. Mandla Langa	28
a) <i>A Rainbow on the Paper Sky</i> (1989)	28
b) <i>Tenderness of Blood</i> (1987)	48
c) <i>The Memory of Stones</i> (2000)	62
2. Zakes Mda	66
a) <i>The Madonna of Excelsior</i> (2002)	66
b) <i>Ways of Dying</i> (1995)	71
3. Nadine Gordimer	72
a) <i>None to Accompany Me</i> (1994)	72
b) <i>The Pick Up</i> (2001)	76
Chapter 3: Writing Women's Lives in the Public Sphere	80-138
1. Nadine Gordimer	84
a) <i>None to Accompany Me</i> (1994)	84
b) <i>The House Gun</i> (1998)	90
c) <i>The Pick Up</i> (2001)	92
2. Zakes Mda	96
a) <i>The Heart of Redness</i> (2000)	96
b) <i>Ways of Dying</i> (1995)	104
c) <i>She Plays with the Darkness</i> (1995)	106
d) <i>The Madonna of Excelsior</i> (2002)	109

3. Mandla Langa	115
a) <i>A Rainbow on the Paper Sky</i> (1989)	115
b) <i>The Memory of Stones</i> (2000)	126
Chapter 4: The portrayal of Rural and Urban Women in their Private Lives	139-248
<u>A. The Private Realm of Rural Female Characters</u>	141
1. Reading Zakes Mda's Texts	141
a) <i>Ways of Dying</i> (1995)	141
b) <i>The Madonna of Excelsior</i> (2002)	151
c) <i>She Plays with the Darkness</i> (1995)	164
d) <i>The Heart of Redness</i> (2000)	173
2. Exploring the Private Realm of Rural Women in Gordimer's Narratives	186
a) <i>The Pick Up</i> (2001)	186
<u>B. The Private Realm of Urban Female Characters</u>	193
1. Nadine Gordimer	196
a) <i>None to Accompany Me</i> (1994)	198
b) <i>The House Gun</i> (1998)	216
c) <i>The Pick Up</i> (2001)	226
2. Zakes Mda	229
a) <i>She Plays with the Darkness</i> (1995)	229
3. Mandla Langa	236
a) <i>Tenderness of Blood</i> (1987)	236
Chapter 5: Conclusion	249-259
Bibliography	260-281

Chapter 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The shift from apartheid to democracy in South Africa has created a new socio-political environment within which citizens are aspiring to the establishment of new ways of living and thinking. South Africa's young democracy exhibits the signs of a society concerned with relinquishing old habits in order to face the challenges of modernity. In fact, the recently democratized society seeks to reinvent itself in distinction from the past dispensation by promoting national identity formation. In the introduction to *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995* (1998), Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly observe that South Africans are to a greater extent "reject[ing] not only the determinisms of apartheid, but also the determinisms of those systems which, in addition to racism, were implicated in and supported the ideological machinery of apartheid: patriarchy, sexism, homophobia, class and language bias, ethnic nationalism, and so on" (Attridge and Jolly 1998: 2). These two commentators on South African cultural production add that they "regard the cultural history of South Africa in the transition from apartheid to democracy as richly exemplary of the intricate relations among aesthetics, ethics, and politics" (Attridge and Jolly 1998: 1-2).

Similarly, in "Endings and new beginnings: South African fiction in transition" Elleke Boehmer, identifies two dominant approaches in post-1994 literary production. On the one hand, she notices the presence of striking features of apartheid writing and on the other hand, the emergence of novel ways of writing exemplifying the liberation from the ideological determinism of the past dispensation. Boehmer makes the following comment:

Some writers will continue to respond to the demands of realism, seeking to give a full and faithful account, as they have long done. Others may take the parabolic loop away from historical testimony already forged by J. M. Coetzee in order to make sense of a changed polity. But whatever route

writers follow, it would be encouraging to see in South African fiction the return of endings that allow for new beginnings, for gestative misery, the moments and movements following apocalypse, also the dramatization of kinds of generation and continuity. (Boehmer in Attridge and Jolly 1998: 51)

According to this South African critic, post-apartheid writers should show interest in describing the impact of “gestative misery” on the new society. In other words, Boehmer suggests that whatever orientations post-apartheid writers may take it is advisable that their writings capture apocalyptic moments prior to the establishment of new social order in order to distinguish the intricacies of modernity without losing sight of the extent to which the previous dispensation still exerts its influence.

I situate my study within this specific timeframe where the need for change is confronted with the persistent effects of the old lifestyle. The present study uses textual analysis by focusing on literary representation of female characters in selected novels by three particular South African writers working within this transitional phase of South African history.

The term “transition” in this dissertation refers to the transitional phase of South African literature indicated by Boehmer. The study’s allusion to the transition in South African literature is not necessarily synonymous with the political (so-called) transitional period, but refers rather to the transitional stage of South African literature. Boehmer analyses the new features of post-apartheid literature and argues that “South African fiction is [indeed] in transition” (Boehmer in Attridge and Jolly 1998: 43). In fact, according to Boehmer, despite socio-political transformation the effects of apartheid have not totally disappeared from South African fiction. This point is valid – hence, when I refer to post-apartheid writing in its transitional phase, I try to delineate the dynamic of transformative influences and new social forms registered in the selected literary texts as moving from the dominant forms of writing of the apartheid era to tentative ways of exploring contemporary social realities.

The distinction between *literature of transition* and *literature in transition* is more than a mere quibble, since the second expression more clearly locates the dynamic aspect of change registered in the focus of the writing. The second formulation seems to be more appropriate for an adequate description of the characteristics of post-struggle literature. The first phrase tends to confine itself to a fixed or static timeframe, while literature in transition highlights examples of dynamic transformation. Although the political transition period starts with the unbanning of the ANC and the establishment of a government of national unity in the early 1990s, I have in this study included Langa's early novels, published in the late 1980s, as texts representing a remarkable political phase of South African history described by Nadine Gordimer as the 'interregnum' - that is to say, a period of time between the end of rule by the apartheid government and the beginning of rule by the next, multiracial government. Langa's early texts are analysed in the dissertation because their orientation is towards the future. But most importantly, Langa's narratives help one to grasp the changing trends in resistance writing through novel aesthetic dimensions of his representations of public life and his novelistic interest in delineating individual experiences of female characters in the context of a patriarchal and racist society. Hence, this dissertation considers Langa's works published during the interregnum as appropriate material in an analysis of the kind undertaken in this dissertation, because the author's narratives transcend the period when the texts were published in setting out plots revealing and anticipating different aspects of the social transformation which it envisages for the post-struggle environment.

The author's early texts remarkably represent accounts of women's individual and public forms of involvement in the dismantling of the apartheid system and serve as a noble tribute paid to women's resilience in the long battle against sexism and racism. Langa's two earlier books were published in the late 1980s; the third novel of his under scrutiny here was produced after 1994 and is representative of the social and cultural transformations of that time as well as of the refusal of a section of people to accommodate change –

those who still perpetuate traditional archetypes and social stereotypes. This opposition between ideas and attitudes of those committed to change and those who desire the perpetuation of old habits characterises the period of transition.

The novels of the three writers analysed here are described as works of transition partly because they were published during the time of political and social reformation, but more importantly, because they exemplify the shift from domination of the national imaginary by racial ideology to the implementation of democratic values. The shift away from the ideological determinisms of the past entails the redefinition of other socially influential concepts such as notions of gender in general and images of women in particular. These particular narratives attempt to illustrate aspects of the transition by providing different images of women reflecting both social transformation and a novel form of writing appropriate to a post-apartheid literature.

The aesthetic dimension of the representation of women is a key feature of the definition of transition in this dissertation. Although the timeframe is important in the definition of this term, the thesis mainly seeks to analyse images of women in order to assess the degree of change occurring in the society by investigating how the portrayal of female characters can reflect the persistence and/or transformation of cultural mindsets and stereotypes.

I am interested in analysing how the representation of numerous female characters in these texts reflects on the sector of South African society that forms the social setting of each text. This dissertation explores the portrayal of female characters in selected fictional works by examining the way the novelists Mandla Langa, Zakes Mda (both of them black and male writers) and Nadine Gordimer (a white and female novelist) characterize women in novels depicting this adapting society.

The field has been narrowed to three authors in this dissertation in order to avoid vagueness or superficiality. It was necessary to choose South African authors who had published a significant body of work during the period of

social and political transition so that adaptations in the portrayal of women could be traced within a manageable number of texts from each author's oeuvre. Hence the decision to analyze ten novels as primary texts, considering issues around the depiction of women in each writer's texts. The analysis of the depiction of women in the thesis needed to be fairly inclusive in terms of authors' gender and race. Although I do not use as primary texts works by black female and white male writers, I bring into the debate relevant texts by both black female and white male authors. The wide range of portrayals of women in the chosen narratives is another reason for the choice of these particular authors' works. Moreover, with a view to making a balance between the gender and race of authors and characters, and the number of texts under scrutiny, this selection seems to be the most satisfactory. The chosen texts are: *The Memory of Stones* (2000); *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989); *Tenderness of Blood* (1987) – all by Mandla Langa; *Ways of Dying* (1995); *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995); *The Heart of Redness* (2000); *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) - by Zakes Mda and *None to Accompany Me* (1994), *The House Gun* (1998) and *The Pick Up* (2001) by Nadine Gordimer. Other recent South African novels - by Zoë Wicomb, Sindiwe Magona, J. M. Coetzee, Lauretta Ngcobo and Njabulo Ndebele - are briefly referred to in the course of the study.

The reason for choosing such a topic is twofold. Firstly, as a male critic my aim is to embark on what is commonly perceived as an exclusively 'female' field of study in order to show that women's social issues should not be the preserve of female critics and writers only. It is my conviction that male writers and critics should play their part in changing the perception of women in society along with women, since men are very often staunch advocates of patriarchy. By undertaking this study I seek to introduce a male perspective in studying the literary representation of female characters in South African fiction of the transition.

Secondly, literary criticism focused on the representation of women in South African texts used to be subject to the political pressures of the

apartheid era. Even though those pressures have slackened somewhat, much (perhaps most) criticism of post-1994 South African writing remains preoccupied with its racial dimensions, whether in terms of “identity” or “hybridity” (compare essays by Hlongwane; Sarinjeive; Sastry – all 2002). One can in consequence identify a lack or gap in the critical study of recent South African English fiction which this thesis seeks to contribute to filling by its focus both on the female characters in a range of novels, *and* on the way these characters’ activities, ideas and conduct testify to the kind of social and private roles the novelists see as available (or unavailable) to women in this young democracy. I undertake this investigation to ascertain whether post-apartheid literary production delineates “new women” for the new South African society. Another concern is to analyse the differences between fiction and reality by interrogating whether (as compared to actual social circumstances) literature provides convincing or idealised images of women.

In the context of the current intense debate about human rights and principles of freedom in a newly democratized South Africa, the redefinition of gender relations cannot be put aside. A critical analysis of the portrayal of female characters in noteworthy novels is needed in so far as it can highlight significant ways in which women are seen in this transforming society. This dissertation can contribute meaningfully to a critique of the depiction of women in post-apartheid South Africa and highlight the social need for greater awareness of the effects of depictions of women on social conduct and within the larger social dispensation. Consequently, as an academic contribution, it can assist in addressing and assessing behaviour towards women, and conceptions of their individual and social worth, in a society where appalling violence and discrimination against women are unfortunately still prevalent. As a point of departure in my analysis I use Ruth Robbins’s philosophical perspective. Criticising social (mis)conceptions of women, Robbins in *Literary Feminisms* (2000) proposes that artistic portrayal of women can effectively contribute to cultural change with regard to the assertion of women’s social worth:

And if literature is one of the privileged sites of representation, if the images presented in literary and artistic texts are powerful because of the power accorded to literature, images of women are the obvious starting point to begin a critique of the place of women in society at large. Representation is not the same thing as reality, which is, of course, part of the problem. It might also be seen, however, as part of the solution. The analysis of literary representations of women and their differences from real women's lives might well be a fruitful place to begin a politicised analysis of that reality, through the means of representation. Furthermore, representation might not be the same thing as reality, but it is a part of reality. The images we see or read about are part of the context in which we live. If we can read these images differently, against the grain, as it were, we can go some way to altering our perceptions of reality, we can see a need for changes: and when we have seen the need, perhaps we can bring it about. (Robbins 2000: 51)

By suggesting that the demarcation of literary representation of female characters from real women is “a fruitful place to begin political analysis of that reality” Robbins wants to give recognition to the political role art can play in society by inspiring the idea of change in people's attitudes. According to Robbins the depiction of women can be the starting point to evaluate the need for social and cultural transformation. In the texts under scrutiny a wide range of female characters with extraordinary functions and roles pose an array of questions regarding the ranges of images women can also reflect in real life. For instance, Mda's novels, which are characterised by the magical realist mode of writing, evince differences between real and fictionalised women, since Mda's narratives often take the perspective of a fairy tale to convey a moral lesson. However, Langa and Gordimer depict female characters with attributes of real women in society. Some of the texts under scrutiny idealise female characters while others are more realistically oriented towards the delineation of the constraints affecting the lives of actual women.

In fact, the thesis locates itself within the framework of literary criticism analysing “images of women” in fiction by looking at the different ways in which art impacts on the perception of women in both imaginatively and

evoked actual lives. Negative depictions of women can be seen to contribute to the persistence of damaging cultural stereotypes of women in the social world, which, in turn, implicitly but detrimentally influence women's circumstances. While this approach is not itself groundbreaking, its application to the delimited field of study (texts produced during a period of profound political and social restructuring) renders it most significant and illuminating. Not least, the study is able to evaluate the extent to which the shift from racial disenfranchisement (with its gendered effects and implications) towards democracy has resulted in new conceptions of gender in general and of women in particular.

Three main literary aspects of the primary texts are considered in the analysis contained in this thesis: characterisation, setting and discourse. In considerations of characterisation, the social roles assigned to female characters in the selected novels are analysed. However, the distinction between 'roles' and individual female characters is made for a more articulate explanation of the literary approach I adopt here. The reference in the thesis to women's social roles entails the interpretation of female South Africans' social status or their participation in the decision-making process concerning various problems affecting their communities. Depictions of individual characters are analyzed in terms of aspects of personality or mindset as portrayed in the chosen texts, including characters' reflections on and responses to the roles assigned to or devised by them as well as the positions they have achieved, or are denied. The study of female characterisation in these novels of the transition investigates how the three novelists represent both central and marginal characters with regard to the notion of change in this transitional phase of South African society.

The chosen novelists depict two main types of female characters. On the one hand, they represent central characters who are shown to evolve in terms of their thinking and social roles as the novel proceeds. The idea of change illustrates the maturing process undergone by such characters and importantly reflects women's determination to be engines of social and cultural

transformation in an environment concerned with relinquishing old habits. On the other hand, the narratives under scrutiny represent a type of female figure traditionally called peripheral or flat (characters) because they do not change. They represent a single characteristic that the novelists need for the complete social picture being created. Flat characters in the present dissertation are studied to highlight the persistence of old habits and of some people's resistance to change, although the whole country has embarked on a process of social and political restructuring. Noria in *Ways of Dying* by Zakes Mda, Khetiwe in Langa's *A Rainbow on a Paper Sky* and Julie in Gordimer's *The Pick Up* illustrate the dynamic process of change occurring within central characters, while peripheral characters such as Topololo in Mda's *She Plays with the Darkness* or Aunt Margret in Langa's *A Rainbow on a Paper Sky* are shown with unchanging characteristics from the beginning to the end of the narrative.

The analysis of characterisation allows the distinction between physical and moral representation of female characters. Physical delineation of female characters sometimes tends to convey images of women reflecting male stereotypes, especially in situations where the woman's body becomes the central interest of the representer, neglecting other aspects of women's lives. The psychological description of female characters, on the other hand, reveals the depicted woman's mindset (her perception of society as well as of her own position with regard to social and cultural values), determining the degree of such a woman's commitment to social change.

Settings are examined in order to ascertain to what extent the context in which female protagonists perform is shown, by the novelists, to influence their actions and their choices. In order to establish a range of reference, the novelists' depictions of both rural and urban women are studied - in both domestic and public contexts. Consideration is given to issues of 'time-frame', i.e. whether the author describes contemporary or past conditions and from what perspective in time the narrative functions. The analysis of settings helps

one to read images of women emanating from landscapes and social or cultural spaces around which the selected narratives are woven.

Thus the interpretation (in this dissertation) of novelistic depictions of women's lives shows to what extent images of female characters can reflect certain cultural norms and values. In other words, through the analysis of such images cultural archetypes and stereotypes are uncovered. The analysis of authors' portrayals of women in the rural and urban spheres shows that women's lives in the two settings are subjected to different cultural values and different social pressures. Mda, Langa and Gordimer depict a wide range of rural women, implicitly denouncing patriarchal attitudes that govern life in rural areas. At the same time they show how cultural reformation happens more slowly in rural settings than in urban areas. Contrastingly, the three authors represent urban women in a position of active change even though change is sometimes synonymous with the disintegration of cultural and spiritual values.

The interpretation of how settings are presented in the dissertation helps to establish distinctions between women depicted in terms of their living environments and those shown in social activities. In fact, the evocations of women's domestic activities in the examined texts differ from the representations of women in the public sector.

As my focus is the representation of women in these particular novels, the use of the term representation requires the exploration of its multi-layered functions and various implications. Representation can be synonymous with depiction, portrayal and image, or simply indicates a picture or painting. It can also indicate (according to Harrap's 21st Century Dictionary) "the act or process of representing, or the state or fact of being represented". In other contexts, it can imply *speaking for*. In fact, the term *representation* can be "problematic" as Edward Said indicates. Said considers the notion of representation as "itself problematic because it is embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institution and political ambience of the representer" (Said 1978: 272). Said's point seems to be that the cultural and

political environment of the artist can influence her or his way of representing social realities. In other words, the position of the representer is crucial in order to determine the function of represented images. Thus, depictions of women by male writers (Mda and Langa) sometimes disclose predictable trends in or aspects of male authors' representation of women. Although the two male writers present largely positive depictions of women, the thesis notes the occasional presence of male stereotypes and writers' limits in aspiring to render adequate representations of women. The works by the three novelists of the transition whose texts are used as the basis of the argument highlight the shift from ideological determinism of the past towards the adaptation of novel ways of representing women in the post-apartheid context.

The interpretation of novelistic discourse that forms part of the thesis more fully discloses each author's mode of recognising as well as depicting female characters' insights and their ways of coping with or changing their circumstances. By means of analysis of discourse the thesis explains how linguistic elements can be used as oppressive codes against women. Discussion of discourse in the thesis helps to interpret or bridge the binary between voice and silence by placing readings of silence in dialogue with readings of voice. Both silence and voice are explored here in order to grasp their different connotations. Through the interpretation of silence and voice, oppressive codes are read between the lines, and women's resistance to various forms of oppression is discerned. Discourse analysis is used to comment on factual vs. fictional aspects of the narratives under scrutiny. Since art can translate social, personal and ideological values, the examination of stylistic elements is important to assess to what extent language used in the texts depicts reality or creates fiction. Discourse, explains Rob Pope, "tends to cut across conventional fact/fiction distinction, encouraging us to treat all texts as in some sense fictional... and all hi/stories as potentially related" (Pope 1998: 189). In using the term "factional" Pope refers to the intertwinement of realism and fiction. He suggests that history is story and story history by demonstrating that narratives can be both factual and

fictional. In addition to the above mentioned recognition of the relation between fiction and fact I make use of Maria Pia Lara's consideration of the possible feminist influence of narrative presented (as novels) in the public sphere, a perspective which Pia Lara links with Hannah Arendt's delineation of the role of narrative in assisting public adjustment to freer futures. Pia Lara writes that Arendt "connected her conception of narratives as the sources of a reflexive judgement capable of envisioning utopian futures" (Pia Lara 1998: 11). Pia Lara writes

To the extent that the narratives of art have an effect, they bring something new into the world. In my opinion, it is here, in narratives as actions, that every myth can be challenged. As Arendt argues, no story belongs to one person in particular; every one of them is rewoven into new stories that bring to life a variety of different meanings and experiences and thereby provide new possibilities for action...The appropriation of stories has been an empowering technique aimed at the recovery of 'women' and their intentional capacities. (Pia Lara 1998: 16-17)

Pia Lara also enlarges the focus on novels per se by seeing them as stories. She writes:

Stories have been, for more than a century, inventing a variety of new profiles for women. Self-identification is not a simple lineal task but a great and complex process that relates two different fields. The freedom of imagination allows one to grasp the levels of experience in the institutional frame of language, and these fragments are then projected into a moral sphere, where new and more effective processes of learning and judging emerge. In this framework, reflexivity becomes a principal feature of the contemporary subject. One process of reflexivity starts when an author is creating an exploratory moral quest for identity through the written word. The second level is related to that of the readers in the 'act of reading', which is itself a highly reflexive moral search. (Pia Lara 1998: 16)

The discussion of the politics of representation in the dissertation shows that representations can disclose ideological perspectives. By choosing the method of textual analysis of women's portrayal, the thesis aims to consider ideological implications of the type of literary representations of female characters in the new South African society. Discourse analysis is used to

show how literary representation of female characters uses impressions or knowledge of actual women's circumstances to construct fictional stories. Zakes Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* is one of the studied texts which fictionalises history by portraying Excelsior women who were involved in a sex scandal during the previous dispensation. In fact, *The Madonna of Excelsior* is an account inspired by recorded events in an actual South African town, during an actual period in South African history. Mda demonstrates how fiction and facts can be interwoven in literary narratives. Discourse analysis helps to determine whether portrayals of women in these novels of the transition negotiate a space accessible to actual women. Pia Lara's perspective is useful to the discussion as she demonstrates "how the aesthetic and moral interweaving of women's discourse establishes a new viewpoint that profoundly reorders social values and needs" (Pia Lara 1998: 1).

The scrutiny of these texts of the transition period is effected by means of a comparative approach, with emphasis on parallels as well as contradictions in the authors' ways of describing women's circumstances and responses to their social predicaments and opportunities. The analysis is not undertaken in chronological order in terms of publication dates of these particular novels, because the degree to which history is fictionalised is determined by the orientation of the narratives towards either or both the past and present dispensations.

Therefore I examine each of the selected texts with a view to achieving a smooth development in the discussion according to the chosen process of argumentation. In addition my method allows for some comparisons to be made between female characters in the same narratives or between women protagonists from different texts by the same author, or occurring in works by two or three different writers (whether male or female). This perspective seeks to capture adequately past and present realities (to some extent, even future possibilities) as reflected in literature to evince the effects of transition. In fact, a textually chronological study appears contradictory to the design of the dissertation, because the thesis also illustrates the presence of the vestiges of

the past in the novel as a striking feature of South African literature of the transition.

My textual analysis allows the division of the dissertation into three main chapters, examining fictional representations of women's political activism regarding the struggle for social change in South Africa as well as the depiction of women in both the public and domestic spheres. I have adopted this structure to sustain my argument concerning the transition from the idea of the struggle against apartheid to the new artistic interest in investigating the ordinary lives of women in the new society.

I explore the different ways in which Gordimer, Langa and Mda depict female characters' insights and experiences as contributions to the public debate regarding the necessary promotion of cultural transformation of a liberatory kind. The analysis of women's political activism in the dissertation highlights the social and political mission of critical fiction. All of the selected works of the transition explicitly or by implication describe the late apartheid and post-apartheid context with its new political challenges. I examine the fictional representation of women's political activities in the chosen texts as evidence of the authors' commitment to the ongoing struggle to attain and comprehend a locally suitable modernity. My critical perspective accords with Cherry Clayton's recognition of the importance of addressing the struggle to assert specific individual rights in the post-apartheid environment. In *Women and Writing in South Africa: A Critical Anthology* (1989) Clayton argues that (despite the end of apartheid):

There is no post-feminism in the sense of moving beyond struggle, but the liberation the individual finds in the acceptance of personal responsibility, for which I've been using the model of liberated daughterhood, is the only guarantee we have that our post-colonial or post-apartheid worlds will be an improvement on the old world of dominance and slavery. (Clayton 1989: 143)

According to Clayton, then, although South Africa has achieved national liberation from the apartheid system, the post-struggle context needs to ensure

that respect for individual rights and freedoms becomes embedded in this society. In this part, I bring into the discussion narratives which give accounts of women's involvement in the liberation struggle as well as illustrating their political commitment to social transformation during and after apartheid. I will use an approach similar to that of Cherry Clayton, who investigates prison narratives by South African women in her paper "Post-colonial, Post-apartheid, Post-feminist: Family and State in Prison Narratives by South African Women". Clayton attempts to establish whether the prefix 'post' (of the three compound words) means "a movement beyond the struggle of the past" (Clayton 1990: 136). In the conclusion of her article, she maintains that "Our surest path into a shared trans-national human condition lies in the defense of specific rights, and specific freedoms" (Clayton 1990: 143). My own reading of the selected texts hence concentrates on such "specific rights and specific freedoms", focusing on the struggle to attain them and the forms of lingering resistance to their attainment.

The discussion in the thesis starts by examining depictions of women's political activism and the chapter works through the trope of memory in order to draw attention to the present. The chapter signals the deployment of a post-colonial theoretical framework by suggesting, after scholars such as Elleke Boehmer and Trinh Minh-ha, that the struggle against gender discrimination, and the domination of women in particular, coincides to some extent with but is also distinct from (and not to be simply conflated with) the desire for liberation against class and race discrimination within a post-colonial context. The chapter explores the representation of women in struggle and shows how these three writers of the transition shift their narrative lenses from women as victims of oppression to women as actors in history. The delineation of women as subjects of history is examined to assess women's potential for contributing to, and actual achievement in, the struggle for national liberation.

Langa's early texts, those published before the transitional period, are included in the discussion because they give accounts of female characters' active roles in the national liberation struggle. However, the most intriguing

aspect of Langa's description of women's political activism in his early novels is the author's insistence on demonstrating the links as well as tensions between the national liberation project and the quest for the liberation of women. Starting from this point highlights the shift from the 'spectacular' form of writing to the "the rediscovery of the ordinary", suggested by Njabulo Ndebele as a novel way of representing social realities of a time when South Africans were still struggling towards the attainment of democracy. In other words, since we are still in the transitional period, old forms of writing public life still persist and need to be juxtaposed with alternative, enlightening visions.

Although examinations (in turn) of women's political activism and women's participation in the public sphere may at first sight appear to be a repetition, I have chosen to distinguish these two sections of the thesis, for the following reasons. By starting from women's political activism I want to pinpoint women's involvement in the national liberation process and the struggle for social transformation. Then I develop the point that women's political commitment has resulted in some women's attainment of social recognition in the public sector as exemplified by their professional/career and educational advancement, sense of social responsibility and their participation in the national decision-making process.

Women's public lives highlight the social transformation taking place in the public arena in the New South Africa as hopeful signs of the beginning of women's liberation from political and patriarchal oppression in some sectors of society. This chapter shows how Mda, Gordimer and Langa set out to interrogate patriarchal authority to undermine it through the technique of representing a reversal of public roles across genders. This the authors do by constructing powerful female subjects and inserting them in roles which have hitherto been the domain of men. I develop the argument that the new democratic dispensation creates spaces within which women's social mobility is enhanced and their emergence as full citizens of the South African democracy is becoming increasingly visible. To the extent that the novels

under scrutiny describe the structural transformation of the public sphere, I conceive my theoretical analysis by focusing on Pia Lara's position concerning women's presence in the public arena. Pia Lara points out that the position of women in the public sphere is affected by the

Creative process of the initial construction of the literary narrative which is followed by a return to the experiential dimension of the readers, where narratives gain influence and transform previous ways of seeing things, a process that can occur both contemporaneously, and also decades or centuries later. (Pia Lara 1998: 19)

Pia Lara also suggests that institutional transformation can stimulate women's self-realisation and self-determination in the public sector. Therefore, creating new narratives in the public sphere can bring in new ways of interpreting the public image of women. I examine the role narratives can play in the public sphere by taking as point of departure my selection of novels of the transition in order to analyse the portrayal of the new kinds of available female public images reflecting social and political transformation.

The next chapter, dealing with the evocation of the private lives of female protagonists in the texts I have chosen, is divided into two sections. The first section studies the portrayal of women's domestic lives in rural settings and the second explores the domestic lives of urban women. The chapter accepts the recommendations concerning South African writing suggested by Ndebele recommending the "rediscovery of the ordinary" as applicable to both apartheid-era and post-apartheid writing and particularly suitable to the focus (on the depiction of women) of this dissertation. Ndebele's recommendation that the private realm of individuals should be brought into fuller focus in such South African writing is not at odds with Pia Lara's viewpoint, since depictions of (especially of women's) private, personal or domestic spheres is appropriately made a matter of public concern in such texts as are considered here.

The emphasis in this chapter is on how the writers dramatize and explicate the more personal and intimate lives of female characters in their social

setting. I try to argue that the novels of the transition show an obvious deviation from sentimental and idealised notions of traditional culture to deliberate devalorization of African tradition in order to expose its affinity to patriarchal authority and to remove the lid on sex and sexual practices and mores in local societies. It is in the violation of boundaries between the rural and the urban and in the trafficking of ideas between the two social zones that the radical challenge to and re-drafting of patriarchal values in the rural setting can be set in motion. Similarly, novelists' imaginative investigations of the lives of women in their private spaces are illustrated in, for example, Nadine Gordimer's novels of transition – texts which strive to celebrate the civil imaginary born of a new dispensation. Silence on intimate issues of sex and sexuality, sexual violence and failure to address the general violation of women's rights - problems that are often concealed in the exclusionary striking narratives of liberation - are now challenged by their forceful articulation in texts of this kind. I suggest that the new social imaginary intersects with the liberties associated with the urban space to encourage challengingly different forms of behaviour among women and a general transgression of patriarchal norms, leading to a new breed of independent and powerful female figures who strongly articulate their own views. Such new social forms are both reflected in and promoted by texts of the type that I examine here.

Throughout the thesis, I bring certain considerations (outlined below) to bear on the texts examined. I examine the power of art in influencing perceptions of women in both fiction and reality. I analyse problematic questions concerning the literary representation of women by bearing in mind Ruth Robbins's criticism of negative depictions of women in imaginative works and in reality as contributing to the perpetuation of widespread, damaging cultural stereotyping of women. Although fictional representation of women is not always homogenous in different literary texts, Robbins recognizes that they "all share a commitment to pursuing the image as a way of analyzing the ideological force of literature, and as a method for pursuing

political analyses in the worlds beyond the text” (Robbins 2000: 57). According to this theorist, the depiction of women in literary texts can highlight “a thoroughgoing politicized discussion of the place of women in society and culture” (Robbins 2000: 57). Therefore, Robbins adds, the critical analysis of the portrayal of female characters

Can be a fruitful exercise, depending on how it is done. Useful examples for feminist literary theory can be found in the fields of feminist art history and feminist cultural history, both of which are very much concerned with images of women, but which are also significantly focused on placing images in contexts, and on historicizing representation. In their insistence that images of women are not autonomous, art and cultural historians have traced developments in ideas about representation. They show that ideal images of femininity have a history that maps onto cultural changes through time; the ideal is not then a fixed entity, timeless and immutable, but something that has changed through differing social and historical circumstances, and something, therefore, that can change again: perhaps this time through the agency of female subjects reclaiming their images for themselves. (Robbins 2000: 65-66)

The analysis of fictional representations of women in this dissertation contributes to the assessment of the changing place of women in this transforming society and to the recognition of the need for further and fuller empowerment of women, especially by transforming images in whose inevitably idealising representations of women there is the potential for achieving larger liberatory space for actual women.

The thesis sets out to delineate the kind, and the quality, of lifestyles and social roles available to South African women as portrayed in these three authors’ recent texts. The thesis seeks furthermore to establish how these writers variously give or deny ‘voice’ to female characters, asking to what extent the authors are suggesting that the society limits or allows women’s self-expression and the fulfilment of their potential as public role-players and privately valued partners or parents. This study considers the factors to which women’s past or contemporary social position is ascribed in these texts by

using the philosophical approach of Maria Pia Lara in her description of the public nature of literature and its socio-political role. In her *Moral Textures: Feminist Narrative in the Public Sphere*, Pia Lara demonstrates that “emancipatory narratives can themselves create new forms of power, configuring new ways to fight back against past and present injustices, thus making institutional transformations possible.” This is the power of what is in Lara’s text termed “illocutionary force”¹ (Pia Lara 1998: 5). Pia Lara’s work helps me examine the political and philosophical dimension of literature recognisable in these three selected authors’ depictions of women in the public sphere.

¹ Lara acknowledges that she derives the expression “illocutionary force” from Jürgen Habermas, but makes clear that she adapts it for her own purpose (Pia Lara 1998: 5).

Chapter 2: WOMEN AND POLITICAL ACTIVISM

This chapter aims at examining different kinds of literary representation of women's political activism in the struggle for social change as articulated in the texts chosen for discussion. The analysis is introduced with reference to a range of theoretical perspectives pertaining to feminism and post-colonialism in order to make a pertinent textual analysis of women's political activism (as depicted in these selected novels of the transition), since the contextualisation of each narrative demonstrates particular adaptations to relevant theories or theorists' perspectives.

In fact, the study of women's political activism will cover female characters' attitudes towards and actions against oppressive institutions based on gender, class, age, religious, or racial discrimination. The use of the feminist and post-colonial theoretical framework in this section is central in order to analyse representations of women's resistance against unfair rules and practices through their political actions. The literary analysis of female characters' opposition to patriarchy, class and/or racial discrimination will highlight their determination to bring about social and cultural transformation.

In *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action* (1992) Sheila Rowbotham defines feminism as a movement which is not only concerned with women's rights, but also includes resistance against oppressive culture in terms of class, race and/or sexual orientation. Rowbotham argues that feminist politics can be divided into three main types of feminism according to the purpose of each branch. She identifies radical feminism (advocating female power to counter masculine power domination), liberal feminism

(seeking fair social opportunities between men and women) and socialist feminism (proposing egalitarian principles on class and racial basis).

Rowbotham infers that:

Feminism is sometimes confined to women's struggles against oppressive gender relationships. In fact, however, women's actions, both now and in the past, often have been against interconnecting relations of inequality and have involved many aspects of resistance around daily life and culture that are not simply about gender. (Rowbotham 1992: 6)

This section of the thesis will not only focus on novelistic representations of women's commitment to changing power relation across gender but it will also illustrate women's political and humanist vision for social transformation, as female characters play active roles opposing any type of social discrimination ranging from the private to the public sphere.

Among the feminist writings providing insightful theoretical contributions to the analysis of depictions of women's political actions in this dissertation is Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and Politics of Empowerment* (1990). In her text, Collins conceptualises two interdependent dimensions of black women's activism, the first aspect being related to "group survival" and the second to "institutional transformation". This African-American feminist explicitly delineates her perspective concerning black women's activism in the following passage:

The Black women's activist tradition of the individual and group actions designed to bring about social change has occurred along two primary dimensions. The struggle for group survival is the first dimension. Consisting of actions taken to create Black female spheres of influence within existing structures of oppression, this dimension does not directly challenge oppressive structures because, in many cases, direct confrontation is neither preferred nor possible. Instead, women engaged in creating Black female spheres of influence indirectly resist oppressive structures by undermining them... The second dimension of Black women's activism consists of the struggle for institutional transformation – namely, those efforts to change existing structures of oppression. All

individual and group actions that directly challenge the legal and customary rules governing African- American women's subordination can be seen as part of the struggle for institutions. (Collins 1990: 141-142)

Collins's standpoint about the perceived interconnections between gender and racial issues being part of African-American women's political agenda can also be applied to the African context. In fact, African women's political action does include their resistance against imperialism, class, and gender oppression.

In *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (2005) Elleke Boehmer uses a similar critical perspective in looking at female characters' political resistance in African narratives. Boehmer places her study of the interrelationship of gender struggles and nationalism "within the ambit of postcolonial critique" because, she explains, "political actions of the colonised involved in changing the conditions of their lives [are linked to] the legacies both of women's resistance and nationalist struggles for self-determination" (Boehmer 2005: 7).

In *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (1989), Trinh T. Minh-ha shows that ethnicity and womanhood represent the duality of the Third World woman's identity because of her double oppression related to her race and her gender. Concerning the Third World woman's identity Trinh T. Minh-ha writes that "the personal – the ethnic me, the female me – is political. Difference does not annul identity. It is beyond and alongside identity" (Minh-ha 1989: 104). Minh-ha attaches women's emancipation to the liberation of the post-colonial world, since she explains that "the work of decolonisation will have to continue within the women's movements" (Minh-ha 1989: 104). Furthermore, she suggests that black women's adhesion to the feminist movement should be particularly valued because "today it is more convincing to reject feminism as a whitewashed notion and a betrayal of root values, or vice versa, to consider the promotion of ethnic identity treacherous to that of female identity or feminism" (Minh-

ha 1989: 106).

In “Southern African Women’s Autobiography and Self-recreation” Mary E. Modupe Kolawole gives particular recognition to Ellen Kuzwayo’s autobiography, *Call Me Woman* (1985), by stressing the double mission of the South African woman’s struggle. Kolawole analyses women’s political engagement depicted in Kuzwayo’s text and observes that the writer “problematizes the dual political and social standards of her time in her experience in her home in Soweto” (Kolawole 1998: 217). According to Kolawole, Kuzwayo’s commitment to the political cause can be justified by her personal experience of and exposure to forms of social and political discrimination. The Nigerian critic illustrates her statement in the following lines:

In dealing with unemployment, poverty, Bantu education and girls’ educationally underprivileged position, gender disparities in job opportunities, crime and institutionalised violence, we see the impression from her personal involvement with youths and later with political organisations. Her community service and her political engagement are inseparable as we see in her activities and activism as an employee of Non-European Affairs Department (NEAD) in Johannesburg where she tried to launch an office for access to employment for young people from their youth clubs. (Kolawole 1998: 220)

In other words, the struggles for black people’s liberation and women’s rights are intertwined in women’s political conduct because the political environment they live in denies them fundamental human rights. Kuzwayo’s text represents women’s resistance against patriarchy, racism and social predicaments interconnectedly, since the women portrayed also endeavour by all means to resist rampant poverty.

Similarly, Florence Stratton’s *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (1994) will be referred to in the discussion, since her book examines dynamic changes in African literary criticism. Stratton analyses the new orientation of African literature towards the valorisation of feminist views within the African literary canon. She explores both female and male

writers' works which deal with gender issues and makes the following comment:

The literary dialogue between men and women is particularly significant in this regard in that it is occasioning major changes in the orientation of African literature – a turning away from a concern with the issue of race to a concern with the issue of gender, as well as a turning away from an interrogation of European texts to an interrogation of African texts. As the initiators of this dialogue, women writers have earned a place in African literary history, one which has been denied them because gender has been ignored as a factor in the development of African literature. (Stratton 1994: 11-12)

The representation of female characters in the field of political activism in the selected novels invites the reader to look at politically active roles played by women in order to break down social constraints impeding their fulfilment. Instead of insisting on the depiction of women's victimised positions, the analysis will focus on different means female characters use in order to resist socio-political oppression by taking their destiny in their own hands. In other words, evaluation of fictional representation in the selected texts will look at the shift from passive and voiceless images of women to active and heroic female figures. Mary E. Modupe Kolawole uses the same perspective in analysing women's politically active roles in the alteration of socio-political oppressive structures. Kolawole maintains that:

Other instances of women's dynamic involvement in the struggles against oppression at crucial periods in the history of the continent show that women's passivity or subjugation is not an inalienable aspect of African culture. We need to focus more on women as active moulders of society than as passive suffering victims. When people's vision gets accommodated to negative perceptions of their environment, they resist change. (Kolawole 1998: 27)

The study of the three selected authors' delineations of outspoken and enterprising female protagonists in their fictional works will demonstrate the authors' sense that women can express their agency against oppressive

practices by articulately protesting against the effects of socio-political predicaments. Therefore, women's commitment to breaking the "conspiracy of silence" (Nyoka 2004: 168) will be explored by referring to Toni Cade Bambara's perspective on the value of women's voices in breaking down oppressive institutions. In *Deep Sightings & Rescue Missions: Fiction, Essays, & Conversations* (1996), Bambara shows that by denouncing any form of oppression against them, women empower themselves in order to resist their oppressors. The African-American writer's view is summarised in the words of Grandma Dorothy (a female character in her short piece, *The Education of a Storyteller*): "speak your speak, [be]cause every silence you maintain is liable to become *first* a lump in your throat, then a lump in your lymphatic system" (Bambara 1996: 255). Through this quotation, Bambara wants to suggest that being silent could be interpreted as self-oppression, which affects the whole immune system and consequently the health of the person. In other words, silence can be seen as a contribution to one's own oppression. To Bambara, adopting silence in oppressive conditions makes room for the perpetuation of submissive cultural practices.

The denial of voice to a category of people can also result in an endless conflict between the oppressed and oppressors. Rev. Siwisa in Mtutuzeli Nyoka's *I Speak to the Silent* (2004) explains that depriving the freedom fighters of their voice is a useless enterprise which does not solve the problem but instead worsens the situation. The Reverend raises the unanswerable question: "If you silence the advocates of the war, who will stop it" (Nyoka 2004: 48). He wants to suggest that cultural transformation can only be achieved if the oppressed group can overtly express their resistance against the oppressors. This is so because dialogue between the two groups is the only way to extinguish or settle hostilities.

The discussion will also examine the way these three novelists represent different aspect of South African history by "politicising the personal and bringing personal issues into politics" (Rowbotham 1992: 275), depicting this as part of women's political militancy in the struggle for social reforms.

In other words, women's political activism will be explored through women's social commitment to redressing domestic practices with regard to sexual and power relationships between men and women. The analysis will be oriented towards female characters' political awareness in insisting on introducing into the political sphere supposedly domestic issues such as sexual abuse and homophobic oppression.

In "Narratives of Struggle", bell hooks looks at resistance writing (exposing ethnic, class, sexist and or homophobic oppression) and its contribution to what she calls "political self-recovery" (hooks 1991: 53). In fact, hooks acknowledges the power of art in stimulating cultural change and she explains that:

Critical fictions work to connect art with lived practices of struggle. Constituting a genealogy of subjugated knowledges, they provide a cultural location for the construction of alternative readings of history told from the standpoint of the oppressed, the disinherited, or those who are open to seeing the world from this perspective. Concurrently they enable the articulation of cultural practices that are part of the reality of marginalised groups, not forged in the context of the struggle. (hooks 1991: 59)

The discussion of novelistic portrayal of women's political activism will start with the interpretation of women's political attitudes and actions occurring in Langa's works. The debate will proceed with the analysis of texts by Mda and Gordimer. Furthermore, a few works by other authors (male and female) who explore the same theme/s will be introduced into the discussion in order to have a broad view of portrayals and assignments of women's politically active engagement in a society where politics have dominated other aspects of human existence.

1. Mandla Langa

a. *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989)

In *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989) Mandla Langa depicts female characters at the forefront of the political scene. The main feature of the narrative is the political roles assigned to women. Langa's female characters display firm commitment to their aim of disrupting and altering oppressive imperialist and patriarchal structures. The most influential female figure in novel is the young nurse, Khethiwe.

The depiction of this character's life from childhood to adulthood shows Khethiwe's passage from the stage of innocence and ignorance to that of consciousness and responsibility. She is shown to be engaged in a learning process concerning the way black people live in her country when she leaves her village and moves to live with her aunt in the city. As a little girl, Khethiwe embarks on a journey towards the city of Durban where she develops awareness of social injustice – opposing which will be part of her political struggle later in her life. She discovers shocking contrasts in ways of living in Durban. The heroine identifies three main social dichotomies based on racial, class and gender grounds, highlighting three types of discrimination.

First, through the analysis of people's attitudes in the streets, Khethiwe notes that white people (men, women and children) walk

with the authority of Jozini farmers inspecting their fields. The blacks, [on the other hand], walk the streets of the city with their shoulders braced... as if they were trudging against a buffeting wind that could sweep them far (Langa 1989: 10).

Langa shows that Khethiwe even as a little girl has discovered the institutionalised power relation between two races, in which whites represent authority and blacks subjection.

The narrator's description of Khethiwe's first impressions of the city shows the youthful character's contrasted feelings, paralleling the dichotomy of the city itself. She realises that socio-political structures in the city are set by the policy of racial separation. In other words, the beautiful side of the city, displaying its inhabitants' wealth, belongs to whites, whereas the ugly and poor area belongs to blacks. The following passage illustrates the little girl Khethiwe's discovery of racial and class discrimination in the city:

The city was full of contrasts: the indescribably ugly Durban Station building; then, the heart-wrenching beauty of the brown front of the new post office. The flowers and the fountains, the spray that caught the colours of the rainbow. She saw all this, Khethiwe, and marvelled. But still – there was this thing which snagged at the base of her throat which told her that she would never, on pain of death, be welcome in, or wish to be part of, the inner circles of this marvel. It was as if she were watching delicacies behind plate glass, so near yet so far, so poisoned. (Langa 1989: 11)

The narrator refers to two symbolic buildings representing the disparities between people of the same city. On the one hand, the unsightly image of Durban station evinces the government's failure or refusal to improve social conditions of blacks who are the majority of users of public transport. On the other hand, the exposure of the beautiful image of the new post office shows the privilege of the white-inhabited area, where infrastructures are constantly renovated.

Another aspect of life in the city inciting Khethiwe's political awareness is the condition of black women who suffer double oppression from the political regime and black men's sexist attitudes. Despite being an immature girl, Khethiwe commiserates with Clara, her aunt's friend, whose distress-filled life is related to the loss of her future husband who dies from an illness in detention, after prison warders refuse to send him to hospital for treatment.

Langa's description of Khethiwe's pain when Clara informs her that she stays "in the white man's backyard" (Langa 1989:11) where she looks after their children highlights the author's denunciation of black women's harsh servitude during the apartheid era.

The portrayal of Clara's relationship with her white employer is reminiscent of the relationship between master and slave. For, historical accounts reveal that slaves used to be detached from their families to stay with the slaveholder. Langa uses this image to show to what extent black women's rights were abused in the former political dispensation.

In *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989) Langa shows that Khethiwe's psychological development is influenced by her education and her daily perception of life in the surrounding environment (KwaMashu township in particular). Khethiwe's exposure to day-to-day confrontations between the oppressed and oppressors in the township; and her relationship with freedom fighters such as her own father, Ndungane, and her friends Shelley and Mark, the poet, help to forge her political vision.

As the narrative evolves, Khethiwe gradually assumes (her) responsibility to commit herself fully to the struggle for her people's liberation. Her political vision includes her struggle for social transformation and the dismantling of racial, class and patriarchal structures. Langa's portrayal of this female character shows that Khethiwe embarks on political activism when she reaches the stage of maturity. In other words, the author equips his character with efficient tools before allowing her to step into the field of political resistance.

Langa values the education of a freedom fighter so that she/he makes the right decisions for the liberation of the people. He does so in recognition of the fact that education enhances the notion of responsibility and respectability in society. After becoming a nurse, Khethiwe feels ready to put into practice her political plans for the liberation of her people. In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of*

Empowerment, Patricia Hills Collins shows the importance of education within the African-American community as the source of black women's empowerment in the political arena. Collins explains that "Educated black women traditionally were brought up to see their education as something gained not just for their own development but for the purpose of race uplift" (Collins 1990: 149). According to Collins, black women's commitment to the value of education discloses "a fundamental dimension of black women's political activism" (Collins 1990: 147), since education equips them to defend the development of (their) black community.

Langa's portrayal of his heroine's enrolment in the political struggle shows black women's involvement in politics occurring as a result of a freely responsible choice. In fact, Khethiwe has learned a great deal about political resistance (referred in the text as the Movement) from her friends (Mark and Shelley) and from her father, Ndungane, who invites his three children to join the Movement because of "what is happening in the country" (Langa 1989: 48). Nevertheless, Langa allows his female character the freedom of choice whether or not to engage in the political struggle. Khethiwe knows that adhering to the Movement is a responsible choice of a role that she personally wants to assume. Therefore she refuses to "allow anyone to dictate to her" (Langa 1989: 48) what to do – not even her father, Ndungane. Langa seems to assert that black women's participation in the liberation struggle was not dictated by men. It was rather a freely responsible decision made by women themselves to fight against their people's oppression.

Langa shows that the atrocities meted out to black people do not leave women insensitive to such oppression. In fact, through the dreadful daily spectacle of suffering Khethiwe witnesses at King Edward VIII Hospital, the heroine realises the urgency of taking action against the apartheid government. Khethiwe's determination to stand against racial oppression is exemplified in the following extract:

In the suffering she had helped to assuage, in the wounds she had salved,
in the deaths she had witnessed – nothing could have been more eloquent

about her country. In the screams of a woman giving birth, in the last gasp of a man with a bullet in his body, she had walked a long way to a realisation that chilled her: she was willing to kill in order to bring a certain amount of sanity to the insane rulers. It was that simple. (Langa 1989: 108)

Langa suggests that people's resignation to social injustice or their use of peaceful means were futile in the fight for the alteration of the mindset of the ruthless apartheid government. However, the alternative way to tackle the problem was to resort to revolutionary practices, including the use of violent means.

Mandla Langa's portrayal of women in the political arena shows that female characters are active agents of political transformation. They appear as subjects of history because of their active participation in the struggle against oppressive forces. Langa depicts the struggle as a prerequisite to the achievement of political freedom. The author assigns a delicate mission to his heroine, to "stand up and rouse the sleepers from their slumber... and explain to them that they needn't feel ashamed of their conditions, it was a temporary inconvenience" (Langa 1989: 111). Khethiwe is certain that "building a rock pile of resistance [will] grow into a monument to their inalienable rights to humanity" (Langa 1989: 114). In fact, Langa's heroine is endowed with the attributes of a dynamic political leader with great dreams for her people.

The author's perspective in dealing with political activism shows that it is a complex task to work for the liberation struggle's Movement because of many hindrances to be overcome. Langa's representation of women's political activism may have a close link with his personal experience in the struggle for freedom, as he assertively underpins the importance of being creative when embarking on political activism. Langa depicts Khethiwe as a good leader with lucid plans for future political action.

The author juxtaposes the struggle for the recognition of black people's rights to the resistance against social disparities. Khethiwe's idea of

establishing a clinic in the rural area in order to bring medical assistance to both villagers and freedom fighters in the battlefield highlights the heroine's dynamism and determination in tackling both racial and class oppression.

Khethiwe articulates her strong determination to fight against political and economic oppression of her people in a discussion with her father regarding the warfare strategies of the Movement. She agrees with him that their "job is to turn all the plans of Pretoria into ashes, their dreams into nightmares" (Langa 1989: 125); then she concludes that "all we have to do is to keep the fires of resistance burning – all the time. Isn't that what causes people to regard us as insufferably arrogant?" (Langa 1989: 125). Langa's heroine acknowledges that the price of freedom requires sacrifice. However, she vows to work for the benefit of the needy.

The delineation of influential female figures as actors in the national liberation movement in Langa's narrative is reminiscent of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's idealisation of Kenyan women's participation in dismantling socio-political oppressive structures. Both Langa and Ngugi show women's moral integrity and sense of sacrifice as the two writers' female characters endeavour to eliminate racial and class discrimination. In *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation* (1999) James Ogude studies Ngugi's portrayal of women and observes that the Kenyan writer assigns a double political mission to his female protagonists, who stand against imperialist forces and class exploitation. Ogude maintains that:

For Ngugi, there is no borderline between personal morality and political engagement. It is one's involvement in the political struggle for justice and equality. No other struggles exist outside class war. This logically leads to an ideological absolutism in which other forms of democratic struggles are repressed in favour of rigid class parameters as the only litmus test for change within society. No democratic spaces exist for women outside class struggle. (Ogude 1999: 123)

Ogude attaches Ngugi's allegorical representation of female figures as icons of the struggle for Kenyan national liberation to the author's

recognition of the political leadership roles played by women to resist both colonial and class oppression. Elleke Boehmer also admits that Ngugi's feminisation of actors in the national liberation movement is linked to the writer's attempt to "seek to identify the liberation of African women with his resistance to all forms of oppression" (Boehmer 2005: 43).

Mandla Langa registers a vision of political action as an imperative to alter established political and cultural structures. The author presents issues of gender equality in his political perspective to fight against the apartheid system. He refuses to adhere to the general liberation discourse with its monolithic orientation which neglects women's emancipation in the struggle for national liberation. Langa is an author who tends to suggest that the adoption of democratic principles cannot be successful if women's liberation is not included in the political correction of the past dispensation.

In "To Hear the Variety of Discourses", Zoë Wicomb criticises the liberation discourse for not including the aim of the emancipation of women into the struggle against racial discrimination. She sees the failure to combine gender issues with racial ones as a way of perpetuating patriarchal oppression. Illustrating this, she observes that:

Black patriarchy, deciding on the legitimate portrayals of black gender relations, does so in the name of racial solidarity. Those who control discourse, whom a culture authorizes to speak, will not tolerate exposure and, indeed, will construct it as treacherous and politically unsound. (Wicomb 1990: 36)

Similarly, Boehmer analyses power relation across gender in post-independence settings and observes that when gender issues are not incorporated into the people's liberation, gender oppression remains a critical problem and an obstacle to social change. She explains:

Yet, as histories of national liberation movements have shown, the establishment of a new order rarely if ever brings extended change: patriarchal laws may be relaxed, or, in a crisis situation, adapted, but once the desired social transformation has been secured, political leadership

tends to re-impose gender structures with more or less the same severity as their former capitalist and/or colonial foes. Gender is in this respect the last redoubt of the radical activist. (Boehmer 2005: 45)

Langa invests Khethiwe with feminist ideas in order to break down traditional power structures based on the marginalisation of women both in the public and the private realm. Langa exposes his heroine's feminist stance through her overt feminist opinions concerning gender issues. Khethiwe is very articulate in her determination to combat patriarchal laws. She refuses to allow her personality to be proscribed by cultural conceptions. The character strongly believes in constructing her independent identity outside male influence. She dismisses Aunt Margaret's resignedly submissive position concerning women's social status.

Aunt Margaret illustrates her analysis of traditional discourse on gender relations from her life experience and discloses her despair about the alteration of the traditional status quo of women's socially subordinated position. Aunt Margaret has no hope of the construction of the woman's identity outside the domestic roles ascribed to her by patriarchal structures. Therefore, she tells Khethiwe the following:

I don't know where you come from with these ideas. One thing I can tell you, and I'm speaking from more than fifty years' experience, is that you'll fall in love... and get married to a man who'll ride you and pump you full babies. At the end of the day you'll be so tired after cooking and washing. Then all that feminist nonsense will be a thing of the past. (Langa 1989: 49)

Langa exposes two generations of women with different views about women's emancipation in society. On the one hand, he represents the older generation to which Aunt Margaret belongs displaying resigned passivity, as this generation of women have accommodated themselves to male oppression. On the other hand, the author portrays a new generation of women who want to fight for the recognition of their rights in society.

Langa shows his admiration for this generation of women because of their

vocal political position with regard to social and cultural transformation. He seems to demonstrate his trust in dynamic and committed young female leaders to be agents of social change in a country with different forms of discrimination. The author's reference to feminist discourse evinces Langa's support for all political movements which can help to bring about political and cultural transformation.

The writer demonstrates (in his novels) a belief that the implementation of feminist ideas in the South African context is crucial to boost women's self-confidence and sense of confidence in their ability to take action for their own liberation. In "Southern African Women's Autobiography and Self-recreation", Mary E. Modupe Kolawole explores female writers' autobiographies, exploring women's position in the struggle against oppression. Through her analysis of women's resistance Kolawole suggests that in apartheid society

Any African who wished to survive would need the boldness to confront negative myths and traditional stereotypes. For African women to survive in the same socio-political cosmos, however, they needed twice the courage, boldness, resilience, genius and determination to be visible and audible. (Kolawole 1998: 223)

Kolawole wants to suggest that since African women suffer double oppression (patriarchy and racism), their resistance should be double.

Langa shows that Khethiwe is a stalwart feminist who believes in activism as an imperative to change traditional practices. The heroine's positive convictions about the feminist stance she has embraced are summarised in the following sentence: "Aunty, Aunty... is that what happened to you? Look... whatever man I'll meet, everything will be done on my terms" (Langa 1989: 49). Khethiwe shows determination to make independent decisions for her life without accepting male domination.

Langa's adoption of a feminist perspective in his representation of women shows that in the production of African men's literature a new orientation, which deviates from the traditional canon, is beginning to be noticeable.

Langa joins a category of male writers who have understood the magnitude of the need for transforming men's as well as women's images of women in both their fiction and society.

Langa acknowledges that women's oppression can be a huge obstacle to social development. However, he also blames passive women who refuse to fight back against patriarchal institutions. Like his heroine, Langa does not condone the resignation of the oppressed group when faced with subjugation. He instead proposes action as the only way to overcome oppression.

The author's stigmatisation of passive women refusing to fight against their oppressors is illustrated in Khethiwe's conversation with Mark, a fellow political activist, when they talk about a category of women who are sexually abused by men, the latter having seduced their victims with alcohol. Khethiwe expresses scathing criticism against women who adopt sexually loose attitudes permitting the perpetuation of their subjugation, as she argues that "perhaps, the women are also to blame for allowing themselves to be treated like commodities" (Langa 1989: 75).

Langa seems to propose a stark attitudinal change in both men and women's conduct and beliefs, because they can both be blamed for perpetuating sexist practices in certain contexts. Langa suggests that cultural conceptions should no longer dictate our deeds. Therefore, it is often crucial to invoke critical thinking to avoid acting according to cultural taboos. Khethiwe does not conceal her disapproval of Mark's decision to leave his wife after discovering her unfaithfulness in his absence. Khethiwe invites her friend to transcend gender-biased cultural judgement in order to come to terms with this dilemma. She exhorts him to be honest and follow his own heart instead of doing what society requires him to do:

Don't you think it's a bit unfair? I mean, you must have been having some affairs yourself. You've just told me that you were treated like a hero. I suppose there must have been some fleshy fringe benefits ... it's exactly that arrogance and total disregard for women's feelings that I find galling with most men. It's all right to get a bit of nookie on the side, but let a

woman do the same thing, then there's a big to-do. I think you're lucky you had a discreet woman for a wife ... And old-fashioned as it may sound, you need someone to share your successes and failures with. This world is hard, unforgiving; its paths are strewn with thorns and barbed wire. It's also full of unbelievable folly. All around us, marriages are crumbling like a child's sand-castle, divorce is in vogue. If there is a chance for reconciliation – for wresting your wife and kids from whatever clutches – grab it. (Langa 1989: 104)

Langa condemns people who lose their freedom to act because of cultural influence. The author shows that making decisions according to cultural stereotyping can contribute to one's unhappiness, since in such a situation one does not do whatever one's heart tells one to do, but instead enacts what society dictates.

Langa's reference to the contribution of feminist discourse to the political struggle against social injustices evinces the writer's vision for the promotion of democratic values in his society. In fact, he wishes to suggest that the adoption of democratic principles also implies a redefinition of cultural values. In his article "Conference Presentation" published in *Critical Fictions: the politics of imaginative writing*, Homi K. Bhabha observes that the tendency of contemporary critical fictions from the "culturally peripheral" parts of the world is towards the valorisation of feminisation in the public sphere, as he explains in the following passage:

So what I want to suggest is that the public sphere, posited as a feminised body of memory and imagination, may allow us to think of the social contract not merely as part of a kind of "visibility and rationality of traditions", as Hannah Arendt puts it. But that through this feminisation, we might actually be able to explore other forms of social affiliation – those that come to us through pleasure, eroticism, friendship, and a profound political re-articulation of private values and public virtues. (Bhabha 1991: 65)

Bhabha indicates that gender issues should be exposed to the public arena with a political dimension in order to achieve cultural transformation.

Through his representation of female characters in the political sphere, Langa seems to idealise women involved in political struggle. His delineation of Khethiwe's courage and sense of sacrifice puts the character on the pedestal of great political leaders. Khethiwe displays the bravery of a strong freedom fighter, as exemplified in the scene where she dexterously uses her weapon to shoot back at Duma, a police officer well-trained in counter-guerrilla warfare. Duma encounters death with surprise, as he could not expect to be confronted in the battlefield by "a black woman with a weapon" (Langa 1989: 190). Langa's celebration of Khethiwe's courage and determination recalls Kagiso Lesego Molope's description of two female protagonists' revolutionary prowess and bravado in *Dancing in the Dust* (2002).

Molope's narrative approves young South African women's political resistance through the description of Dikeledi and Tihelo, the heroine. Dikeledi is a political activist who is the only person to guard the headquarters of the revolutionary movement despite the danger of being invaded by the apartheid military forces. Her courage is vividly displayed in her active participation in the confrontation between students and the police. Her death in the battlefield highlights even very young women's determination to face death for the sake of liberating their people. Her death cannot be seen as a defeat. The writer rather uses her female character's victim position to extol women's courage. Obioma Nnaemeka sees this perspective of recasting the female's victim status as:

Fundamental to feminist scholarship by foregrounding [female] agents of insurrection and change operating within an oppressive situation. What is important is not whether these agents survive their insurrection or are crushed by it; what is crucial is the fact that they *choose* to act. (Nnaemeka 1997: 4)

Tihelo, a female student, is another figure to be involved in the activities of the liberation movement. She also plays a leading role in the students' demonstrations. Neither Tihelo's youth nor vicious police reprisals can

change her determination to resist political oppression. Despite the beating inflicted on her by the police her courage remains indomitable, as exemplified in the following passage: “I had no tears. Nor did I wish I could cry. My body had reverted to that state where all the hard emotions were tied up in a knot inside it” (Molope 2002: 141).

Molope’s delineation of courageous women’s contribution to the political struggle against apartheid shows that despite all the predicaments female freedom fighters went through they displayed resilience and strength. Molope’s female political activists seem not to allow emotions of anxiety and fear or experiences of pain to overcome their boldness in resisting oppression, since they believe in the following proverb: “the home of the paranoid never sheds a tear” (Molope 2002: 107). Molope and Langa adopt similar perspectives in depicting female characters’ political activism. Both writers extol women’s bravery and their resolute willingness to sacrifice.

In Langa’s narrative the heroine’s political commitment to the people’s liberation is portrayed through her sense of sacrifice for the benefit of the people. Through her heroic death on the battlefield Khethiwe rises to the status of a martyr. Langa mixes images and ironies to describe nature and people’s emotions when Khethiwe’s body is taken back to the village dangling from a helicopter. The text seems to give indications that the heroine’s tragic death represents the demise of an important public figure in a community, as illustrated by a very detailed description of the atmosphere in the village:

The body of Ndungane’s daughter, Khethiwe, dangled crazily at the end of Mbongwa’s rope as the whirlybird flew above the people. They read the sign: this is how the Republic of South Africa deals with terrorists and their sympathizers. The villagers looked on, at the sky stamped with the message of death. The people knew then that their shrines had stretched to embrace the skies. (Langa 1989: 191)

Through the delineation of Khethiwe’s heroic death, Langa wants to pay tribute to all female freedom fighters for their individual sacrifices and

political involvement in the construction of the Rainbow Nation. In other words, the author gives recognition to the contribution of female political figures to the struggle for political and social transformation.

Langa's celebration of his female character's martyrdom in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989) parallels Mtutuzeli Nyoka's *I Speak to the Silent* (2004). Nyoka is another male writer whose narrative pays tribute to women's political activism by glorifying their heroism. Kondile, the narrator, gives the account of his own daughter's heroic contribution to the struggle and the appalling injustice of her ignominious death resulting from a male leader's betrayal and exploitation. Kondile's comments on Sindiswa's political achievements in the struggle reveal his pride in his daughter's heroism, as exemplified in the following passage:

Information gleaned from the constant reports that streamed into the police headquarters, she was a key player in the insurrection. Her exploits were the talk of the village. Every move she made, any action she took was widely discussed. Her bravery raised our hopes and made us believe that the impossible was indeed possible. (Nyoka 2004: 102)

Nyoka wants to keep alive the exploits of brave freedom fighters by excavating their stories for the public. Nyoka wants to suggest that political martyrs should be remembered because their accomplishments still impact on the world of the living even though those heroes have passed to the world of the ancestors.

The author acknowledges women's bravery in resistance against the apartheid regime. The narrator's initially somewhat sexist mindset is betrayed by his disbelief in his daughter's 'masculine' courage in undertaking risky actions against the oppressor by orchestrating the uprising. Kondile confesses that "it has taken [him] a very long time to understand what [his] daughter's life was about, but now that [he] do[es], [he is] proud that she died a hero in the field" (Nyoka 2004: 187). In fact, through her heroic contribution, Sindiswa makes both her parents and the whole community proud by displaying inflexible courage in her commitment to

resistance against her people's oppression. Nyoka and Langa seek to revitalise the deeds of past female heroes by attempting to rekindle their stories in the collective memory and to set the record straight about male 'heroes' who sordidly abused them. By so doing both writers engage in a type of resistance against the forces of forgetting as interpreted by bell hooks. According to hooks, "resistance is also a struggle of memory against forgetting. Remembering makes us subjects in history. It is dangerous to forget" (hooks 1991: 54).

Langa's depiction of women's participation in the political struggle shows women being role models for other women because of their charisma and commitment to the struggle. Dr Shelley Vilakazi is represented as such a model for young political activists. She is endowed with intelligence and a strong personality, and her political convictions have a great impact on Khethiwe's political vision. She can be described as Khethiwe's political mentor. Throughout the novel Langa indicates Khethiwe's profound admiration for Shelley's political activism; she wishes she had "the power to communicate why people like Shelley were so necessary, the size of their dreams and the colour of their vision" (Langa 1989: 111). The writer extols this kind of political leadership through the admiring evocation of Shelley's achievement in infusing revolutionary ideas into younger freedom fighters such as Khethiwe, who is thus readied to begin to participate in action against oppressive structures.

Shelley is depicted as an experienced political activist with resources of knowledge of the tough challenges awaiting any young freedom fighter newly involved in political resistance. Shelley welcomes Khethiwe's joining the Movement and reveals to her the vital political strategies for successful activism. Shelley's political mentorship is displayed through the lessons she teaches Khethiwe, as exemplified in the following passage:

You're still young and attractive. You'll learn how difficult it is to maintain a stable relationship and still go on doing your work effectively. Your best defence is to say as little as possible and do as much as you can.

Keep away from cheap gossip; it does nothing but demoralise. Know your enemy, learn the skills of war – and keep on smiling but don't ever let anyone give you shit ... So, baby, welcome. Someone once observed that there's nothing more beautiful than a people in revolution. Welcome to the ranks of the beautiful! (Langa 1989: 106)

Langa's choice of a woman as a political mentor for another woman highlights the author's commitment to the endorsement of female political leadership. Langa seems to assert that women are initiators of their own political strategies because their intelligence and personality allow them to do so. The coalition between Khethiwe and Shelley shows that women do not need men to teach them political lessons. They can instead assist one another in order to forge brilliant political careers.

Langa's depiction of women's resistance to political oppression depicts actions undertaken by female characters in challenging oppressive institutions. Debra, the white journalist, is another female figure positively represented in the text for her political vision. Her opposition to the oppressive laws of apartheid is illustrated when she publicly confronts the police on the issue of the Immorality Act. Langa politicises sexually interracial discourse in the narrative and exposes Debra's transgression of the political law forbidding miscegenation as women's commitment to breaking down oppressive institutions denying them even the most intimate rights.

Although Langa's text shows women in the forefront of political activism, the author also represents other women playing secondary roles in the struggle. Some of them display their support to their husbands involved in the struggle, while others oppose their husbands for being part of the Movement. Aunt Margaret, for instance, shows passivity with regard to political resistance and suggests to Khethiwe that it is better "to leave politics to the politicians" (Langa 1989: 21) because of the high risks involved in political activism. In fact, Aunt Margaret resents politics because it has deprived her of her husband who died because of his political activities. Aunt Margaret holds that she suffers from loneliness because of politics.

MaCele's opposition to anti-apartheid political activism, on the contrary, is not based on the fear of losing her husband because of his political attachment to the Movement. MaCele is depicted as a rebellious woman who refuses to stand next to her husband in support of the noble cause of liberation. Langa does not demonise his character for not being supportive of her husband's political ideas. Through the representation of this character, Langa allows the reader to make his/her own judgement of MaCele's behaviour.

MaCele's reputation as a gossip is dreaded by her husband Mbongwa. His apprehension makes him avoid his wife's inquiries about the activities of the Movement. MaCele's relationship with Mbongwa is shown as a distant marital affiliation characterised by suspicion and mistrust with regard to political activities. MaCele's collaboration with the police in trying to reveal the plans of the Movement shows that MaCele belongs to the category of black men and women who stood on the side of the apartheid regime in resisting political change. Her venomous resentment against her husband for violently abusing her has turned her into a traitor to the cause of liberation.

However, Langa also shows that some women stood side by side with men to combat oppression. The ideal female figure to have defended the same ideas as her husband is Nomusa, Ndungane's wife. Nomusa's contribution to the struggle places her in the ranks of loyalty-inspired political figures. Although Nomusa is dead, the part she played in the struggle is still valued by her husband, who is resolute about keeping on fighting in order to soothe Nomusa's spirit. Langa wants to point out that women can inspire men to engage in participating in the resistance movement. Ndungane's gratitude for Nomusa's significant contribution to his political activities is exposed in the following lines:

She dies giving birth to a life we struggled so hard to bring to this world ...
Nomusa was part of the breath of the ancestors; that was a bitter triumph.
She died having accepted and supported what he stood for. He loved her
with each fibre in his body; the fight against tyranny would be a living

monument to her memory. (Langa 1989: 56-57)

Through this quotation the narrator shows that Nomusa's adhesion to the same political ideology as Ndungane is a free and responsible decision. Langa wants to show that women's political engagement is not due to external pressure but to their own critical analysis of the socio-political context. Nomusa expresses her freedom of choice without being dictated to by her husband. Langa contrasts his depiction of the two figures of MaCele and Nomusa to show that although both women deliberately choose their political stance, their actions and attitudes are opposed.

This author's depiction of women's dedication to political activism does not focus only on individual female characters' actions. The writer also incorporates history to evince the meaningful contribution of women's collective activities to the struggle against socio-political oppression throughout history, as exemplified by his reference to the 1946 Great Miners' Strike and the 1973 South African Workers' Strike. The narrative underscores full participation of women in protest and defiance actions against socio-politically oppressive institutions. Women's presence in strikes and protest marches evokes women's determination to articulate their voice in the political sphere. Women's insertion into politics highlights their efforts to establish their position in an arena traditionally reserved for men.

The account of a popular uprising in the text shows equal gender participation in the struggle. In fact, women transcend their traditional social roles to articulate their struggle for social justice. Langa's detailed description of events shows that women make use of any tool of resistance available to them to fight against the oppressor. The depiction of the battle between the people of Ndaweni and the apartheid army evinces women's significant contribution to the villagers' victory:

Since the fighters knew the forest like the back of their collective hand, they retreated there and set up base. Young men manned the barricades; women prepared gigantic *drievoet* pots full of boiling water and porridge. When the raiding party came soon after midnight, the trucks could not

pass. They had to disembark and proceed on foot ... Those who ran pell-mell into the forest to seek cover were cut down with firearms, pangas and spears. Some fell into the camouflaged trenches where they screamed in agony as boiling scalding porridge rained on them. (Langa 1989: 61)

The passage demonstrates the equal participation of black men and women in the struggle. Despite acknowledging the involvement of rural women in the liberation movement, the author places the assignment of roles across gender and age within traditionally patriarchal structure of the rural setting.

Langa's women play politically active roles and stand alongside men in the battle for the recognition of black people's human dignity. The author seems to exhort men to unite with women in order to make their struggle more effective. Ricky, a political activist, acknowledges that the inclusion of women in the battle can elicit positive change. The character proposes that men and women be jointly trained because "when they have reached a certain level of understanding, it will give them that sense of camaraderie, of belonging ... what they call esprit de corps, when they find themselves part of a big group" (Langa 1989: 93).

Langa does not allow gender discrimination in the struggle against imperialist forces. In fact, women's joint participation with men in the struggle against racial oppression is valued, since women are as aware as men are of the importance of taking action to improve their living conditions. Their refusal to stand on the margins of the liberation movement accounts for their significant representation in social protest movements as depicted by Langa.

The author's description of women's resistance goes beyond opposition to racial discrimination. Their participation in popular revolt shows that women stand against various forms of oppression, as illustrated in the following quotation: "Factory after factory in Durban was hit by a strike; men wielding sticks and cudgels, women who sashayed and ululated took the streets and demanded that they be treated like human beings" (Langa 1989: 61).

Lauretta Ngcobo also emphasises the collective implication of women's role in the political struggle for social justice in her famous novel *And They Didn't Die* (1990). The most important event in the narrative describing women's politically active roles to express their resistance against apartheid laws is the protest march they undertake to defy the apartheid government by publicly burning their passes. Ngcobo depicts strong and courageous women in action against this dehumanising law. However, her perspective in describing women's participation in the struggle differs from Langa's, as Ngcobo underscores that women, single-handedly can take action without men's partnership, whereas Langa's female political activists are always represented in action along with their male counterparts, or they are less visible in the resistance movement because of their dependence on male leadership.

b. *Tenderness of Blood* (1987)

Langa's *Tenderness of Blood* (1987) also provides a range of examples on women's political involvement. Langa's portrayal of these characters varies according to the political issues each female political activist attempts to address and the means of resistance each activist uses. Nomakhwezi, for example, is portrayed as embodying the ideal of women's political engagement. As a student at Fore Hare, she is an active member of BUS (Black University Student). This student movement was created in the context of the Black Consciousness Movement. Black students saw the necessity of organising themselves in more representative groups in order to oppose resistance against the racist regime. The theorists of BUS wanted to show that black people are capable of fighting for the recognition of their own rights in a racialised political system. Their political vision is well described in the following passage:

We have to get rid of racism first before we can hold hands in a clasp of brotherhood. But even before all that we have to take ourselves seriously. Because ... there's no way we're going to get anywhere if we don't take that leap, if we still depend on these white liberals to dictate to us how to respond to oppression. (Langa 1987: 45)

Nomakhwezi adheres to the ideology of the resistance movement despite being the daughter of one of the Transkei members of parliament. Her father is also the Minister of Agriculture in Matanzima's Government. Unlike Khethiwe, the heroine in *A Rainbow on a Paper Sky* (1989), whose family has a record of participation in the struggle, Nomakhwezi's father is among the people who want to maintain the apartheid system because it secures their privileges. Nomakhwezi takes a stand against her father's position and chooses to join the liberation movement.

Through the character's decision to commit herself to the cause of the masses instead of backing her father, Langa wants to show the right path to follow in political struggle. The writer seems to assert that good political leadership requires individual sacrifices, including a severance of family ties when they become an obstacle to the achievement of one's ideal. Nomakhwezi articulates her dedication to reaching her political ideal and strongly advises her friend Mkhonto to set up a political target that needs to be achieved. She tells him that he "is still in darkness when it comes to the truths of the revolution", therefore he should "be committed to an ideal" (Langa 1987: 57).

Nomakhwezi shows great ambition related to her political engagement. She wishes to identify herself with emblematic political figures in history. She confesses that:

I'm sure that had I been around Mandela's time, I would have been moved to say or do something that would have put me on the collision course with the Boers. But, in the same way, being born in one generation doesn't mean that what is done by other generations before yours had nothing to do with you. We are all connected by the tender blood of the struggle which didn't start yesterday. It has its roots in blood, which connects us to more than five centuries of battle. What Dingane, Cetshwayo, Bambatha, Makana, Sekhukhuni, Moshoeshoe – and all those nameless thousands – did in those gone years has a direct bearing on our actions today. It influences the way we are ruled and our responses to oppression. (Langa 1987: 57-58)

The character's reference to historical names as symbols of resistance against colonialism and imperialism shows that Nomakhwezi wants to engrave her name in the pages of history. Nomakhwezi intends to follow the footsteps of the most charismatic freedom fighters in history. Then, her political involvement, in return, will inspire other generations of leaders. The author wants to highlight the connectedness between freedom fighters of different generations through their common commitment to the struggle. Through Nomakhwezi's dedication to the liberation movement, Langa also

suggests that it is high time women's names should be recognised among the legendary political figures of resistance.

Nomakhwezi rejects all the privileges provided by a wealthy father, firstly because he has sold out his people's interests through his involvement with Matanzima and secondly, for his sexist treatment of her mother. Nomakhwezi's revolt against her father can be seen as Langa's condemnation of black leaders in the Bantustan System for their egocentrism and corruption.

Nomakhwezi is repulsed by the idea that her father supports a system which causes a lot of suffering to their people. Nomakhwezi is portrayed as a person who cannot condone social injustice. She feels ashamed of her family identity and despises her father for his heartlessness, since he has gained wealth at the cost of people's pain. Langa shows a female character that rejects family wealth for the reason that it was gained by means of corruption and criminal acts. Nomakhwezi instead displays compassion for the underprivileged. Langa exposes his character's sensitivity to social injustice through the description of her emotions, as illustrated in the following passage:

It was like looking at your face in a broken mirror. But what really hit me, when it became glaringly clear that all the clothes I wore and the money I had for all sorts of nonsensical things were in fact financed by a system that caused all these tears, a system my father stood for, I almost went out of my mind. (Langa 1987: 53)

Through the depiction of this character, Langa wants to emphasize the emotional conflict an individual undergoes when she/he gets to understand the disgraceful nature of her or his parents' activities. The character admits that she "becomes drenched with self-disgust" (Langa 1987: 57) when she learns the truth about her father's shameful deeds. In her analysis of Nomakhwezi's rejection of her privileges, Marsden maintains: "Langa's representation of his character suggests the author's sensitivity to the complexity of emotions which might be suffered by a young woman from a

wealthy family if she has a highly developed social conscience which makes her reject her own upbringing” (Marsden 1994: 94).

Nomakhwezi’s awareness of socio-political oppression shows that the writer wants to underline all forms of oppression that gravitate around the major problem of racial discrimination. Langa orients his female character towards diverse battlefields to combat all forms of oppression. Through his characters, Langa denounces political laws which are responsible for cultural tragedy in his society, since those laws deny people the right to get access to general knowledge and professional skills. Nomakhwezi realises the importance of knowledge in achieving the alteration of people’s mindsets. The character’s concern with ensuring adequate education for her people is illustrated in the following quotation:

The thing that’s such a bleeding tragedy, though, is the way our people are so starved intellectually and culturally by the banning, this censorship. It’s criminal to have children growing up ignorant of the existence of people like Mayakovsky, Gorky, Sholokhov, to name a few writers, just because they’re from the Soviet Union or Russia in the language of the SABC.
(Langa 1987: 66)

Langa seems to point out that cultural and intellectual oppression can be an obstacle to social change because it leads to people’s subjection through their isolation. In this regard, Nomakhwezi explains, “naivety and ignorance have claimed many people and put them within the laager of the system” (Langa 1987: 67). Langa’s character wants to combat ignorance because it prevents the oppressed group from realising the importance of fighting for their rights. Patricia Hill Collins points out the value of education for black community development by maintaining that “African-American women have long realised that ignorance doomed black people to powerlessness” (Collins 1990: 147).

Langa’s delineation of women as part of the intellectual elite playing active roles in resistance against oppression highlights the author’s admiration of intellectual achievement and its impact on social change. The

main feature in Langa's narrative is the representation of an educated woman who uses her knowledge in the service of liberation. bell hooks posits the importance of education in creating awareness of the need for political resistance and explains how education has helped her to stand against oppression:

I became an intellectual in resistance responding consciously, critically to conditions of suffering in my life and the lives of family and community. I wanted knowledge only to the degree that it would enable that suffering to end. I wanted education to offer the critical guidance that would provoke, stimulate awareness and the will to change. I learned about the importance of critical reflection, cultivating strategies that would ensure survival in the face of abuse and open up the possibility of a transformed future for us, the black poor, the underclass, [and] the disinherited. (hooks 1991: 54)

Langa's depiction of Nomakhwezi displays the character's strong determination to fight against political oppression. Her vision of political activism is grounded in courage and faith in the Movement. Her definition of political involvement reveals the author's loyal attachment to the struggle for the liberation of black South Africans. Nomakhwezi perceives political engagement as:

Something we should embrace the same way we embrace a religion – and with as much fervour... If there's a section that's like that [people opposing change] in our society then it's because they have embraced with religious intensity the lies this regime feeds them on every day ... there are some of us who are part of the problem and then there are those who are part of the solution. (Langa 1987: 67)

Nomakhwezi shows that the liberation of the oppressed depends on the degree of their commitment to the struggle. In fact, through his character's perspective on political activism Langa exhorts freedom fighters to adopt religion-like convictions with a view to achieving what Ngugi calls a "decolonis[ation of] the mind" (Ngugi 1986) of the oppressed. Langa seems to suggest that changing the mindset of people is another prerogative of political activists. Therefore, infusing principles of freedom into one's

people's minds can bring about social transformation.

Nomakhwezi identifies two types of “anti-people” among the black community. On the one hand, she refers to the people who support the system out of mere ignorance or naivety. To Nomakhwezi, this section of people (the one she identifies with) does not constitute a big problem because she seems to suggest that they can still join the Movement once they are exposed to the truth. Patricia Hill Collins analyses the fundamental paradigmatic shift in the way Black Feminist thought perceives oppression. Collins maintains that:

By embracing a paradigm of race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression, Black feminist thought re-conceptualizes the social relations of domination and resistance ... and addresses ongoing epistemological debates in feminist theory and in the sociology of knowledge concerning ways of assessing “truth”. Offering subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering. (Collins 1990: 222)

On the other hand, Nomakwezi sees people like her father as “actively part of the problem [and] the most dangerous” (Langa 1987: 67). Langa wants to underline that the struggle against the apartheid regime can be extended to all the sympathisers of the system, irrespective of race.

Langa acknowledges that the hard assignment of achieving people's liberation cannot be achieved without equal participation of men and women. He gives voice to the character Nomakhwezi in order to challenge sexist stereotypes within the Movement. Langa's female character criticises the lack of recognition of women's contribution to the struggle and the way male comrades attempt to perpetuate oppressive cultural mores. Nomakhwezi lists her criticisms of men's sexist attitudes:

I look at my sisters in the struggle, how they try to lead their lives at the same time attempting to make a meaningful contribution to the struggle. The thing that fucks them up is, no matter how liberated they might proclaim themselves to be, they suffer from this failure to fashion their lives the way they want them to be. There are so many hang-ups where, if

you look closely, we still depend on men insofar as making a contribution to the struggle is concerned – even the women’s struggle. We allow men to have no option but to reinforce their chauvinistic and sexist images they hold of us ... I began to see, also, how vulnerable men really are, how jealousy and accumulated bickering can eventually cripple a relationship. How women can really do their damndest best to function creatively in a liberation struggle not as junior partners but as equals to men. (Langa 1987: 67)

Through Nomakhwezi’s analysis of gender relationship between comrades in the liberation movement Langa tries to demonstrate that women fight two opponents concomitantly. On the one hand, they resist oppression alongside men and on the other, they challenge patriarchal attitudes in their male counterparts.

Nomakhwezi’s disapproval of sexism suggests that Langa assigns his female character the mission of changing men’s perception of women in the Movement because they tend to ignore the significance of the contribution women have made to resistance against imperialism. The depiction of women’s equal participation in the struggle with men shows that the author deliberately chooses the battleground to highlight women’s power and ability to perform whatever actions men can do.

Langa’s female character epitomises women’s commitment to fighting against social injustice. The most illustrious aspect of Nomakhwezi’s political activism is portrayed when she takes the route of exile to Botswana in order to join the Movement. The description of Nomakhwezi reveals that the character has an exceptional commitment to moral values, which allows her to sacrifice self-interest for the benefit of her people. Through Nomakhwezi’s decision to join the liberation movement Langa wants to valorise the sense of sacrifice young people displayed in abandoning their studies, friends and families to participate in guerrilla warfare.

Nomakhwezi’s departure to Botswana coincides with the murder of her father, who is “shot in the head with the same pistol that Kaiser Matanzima

had given him” (Langa 1987: 102) while having supper with his family. Media reports evoke Nomakhwezi’s responsibility for committing patricide by maintaining that “South Africa was indeed a sick country when daughter slew father” (Langa 1987: 102).

However, the narrative does not bring light to the reader’s mind concerning Nomakhwezi’s implication in her father’s assassination. Langa allows the reader to make her/his own judgement of facts since the character is no longer in the country to answer the charges against her. The writer refrains from giving any conclusive illumination on this issue. Grace, Nomakhwezi’s roommate, reinforces the ambiguity created by Nomakhwezi’s allegations about her murdering her father when she tells Mkhonto not to “believe what [they] all read about Khwezi shooting her father. She didn’t”, but Grace adds that she is certain that if Nomakhwezi “had the opportunity she would have done it, that’s how committed she is. But newspapers have to create all these sensations” (Langa 1987: 153).

Langa refuses to settle the dispute concerning his character’s responsibility for or innocence of this murder (or execution), even though Nomakhwezi’s degree of commitment to the struggle could undoubtedly have led her to that stage. But the writer allows the reader to draw her/his own conclusions and allows a degree of mystery to surround the event. Through Nomakhwezi’s opposition to her father’s political ideas, Langa tries to show that resistance against the apartheid system was not focused on the apartheid government only but also on black people who supported the system. Langa’s character gives an exceptional political lesson by challenging her father on his betrayal of his people to satisfy his greedy, selfish interests.

Langa’s delineation of women in this narrative shows that political resistance can take many forms without necessarily implying absolute confrontation with the oppressor. The writer gives value to women’s political contribution to the struggle through depicting the contribution some of them

make by means of their assistance to more active political figures. Sharon, the woman Mkhonto meets at the house of Max and Zodwa when a party is organised for his release from prison, is described as a photographer who has made a significant contribution to the struggle. She follows her husband Don, a political activist, to attend all freedom rallies in order to take pictures to be published in the media. Sharon explains that her action has

been influenced by the woman who used to follow Malcolm X wherever he went with a Super-8 camera, and was there to record his final exit. I used to tag along like a faithful dog behind Don and managed to get God knows how many hundreds of feet of film. Then there was the Freedom Rally where people came out in thousands in defiance of the ban that had been imposed by Jimmy Kruger. (Langa 1987: 269)

Despite not being an active member of the Movement, Sharon is cast as a political activist because of her unconditional support for the liberation movement. She is portrayed as a subject of history through her active participation in recording historical events that are part of the struggle. Sharon is satisfied with her politically active involvement because she comments: “There was that tangible thing in the air that made all of us feel that we were witnessing another leap in history, our history. We were participating in an event that the coming generations would speak about with pride” (Langa 1987: 269). Sharon’s presence at demonstrations exemplifies her courage in facing police violence.

In fact, Sharon’s contribution to writing history links her to the struggle. In “Cartographies of Struggle: Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism”, Chandra Talpade Mohanty analyses the impact of writing and remembering history and maintains that:

The very practice of remembering and writing leads to the formation of politicised consciousness and self-identity. Writing often becomes the context through which new political identities are forged. It becomes a space for the struggle and contestation about reality itself. (Mohanty 1991: 34)

However, Langa's description of the relationship of Don and Sharon reveals the husband's lack of confidence in his wife, whom he excludes from strategy planning despite her active role in promoting the rallies. Langa seems to criticise some men's sexist attitudes towards their female counterparts also committed to the political struggle. Through Sharon's story, the writer also seems to suggest that in the shadow of a charismatic political leader there is usually a dynamic female figure. However, this style of representing gender relationships in the political struggle tends to promote the image of the man and overlook the woman's contribution.

Langa's narrative also emphasises women's complicity with their children who are politically involved in resistance. The author's depiction tends to suggest that there is a range of women who play capital roles in the struggle even though they are not conspicuous in the public scene. He shows particular interest in senior women's contribution to the struggle. Despite their lack of the physical capacity to participate actively in the liberation movement, those women provide moral support to the youth.

Unlike her husband, Nomakhwezi's mother shows great affection and admiration for her son, Vuyani, for his political activism. The narrator analyses motherly love for a son by pinpointing the amount of support the mother gives Vuyani, despite her husband's hatred of his own son. Nomakhwezi's mother is represented as a grief-stricken woman. She suffers from an illness, but doctors "cannot reach the root of the illness" because "it's something that has touched her mind. The death of Vuyani [is] the straw that broke the camel's back" (Langa 1987: 55). Langa links Vuyani's tragic death to his mother's ill-health to highlight women's involvement in the struggle through their emotional commitment to their children and hence their children's political activities.

Mlungisi's mother, Mrs Guma, represents the ideal image of women's indirect participation in the struggle through their children's political activism. She is depicted as a very supportive mother who cares for her son's

political activities. She accepts to stay in confinement with Mlungisi to comfort him while he is observing his banning order. Mrs Guma gives moral support to her son in order to encourage him not to give up his radical political stance regarding oppression. Langa seeks to underline women's role as political advisors for their children. Mrs Guma exhorts Mlungisi and his friends, Ntombi and Mkhonto, as freedom fighters, to "fight despair" (Langa 1987: 210). She argues that

There is so much evil that can destroy you if you allow yourself to be destroyed. There is no cure for despair except to recognise its source, isolate it and deal with it. Otherwise, it sucks you up its vortex and you're doomed. This is something I knew as a child when my own parents, who had fought their own battles, told me these things. That kind of knowledge you just don't allow to lie stored in your brain. You have to teach it to the young ones because we must take care of one another if we must survive. (Langa 1987: 191-192)

The above quotation suggests that despite the hindrances political activists may face they should not lose their determination. Through Mrs Guma's words, Langa wants to underscore the role played by mothers through their cooperation with children. By revealing their political experience to the youth, mothers help them to carry on the struggle effectively. Langa wants to argue that the younger generation of political activists has something to learn from the older generation. The youth can avoid their parents' mistakes and acquire wisdom if they collaborate with former freedom fighters.

Langa's description of women's political activism also shows the existence of a category of women who are highly esteemed in their community merely because their children are involved in the Movement. Therefore, political activism becomes a determining criterion to define women's social status. The ideal image of the woman whose status has been elevated is John and Mkhonto's mother - because of John's link to the Movement. She is cast as a woman proud of her offspring. She evokes respect and envy from other women of the community because of John's political activism, as she explains to the young Mkhonto:

You'll soon become a man, Mkhonto ... and you will start realising that there are people in this bleeding country who hold some truths dearer than life itself, who are loyal to things higher than themselves. We might not even have agreed with some of the methods used by your brother. But I think he is one such man. That makes him unchangeable in our eyes. MaZulu and some of the churchwomen say with pride that they'd like their daughters to bear sons of men like him, your brother. (Langa 1987: 245)

The author seems to pinpoint political engagement as an element of social mobility for mothers in black communities. However, Langa's perspective in delineating women who have achieved high social status due to their sons' involvement in the political struggle seems to perpetuate cultural misconceptions about women. In fact, the writer's approach tends here to keep women at the level of dependence vis-à-vis men. The above quotation reinforces the idea of women's subordination to men through the attitude of churchwomen who believe that having a son with political ties to the Movement is determined by fatherly inheritance.

Ntombi, Mkhonto's wife, is portrayed in the opening pages as an active freedom fighter. She takes part in the black student movement resisting the apartheid system. As a student in the department of history, she uses her knowledge of prominent freedom fighters in history in order to learn what methods of resistance are appropriate for the South African situation.

Ntombi is described as an intelligent woman who gives her husband insightful suggestions. She understands the importance of undertaking actions against political oppressive structures. Nevertheless, Ntombi also reckons that the militancy of the people in accepting the ideology of change is the better option to create new dynamics in the struggle. She advises Mkhonto not to "forget that there's nothing we can do without those people in whose name we're demanding change", because she explains that "the problem with most of us is the belief that we can go it alone, challenge the dragon and even slay it without the participation of the people" (Langa

1987).

Langa points out the importance of mobilising people politically for action because the support of the people is a prerequisite for success. Hence it is clear that he wants to highlight the significance of thinking strategically instead of acting emotionally in order to achieve the ideals of the struggle.

His character Ntombi is represented as a victim of socio-political oppression. Firstly, she suffers contempt from her friends and Mkhonto, her husband, because of her crossing of the colour line with regard to her former intimate relation with Steve, the white man she met in the USA. Miscegenation is a political offence that her own people refuse to tolerate.

As the plot evolves, Ntombi becomes a passive character, withdrawn from the sphere of political struggle. She seems to have been consumed by despair after the predicaments she went through. She is first sexually abused by her white boss and his guests. Then, her husband abandons her in her pregnancy for reasons of jealousy to join the Movement in Botswana. Because of these combined events she loses her articulate voice in the struggle. Her impotence and inability to fight back against oppression plunge her into a stark silence of resignation.

However, despite Ntombi's absence from the activities of the liberation movement, the narrator shows that the character was once the driving force in her husband's political involvement. Langa tends to emphasise women's responsibility in causing men to commit themselves to political activism. In the case of Ntombi, her husband believes that his wounded masculine pride must be avenged after a group of white men rape his wife. Therefore, he wants to vent his rage on the racist regime. Ntombi is portrayed as "a woman [who] has been used as the catalyst for male political activity" (Maderson 1994: 84).

In fact, Zodwa, Max's wife, discloses the main reason Mkhonto takes the route of exile as she reminds him that Ntombi "swears that she was the main cause of [his] flight. She knew that [he] was taking a long returnless journey

into some unimaginable wilderness” (Langa 1987: 239). Zodwa seems to condemn Mkhonto for adopting a sexist attitude towards his wife while she was not responsible for the painful events she went through. Zodwa is depicted as a feminist moralist. Through the reproaches she addresses to Mkhonto, the latter realises that she “has the strength to create order out of the chaos boiling in her husband’s head” (Langa 1987: 238).

Zodwa embodies the ideal image of the woman who supports her husband’s political involvement. However, her militancy in political resistance against racial oppression echoes her struggle for gender equality. Zodwa is depicted as a strong woman demanding respect from her husband, who (admirably) appreciates her actions. Through his female character’s feminist vision, Langa wants to draw attention to a woman who provides maximum psychological support for her husband’s political activities and indicates that in return, her sacrifices and suffering deserve to be valued.

Langa’s analysis of his character’s feminist position can be seen as recognising a fundamentally political activism committed to the people’s struggle for liberation as well as to the eradication of gender oppression. Ifeoma Okeyo observes that Third World women’s feminism is connected to the political struggle and maintains: “For African women the subject of women’s advancement is highly political because it is an integral part of our quest for justice not only at the household level but all the way within the local, national and world economic order” (Okeyo 1991: 317-318).

c. *The Memory of Stones* (2000)

In *The Memory of Stones* (2000) Mandla Langa also pays attention to women's political engagement, but with a different approach from his earlier novels. Langa's writing shifts from the representation of women's political actions against racially segregationist institutions to insist on women's political commitment to redressing socio-economic structures and gender power relations. The author attempts to transcend the epistemological structures of the former dispensation to achieve Njabulo Ndebele's 'redefinition of relevance'. In his notable essay, "Redefining Relevance" (1991), Ndebele suggests that South African writers should liberate themselves from apartheid discourse in order to give South African literature a more universal aesthetic dimension by not only focusing on the representation of the 'spectacular' and the 'sensational'. Ndebele argues that:

The greatest challenge of the South African revolution is in the search for ways of thinking, ways of perception, that will help to break down the closed epistemological structures of South African oppression ... The challenge is to free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from laws of perception that have characterised apartheid society. (Ndebele 1991: 65)

Langa's post-apartheid text emphasises the new political demands of his society. The author seems to be particularly intrigued by the portrayal of women's resistance against other forms of socio-political oppression. Although he still concerns himself to some extent with women's political struggle against the former political institution, Langa does so with less enthusiasm as compared to his texts published under apartheid. In *The Memory of Stones* the novelist's depiction of Benedita Venter's political activism, for instance, is not as powerful as his description of other political female figures such as Nomakwezi (in *Tenderness of Blood*) or Khethiwe (in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*). Benedita's political actions are not explicitly

delineated in the narrative. The only information the reader gains concerning her political engagement relates to her former militancy in the anti-apartheid movement, as summarised in the following lines:

Benedita, formerly a staunch member of the British Anti-Apartheid Movement (A-AM), left London in 1992. The journey to South Africa had as much to do with the emptiness left by the release of Mandela as finding a connection with a lost father. (Langa 2000: 60)

Langa's depiction of this female character focuses more on her disenchantment in not retrieving her identity than on her former political activism. By so doing Langa does not undermine Benedita's anti-apartheid resistance in the past, but he wants to extend women's political actions to the new socio-political demands of the transition period.

Langa historicises political events of the early 90s by setting his narrative in the context of a political change characterized by unprecedented tensions and feelings of uncertainty. Langa criticises black male political leadership in Africa because it is responsible for socio-political instability on the continent. The writer refers to political skirmishes between Inkatha militants and the members of the UDF and the ANC to highlight the failure of African male leadership in tackling the most important preoccupations of their people.

Langa draws attention to women's participation in socio-political transformation. The author depicts Zodwa, the heroine, as the ideal political female leader of modern times. Her succession to the chieftaincy position of Baba Joshua indicates the emergence of a new generation of political leaders, including female figures.

Langa empowers Zodwa politically in order to underscore the importance of allowing women to take political leadership positions. Langa seems to suggest that women's political empowerment can be a viable alternative in the quest for good male African leadership. In fact, the portrayal of Zodwa reveals the writer's faith in female African political figures because the latter can display genuine determination to promote social development and to

achieve democracy. Zodwa's political vision shows her prioritisation of the needs of the people instead of displaying the brittle and demanding ego of so many male leaders, as the character attempts to explain:

There is nothing here, people are poor ... but in this poverty I have come across demonstrations of great generosity. As Africans, especially now that we have our own government, we have to be generous without being foolish. We have to strive for peace and democracy. (Langa 2000: 354)

Through his sympathy for women's political leadership, Langa wants to promote democratic values in the transformation of society. He claims the need for the absolute dissolution of patriarchal structures in the political sphere because, as (in *Gendering World Politics: Issues and Approaches in the Post-Cold War Era*) J. Ann Tickner points out: "new democracies are not always friendly toward women" (Tickner 2001: 7). Langa's perspective appears to endorse Cherry Clayton's view about the respect of individual rights of women in the newly democratised South Africa because Clayton believes in the respect of specific rights and specific freedoms as a guarantee for sustainable peace in a post-struggle environment. (Clayton's viewpoint has already been explored in the early section of the dissertation).

Langa's depiction of the transforming political environment foregrounds both the liberation of women and the promotion of socio-economic development of the so called grassroots section of the population. The author places the heroine in the leadership position and entrusts her with the crucial mission of addressing poverty and dismantling patriarchy. Zodwa has a complex political assignment, which Nozizwe defines as follows:

If anything goes wrong here, if people do not get running water and electricity, if the gangsters still victimise women – can you honestly say then that you did right by not giving your father's people – no your people – a fighting chance? Will you hold your head high when you didn't take a chance and helped build schools, so that our children's children are also equipped to the face the New World? Life ... can only be lived when people take a chance to weave miracles out of nothing. (Langa 2000: 222)

Women's political activism in Langa's post-apartheid text bifurcates from the struggle for the redefinition of the politics of race to take a new form of political resistance, foregrounding the transformation of socio-economic structures.

2. Zakes Mda

a. *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002)

In *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) Zakes Mda delineates socio-political transformation in the town of Excelsior from well before until shortly after the 1994 elections. Mda draws particular attention to women's political actions, highlighting their determination to bring about social change. One of the examples of women playing catalytic roles as agents for change in their community is provided by Mda's depiction of Popi. The novelist dramatises Popi's self-realisation in the political sphere by exposing her contribution to the negotiation process prior to the first democratic elections and by showing her active role in the newly elected municipal council.

Popi is represented as a person engrossed in her dedication to her political assignment. Mda uses irony to comment on Popi's great enthusiasm in addressing political matters. The narrator describes Popi's strong commitment to the Movement as a metaphorical relationship between lovers, as one can read in the following description:

Popi revelled in being a Young Lion. Her entry into the world of politics had been an unexpected one. Soon after her body had healed from its beating [in an incident of police violence], she had been sucked into the Movement. The Movement had become her lover. ... The Movement filled a hole in her heart. (Mda 2002: 167)

Popi invests a lot of energy in the socio-political transformation of her community.

Mda gives articulate voice to his black female characters as they participate actively in the political debate. The narrative encapsulates the transition period by highlighting black women's political struggle for black representation in political institutions (such as Excelsior's municipal council)

within the new dispensation. In *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in black South African literary history*, David Attwell explores Mda's post-apartheid text and explains that the author's tendency to depict post-apartheid contexts underscores Mda's endeavour to represent the ongoing struggle over modernity. Attwell maintains the following:

It is the emergence of democracy in 1994, and more especially the period immediately after the elections when political freedom needs to be translated into autonomous social development. In choosing these moments as narrative foci, Mda ... implicitly places in question the problem of agency. (Attwell 2005: 197)

The depiction of Popi shows Mda's empathy for black women in their struggle for political empowerment and in their ways of expressing agency. Popi is represented as an icon of political resistance. Mda allows his female character to undertake political actions for the liberation of black people in the public sphere. Popi celebrates the downfall of the apartheid system as "she was no longer going to be a bystander. Or a sidewalker who minded her own business. A sidewalker who had done no wrong and would therefore not run away" (Mda 2002: 159). However, Mda's depiction of the new political environment displays a wide range of challenges. Popi, for instance, acknowledges that the absolute liberation of her people should include power redistribution in the public arena because, according to her, "the Boers are still the rulers" (Mda 2005: 141).

The author draws attention to the issue of affirmative action in the new dispensation by foregrounding the emancipation of women on the one hand and black people on the other. Popi's election as member of the municipal council indicates the emergence of the formerly oppressed people in the decision making institutions embodying national political interests. Popi's political stance focuses on the eradication of the vestiges of the past as she stands firm against her white half-brother's racist attitudes. Popi establishes her resistance against racial, gender as well as class discrimination.

Through Popi's political engagement Mda wants to place his female

character at the centre of social change. In this way Mda extols this female character's political activism through showing her dynamism in tackling the problem of land redistribution, which is still a major political issue in South Africa. Popi's assistance lent to those deprived of land evinces Mda's political concern with tackling the problem of wealth redistribution in this transforming society. Popi's political action at the council is exemplified in the character's own explanation of her political achievement: "You know that in the council chamber I have supported the Baipehi. I have fought for them to be given land of their own which must have all the infrastructure" (Mda 2002: 190).

Mda's female character does not orient her political agenda only towards economic development but also towards social development. The novelist tends to suggest that the equal division of national wealth should also promote sustainable development by improving social facilities and providing proper education to the youth and decent housing to the poor. Popi is represented as an active agent of social development. She endeavours to "attack the duties of her new portfolio with great enthusiasm" (Mda 2002: 207) by building and equipping a new library in Mahlatswetsa Location.

Mda's depiction of female characters' political activities seems to display their high degree of moral integrity as compared to many of his male characters. By contrasting his descriptions of women's political activism with that of his male characters, Mda employs a satirical approach to represent the new political order in his country. Mda is critical about the new black male elite for their corruption and the way they neglect addressing the people's vital needs. In this regard, the author emphasises Popi's decisive action in resisting corruption by highlighting the conflict between the Pule Siblings. Popi expresses agency against all corrupt practices in the new local government. She does not hide her harsh opposition to her own brother's tendency to privilege his personal interests over the people's. Mda's criticism of male characters' lack of integrity can be interpreted as a call for women's political action to bring about genuine social and economic development.

In “An Approach to Viable Futures”, Njabulo S. Ndebele criticises corrupt means used by former freedom fighters in the new political environment. Ndebele demonstrates that the policy of black empowerment contains

“pitfalls” because “the conflict between material needs and inherited rewards on the one hand and political legitimacy on the other can weaken individual resolve. This [he concludes] may transform a competent and proven struggle stalwart into a common corrupt official”. (Ndebele 2004: 15)

Popi’s decision to retire from the public arena is perhaps the writer’s deliberate decision to draw attention to his female protagonist’s moral integrity. Unlike most African political leaders, Popi does not relish the idea of clinging to power. She epitomises the ideal political leadership in a democratic society. Through his female character’s decision to retreat from politics Mda seeks to demonstrate that the longer one stays in power the more she/he is likely to become corrupt and ineffective. Mda’s character seems to avoid this tendency of many African male politicians who determinedly cling to power, once attained.

However, Popi’s withdrawal from the political scene at the end of the plot can be deemed a weaker aspect of Mda’s delineation of female characters’ political activism. In fact, Popi’s loss of enthusiasm for political engagement can be interpreted as a failure to keep up the struggle for social development in a society where much still needs to be done to abate the social crisis.

Mda’s description of women’s various roles in the new socio-political order presents many possibilities. The writer does not only portray black women’s politically active roles, as he also evinces great admiration for white women’s political activities - foregrounding cultural and political transformation. Lizette de Vries, a National Party member and newly elected mayor of Excelsior, exemplifies Mda’s acknowledgement of white women who contribute to social change. Lizette de Vries plays an important role in the reconciliation process among the people of Excelsior.

The most striking aspect of her political activism is exposed through her active participation in the negotiation process that leads to the first multi-racial elections of the municipal council. Lizette de Vries epitomises the intellectual maverick who transcends cultural misconceptions to forge a personality based on more humane values. The character goes beyond the concept of race and the ethics of her political party to invest her energy in the social transformation of the small town of Excelsior, including Mahlatswetsa Location, the black township. Lizette de Vries's strong political determination to bring about equitable social development is rewarded when she is elected Mayor of Excelsior by the municipal councillors, including even people outside her party.

The depiction of Lizette de Vries's political activities shows Mda's commitment to challenging oppressive cultural structures. Lizette de Vries, for instance, is critical of both racism and patriarchy. She does not hesitate to admonish Tjaart Cronje for his sexist and racist attitudes towards Popi as she reminds him not to "talk to a lady" disrespectfully (Mda 2002: 194). The mayor's reaction can be interpreted as a demand for the respect of women's rights, among them freedom of speech. She opposes Tjaart's endeavour to silence and humiliate Popi on the basis of his dim-witted and vulgar syllogism: "She is no lady... Ladies shave their legs. She doesn't. She is therefore no lady" (Mda 2002: 194).

Lizette de Vries's defence of Popi indicates Mda's purpose of promoting solidarity between women of different races in the struggle against patriarchy. The author seems to point out the possibility for white women to show sympathy for black women's predicaments instead of oppressing them, as is often suggested by black feminist theorists. Mda wants to encourage political partnership between white and black women in order not only to eliminate patriarchal structures but also in order that women may become authors of social transformation.

Mda sees female solidarity across racial boundaries as an attempt to

establish a new national feminist discourse foregrounding women's empowerment in the political scene (irrespective of race). The close relationship between Popi and Lizette de Vries evinces women's common determination to fight for female public recognition in the new social and political context. The narrator, for instance, ascribes these two female characters' distinctive political achievements to their effective cooperation, as suggested in the following statement: "Lizette de Vries, who since becoming mayor had been working closely with Popi" (Mda 2002: 212).

b. *Ways of Dying* (1995)

In *Ways of Dying* (1995) Mda's narrative also explores the theme of female political engagement. But the writer takes a different approach in this text as he mainly criticises masculine attitudes towards women in the political arena. Women's political activities appear in the story as more productive in terms of social development as compared to male political activists' input. However, the author emphasises his criticism of asymmetrical power relationships between genders in the political field, as women are discriminatorily assigned junior roles in political leadership. This aspect of Mda's delineation of women's political status in the narrative is examined in a later chapter as an example of practised discrimination against women in the public arena.

3. Nadine Gordimer

In two of her post-apartheid novels Nadine Gordimer explores female political activism in an approach different to that manifested in her apartheid era texts. Although the Nobel Prize winner for literature has shifted from writing about the political oppression of the apartheid regime, she has not totally lost interest in analysing the effects of political change-over on the public and domestic fields in the newly democratised South Africa. In “The End of History: Reading Gordimer’s Post-apartheid Novels”, Ileana Dimitriu argues that despite Gordimer’s new interest in describing “the climates of the civilian as opposed to revolutionary times” (Dimitriu 2003: 18) the author’s “shift in emphasis does not mean that the political dimension simply vanishes from the fictional landscapes” (Dimitriu 2003: 19). In fact, Gordimer’s post-apartheid texts reflect on political issues of the transition.

a. *None to Accompany Me* (1994)

In *None to Accompany Me* (1994) Gordimer dramatises women’s political activism in the new political context. Her narrative features political transformation by redefining power relations across race and gender in the new political scene. The author describes two female political figures with different prerogatives. The first influential female political activist is Vera Stark, a white lawyer who uses her professional skills to resist political oppression of black people. Through references to the activities of Vera’s Legal Foundation the reader is informed that Vera “had been active in campaigns against detention without trial, forced removals of communities, franchises that excluded blacks” (Gordimer 1994: 5). The portrayal of Vera highlights Gordimer’s tendency to commend white women’s political engagement to the struggle against racial discrimination.

The delineation of Vera's political commitment to the struggle against racial discrimination echoes Gordimer's own political stance against the apartheid regime. Many parallels can be drawn between Vera and Gordimer in terms of their political involvement. Vera and Gordimer are professionally committed to resist political oppression, as both of them use their professions as platforms of political resistance. Vera resorts to her Legal Foundation to express agency against socio-political oppression while Gordimer uses art as a weapon of political struggle.

Despite a few similarities between the heroine's political activism and the author's engagement to the struggle, Gordimer refuses to identify herself with her female character. In an interview published on the website <http://www.readinggroupguides.com> Gordimer rejects the idea that Vera's political engagement be looked at as reflecting her own biography. The author articulates the discrepancy between herself and Vera by explaining: "I'm not a lawyer. She [Vera] is involved professionally. My political involvement, oddly enough, has been on a much more personal level than hers. I've never done any work like hers to bring me into the kinds of contexts she has" (Gordimer 2002: 5).² The writer extols Vera's political achievement as Gordimer represents her heroine as an icon of political resistance through her professional activities. Vera is described as a powerful woman who transcends the dread of dying for the sake of the oppressed. The incident where she gets injured and Oupa, her black assistant, meets his death, exemplifies the heroine's courage and resilience in participating in the political struggle.

In her delineation of women's political activism Gordimer shows two categories of female political figures. On the one hand, the author represents Vera, who belongs to the category of freedom fighters who chose to resist apartheid from within by staying in the country. On the other hand, Gordimer depicts a powerful black woman, Sibongile Maqoma, a returnee from

² Nadine Gordimer. "Author Interview".
http://www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/none_to_accompany_me-author.asp 26-11-2002, p. 5. 6.

political exile. Sibongile represents freedom fighters that were forced to choose the route of exile to carry out resistance beyond national borders. Since Sibongile's return from England she has begun playing an active role in socio-political transformation of the newly democratised South African system.

In "Black Women in Nadine Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*", Toshiko Sakamoto examines Gordimer's empowerment of women in the new political scene. Sakamoto argues that *None to Accompany Me* "explores both black and white women's empowerment within South Africa's national transformation during the period of dramatic change in political power from white dominance to the first democratically elected government" (Sakamoto 2006a: 1).³

Gordimer's narrative contextualises the political transition as it reflects on the lives of characters. The most striking feature of the narrative is Gordimer's delineation of a politicised black female character. Gordimer tends to rectify the reproach concerning her previously somewhat scant fictional representation of black women's participation in the political struggle. Sakamoto explains that Gordimer's approach in delineating female black characters has been criticised for the following reasons:

Black women [are] silent and invisible in revitalising and liberating exclusively white women through their attachments to black men as if to suggest that the issues of liberation may only be explored between white women and black men, and as if to endorse the assumption that matters of liberation within the non-white community are entirely masculine issues. Gordimer sees the emancipation of black women as secondary to national liberation within which black women's struggle is subsumed. (Sakamoto 2006b: 1)⁴

In fact, during the apartheid era the author privileged racial oppression

³ Toshiko Sakamoto. "Black Women in Nadine Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*". <http://www.ccsu.edu/afstudy/upd8-2.htm> 07-02-2006, p. 1. 5.

⁴ Toshiko Sakamoto. "Black Women in Nadine Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*". <http://www.ccsu.edu/afstudy/upd8-2.htm> 07-02-2006, p. 1. 5.

over feminist issues. In the post-national struggle Gordimer explores gender issues by drawing attention to black women's empowerment in the political arena. Gordimer politicises Sibongile, the black protagonist, by assigning to her a wide range of political roles available to black women in the new dispensation. Sibongile's political position as deputy director of the movement in charge of social reinsertion of returnees from exile and her election as member of the executive board of a post-apartheid movement indicate the advance of black women to occupy powerful positions in the political sphere.

Gordimer's depiction of Sibongile's political activism shows that the character is totally empowered in the political arena. She is very enterprising in tackling new national political challenges. Through the representation of Sibongile's political empowerment Gordimer wants to exemplify the alteration of black women's political roles in the transforming society. *None to Accompany Me* (1994) tends to reflect the presence of a good number of black women in current local and national governments. The author seems to suggest that the political liberation of black people parallels the liberation of black women in the political arena. Therefore, black women's political participation in 'home' politics can promote the emancipation of women in the political sphere. In this respect, Sakamoto points out that "the novel's very complex conflation of many issues in both locations of gender and political struggles indicates that political struggle is also women's struggle" (Sakamoto 2006c: 1).⁵

In *None to Accompany Me* (1994), Gordimer's portrayal of women's political activism progressively shifts from the description of resistance against institutionalised racial dichotomy to the evocation of women's novel political activities in the New South Africa.

⁵ Toshiko Sakamoto. "Black Women in Nadine Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*". <http://www.ccsu.edu/afstudy/upd8-2.htm> 07-02-2006, p. 1. 5.

b. *The Pick Up* (2001)

In *The Pick Up* (2001) Gordimer subtly approaches political issues without overtly engaging her female characters into political activism. Although the narrative is more oriented towards the identity crisis in the post-apartheid context, the author portrays her heroine's political positionality within modern socio-political realities. Julie, Gordimer's heroine, is not an apolitical character per se, as she attempts to address public issues affecting the new socio-political order.

Through Julie's personal opinions about the policies regarding immigration and HIV/AIDS in her country, Gordimer tends to politicise her female protagonist. The author goes beyond racial politics to show how her female character responds to the new social realities. Political racism seems to have been replaced by oppression against African immigrants. Xenophobia in the post-apartheid society is seen by critics such as Sarah Nuttall as an immediate consequence related to the failure of the liberation movement to "breed a pan-Africanist consciousness" (Nuttall 2004: 744). Gordimer entrusts her character with a mission to promulgate transnational and transcultural vision in the context of globalisation. In this regard, Julie articulates her agency against new forms of discrimination characterising the new socio-political environment. The character condemns xenophobic laws as well as the government policies on the HIV pandemic.

By allowing Julie to address new political challenges, Gordimer seems to endorse David Maughan Brown's view about political struggle in the new dispensation. In "Politics and Value in South African Literature: Some Thoughts on Recent Interventions by Albie Sachs and Njabulo Ndebele", Maughan Brown suggests that "the struggle in South Africa will not end with the dismantling of apartheid; democracy and 'democratization' will have little meaning without a fundamental restructuring of South African Society" (Maughan Brown 1994: 153). Gordimer's depiction of Julie's political

activism diverges from the perspective of propagandist writing to adopt Ndebele's outlook about the epistemological redefinition of the social imagination. According to Ndebele, the South African writer should look at specific social details in order to foreground a novel hermeneutics of socio-political realities:

The operative principle of composition in the post-protest literature is that it should probe beyond the observable facts, to reveal new worlds where it was previously thought they did not exist, and to reveal process and movement where they have been hidden. (Ndebele 1989: 50)

Gordimer's heroine evinces this kind of broadening of her political activism by grappling with the deconstruction of imperialist misrepresentations of cultural aspects of post-colonial settings. Julie's political actions in resisting the cultural domination of the West is portrayed through her personal choice of relinquishing the privileged lifestyle that her parents can offer both in South Africa (where her father lives) and in the USA (where her mother has settled after emigrating).

Unlike her fellow white South Africans who pick the American, British, Canadian or Australian destination, Julie chooses to live in the Third World. In fact, Gordimer seeks to prove that the wealthy suburban context in which Julie was brought up failed to teach her some basic human values. Ironically, it is in this North African, supposedly 'backward country' that Julie learns new ways of living. She discovers, for instance, love, social awareness and solidarity in this rural community. The novelist shows how communal interests are more valued than individual ones in this North African village.

The narrator shows that Julie discovers spirituality in this Muslim community and quickly adjusts to her husband Ibrahim's culture. She performs all the local domestic chores with other women, and learns their traditional culinary art. Furthermore, Julie does not hesitate to fast at Ramadan. The narrator's reference to the passage where Julie relishes the reading of the text about mercy in the Koran highlights the positive image of Islam that the West has always rejected. Julie's political struggle against

Western cultural hegemony highlights Gordimer's endeavour to promote a transcultural philosophy in a world where many forms of intolerance tend to affect the current socio-political order.

The representation of women's political activism in the present chapter provides a wide range of examples of politicised women articulating resistance against distinctive forms of socio-political subjugation. Instead of being submissive objects of oppression, female characters in the novels under scrutiny are depicted as icons of political resistance. Female characters' political engagement focuses on the dismantling of oppressive institutions and cultural stereotypes in their social milieus. In other words, the aim of women's political struggle is not only oriented towards the liberation of women from patriarchal oppression but it also seeks to address other issues regarding economic and/or socio-political injustices. Although the analysis of women's political activism already exposes women's struggle for the assertion of a female presence in the public sphere by displaying heroic images of women or those of highly-esteemed female political leaders, this chapter does not focus primarily on the new social position of women in the public arena. However, the next chapter attempts to ascertain the new public image of women by assessing how various socio-political transformations are reflected in these works of the transition. In other words, the chapter seeks to answer the question whether women's political activism has succeeded in promoting or altering their public image in a post-struggle environment. Nevertheless a point made by Lara (in the quotation below) seems apposite here:

I believe that women's identity formation has been more a process of invention than a recovery of something lost, hidden or forgotten. This viewpoint takes into consideration the importance of language and shows the changes that occur through its use in outlook and life styles. Another relevant issue here is the creation of identities. By narrating a past that best generates a sense of personal identity, women have developed a pattern in which the present is the source of future possibilities. Women have used the word 'personal' because employment has been their tool to create individual meaning through other stories – of

women of the past – in order to tie into a historical understanding the ongoing content of women's lives within narratives that offer a wider conception of 'agents' as moral subjects. In this sense, individuals do not simply have memories in the historical sense, but, by adopting everchanging attitudes towards them, continuously restructuring them, they can develop new interpretations. That is why there are constant changes in opinion. Identity is conceived differently in narratives not only because past experiences are rewoven through time, but also because each new and broader narrative gives new meaning to society's own larger narrative. (Pia Lara 1998: 93)

The above quotation, with its focus on "identities" and "public opinion", may also serve as a hinge to swing the discussion into the next chapter with its focus on novelists' representations (in the texts of the transition) of female roles in the South African public sphere.

Chapter 3: WRITING WOMEN'S LIVES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

For centuries women's roles and functions in patriarchal societies were exclusively restricted to the domestic arena. The status of women within the family unit remained confined to their biological functions, such as procreation and childcare, confining them to a lower marital and social rank compared to their male counterparts. The public sphere has consequently been a male dominated territory where the masculine gender has single-handedly enjoyed many social advantages and privileges.

The present chapter aims to consider novelistic representations of female protagonists in the context of the public sphere. This is done in order to grasp another dimension of women's realities as represented in the texts selected for study in this dissertation. In fact, the reconstruction of South African society, a country which has chosen a democratic political ethos and practice, needs fundamental social transformation starting from the individual level but proceeding further – that is, advancing from the private to the public spectrum.

The chapter will study the status of women in the workforce as well as their participation in social dynamics. In other words, the position of women in the public arena and their contribution to social development will constitute the core of analysis in the present chapter. The focus will be on women's self-determination and self-fulfilment in their public lives. The analysis in this part will be backed by discussion of a few feminist theorists' approaches which value the place of women in society. In her paper "Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa", Katherine Frank lists crucial factors for the assertion of women's role/image in the public sphere by referring to Mariama Bâ's advice concerning the need for female solidarity in *So Long a Letter* (1980), Flora Nwapa's position regarding women's financial autonomy in *One is Enough* (1981) and Buchi Emecheta's *Double Yoke* (1982), a narrative

conveying the novelist's view about education as being "the most potent means of women's liberation" (Emecheta quoted in Durisimo 1987: 21, vol. 15).

The Mexican philosopher Maria Pia Lara is another theorist who makes an insightful contribution to the analysis of texts in this chapter and, as the author of *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere*, provides a different approach based on concepts of justice and solidarity. Pia Lara argues that the emancipation of women in the public domain can occur if the rights of women are recognised and solidarity between men and women is valued. According to Pia Lara, women's social integration requires novel ways of interpreting social 'facts and norms':

The public sphere is the area where the interpretation of needs and rights, together with the contextualization of needed institutional changes, interweave justice with claims of solidarity. This connection between justice and solidarity is captured in the term that best defines the dynamics between the emerging public and public opinion itself, that is, 'illocutionary force'. Women's claims for justice can succeed only through a responsive acceptance that reframes their claim, taking it not only as a new understanding of a particular issue, but as a newly broadened collective self-understanding of the daily life of civil society. Thus, a whole set of cultural, social and political problems are included in discussions of 'gender identity'. The communicative notion of 'we' – the public – is an ongoing process of engagement and critique that establishes a connection between justice and solidarity based on the insight that moral norms are aspects of a shared form of life. (Pia Lara 1998: 110)

Pia Lara points out the value of re-assessing ethical norms in order to establish justice and solidarity in society. She also acknowledges that feminist narratives play an important role in transforming cultural misconceptions of women. Thus, she shows how story-telling (i.e. narrative) can take a crucial place in changing cultural norms. Pia Lara adds that the introduction of women's lives as stories in the public debate has contributed to the recognition of female public figures or women as persons with a public as much as a private role. Pia Lara's point of view is clearly stated in the following lines:

The many theories that feminists have elaborated constitute a 'body narrative' of levels, a powerful discourse and a hermeneutic and deconstructive lens that has been displayed in the techniques of storytelling, in novels and books in general, in films and television shows, in the news and printed media. The performative constructions of women's identity have succeeded because they have been skilful and imaginative in addressing symbolic and linguistic structures in the fragmented public sphere. They have simulated the appearance of new subaltern publics that have given positive feedback to these narrative claims demanding that 'general interest' be focused on new stories about justice and solidarity. (Pia Lara 1998: 73)

The analysis in the present chapter will consider several texts by Gordimer, Mda and Langa by focusing on similarities, differences as well as particularities in the way women are represented in the public arena in these novels.

Despite the tendency towards the portrayal of 'the civilian' in post-apartheid writing, which advises the "re-discovery of the ordinary" (Ndebele 1991: 50), the three authors depict influential female characters who occupy high positions within the social fabric of their environment. Although the depiction of rural settings predictably tends to confine women to minimal roles (especially with reference to their relegation to the domestic sphere) compared to male characters, Gordimer, Mda and Langa use the same setting to denounce the abuse of women's rights both in the public and domestic fields, or to highlight women's power, which can succeed in overturning patriarchal constraints. The texts under scrutiny provide examples of female characters who, against the odds, manage to a large extent to overcome patriarchy in order to fulfil their own identity as independent women by transgressing arbitrary positions assigned to women in society within a biased, sexist dispensation.

The first quality the three writers give women in their works is knowledge, which helps them to obtain public recognition in society. In fact, knowledge is a principal means for social advancement for both women and men. Despite

the resistant force of patriarchal structures, both traditional and modern worlds allow social empowerment to women mastering traditional lore (principally in the rural context) as well as to educated women in modern society. In her article “Freedom of Expression for Women: Myth or Reality”, Sindiwe Magona makes reference to the conditions of women in traditional African life and argues that “in traditional African communities, with age, the woman was greatly respected as it was held she had, by that time of her life, acquired great wisdom” (Magona 2000: 21). Magona supports the claim that the mastering of traditions allows the African woman in traditional society to enjoy a respected status.

In similar vein, in her article “Recovering Igbo Traditions: A Case for Indigenous Women’s Organizations in Development”, Nkiru Nzegwu examines the status of Igbo women in the political structure during the pre-colonial and post-colonial times and shows that in traditional Igboland, women had important social and political roles. Describing the political environment of Igbo traditional society, Nzegwu explains that:

The social political structure required and depended on the active participation of women in community life. Their views were deemed critical, not because they were women, but because of the special insight they brought to issues by virtue of their spiritual, market and trading duties, and their maternal roles. (Nzegwu 1995: 446)

Furthermore, this Nigerian sociologist criticises “the politics and ideological power of literacy”, which tends to deny a privileged status to illiterate people in the post-colonial environment by maintaining the following: “There is no question that in today’s world literacy is vital, but it must be put in a proper perspective. It does not have a propulsive force all of its own to instil knowledge and experience” (Nzegwu 1995: 453). In fact, Nzegwu acknowledges the importance of modern education. But this sociologist also wants to give credit to people who have practical skills and lack literacy.

The discussion around the empowerment of women through education

starts by examining some of Gordimer's novels.

1. Nadine Gordimer

a. *None to Accompany Me*

None to Accompany Me represents two powerful female characters with advanced education. On one side there is Vera Stark, a brilliant white lawyer who plays a pivotal role in the setting up of the Legal Foundation helping black people to claim redistribution of land. Her public activity as the Deputy Director of the Legal Foundation makes her use her brains and energy to work for the benefit of the needy by even risking her life in critical circumstances where Oupa, her black assistant, gets killed.

Vera is depicted as a fulfilled woman in the public domain, as she aspires for retirement from a milieu in which she considers she has achieved a great deal. In professional comparison with her husband Ben, Vera represents a successful lawyer, while Ben's artistic career is described as a simple failure due to his lack of maturity in tackling domestic issues. His irrational passion for Vera makes him sacrifice his artistic talent. Ben becomes a real burden to his wife on whom he totally depends: physically, emotionally and financially.

Vera, on the contrary, epitomises competence and the image of a powerful woman as exemplified by the narrator's description of her personality at work: she is a woman with "white-streaked hair cut like a man" (Gordimer 1994: 23), with her "briefcase documenting inquiry into other people's lives" (Gordimer 1994: 39). Both her hair-style and attitude reveal Vera's equal status with men, since her "haircut of a woman who has set aside her femininity" (Gordimer 1994: 39 – 40) highlights Vera's attempt to break subservient etiquettes socially ascribed to women. However, Vera wants to withdraw from the public sphere to concentrate on her private life, a field

where she still has a great deal to learn.

On the other hand, Gordimer depicts a black woman, Sibongile Maqoma or Sally, who returns from exile during the transition period in South Africa. Unlike Vera, who shifts from the public life to the private in search of self-discovery after achieving much in the public domain, Sally, Vera's friend, represents the new black woman who is asserting her status in the public sphere. She epitomises the image of the new black woman who benefits from the policy of black empowerment, which attempts to redress past disparities by giving leadership positions to black people.

Sally is an influential political figure whose personality has grown with her political involvement in the movement while in exile in England. She is depicted as a woman of strong personality whose "obvious undocile femininity" (Gordimer 1994: 78) is even feared by her husband whenever she speaks at conferences:

Didymus kept in himself a slight tautness, the tug of a string in the gut ready to tighten in defence of Sibongile – he was troubled that her frankness would be interpreted as aggression; her manner, sceptical, questioning, iconoclastic, would be taken as disrespectful of the traditional style of political intercourse that had been established in the higher ranks of the Movement through many years of exile, and would count against her advancement at the level to which she had, for the first time, gained access.

(Gordimer 1994: 77-78)

Sally is given a high position in the public arena as she is "appointed Deputy Director of the Movement's redeployment programme" (Gordimer 1994: 52). As compared to her husband Didymus, Sally has a better job. She travels around the world to represent her country at conferences. Sally shows an emergent, positive image of a woman who has been promoted to a decision-making position. She belongs to a higher social class where women start extricating themselves from social conditions prescribed for women. Gordimer appears to endorse Sibongile Muthwa's vision concerning the emancipation of women in the public field. In "Breakthrough Leadership: A

Review of Women's Positions in the State and Social Impact on Everyday Lives of Women" Muthwa acknowledges that the new dispensation has fostered the liberation of women in public life as a good number of women have emerged to occupy important, politically public roles. She also admits that more efforts should be made, because she argues:

Even though I take a sceptical view of the assumption that by simply increasing the number of women in the public office the positions of women will be improved, I can appreciate that the increasing numbers is one of the mutually reinforcing strategies. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that more visibility of women in public life, reflecting the country's demographics, has the potential to improve awareness of gender inequality. (Muthwa 2003: 138)

The narrator's detailed description of Sally's work environment exemplifies the high status of an intellectual woman who effectively plays a leading role in a male-dominated world:

Although Sibongile spoke of her job as if it were quite humble – it was the democratic vocabulary, hangover from exile with its brave denial of hierarchy – she was one who could not be reached except through a secretary these days. She had her offices and battery of command – computers, fax, assistants whose poor education and lack of skills she was attempting to tolerate while disciplining and training them. When there were complaints about her she said to her comrades in high positions what they themselves thought it better not to express. (Gordimer 1994: 74)

Gordimer portrays a black woman who by means of education has gained power in a formerly male-dominated territory. In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela comments on the importance of education as a factor of social mobility:

Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine; that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation. (Mandela 1994: 194)

Unlike some texts by some African male writers in which women occupy secondary roles as compared to their male counterparts, Gordimer's female characters have the leading roles while men take less important positions. The novelist seems to reverse traditional views about women in society. In fact, for centuries women in many societies were confined to the performance of domestic tasks and to playing secondary roles while men enjoyed high positions in the public arena. The representation of the Maqomas shows that Sally's life is more oriented towards the public field than her husband's, as she is always on duty and has less time to allocate to her domestic life. Didymus, her husband, is instead fulfilling her supposedly "feminine" role by taking care of domestic tasks:

Home was set up; but she did not have time to do the daily tasks that would maintain it; it was Didymus who took the shopping lists she scribbled in bed at night, who drove Mpho (their daughter) to and from her modern dance class, to the dentist, to the urgent obligations that school girls have to be here or there, it was he who called the plumber and reported the telephone out of order. His working day was less crowded than hers. She would be snatching up files, briefcase, and keys in the morning while he was dipping bread fast in coffee, changing back and forth from local news to BBC. Their working life was housed in the same building; sometimes he came to look in on her office: she was talking fast on the telephone, held up a hand not to be interrupted; she was in the middle of briefing the fieldworkers through whom she had initiated research into the reintegration of returned exiles. (Gordimer 1994: 74 - 75)

Sally is represented as a powerful and hardworking woman in the public field, whereas her husband Didymus is less visible in the public domain and is portrayed as exhibiting the attributes of a weak and lazy man in comparison with Sally. The husband does not have a choice but to take care of domestic tasks, since his wife's working days are busier than his. Karen Lazar, in her paper "Feminism as 'Piffling'? Ambiguities in Nadine Gordimer's Short Stories" rejects the ambiguities often mentioned by critics concerning Gordimer's affiliation to feminism. Lazar underlines the fact that the author adopts a feminist discourse to depict her female characters; it is clear that

despite her refusal to identify herself as a feminist, Gordimer's stance echoes a feminist position which values women's social affirmation. Karen Lazar points out the characteristic portrayal of Gordimer's female characters:

At first glance it seems as if Gordimer is making a case against the traditional success formula for female fulfilment, namely marriage and motherhood. Instead she seems to construct sympathy in favour of the working woman who finds satisfaction outside domestic concerns and within intellectual and 'public' ones. (Lazar 1993: 217)

Gordimer's depiction of women in her short stories as explained by Lazar is quite similar to the delineation of female characters in *None to Accompany Me*. Vera, on the one hand, symbolises the woman who does not find satisfaction in marriage and motherhood. However, she seeks for self-discovery after having satisfactorily performed her public role. Vera has reached a stage in life where she is more concerned with the assessment of her personal identity.

On the other hand, Sally represents the intellectual black woman who wants to prove women's worth in the public arena. The demands of the public life make Sally retreat more and more from the so-called 'women's domestic duties'. Unlike Vera, the white lawyer, who has fulfilled her mission in the public domain, Sally is just starting to establish her presence in the field where black women were denied access under the previous dispensation.

Sally shows diligence and efficiency at work. She wants to teach the same virtues to her daughter Mpho, as both Sally and Didymus encourage their "bright girl whose intelligence had been stimulated in exile by a superior education..." (Gordimer 1994: 77). In fact, the Maqomas' attitude parallels Katherine Frank's viewpoint about education in her article "Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa":

Most importantly, it equips women to be economically independent, to prepare for a job, a profession that will enable them to take care of themselves and their children without the help and protection of men. Perhaps just as importantly, though, education also gives women a vision of

human experience beyond the narrow confines of their own lives; it bestows a kind of imaginative power, a breadth of perspective, an awareness of beauty, dreams, possibility. (Frank 1987: 23)

In fact, Frank's words underline the importance of education as main factor of women's affirmation in the public arena as it both develops in women a feeling of self-confidence and asserts their social worth.

Another striking feature of the novel is women's solidarity, exemplified by the relationship between Vera and Sally. The two women have been friends for a long time. Vera is Sally's friend indeed as she welcomes Sally and her family, inviting them to live at her house when the latter arrive from exile and do not at first have a place to stay. Vera assists Sally so that she and her family adjust much more quickly to the new South Africa where the returning exiles are disillusioned by the current situation of unemployment. Both women share accounts of their work-day experiences whenever they meet to discuss things. The balanced and satisfying relationship between Vera and Sally shows unity between a black and a white woman. Both women transcend racial boundaries to assert their common gender identity which, Gordimer seems to tell us, is no longer determined by 'the body' or physiology, but rather by 'the mind'.

Gordimer's post-1994 texts seem to be more oriented towards the exploration of the domestic arena; the public sphere has not totally disappeared, though. As in *None to Accompany Me*, Gordimer uses the same approach of representing her female characters in *The Pick Up* and *The House Gun*. Vera (*None to Accompany Me*) to some extent resembles Julie in *The Pick Up*, as both characters have embarked on an individual quest for personal identity by deliberately withdrawing from the public scene. Julie assumes that her self-discovery can only be achieved in Abdu's village.

b. *The House Gun*

Unlike Julie and Vera who deliberately choose to reflect on domestic issues, Claudia (in *The House Gun*) is forced to deal with her motherly emotions after her son Duncan has committed a murder. However, her status in the public sphere is enviable. Gordimer's portrayal of female characters seems to ascribe to them remarkably high positions in the public sphere. Claudia Lindgard's profession as a medical doctor shows that women are sufficiently intelligent and skilled to succeed in traditionally male dominated fields.

Gordimer's description of the professional success of women pinpoints women's rejection of attributes conventionally considered feminine in order to stand on an equal footing with men. As a medical doctor, Claudia is constantly exposed to the public as she treats many patients coming from different cultural and social backgrounds. In comparison with her husband Harald, a respected insurance executive, Claudia's life principles are based on rationality or science, while Harald's rest on faith. The only reproach a reader may raise against Claudia is her failure to probe and heal her patients' emotions. However, Duncan's tribulations put Claudia in a position where she needs to change her approach in communicating with the outside world, as the text shows:

At the clinic and in the surgery hours, the doctor was within an unchanged enclosure of her life, a safe place; people who are surrounded by encroaching danger may be precariously protected for a time in areas declared as such by those outside threat, some agency of mercy. However she had difficulty in retaining the personal interest in patients' lives which she had always held as essential to the practice of healing. The first identification with another whose son is imprisoned soon disappears in the crowd of those who are in misfortune; once truly jostled, become one among them, there has to be a sense that if I had to listen to your trouble

you would have to listen to mine. (Gordimer 1998: 50)

Gordimer's generally positive characterisation of women portrayed as functioning in the public arena highlights cultural transformation in a society where women want to extricate themselves from traditional forms of gender discrimination. But the author suggests the need for solidarity between women.

c. The Pick Up

Julie, the central female character in *The Pick Up*, embodies the image of a woman determined to reaffirm unity between women. Julie abandons her privileged suburban life-style to relocate in Abdu's 'backward' North African village. This is the place where she believes she will be able to fulfil herself, by committing herself to serve and work with the other women in the village.

Julie initiates social work in the village by giving education to women and also helping them to set up a cooperative of their own in order to free themselves from patriarchal shackles. Julie succeeds in empowering these women psychologically and financially by teaching them notions of self-esteem and financial autonomy. She sees education as a top priority for women's fulfilment in society. Julie is committed to equipping women with tools which will change their destiny. Thus, she endeavours to end discrimination against girls who are not given the same opportunities as boys in terms of access to schools. The narrator analyses Julie's commitment to assisting other women by making the following comment on the heroine's dignified actions:

Strange; she had never worked like this before, without reservations of self, always had been merely trying out this and that, always conscious that she could move on, any time, to something else, not expecting satisfaction, looking on at herself, half-amusedly, as an ant scurrying God knows where. In addition to the ladies' conversational circle, the lessons for the other adults who sought her out, and the play-learning she discovered she could devise (probably started with Leila) for small children, as well as the classes she taught in the primary school, she had been able to persuade – flatter – the local school principal to let girls join the classes although it was more than unlikely their families would allow them to leave home. (Gordimer 2001: 195)

Through Julie's actions, Gordimer shows how solidarity between African

women should be promoted. Julie's undertaking to teach English to rural women has resulted in the transformation of these women's mindset. In this regard, Abdu sees change in these women's behaviour and accuses Julie of "influence[ing] them with her rich girl's Café ideas of female independence" (Gordimer 2001: 256).

Despite her commitment to assisting rural women Julie does not pretend to speak on their behalf, because the latter are able to take their destiny in their own hands. Gordimer seems to bring back the debate around the representation of African women in public feminist discourse. By representation we refer here to the debate around the question whether non-African theorists can accurately or adequately describe the position and experience of African women. In other words, the author raises a moot point about who has the right to speak for women of the periphery. In fact, Gordimer's heroine supports the idea of letting African women speak for themselves because they are the right people to know their own needs, as the text explains:

But they [women] want to decide for themselves. They don't want anyone to tell them to wear the chador, all right, but if they do want to wear it, they won't have some Westerner telling them to throw it away. They want to study or work anywhere they decide outside the kitchen, the modern world where men still think we're the only ones to have a place. (Gordimer 2001: 178)

Gordimer's narrative represents many women who enjoy financial independence. This is the case of black and white women who are hosted by Nigel Ackroyd Summers (Julie's father) and Danielle, his new wife, at a party in their house. Business occupies the central place in their discussion to such an extent that one can identify them as belonging to the haute bourgeoisie. However, Julie despises these women's snobbishness, since they do not pay attention to Abdu, who is sitting with them, because of who he is. Gordimer perhaps romanticises women's recognition in the public sphere but at the same time she condemns presumptuous attitudes from women. Julie, on the

contrary, epitomises humility and a strong character.

Julie performs actions without caring about public judgement; she rather attempts to correct popular opinion about foreigners by “picking up” an outsider for a husband and relocating to his underdeveloped country. Through Julie, Gordimer criticises any form of discrimination in her society where the collapse of the apartheid system shows the emergence of new forms of discrimination such as xenophobia, homophobia, and discrimination against AIDS patients, etc.

Julie’s preoccupation with achieving social change is noticeable when she discusses public issues with her friends at EL-AY Café. She manages to put into practice her theories by assuming her actions in order to change people’s mindsets in a newly democratised country. In *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere*, Maria Pia Lara shows the value of debating social issues as it provides different interpretations of the cultural fabric and reinforces democratic values. Pia Lara explains that “Public discussions are thus an important factor in deepening the democratic culture of civil society; they provide an arena for communication and the self-reflexive critical tools to examine the legacy of ‘social integration’” (Pia Lara 1998: 110).

By way of contrast with Julie’s public concern for poor women and her involvement of them in public debate, Gordimer depicts Julie’s mother – whose business acumen is of a clearly capitalist variety. Julie’s mother moved to California (in the United States of America), where she lives with her new husband. She is given the attributes of a “wealthy American citizen mother” in the narrative (Gordimer 2001: 160). Her economic power allows her to have many choices, such as deciding on the place where she wishes to live and what type of man she wants to marry - without being dictated to by popular opinion. The casino owner she has married is far younger than she, but this does not alter her commitment in choosing to love him. She therefore rejects conventional trends, which dictate that the wife should be younger than the husband. This ideology is discriminatory against older women who want to

have younger partners.

As in most of her novels, Gordimer puts her female characters themselves in a position where they have to negotiate between the dominant social ideology and personal responsibility to establish their female sexual and social identity. Gordimer's questioning of conventions in her recently published novels seems to become a central feature of her novel fictional strategy whose aim is to free people from system-bound thinking.

2. Zakes Mda

a. *The Heart of Redness* (2000)

The discussion about the delineation of female characters in the public arena proceeds with the examination of Mda's texts, starting with *The Heart of Redness* (2000). Mda's characterisation of women in the novel displays an absolute contrast between different types of women, one that accords with the conflict between the Believers and Unbelievers in the village, or between the advocates of tradition and those who promote modernity.

Mda's narrative revisits the story of the mid-nineteenth century in the Eastern Cape village of Qolorha, when the prophetess Nongqawuse delivered a prophecy supposedly received from the ancestors of the amaXhosa people. The prophetess told that the ancestors required the slaughtering of all the people's cattle to assuage their ancestral wrath, to which the presence of hardship and disease in the community was ascribed. The prophetess assured her people that the cattle killing would result in bringing the dead heroes back to life. The prophecy split the community into two camps, the Believers and the Unbelievers.

Surprisingly enough, through the character of Nongqawuse, the narrator exposes the degree of the woman's power in traditional society. Mda shows the revered role of the prophetess in traditional Africa. In fact, in that society, the woman is seen as the guardian of traditional lore as she can play the intermediary role between the world of the dead (the ancestors) and that of the living. Therefore, in religious or spiritual matters the woman is given public recognition, as exemplified by the devotion of several men (such as Twin) to the prophetess. The spiritual dimension of the prophetess's role is reminiscent of Ayi Kwei Armah's text *The Healers*, in which female as well as male

characters play the role of medical, spiritual and social healers.

In her article “Parasites and Prophets: The Use of Women in Ayi Kwei Armah’s Novels”, Abena P.A. Busia studies Armah’s depiction of women and points out women’s positive proclamations in public spaces. Busia looks at the way women are portrayed in Armah’s *Two Thousand Seasons* and comments that it “breaks away from the conventions of the modern realistic novel, its liberating, powerful prophets are strong, public characters, who carry their societies with them, rather than being carried by them” (Busia 1990: 106).

Although Mda gives recognition to the public role played by some women, the failure of Nongqawuse’s prophecy seems to undermine the leadership positions women used to have in this village of Qolorha. The fact that the prophecy misled the prophetess’s people connotes injudicious leadership from this female character.

The account of Nongqawuse’s misleading prophecy reminds one of the conventions of African oral literature, a reminder that Mda has acknowledged that his writing derives to an extent from the storytelling traditions of African culture. Thus, the influence of tradition can obviously be detected in his narrative. In “Images of Women in African Literature: Some Examples of Inequality in the Colonial Period”, Ester Y. Smith demonstrates that “in narrative genres of traditional oral literature from Africa, as in those from around the world, images of women show the good and the evil, the weak and the strong, the queens and heroines with magical powers, as well as the wives and mothers of more ordinary resources” (Smith 1990:29).

Mda’s characterisation of women in the narrative also adopts a nuanced approach in examining and depicting female roles. The negative image is exemplified by Nongqawuse, who leads the whole community astray by relaying a misleading prophecy. She is referred to in the narrative as “a young girl who deceived the amaXhosa nation into suicide” (Mda 2000: 39) in order to highlight her immaturity and to characterise her as a person ill-equipped to

lead a nation.

Mda's choice of technical devices shows the novelist's interest in reviving African oral culture since he uses a metaphorical language to describe some facts. The author's style indicates his attachment to oral traditions. The way the narrator expatiates on NomaRussia's illness portrays traditional African lore about sex issues, which are not spoken about in public because they are considered social taboos. The narrator makes use of many images in this passage to pinpoint this aspect of African culture (regarding sex):

Since that day the girl has never been able to have another tryst with anyone. Lovers have run away from her because whenever she tries to know a man – in the biblical sense, that is – she sees the moon. Things come in gushes, like water from a stream. (Mda 2000: 44)

This passage also exhibits the negative, sexist conception of women's menstruation, which is often associated with impurity in traditional societies.

The Heart of Redness juxtaposes two contrasting representations of women in contemporary Qolorha by emphasising the antagonism between Believers and Unbelievers; in other words, between traditionalists and modernists. On the one hand, Xoliswa Ximiya is endowed with the prerogatives of the modern woman. She is an educated person who supports Western values concerning progress and development. Her references in terms of education and experience of travelling in the USA have secured her a good position in the work place; she is promoted to the position of principal of Qolorha-by-Sea Secondary School.

Her leadership position is incontestable in the village, where men and women alike fear and respect her. Indeed, "as principal of Qolorha-by-Sea Secondary School, she is the second most important person in the village after the chief" (Mda 2000: 132), while the chief is said to be "a headless twit whose function in society is to eat bribes" (Mda 2000: 132). Xoliswa Ximiya is considered by the villagers and her colleagues as the only person capable of explaining the values of modernity or progress, since she has been to big cities

in America but also at home, for instance to Johannesburg.

The negative aspect of Xoliswa's power is her arrogance vis-à-vis her assistants. She sometimes lacks humility when she addresses them by adopting a condescending manner, merely because they do not have her travelling experience. Xoliswa's reaction to the history teacher's refusal to reveal his position in the debate around the developmental project on which the Believers and Unbelievers are feuding, displays the headmistress's bumptiousness.

The narrator makes use of both indirect speech and direct speech in the following passage to portray the character's attitude. The use of indirect speech by the narrator helps to describe Xoliswa's body language and emotions whereas through direct speech, Xoliswa publicly exposes her own personality through the words she deliberately uses: “‘You do not know?’ asks Xoliswa Ximiya with disgust. ‘A whole secondary school history teacher is ignorant of the developmental issues! What did your parents send you to school for?’” (Mda 2000: 109).

Xoliswa uses authoritarian discourse reminiscent of patriarchal speech whenever she talks to her colleagues. Her behaviour shows her determination to break all prejudices about women by establishing her ‘masculine’ power in a traditional environment.

Xoliswa is portrayed as a powerful woman with remarkable status on the public stage. She has a strong personality and epitomises the emancipated African woman. The character represents the authority of an independent woman. The fact that she does not have a single boyfriend makes the whole community think that men are intimidated by her social status and especially by her education, as the quotation illustrates:

It is clear that the community has been worried that their headmistress might die an old maid. It is well known that men are intimidated by educated women. And by ‘educated women’ they mean those who have gone to high schools and universities to imbibe western education, rather than those who have received traditional isiXhosa education at home and

during various rites of passage. Men are at home with the kind of woman they can trample under their feet. Even educated men prefer uneducated women. (Mda 2000: 111)

The quotation pinpoints the value of modern education, which is the source of women's empowerment in society. Xoliswa strongly challenges masculine authority and wants to achieve leading status in her profession. She is a woman with a great deal of career ambition, as she aspires to ascend to higher positions by working for the government in the city of Johannesburg.

Her financially independent position has allowed her to build a house for her father, Bhonco Ximiya. Indeed, Bhonco is so proud of his daughter's achievement that he despises Zim, his opponent, because the latter's daughter, Qukezwa, is not educated. But the prestige Bhonco is enjoying due to Xoliswa's position in the village turns him into an arrogant and selfish person. His selfishness is shown when he tries to dissuade his daughter from moving to the city in pursuit of professional ascension.

Mda contrasts the image of an educated woman with that of a woman committed to local tradition. Unlike Xoliswa, Qukezwa masters traditional lore. Like her father, she stands on the side of the Believers. In fact, Qukezwa advocates the revalorisation of African traditions, "and her vast knowledge of the Qolorha fauna and flora set her apart from the other women" (Koyana 2003: 57). Mda indicates an appreciation of traditional knowledge by his appreciative portrayal of Qukezwa's personality. She is shown to have no trace of an inferiority complex vis-à-vis educated women such as Xoliswa, whom she confronts with her opinions. She is proud of her rural identity and strongly articulates her views about the necessity of preserving African traditions and customs.

The description of Qukezwa is more focused on the character's spiritual values, while Xoliswa's is centred on her admiration of western rationalism. Through its portrayal of the two main female characters, the text exhibits a binary relation between modernism and traditionalism or between rationality and beliefs. In "Qolorha and Dialogism of Place in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of*

Redness”, Siphokazi Koyana suggests that “Qukezwa defines the potential of the new dynamic African woman” (Koyana 2003: 58) because of her spiritual dimension and her convictions. Qukezwa refuses to renounce her African cultural values and be treated disrespectfully by any man. Koyana explores Qukezwa’s personality in the following lines:

Her organic, harmonious relationship with the natural and spiritual worlds does not prevent her from working for a living, and although she has a menial job as a shop assistant and cleaner in Dalton’s store, her sense of self is not diminished. Qukezwa is neither under the control of Mrs Dalton’s authority nor under the spell of Xoliswa’s supposed academic superiority... Although she is a reservoir of the past in her relationship with Camagu and with her traditional authority, she is strongly centred in a contestatory womanist consciousness of the present. (Koyana 2003: 57-58)

Koyana shows that despite being the guardian of the collective memory, Qukezwa is a hybrid person who adheres to the ideology of an African Renaissance by participating in and contributing to the rebirth of African culture. However, Qukezwa also represents the contemporary rural woman who attempts to redress public opinions about women.

Qukezwa’s central role in promoting the cultural fabric of her community gives her an important position in this society. She represents a more responsible Nongqawuse, or is something like the prophetess of the present time (because of her spiritual power). Camagu, the foreigner who visits Qolorha in search of the mysterious girl, NomaRussia, is fascinated by Qukezwa’s spiritual dimension. Thanks to her, Camagu discovers the marvels of Qolorha and decides to establish himself in the village. Qukezwa teaches Camagu how to use and benefit from nature without destroying it.

In “Postcolonial Ecologies and the Gaze of Animals: Reading some Contemporary Southern African Narratives”, Wendy Woodward points out that the close relationship between Mda’s characters and nature and their worshipping of ancestors in *The Heart of Redness* is “a mode of attentiveness to nonhuman nature; it signifies not so much an awe or reverence of human

powers, but rather a reverence for those forms that awareness takes when it is not in human form, when the familiar human embodiment dies and decays to become part of the encompassing cosmos” (Woodward 2003a: 295). Woodward posits that Mda’s novel conveys ecological consciousness as exemplified by people resorting to pre-colonial knowledge in order to achieve sustainable development by securing environmental equilibrium. Woodward observes that Qukezwa, the “wild woman” (Mda 2000: 172), “seems almost a reincarnation of Quxu/-Qukezwa, her Khoikhoi ancestor, in her indigenous knowledge of resident plants, animals and birds” (Woodward 2003b: 295).

The most vivid image of rural women’s empowerment in the public arena is given in MamCirha and Nogiant who have set up a business of their own with Camagu’s assistance. The success of these women suggests a significant advancement of rural women in the field of entrepreneurship. Due to his contribution to the task, Camagu represents the new man who understands these women’s needs. His co-operation with rural women suggests the paragon of wholesome change of men’s attitudes towards women.

Camagu is fascinated by local women’s skilful mastering of the techniques of harvesting seafood. He realises that no man can equal them in this field and helps them to be more productive. The enterprise has helped the women of the co-operative to be financially independent. As a result, they do not care about receiving allowances from their husbands who work in mines. Camagu does not conceal his delight from Bhonco regarding the positive results of the co-operative by telling him that “very soon those women [of the co-operative society] will earn more than their husbands in the mines” (Mda 2000: 186). Bhonco, for instance, realises that he is losing power over NoPetticoat, his wife, since the latter has joined the co-operative to make traditional skirts known as *isikhakha* skirts.

In her article “Qolorha and Dialogism of Place in Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*”, Siphokazi Koyana explores the factors which contribute to these

women's achievement in the following account:

In contrast, Camagu's seafood co-op with the two women, MamCirha and NoGiant, grows successfully because Camagu does not impose the enterprise on people. He teams up with them in such a way that they use their knowledge of the sea to harvest the mussels and oysters, while he uses his knowledge of the city and markets to distribute the product. The women are empowered by the fact that they know more than he does about sea harvesting and about cooking seafood, while he complements their efforts by helping them reach buyers as far away as King Williams's Town and East London. In this relationship the women are both empowered and empowering partners who teach him sea harvesting, while he contributes towards their financial independence by selling their harvest. In short, Camagu's approach of immersing himself in the lives of the villagers as a catalyst who is not under the auspices of a government agency, a parastatal, or a research institution, guarantees his success. In time, the mutual trust that develops in the business affects Camagu's personal life, thus suggesting ways in which the traditional African values of *ubuntu* (people first) can be invoked to function in the post-apartheid economy. More importantly, the collaboration addresses contemporary concerns about the role of women in economic and social transformation. (Koyana 2003: 54)

Koyana points out that rural women's contribution to sustainable development in the community becomes possible if rural women's skills in particular domains are identified and used for their own benefit and to some extent that of the whole society. Camagu collaborates with women with a view to enhancing their social status. His action is reminiscent of Toloki's, the hero in Zakes Mda's earlier novel *Ways of Dying* (1995). Like Camagu, Toloki represents the active role that can be played by a man in enabling a woman's self-actualisation in the public arena. In fact, the narrative pinpoints Toloki's sympathy for the women's cause by describing him as "the only man among all of these chattering females" (Mda 1995: 170).

b. *Ways of Dying*

Ways of Dying articulates the importance of women's solidarity in a poor and patriarchal society because it helps them to overcome many challenges. Noria's affiliation to the women's society has contributed to healing her psychological and physical suffering. In a conversation with Toloki, Noria reassures him that "she is not complaining about her life" [because] she has received fulfilment from helping others. And not for a single day has she slept on an empty stomach" (Mda 1995: 135).

The *ubuntu* concept is incarnated by Madimbhaza, the woman who has gained respectable status in the informal settlement due to her generosity. Madimbhaza, indeed, provides shelter to many abandoned children in the community and "her home is known by everyone as 'the dumping ground' since women who have unwanted babies dump them in front of her door at night. She feeds and clothes the children out of her measly monthly pension" (Mda 1995: 166). Madimbhaza's dedication to disadvantaged children shows her dignified concern about the future of the nation.

Mda seems to suggest that Madimbhaza's example needs to be followed in order to alleviate the rampant increase of street children. He indicates that the nation can expect a bright future from underprivileged children if they are reintegrated into a family-like environment. His portrayal of Madimbhaza gives implicit recognition to the many women in South Africa who have adopted similar socially recuperative roles, often without official support or recognition.

In *Ways of Dying*, women play an active role in the social transformation of the community. Their active participation in solving the community's problems is remarkable. Toloki, the only man who sympathises with women's social conditions, points out that:

The people who are most active in the affairs of the settlement are women.

Not only do they do all the work, but they play leadership roles at this meeting, they present the most practical ideas to solve the various problems. The few male residents who are present relish making high-flown speeches that display eloquence, but are short on practical solutions.

(Mda 1995: 172)

Male characters in the narrative excel in expounding empty theories, which do not meet the needs of the community; they rather exhibit their masculine vanity. Women of the informal settlement, on the other hand, have understood the importance of organising themselves as a united society in order to alleviate poverty. For instance, they assist one another in building shacks. Female characters are portrayed as hard workers since they are always seen in action, while men are passive and they “tend to cloud their heads with pettiness and vain pride” (Mda 1995: 175).

Despite their enormous participation in the political arena, women still experience gender discrimination in exclusion from top leadership positions. Women are denied equal opportunities as compared to their male counterparts in terms of social mobility. Noria analyses the situation of women in the public sphere and makes the following comment: “All over the country, in what the politicians call grassroots communities, women take the lead. But very few ever reach the executive level. Or even the regional or branch committee levels” (Mda 1995: 176).

Although the narrative shows that the discrimination against women in social and political leadership positions is still present in this transforming society, Mda’s text closes on a positive note. Through Toloki’s reflection on the need for the enhancement of women’s status in society, Mda seems to suggest that men should start appreciating women’s work. Toloki, Mda’s male protagonist, is convinced that women can play a capital role in social transformation if they are allowed to take leadership roles. According to Toloki women are irrefutably agents of social development because, he explains: “From what I have seen today, I believe the salvation of the settlement lies in the hands of women” (Mda 1995: 176).

The most conspicuous feature of social transformation in *Ways of Dying* is the way women of the informal settlement organise themselves into a social group which puts appropriate strategies to bring social development to the community into practice. The same narrative element recurs in *She Plays with the Darkness*, another text by Mda.

c. She Plays with the Darkness

The author portrays rural women who assume leadership roles in the development of their village. They foregather into a communal co-operative which is involved in social work. More importantly, they invest their energy into agricultural activity. *Mother-of-Twins* and *Mother-of-the-Daughters* represent two women who discover the joy of playing public roles in their community by detaching themselves from institutionalised motherhood roles.

The shift from motherhood identity to the state of socially and financially independent women evinces these women's refusal to have their activities proscribed by social stereotyping. In her article "The Female Writer and Her Commitment", Molara Ogundipe-Leslie presents the female writer's mission as that of being the agent of behavioural change in society, as she rejects stereotyping modes of depicting women. Ogundipe-Leslie, for instance, argues that "the 'mother' stereotype leads to the limiting of a woman's potential in society" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1987: 6).

However, Obioma Nnaemeka, another Nigerian critic, identifies two different perceptions of motherhood. She refers to Adrienne Cecile Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1977) as a "path-breaking book" because it is among the first texts to have provided "an interesting distinction between motherhood as an institution and motherhood as experience, arguing that patriarchy constructs the institution of motherhood while women experience it" (Nnaemeka 1997: 5).

According to Nnaemeka, motherhood, on the one hand, can be seen as a patriarchal institution, which restricts women's roles in society. On the other hand, Nnaemeka observes that "the arguments that are made for motherhood in the African texts are based not on motherhood as a patriarchal institution but motherhood as an experience ("mothering") with its pains and rewards" (Nnaemeka 1997: 5). For example in this Mda text *Mother-of-Twins* and *Mother-of-the-Daughters* reject motherhood as institution, but still relish their experience of being mothers as exemplified by their love for their children.

Mother-of-Twins feels empowered by the activity she is involved in with the rest of rural women. The communal co-operative has helped her to recover her dignity and self-esteem. Her decision to move out of the mansion built by Radisene, her corrupt son, foregrounds her determination to affirm her independence that has been restored by her public, self-constructed image.

Mda's approach in representing rural women shows that these women can empower themselves in the public sphere by using their potential strength in the traditional world. In *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), Mda revalorises traditional lore by depicting Misti, a highly-educated female protagonist who succeeds in reconciling her professional career as a medical practitioner with her gifted function as a traditional doctor. The physical and psychological description of Misti when she meets her home friends, Tampololo and Radisene, at the hospital she works for, reveals Misti's hybrid character (as illustrated throughout the text):

She was on a lunch-break from her job at the government hospital and was wearing a white laboratory coat. There was no sign of the paraphernalia of the muthuela diviners, except for a string of white beads at each ankle. She joked that she was enjoying her dual practice both as a traditional doctor in the African mode and as a medical laboratory technologist in the Western mode. (Mda 1995: 172)

Mda seems to tell us that the two professions are not distinct but rather

represent one, as both medical and traditional doctors fulfil the same function of healing people. Mda's attachment to the traditional world highlights his determination to promote an African cultural heritage by endorsing what Homi Bhabha has dubbed hybridity (Bhabha 1994: 19). Through the depiction of this female character, Mda not only acknowledges the legitimated public status reserved for female herbalists in traditional society; but he also seems to suggest that partnership between traditional 'pharmacopoeia' and modern science can disclose positive results in discovering remedies to terminal diseases (such as AIDS and cancers) which are devastating the whole planet. In other words, Mda contextualises the post-colonial environment by proposing an efficient model of human and social development grounded on the bridging of traditional and modern knowledge.

d. *The Madonna of Excelsior*

Mda's delineation of female characters in the public spectrum is more vivid in *The Madonna of Excelsior*. Mda fictionalises history by revisiting a drama which took place in the Free State town of Excelsior in the 1970s. The narrative is constructed around nineteen black women who were arraigned along with their white lovers for contravening the Immorality Act. The aesthetic dimension of Mda's text is remarkable in the way he conflates two epochs by progressively taking the reader from the past to the present days in the small town of Excelsior. The account of past events is based on a politicised sex scandal where black women and white (Afrikaner) men were involved. The aesthetic merit of the text can be attributed to the narrative techniques used in the plot. The narrator utilises a diachronic method of storytelling, which highlights the dynamic aspect of history. The narrative looks at various types of socio-political transformation that have occurred in this particular community since the case of the "Excelsior 19".

The passage from the racist political system to the new democratic dispensation exemplifies the transition period where the author sets the last part of his narrative. The replacement of generations parallels the alteration of laws and leading beliefs. The first part of the story shows how the apartheid system abolished individual rights by politicising the most private aspect of people's lives in instituting the Immorality Act. The author criticises this law which contributed to the aggravation of sexist views vis-à-vis women (as well as racism). Thus, women are represented in the early part of the text as sexually abused and exploited persons who are seen by male characters as simply sexual objects. This aspect of women's representation as sexual body will be analysed in the next section of the dissertation. I will comment for instance on Stephanus Cronje's lustful look at Niki to illustrate men's sexist attitude towards women.

However, the second part of the novel describes a different environment which is adopting new values. The most remarkable change, which distinguishes the past from the new, is the place of women in the political field. Women are no longer defined by their sexuality but by their intrinsic value as they consistently participate in the elaboration of developmental strategies for their community. Mda dramatises the post-apartheid context by depicting forms of social and cultural transformation occurring in South Africa.

Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* particularly romanticises various changes taking place during the transition period. The narrative focuses on the way the acquisition of democratic values is confronted with the shocking truth of the past in a society that has embarked on a quest for reconciliation. Mda shows that reconciliation should not only consider the racial aspect but also cultural and gender differences. Therefore, the post-liberation context should foreground respect for human rights, including the alteration of the status of women in society.

Mda's narrative exposes many possibilities in the construction of the post-struggle environment. The text re-centres the debate around the effects of the affirmative action policy being implemented in South Africa. Mda's description of the public environment reveals that the members of the formerly marginalised section of the population are entering higher positions in the public sector. Viliki Pule, Popi's brother, evinces the black empowerment process taking place in post-apartheid South Africa. Viliki's election as "the first black mayor of Excelsior" (Mda 2002: 171) during the first democratic elections pertains to the redefinition of social classes in the new South Africa. The narrative also shows that an alteration in power relationships between genders is possible as a wide range of female characters occupy leadership positions in the political field irrespective of their race.

Popi epitomises the image of the enfranchised black woman in the new

dispensation. She refuses to operate in a social sector assigned to her by conventions. Owing to her extraordinary beauty people predict a lucrative career for her in fashion. However, she does not subscribe to popular logic and shows that it is high time a woman made her own choices. She is instead determined to make a successful political career and “Popi had no intention of becoming a model. She had every intention of becoming a politician” (Mda 2002: 169). Popi’s decision to be a politician is paralleled by her will to be an independent woman, as the text explains: “But these men were crying in a void. She had no plans to become someone’s wife. Or someone’s anything” (Mda 2002: 170). Popi’s vision of her independence from men is reminiscent of the attitude of Dikosha, the heroine in *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), also by Mda.

Like her brother Viliki, Popi enters the municipal council of Excelsior and shows great enthusiasm in performing her new duties as a town councillor. Popi’s active presence in the political sphere is characterised by her diligence and productive input in the reconstruction of her society. She is the perfect image of a new black South African woman who invests her ideas and energy into her country’s social development. The following extract from the text illustrates Popi’s active role in the public sphere:

Popi took her work as the town councillor in charge of the library very seriously. She spent all her days paging through the books, smelling them, and just fondling them. We even thought she was the librarian, for sometimes she stood behind the counter and assisted students who were looking for books. The real librarian took advantage of her enthusiasm, and often sneaked out to do her washing at home. (Mda 2002: 208)

The narrator’s description of Popi’s dynamism at work, including his humorous touches, can be interpreted as a positive recognition of women’s contribution to social development. It also shows what versatile roles women can play in society. Mda seems to suggest that women are ready to assume high responsibilities in the construction of the new South Africa, but cannot do so unless they are given equal opportunities with men. Mda’s perspective

is to depict an environment which empowers women within all sectors of human existence.

The Madonna of Excelsior contrasts two epochs with different ways of thinking. The narrative shows that during the apartheid era the restriction of women's emancipation is intertwined with a racially discriminatory policy. However, the post-liberation atmosphere is shown to offer many possibilities to women irrespective of their race.

Mda's narrative exhibits profound changes in the public domain as the immediate results of the reconciliation process. The small town of Excelsior becomes a suitable place for the materialisation of many possibilities inconceivable under the former political dispensation. Lizette de Vries's election as mayor of Excelsior exemplifies the significant progress the country has made in only ten years of democracy. The character's election is surprising not only because she is a woman but also due to the political party she belongs to. Despite being a National Party member, Lizette de Vries's victory is facilitated by the support of members of the Movement such as Viliki and Popi. The two siblings' vote for Lizette de Vries is based on the candidate's potential to be an effective mayor, but not on racial or any other considerations. The following quotation from the text shows how democratic values start transcending racial margins in the new political dispensation:

Viliki and Popi voted for Lizette de Vries. The Movement's candidate got only four votes from its council members. Lizette de Vries, with her six votes, became the new mayor of Excelsior.

The unthinkable had happened. A Movement-run town council had elected a National Party member as mayor. In Excelsior, erstwhile rulers and creators of the apartheid system were back in power, courtesy of the former oppressed who had overthrown them in the first place. (Mda 2002: 206)

The above passage exemplifies a vision of the positive aspect of reconciliation in a formerly divided society. The political change-over is characterised here by cultural transformation, which gives room to all kinds

of political coalitions across race and gender divides. In fact, the reconstruction of a divided nation requires the reconciliation of its people, as Viliki explains to his sister Popi: “Next year we have a general election... We shall be liberated and we shall be one people with the Afrikaners. That what the Movement stands for. One South African nation” (Mda 2002: 153).

Mda’s characterisation of female characters in the public milieu does not only stress the positive aspect of change, as the author also exposes the limits of the new political environment. Mda stigmatises the attitudes of other female figures whose participation in the public arena perpetuates prejudiced use of negative social stereotypes against black women. Despite his sympathy for affirmative action, the author does not hesitate to blame the new elite because of the presence of corruption and nepotism in the present government. In the narrative, Mda’s depiction of Niki contrasts with that of her childhood friends Mmampe and Maria, two of the black women who were involved in the case of the “Excelsior 19”. The author shows that thanks to their connections with the new black elite, both women have obtained jobs in their town council after the change of a political regime. The portrayal of Mmampe and Maria indicates critically that some black women are benefiting from the black empowerment policy, despite their being unproductive at work. The following passage from the text shows Mda’s criticism of nepotism, which is itself another form of discrimination:

Once Sekatle had become the mayor, he had employed his sister as a clerk at the registry. It did not really matter that she was barely literate and that the old Afrikaner lady who had been working at the registry for decades, and was now just waiting for retirement, did all the work for her. As soon as Maria had become a clerk, she had “organised” a job for Mmampe as a tea-lady. (Mda 2002: 249)

Despite his faith in social mobility and equal redistribution of power between genders, Mda is not lenient towards idle women. Therefore he satirises reprehensible behaviour such as that of Mmampe and Maria. He condemns some women who seem to enjoy playing passive and parasitical

roles with regard to their participation in social development.

However, the author supports the idea that women can be agents of social change by entrusting to his female characters the mission of fighting corruption and nepotism in his society. Popi represents the ideal image of the woman whose participation in the political arena privileges the interests of the people before her own. Popi stands strongly against corruption in her society and expects the new elite “to be honest... not [to] pretend that they are socialists. And they must not accumulate capital by looting the coffers of the state and by taking kickbacks from contractors” (Mda 2002: 241).

Popi’s example is to be followed. She refuses to dirty her hands by choosing corrupt means to build her house. As compared to other town councillors, she is deemed to have “been foolish” because, as the narrator explains,

She could have taken the opportunity to allocate herself an RDP house while she was a councillor. As all the other councillors had done. Viliki had allocated himself two houses, one of which he was renting out. Other councillors had allocated houses to their mistresses, girlfriends and grandmothers. (Mda 2002: 246)

Popi’s public image resulting from her political activism has already been analysed in the previous chapter of the dissertation.

3. Mandla Langa

Mandla Langa's texts also provide examples of female figures with distinctly public roles. *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989) is Langa's first narrative to be analysed in this chapter, then the leadership status shown to be available to women in *The Memory of Stones* (another text by the same author published in 2000) will be explored. Although these texts were addressed in the previous chapter focusing on the analysis of women's active roles in the alteration of the oppressive political order, the present section of the dissertation shifts its focus towards the examination of the depictions of women in professional roles, since in the chosen texts women are portrayed also as public actors in the process of social and cultural transformation in South Africa.

a. *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*

A Rainbow on the Paper Sky (1989) depicts a variety of important roles played by women in the public arena. Khethiwe, the main female protagonist, is represented as a female icon in the public sphere because of the enormous responsibilities she takes on in order to serve her community. The narrator juxtaposes the physical and psychological development of Khethiwe in order to highlight the maturing process of the character. Khethiwe's relocations portray her increasing awareness of the constraints on public life for black people in South Africa at this time.

Her initial relocation from rural life in the bosom of her parental home to the city and her encounter with modern education can be seen as an initiation process educating her about social realities, because it is in the city that she becomes aware of black people's predicament under an oppressive political

system. Khethiwe becomes a nurse and serves for a while at King Edward VIII Hospital. Her experience at this hospital teaches her a great deal about the challenges awaiting her in her career.

Khethiwe shows a great passion for her profession, which is committed to healing the sick. However, she notices that most patients at the hospital are victims of political injustices. From this point she starts displaying great determination to assist and commiserate with the powerless, as she decides to go back to her village to set up a clinic. Khethiwe is aware that her contribution to the struggle against political oppression will be efficient if she makes more sacrifices for the benefit of the needy. Khethiwe is represented as an influential female character of great integrity with a profound sense of social duty and community commitment. Her concern for the well-being of her people is expressed in her insistence on the urgent need to set up a clinic in the village. She refers to the critical situation women and children are exposed to as she tells her father, Ndungane, about her experiences on her way home:

On my way here I met Ndimande's wife in town. She had a sick child with her. The picture she drew was very bleak indeed. I had an idea that the situation was bad, but after talking to her I realised that it was quite hopeless. I want to think that we can get together some caring people and do something. (Langa 1989: 130)

Khethiwe's clinic becomes a noticeable achievement. She works eighteen hours a day without respite. The massive number of Ndaweni people going for consultation at the clinic every day shows the effectiveness of and need for Khethiwe's laudable initiative. The character's commitment to saving Ndaweni people's lives allows her no break, since she recognises that "if nothing [is] done for rural people...they [will] continue dying and dying" (Langa 1989: 169).

Khethiwe's success is praised and recognised by the whole community. Ndimande, the father of the child Khethiwe helped to get cured when she returned home for the first time, extols with pride Khethiwe's achievement

by stating that the clinic “was built through the effort of Khethiwe, Ndungane’s daughter”. He adds that he “has never known a young person who is so single-minded. Even Ndungane [her father] is a tame cat compared to her” (Langa 1989: 167). Ndimande rates the daughter’s commitment and determination even more highly than he does the father’s, despite the fact that Ndungane is the leader of the Movement in their region as well as their chief (deposed by the apartheid government). Khethiwe is therefore depicted by Ndimande as symbolising the new icon of young leaders endowed with even finer qualities than the older generation of leaders.

The whole community acknowledges the public status Khethiwe occupies in this rural context. The elders, for instance, have invested their confidence in her as “they [have] asked Khethiwe to be their eyes” whenever they receive letters from relatives in the city. Therefore, the heroine seems to have a double mission in this community. In addition to her function as a nurse, curing people’s physical ailments, Khethiwe plays an important public role as the psychologist and secretary as well as social and political analyst of the village. The attention she pays to rural people’s problems has helped her to develop a more mature personality. In fact, she has learned how to heal people’s minds by “becom[ing] witness, unwillingly, to the villagers’ lives, dreams and frustrations” (Langa 1989: 169).

Khethiwe’s determination to help the needy is progressively supplemented by the idea of political activism. She uses her profession effectively to oppose and resist the oppressive political system by providing medical support to political activists such as her father, Ndungane, who is the leader of the resistance in the village. Khethiwe’s idea of building a clinic becomes intertwined with the activities of the Movement. The heroine’s plans for building the clinic are not limited to a social cause. In other words, her purpose is not only to treat patients in the village. She also intends to intervene in the forest, in the battle field, by providing medical assistance to the fighters of the Movement. Khethiwe explains to her father the reasons for her setting up a clinic in the village by clearly revealing the attachment of her

idea to the political cause. She maintains the following:

My brief was that I should investigate that possibility – or join the guerrillas in the forest ... I believe that, since we talk so much about creating alternative structures, this would be our chance to make people see that we're able to execute our own affairs without depending on Pretoria – or the Bantustan. This has been done before. On my part, I will try to get us more medical personnel. I have in mind one doctor and perhaps two nurses. (Langa 1989: 131)

The narrator represents Khethiwe's public figure through the description of her charitable actions in the village. Indeed, this character values the notion of sacrifice for her people. She displays her strong dedication to working for the benefit of the disadvantaged, even though she knows the risks of this enterprise. Khethiwe acknowledges the complexity of the challenges to be taken up in the struggle at the same time as she discovers the reason why "the price of freedom [is] so high" (Langa 1989: 187).

Khethiwe's public profile is enhanced by her commitment to the political cause in becoming a liberation leader. Khethiwe finds death in an ambush set up by the police when she is on her way back home from the forest where she initially started going to administer medical treatment to Hugh, the commander of a military unit of the liberation movement, who is threatened by a malaria crisis. Khethiwe's tragic death raises her status to the level of martyrdom in her society, for she has stood up against an oppressive system by sacrificing her life in the battlefield. Due to her tragic end, Khethiwe can be inscribed in the list of political heroes who lost their lives for the sake of freedom. Langa shows that this is how she is regarded by the village community.

A parallel can be drawn between Khethiwe's public assertion of her political commitment and her friend Dr Shelley Vilakazi's social role in the village of Ndaweni. Dr Vilakazi plays a pivotal role in the narrative. She is represented as Khethiwe's political mentor. As an experienced medical practitioner, she shares her experience with Khethiwe, who is a young nurse.

Shelley contributes greatly to Khethiwe's psychological growth. The older woman assumes the role of a mentor by not only teaching Khethiwe professional skills, but also by opening her eyes to the social and political environment. Shelley's humility and advice have a positive impact on Khethiwe. The latter follows Shelley's counsel and decides to perform her profession with a view to contributing to social and political change.

Shelley shows Khethiwe how an 'individual effort' can have an effect on a larger social scale. To the doctor, political activism should not sacrifice or disregard professional skills because each and every person from different fields of work can contribute to social and political transformation. Shelley explains her opinion about the role of personal efforts in changing systemic principles in the public arena to Khethiwe. The doctor seems to value what an individual contributes to the people's cause and not what she/he receives from them. Her viewpoint is clearly explained in the following passage:

We see all these cloak-and-dagger films and imagine ourselves performing deeds of such heroism that, even if we die, our names remain etched, eternally, on the lips of people. But it is not like that. While individual effort is essential, the Movement – as its name says – is for the people, walking, marching, moving on and on, like a river... they are individuals: all those millions with their own private dreams and anguishes. What they think and do as individuals can sometimes affect the smooth running of the Movement. There are greedy people, there are ambitious people – others are plain crazy. But they are all there and the Movement has opened its arms and embraced them. Then there are temptations. There are liaisons. You are still young and attractive. You'll learn how difficult it is to maintain a stable relationship and still go on doing your work effectively.

(Langa 1989: 106)

Shelley's portrayal shows that she and her friend, Khethiwe, have common interests. In fact, she is represented as an appropriate, even ideal role model for Khethiwe, as the latter is fascinated by people such as Shelley for their importance in society and "the size of their dreams and the colour of their vision" (Langa 1989: 111).

Shelley epitomises the independent and self-confident black woman who has achieved an important public status due to her education and personality. Khethiwe does not hide her great admiration for Shelley and sees her as:

[O]ne of the most self-assured women she had ever known. She had observed this in meetings that were held in the doctors' quarters near the hospital where Shelley's word was not taken lightly. And she could laugh, this dark woman who smoked like a chimney, lighting a cigarette with the butt of the last one. This laughter was threatening to men who couldn't deal with a woman who exuded so much confidence, who was so resolute in her convictions. (Langa 1989: 173)

Shelley's strong character is very much appreciated by Khethiwe who sees her friend as the best partner to work with at the clinic. Khethiwe is certain that Shelley's experience and devotion to the needy will be paramount in order to achieve the project of building a clinic in this remote village. Shelley's humility can be read in her decision to relocate to Ndaweni in order to serve rural people. Despite the lack of proper medical equipment and facilities in the village, she volunteers to take up the challenge. Her presence in the village makes things work smoothly at the clinic, since she actively participates in the decision-making concerning all matters regarding the clinic.

The narrator describes Shelley's caring attitude towards her patients by pinpointing her commitment to the support of the freedom fighters. Shelley wastes no time in requiring Khethiwe to give immediate attention to Hugh, the leader of a small group of MK soldiers, when the latter is threatened by cerebral malaria. Aware of the high risks to which Hugh is exposed, Shelley proposes two different options to Khethiwe: "I think the man needs a course of chloroquine injections... And since it would be crass idiocy for him to be brought here, I suggest that one of us goes there and sees what can be done" (Langa 1989: 182). The delineation of Shelley's role in the public sphere shows similarities between her and Khethiwe. Their shared sense of the need for sacrifice in aid of the people's struggle evinces the leadership roles taken

by women in their society at this time. Their decisive, selfless conduct is portrayed as admirable.

Another black female character who has established her public position in her community is Aunt Margaret. She has constructed her public image within her particular social environment thanks to her strong vision of the possibilities offered by private entrepreneurship. Aunt Margaret runs a liquor shop (or shebeen) where township people come to enjoy themselves. She is a financially independent woman who against all odds has overcome political and social constraints to achieve financial autonomy.

Despite the sad events she experienced in encounters with the police and also the predicament with her male partners, Aunt Margaret does not abandon her alcohol trade. On the contrary, she has matured into a woman with a strong personality as she reckons that “in this city... you’re either a hard woman or a very cold corpse” (Langa 1989: 17). Aunt Margaret is proud of herself for making her living by “running th[e] *shebeen* and catching the lucky number from the Chinaman” (Langa 1989: 21). Langa’s depiction of Aunt Margaret displays the strong, positive public image that a woman running a shebeen has achieved in her community in spite of repression and depression.

Aunt Margaret has established a good reputation in the community. She uses management skills to protect her business. She markets not only goods, but also her image in a society where popular judgement can be detrimental to one’s social advancement. Since she cannot have a child she takes Khethiwe, her niece, to live with her.

Her decision to take care of her niece as if she were her own daughter shows her sense of responsibility in a society where a childless woman is often looked on with prejudice. Aunt Margaret cares about her business as much as she cares about her good reputation in the township. She shows how one’s private life can affect one’s public image in society. Aunt Margaret’s discreet sexual relationship with her assistant, Eugene, exemplifies her

precaution in safeguarding her public image and the interests of her business. In “Changing Images: Representations of the Southern African Black Woman in the Works by Bessie Head, Ellen Kuzwayo, Mandla Langa and Mongane Wally Serote”, Dorothy Frances Marsden pays particular attention to this female character in Langa’s *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*. Marsden analyses Aunt Margaret’s public figure and makes the following comment:

Langa creates the character of Aunt Margaret, a shopkeeper turned shebeen queen who also successfully maintains a respectable image. She is careful to protect her own name from scandal, and is very discreet about the fact that her helper, Eugene, lives with her. She is shown as a caring guardian during the years that Khethiwe lives with her. (Marsden 1994: 64)

Langa’s delineation of women in this particular text consistently provides a wide range of female characters playing different public roles. In addition to Khethiwe, the nurse; Dr Shelley Vilakazi and Aunt Margaret, the businesswoman, Langa depicts Debra Steyn, another female protagonist with a prominent role in the public domain. Debra is a white journalist working freelance. She is planning to publish a book about black music and its impact on the liberation struggle. Debra is described as a person who has been “scour[ing] the townships collecting material from musicians” (Langa 1989: 47) in order to understand the cultural and political dimensions of black music.

As a freelance journalist, Debra goes beyond the essential function of her job of informing people. She is also a humanist because she reports facts without adopting the biased position dictated by the ruling political system. Debra aims at informing the whole world about the situation in South Africa and the contribution of black artists to the struggle.

Langa dramatises the moral nature of the white journalist’s mission by depicting her publicly expressed antipathy to the apartheid system. She fiercely challenges the police on their threat of charging her in terms of the Immorality Act when she is found early in the morning in the apartment of

Mbongeni, the music star. Captain Olivier's attempts to intimidate Debra are futile because the journalist stays firm in her position. She eloquently condemns the political violence led by the police in the country, even denouncing her own brother for his participation in the state's military repression.

Eventually, Debra bluntly warns Captain Olivier and the other policemen accompanying him that the truth about their crimes will one day be unveiled:

I want you people to know one thing. Even if you wield all this power, there are some people who'll make sure that you are reminded that your hands are full of blood. We shall expose you. The whole world has to know what you're all about. (Langa 1989: 152)

Langa's authorial decision to include Debra as one of the voices speaking up for the oppressed transcends the question about who should represent the people on the social margins. In fact, as a white journalist, Debra might be reproached for perpetuating colonial discourse in representing the subaltern merely because she does not belong to the black culture that she wants to portray in her book. However, Langa seems to suggest that any researcher can transgress ethnic, cultural or gender boundaries and represent or depict any group, even those she/he does not belong to, as long as they do so fairly and in pursuit of social justice. Debra's enthusiasm for writing a book on black music (as shown in the narrative) can illustrate a black male writer's recognition of the positive role played by a number of white female writers in the promotion of black culture and in resistance against apartheid.

In fact, Debra's project of writing a book on black music is a noble and laudable initiative because she works for the promotion of the oppressed people's culture. She does not prioritise her own ambition to the detriment of the people she writes about. In other words, she tries to promote black South African artists in order to exhibit and promote their work on the international platform. The reasons for her undertaking are oriented more towards politically moral principles than lucrative intentions.

Langa's portrayal of female characters is not confined to the idealisation of women in this text, as the author depicts both admirable and reprehensible deeds performed by female protagonists. Unlike the female characters outlined above, who participate in laudable activities in the public sphere, the author depicts MaCele, a woman who tarnishes her own reputation in the community because of her mischievous ways.

MaCele is an educated woman, as she boastfully reminds her husband, Mbongwa: "Don't tell me about those know-nothing useless women of Ndaweni ... Me I went to school. You didn't find me tilling the fields or drawing water. I was an auxiliary nurse at Mahlabathini, that's where you found me" (Langa 1989: 133). Despite her education MaCele's reputation as an unpleasant person does not earn her respect in the village. She is simply described as "a troublemaker and a gossip" (Langa 1989: 137), as she likes fighting her husband and has a contemptuous attitude towards the people of Ndaweni. Langa's depiction of this female character indicates that violence is not the preserve of men only, because women can also defy wholesome communal values. MaCele's attitude shows that some women, too, can be abusive towards their male partners and children.

MaCele displays a both weak and intransigent personality in this narrative. Her attempt to destabilize the plans of the Movement (led by Chief Ndungane) when she goes to inform the police that her husband, Mbongwa, is storing weapons at home, illustrates her hard character. Through the depiction of MaCele, Langa wants to suggest that freedom fighters also had enemies among their own people, since some black women as well as men collaborated with the apartheid regime by betraying even their close friends and relatives. (Mbongeni also becomes a traitor to his people.)

Langa's representation of women in the public arena is slightly shifted in *The Memory of Stones* (2000) as compared to his delineation of women in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989). In the later text, *The Memory of Stones* (2000), Langa focuses on the political leadership roles played by female

characters. The examination of women's public role will focus, not on the political actions of women as seen in the previous chapter, but on women's ascension in the public sphere. However, the novel will be analysed to highlight women's ascension to the position of leaders of their community.

b. *The Memory of Stones* (2000)

The most important female figure in this text, who is depicted playing the role of a leader in her society, is Zodwa. After the demise of her father, Baba Joshua, she takes over the chieftaincy with initial reluctance, because of her Western democratic values, acquired at school and university. In fact, because of her contact with modern education, Zodwa wants to distance herself from her people's traditions, among which is the succession of chieftainship from the father to his offspring. She does not initially consider settling in her village even though she is told that she is needed there. The narrator's analysis of Zodwa's psychology reveals that "her spirit on campus and the cities of the country, as well as the route to her chosen career, cannot be nurtured in this land of symbols and skins and the stammering memory of stones" (Langa 2000: 106).

Zodwa instead projects her image of her future life into a modern environment such as Johannesburg, where she plans to work as a lawyer after her graduation. Zodwa describes herself as:

A city woman... I have made my life out here. Tomorrow I' m graduating. Then I'm working in Jo'burg. Get a car, a house, a man, possibly not in that order, but organise my life anyhow...I have great admiration for what my father did, and I love him a lot – but I also love myself a lot. (Langa 2000:88-89)

Despite Zodwa's refusal to take over her father's position in the community, she is persuaded by many female and male characters to lead them, as she is seen as the most charismatic leader able satisfactorily to rule their community. On his deathbed, Baba Joshua wants to hear a promise from his daughter, which will relieve his mind before he goes to join the world of the ancestors. For the sake of their people, Joshua implores Zodwa

that “since she’s now a lawyer...when [he] go[es], [she] [must] take charge of this place. Help [them] build the village” (Langa 2000: 172- 173).

In fact, after the death of Jonah, his only son, Baba Joshua sees Zodwa as the perfect leader to replace him. After retrieving their ancestral lands, Joshua believes that his own mission has been accomplished. However, it is high time new types of leaders took over their duties in order to deal with modern challenges. Baba Joshua, who belongs to the traditional order of leaders, thinks that because of her mastering of modern education Zodwa is the kind of leader the community needs “to decipher for them the meaning of liberation” (Langa 2000: 24). Soon after Baba Joshua’s death, Zodwa starts assuming her leadership role. But her chieftaincy is not acknowledged by everyone, as two other contenders for the same position attempt to contest her legitimate legacy by adopting and mustering patriarchal attitudes against her. Johnny M. (a ruthless criminal) and Zodwa’s unpleasant uncle, Mbongwa, stand against her because, as strong traditionalists, they “cannot bear the idea of being ruled by a woman” (Langa 2000: 221). Nor have they “forgiven her for her dalliance with Horwitz” (Langa 1989: 221). They claim that she is a disgrace because she has brought shame to the community by sleeping with a white man. But the most crucial point justifying the opposition of Johnny M. and Mbongwa to Zodwa is their ruthless greed. Johnny M and his henchmen are ready to wreak havoc by inciting people to use violent means in order to protest against Zodwa’s chieftaincy. However, Zodwa does not take long to display her skills of leadership as she resorts to diplomatic ways of dealing with her opponents’ provocative actions. Her first public address to the people of Ngoza shows her charisma and sincerity as she reveals her noble plans for the community she has decided to serve:

I speak of the evil of men like your champion Mbongwa ... who has never lifted a finger to help a single person. I speak of Johnny M here, standing before you, leading you to ruin. What has he done for you? I ask you all these questions, not because I have any great wish to be your chief. There are many good men and women, most of them in Two Rivers, who have the experience and courage to lead. They are people like MaNdlela; there’s

Nduli in the Eastern Cape, whose heartstrings are tied to the pain all of us feel here ... There is nothing here, people are poor ... but in this poverty I have come across demonstrations of great generosity. As Africans, especially now that we have our own government, we have to be generous without being foolish. We have to strive for peace and democracy.
(Langa 2000: 354)

In Zodwa's speech one can read the character's concern for change in the style of leadership of the people. Zodwa wants to introduce new principles of leadership, grounded on democratic values and economic development. In other words, she has a new vision for her society and sees Africa in a broader sense than the previous generation did. The heroine expresses scathing criticism against a wide range of problems plaguing Africa. She condemns African leaders who privilege their egos by creating an environment of violence from which they benefit materially. She refers particularly to corruption as a serious impediment to social development.

Langa allows his character to explain that good leadership is needed to achieve alleviation of poverty in her community, as well as throughout the whole of the African continent. Therefore, peace and democracy should be promoted as well as African "ubuntu" or generosity in order to achieve stability and development on the continent. Zodwa expresses optimistic views about the future generation of leaders, including her belief that they have the opportunity to correct past mistakes. As compared to the older generation of leaders, the new leaders stand between two cultures; the first culture being based on African traditions and the second connected with modern education.

Langa's heroine wants to highlight the positive aspect of hybridity in the post-colonial world. She seems to suggest that being exposed to diversity can help to make a good combination of life principles from different cultures and allow access to different kinds of skills. In other words, good leaders should also look outside the confines of their own environment to implement policies which were successfully carried out in other places. But, more

importantly, they should adapt these policies to their own realities. Zodwa seems to have realised that the secret of her father's success can be accounted for by considering his hybridised culture. Baba Joshua's religious beliefs are based on a syncretic combination of Christian and traditional values.

Zodwa's good leadership is endorsed by many supporters across gender and age lines. She gets significant guidance and support from Nozizwe, an elderly, energetic woman who worked closely with Baba Joshua as his confidante. Nozizwe is certain that Zodwa will carry out her mission successfully. Like Baba Joshua, Nozizwe sees in Zodwa an enormous potential for political leadership as the latter can also make use of her academic competence to lead her community. Nozizwe's confidence in the young woman's leadership can be read in the advice she gives Zodwa regarding her mission as the new chief of Ngoza:

If anything goes wrong here, if people do not get running water and electricity, if the gangsters still victimise women – can you honestly say then that you did right by not giving your father's people – no, your people – a fighting chance? Will you hold your head high when you didn't take a chance and helped build schools, so that our children's children are also equipped to face the New World? Life ... can only be lived when people take a chance to weave miracles out of nothing. (Langa 2000: 222)

Nozizwe explains the expectations of the people to Zodwa by maintaining that social development and justice are the most fundamental needs of the community. Zodwa's mission is to promote social security by not only building modern facilities such as schools and hospitals but also dismantling any form of patriarchy in contemporary society. This young leader envisions a process of radical social transformation, which includes the refusal to mimic former principles of leadership. In "Violent Women: Surging into Forbidden Quarters" Nada Elia maintains that the duplication of cultural norms can perpetuate oppressive systems. Elia sees the liberation from patriarchal and colonial discourse as a prerequisite for genuine social change, as she concludes in the following note:

Thus if we are genuinely seeking to move away from the oppressive effects of racism, sexism, homophobia and other divisive systems of exploitation and silencing, we must not allow ourselves to duplicate these systems, just as we refuse to be, and sometimes cannot be, defined through them. (Elia 1996: 168)

Zodwa's public position as the chief of the community shows the emergence of female leadership in African society. The alteration of gender roles as described in the narrative exemplifies the need for the redefinition of gender relations in a society dominated, even ruled by patriarchal ethics. Zodwa's new position gives hope to other women with progressive ideas in the community to support her chieftaincy and actions. Nozizwe, who plays the role of Zodwa's political mentor, reassures her that she has strong support from the women advocating female emancipation and leadership in the public sphere. Nozizwe informs Zodwa that "There are some of [them] among the elders who wield power, who want her to take over" and she tells her that she "also ha[s] natural allies among the more politicised women in the New River squatter camp, who are fed up to the teeth with the way men have run roughshod over them" (Langa 2000: 221).

After a long reign of masculine power, women aspire to the transfer of leadership roles to women. Zodwa's female allies take a revolutionary position as they long for the dismantling of patriarchal rule. Langa pinpoints women's awareness of the necessity of transferring formerly masculine control, which has failed to improve the status of women in society, to members of their own gender. Zodwa epitomises the ideal female chief who can promote the liberation of women in this traditional environment. In fact, Zodwa's accession to power indicates the beginning of a type of affirmative action, highlighting women's empowerment in the public sphere. Through his celebration of womanhood, the author seeks to break patriarchy's binary division between men and women.

Zodwa's leadership is not only backed up by people of her gender. Men also give credit to Zodwa's potential for ruling the community. The first

person to place confidence in female leadership is Baba Joshua, Zodwa's father, who has implored his daughter to take over after him for pertinent reasons. Baba Joshua's choice of Zodwa transcends fatherly affection for a daughter. He chooses Zodwa instead of Joachim, a young man he had formerly groomed for leadership.

In fact, Baba Joshua sees Joachim or Jeqe as the replacement of his deceased son Jonah. However, despite being a woman, Zodwa is (according to Baba Joshua) the leader who can best direct the destiny of this community. His conviction that his daughter is the appropriate 'heir' to replace him is not only grounded on the fact that she is his daughter, but rather validated by his recognition that she is "much more intelligent than most people [think]" (Langa 2000: 22). Most importantly, she has a leader's charisma.

Like Baba Joshua, Joachim or Jeqe is another male character to support female leadership in the plot. He declares and manifests his alignment to Zodwa's vision of social transformation and progress. Jeqe's sympathy for women's assertion of responsibility in the public sphere shows a male character standing on the side of women to challenge any form of discrimination against women.

Despite its generally constraining patriarchal beliefs Langa shows that traditional society can allow women to play public roles. Another female figure to play an important public role in the narrative is Nozizwe, Baba Joshua's confidante. As an advisor of the chief, Nozizwe discusses political as well as family matters with Baba Joshua. After Joshua's death she becomes Zodwa's political advisor. Thanks to her experience, she gives guidance to the newly established young chief. Because of her mastery of traditional lore, Nozizwe's duty is to teach Zodwa useful traditional values that she needs to combine with her modern education. Through Nozizwe's tutelage of Zodwa during the early days of her leadership, Langa seeks to draw attention to the importance of allowing rural women status in the socio-political structure.

Nozizwe's significant contribution to decision-making regarding the social and political concerns of the community highlights the important role played by women in traditional society. However, women's active participation in the public field is undermined by a patriarchal system which precludes women from taking leadership positions. Nozizwe and a group of women who wield limited power in the community cannot hide their delight at having Zodwa as their new leader. As a female chief, these women expect Zodwa to resist unfairly discriminatory patriarchal traditions. Langa shows that, despite the presence of women in the political arena, the latter still occupy mostly secondary roles compared to their male counterparts.

Nozizwe also fulfils the role of a traditional healer, which parallels the function of a nurse in the modern environment. Like Dr. Shelley Vilakazi and Khethiwe, who bring medical assistance to patients in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*, Nozizwe uses traditional medicinal plants to cure people's diseases. But Langa dramatises her function of traditional practitioner by underlining the spiritual and moral dimension of her role in society. As a chief's confidante, Nozizwe's public image is well established in this community. She is a very canny person whose deep store of knowledge is permanently consulted by the chief. She is a notable character not only for her grasp of traditional medicinal lore but also for her wisdom in tackling current affairs. Her central significance is underlined by the fact that the name Langa gave this character symbolises her representation of the whole nation.

Nozizwe dreams of a political environment where social justice and development are valued. Despite being one of the elders of this society, she refutes discriminatory traditional views against a certain category of individuals. Nozizwe sees herself as an old person whose "bones are brittle" (Langa 2000: 144) for the battle. Therefore, she believes that social transformation can be better achieved by active, younger female leaders such as Zodwa who "has a good head" (Langa 2000: 144) and the stamina to equip her for this further struggle.

Langa's delineation of female characters shows women occupying various leadership functions. The novelist celebrates the roles played by "unofficial community leaders" (Gagiano 2004: 823) such as MaNdlela who has achieved a respected status in her community because of her humanitarian actions. She is represented as a person who:

Dedicated her life to saving the lives of children. It didn't matter whose offspring they were, the children were sacred bequests, issues of loins once engorged with love and straining and final clenching in the coupling, for the seed to find fertile ground, a place of rest. (Langa 2000: 208)

MaNdlele's voluntary involvement in social work allows her to play a leading role in KwaMagwaza Township, seen as "a place of stabbing – where men violated women and forced the bruised eyes of husbands and children to watch" (Langa 2000: 208). Langa's narrative captures the vicious cycle of political violence opposing "the comrades United Democratic Front members to the warriors of Inkatha" during the transition period. The author's reference to these terrible events highlights his contempt for male political leadership due to its record of human rights abuses.

However, Langa's portrayal of MaNdlela seems to celebrate women's leadership for its attachment to peace and social development. MaNdlela is cast as the voice of women who, she admits, "are vulnerable" (Langa 2000: 208) in this political fighting. MaNdlela's concern with the escalating violence meted out to women leads her to entrust Zodwa, the new chief of the community, with the mission of challenging masculine leadership. MaNdlela's leadership position in her community is given recognition through people's respect for and adhesion to her political views. Her indisputable authority as a public figure is described in the following passage:

MaNdlela did not need to manufacture consensus. All the women, the young and the old, the drowners and the survivors, all agree that something had to be done. It was an instinct borne of the realisation that men could not be trusted. Since they were a species whose very physical organisation

could be a basis of self-esteem or – immolation, dealing with them needed the steady hand of a mining chemist, who could tell just when and how to go about delivering explosive compounds from one shaft to the other. (Langa 2000: 208)

Langa's narrative attempts to address issues of cultural change by exposing the challenges of redefining gender and racial relationships in the public arena. Benedita Venter, who was born from a Scottish mother and a Black South African father, leaves England to seek for her African identity in her father's country. Benedita is an intellectual woman, represented in the story as a hybrid person in terms of both her cultural background and genotype. The character's personal quest for identity exposes her to the vestiges of apartheid culture in the new dispensation.

The description of Benedita's public relations with the rest of the rural community can be seen as the author's attempt to entrust a female character with a social mission aimed at promoting cultural transformation in racial relationships. Langa's concern with correcting cultural prejudices in his text is reminiscent of Maria Pia Lara's perspective of using fiction as a medium of cultural transformation in the public sphere. Pia Lara tells us that:

Recognition is a struggle, a struggle that must be fought in relation to others and in the permanent tension of changing prejudice and transforming the social order. ... it is through others that one can define one's identity, and no solidarity is possible if the discourse does not form a bridge to the other's understanding of what are considered to be worthy features and needs of human beings. Recognition, in this sense, is a performative process of acquiring identity. (Pia Lara 1998: 157)

Pia Lara wants to explain that the recognition of other people's cultural values helps shape one's own identity. Furthermore, solidarity and social cohesion can be achieved only if recognition and respect for the difference between one's own identity and other people's cultural values are promoted.

Langa uses Benedita's hybrid status and her outsider's observation of South African political and social practices to score telling points. The

narrator illustrates the character's determination to bring cultural change in the following description of Benedita:

Benedita presented a mule-like obstinacy when faced with the contradictory aspects of her husband's kinship. She simply didn't understand. Had she grown up in this country and known the price people had paid, then she would be sure to empathise. She saw things his way, here and there, but on the whole, she felt that he was getting so deep into the culture of brutality that he was slowly but surely sloughing off all decency and becoming one of 'them'. He got stumped when she got all steamed up, not knowing whether 'them' referred to the armed *munts* or the armed security people. She probably saw both parties as two sides of the same coin. (Langa 2000: 188)

Benedita's stay in South Africa can be deemed an unsavoury experience due to her perception of the harm done by the former political system on people's perceptions of and conduct towards one another. She is profoundly perturbed by her Afrikaner husband's racist attitude towards blacks as she is feeling rejected by some black South Africans because of her light skin. She summarises her malaise as follows: "I was black in London ... and became white in South Africa, only I realise that I'm back to the consciousness of blackness that only London can evoke" (Langa 2000: 365). Benedita's failure to find her identity and change cultural stereotyping can also be interpreted as Langa's depiction of a contemporary South Africa's socio-political dilemma that requires its people to grapple with the legacy of apartheid, as the politics of race still has a profound effect on human relationships in the new dispensation.

In *The Memory of Stones* Langa's representation of women captures socio-economic transformation. Langa restructures the socio-political fabric and puts women in the leading positions. Langa thus entrusts his women with economic power. His redefinition of power relations between genders is exemplified by the author's portrayal of Khethiwe (to whom Mpanza is married).

The author establishes women's social empowerment through the

restructuring of social class. Khethiwe is represented as an economically independent woman compared to the image displayed by her wayward husband, Mpanza. The reader is exposed to an assessment of both Mpanza and Khethiwe in terms of the moral and economic aspects of their lives. Mpanza, who revels in a bohemian lifestyle, represents an irresponsible father and husband. His failure in public life explains his instability. Khethiwe, on the other hand, displays a strong sense of dignity as she takes care of her children single-handedly and has a good and stable social position. The narrator's depiction of both characters underscores class dichotomy between a man and a woman by highlighting the male character's prejudiced sense of powerlessness when the woman is the main source of income in the house. The woman, by contrast, becomes economically empowered and evokes respect in her community for having achieved success. The following comparative description of the two characters highlights the author's tendency to promote women's achievements in the public arena:

But now Khethiwe has found a well-paying job with Transnet. Armed with some form of economic independence, with its implications for her ability to support the kids, she never lets him forget that the South African National Defence Force is paying him peanuts. Now he has got his discharge. Albeit with the full pension. The very fact that he's expected to join the ranks of the unemployed is certainly going to add to Khethiwe's shame. She is a very proud woman, pretty and confident. For her, life is not to be squandered away. (Langa 2000:37)

Langa's description of black women's economic fulfilment seeks to raise perceptions of women's social status. The author endorses black women's self-realisation in the public sphere by showing the impact of women's public functions on the dismantling of the sexist apparatus, albeit at the cost of fragile male egos.

Another female character with a solid social status is Ntombi, Mpanza's younger sister, who works "as a laboratory assistant at the University of Zululand" (Langa 2000: 54). The description of the power relations between

Ntombi and her husband Roger Zindela, a lecturer in the Geography Department of the same institution, is based on egalitarian principles. Ntombi is depicted as “a decent person, so [is] her husband” (Langa 2000: 57). Through Ntombi’s social status Langa seems to suggest that women’s empowerment in the public arena also permeates their liberation from patriarchal claws in the domestic sphere.

In “Women and Capitalism: Dialectics of Oppression and Liberation” Angela Y. Davis studies women’s oppression and places women’s struggle for self-realisation in the public sphere as a key element for the revision of power relations within marital relationships. Davies makes the following comment:

The man-woman union will always be disfigured unless the woman has liberated herself as *woman*. It will only be radically remoulded when she is no longer defined as if she were a natural prolongation of man. The woman must first break out of the female-male union. Only then can she and man come together on a new basis, both experiencing an equal and authentically human need for one another. (Davies in James and Sharpley-Whiting 2000: 152)

The analysis of female participation in the public arena in the present chapter shows that in these texts female characters are represented as attempting to establish their active presence in the public sphere despite the constraints of patriarchy. They strive to correct sexist views about women’s roles in the workplace by displaying a positive and dynamic image of women. When women are given privileged status in society, they assume leadership roles with great accomplishment. Another aspect of women’s participation in the public sphere which needs to be explored is their participation in the struggle against social injustice. Difficult local circumstances make them choose the route of political activism. This point has already been discussed in the previous chapter. After exploring the change operating in the public sphere regarding women’s public images, it is judicious to investigate the private realm of characters to assess how social

and political transformations are affecting individual lives of female characters.

Chapter 4: THE PORTRAYAL OF RURAL AND URBAN WOMEN IN THEIR PRIVATE LIVES

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS:

In this chapter, I explore two settings, on the one hand the rural environment and on the other the urban. I attempt to investigate the portrayal of women's roles both in rural and urban areas in the novels under scrutiny and in some other relevant texts (by other authors) which depict female protagonists. However, the analysis will be focused on the private lives of female characters to show not only women's oppression and their responses and resistance to social stereotyping, but also the way they tackle new domestic challenges, comprising the new possibilities and/or predicaments of rural and urban women. In fact, intervening into mid-1980s letters and criticism, Njabulo S. Ndebele suggested in his essay "Re-discovery of the Ordinary" a new way of writing in South Africa deliberately not focused on the apartheid system. In the essay, he establishes the need for a shift from the kind of localised political writing which is mainly concerned with the representation of "spectacular forms" (Ndebele 1989: 55) to a more introspective form of writing which explores the "ordinary daily lives" (Ndebele 1989: 50) of people, including those of the powerless. In the same essay, Ndebele redefines the writer's mission in her or his society in these words:

The task of the new generation of South African writers is to help to extend the material range of intellectual and imaginative interest...

It is to look for that area of cultural autonomy and the laws of its dynamism that no oppressor can ever get at; to define that area, and, with purposeful

insidiousness, to assert its irrepressible hegemony during the actual process of struggle. That hegemony will necessarily be an organic one: involving the entire range of human activity. Only on this condition can a new creative and universally meaningful democratic civilisation be built in South Africa. (Ndebele 1989: 159)

Although Njabulo Ndebele's "Re-discovery of the Ordinary" anticipates the liberation from the dominant features of apartheid writing it is not only a prescription directed at mid-1980s letters and criticism, but equally applicable to post-apartheid literature.

In the present chapter Ndebele's call for authorial re-orientation towards the fictional representation of intimacy and of the quotidian will be heeded by focusing on the authors' depictions of ordinary lives of female characters in selected novels. In fact, throughout the analysis of renditions of the private realm of women in both rural and urban societies I seek to place "the ordinary" at the forefront of my investigation, endorsing Graham Pechey's claim that post-apartheid writing is shifting away from assigning overriding importance to politics. In "The post-apartheid sublime: rediscovering the extraordinary" Pechey maintains that:

Post-apartheid writing turns from the fight against apartheid, with its fixation upon suffering and the seizure of power, into just such stories as these: stories which then open out to transform the victory over apartheid into a gain for postmodern knowledge, a new symbiosis of the sacred and the profane, the quotidian and the numinous. (Pechey 1998: 58)

Pechey posits "a new symbiosis of the sacred and the profane, the quotidian and the numinous" in post-apartheid writing to highlight the liberation of South African literature from the dominant forms of apartheid writing by exploring both the realities of everyday life and the spiritual dimension of human existence. Mda's texts are the most illustrative in this dissertation since the novelist describes private issues by invariably adding a spiritual dimension to his narrative.

In the new writing emanating from South Africa the individual becomes

more important than the public terrain. I want to look at the way female characters are portrayed by writers in early transition and post-apartheid contexts, and at the depiction of their struggle against social stereotyping while in addition investigating the degree of these characters' awareness of their own positions in society. My perspective adopts Homi Bhabha's recognition of the importance of exploring the domestic arena, since this theorist contends that "the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (Bhabha 1994: 9). Therefore, by means of critical analysis of literary representation of women's private lives, this chapter exposes crucial aspects of the transitional phase of South African history.

The choice of texts for analysis in this section of the thesis depends on the extent to which the evocation of women characters in it accords with the orientation of the chapter. Some of the texts examined in this thesis are not referred to in this section because they are more appropriately discussed in other chapters. Therefore, I emphasise a specific author's texts and compare them on occasion with other writers' narratives which are not part of my selection of primary texts in order to show how the depiction of female characters in post-apartheid writing may take various directions.

A-The Private Realm of Rural Female Characters

1. Reading Zakes Mda's Texts

a. *Ways of Dying*

Some of the ten novels discussed in the dissertation depict rural settings. Among the three selected writers Zakes Mda's narratives seem to concentrate more attention on the delineation of rural women's private lives. Therefore, I will analyse his texts in comparison with other texts published by other South

African writers (male and female) who either use approaches similar to Mda's or clearly different ones. The main feature of almost every one of Mda's narratives is the centrality of the female voice or perspective, since women are his main protagonists. In *Ways of Dying* (1995), Mda privileges the individual over political experience by placing it central in his narrative, even though the story takes the reader back to the political violence of the transition period before the 1994 elections. The author pays particular attention to women's experiences and emotions. This text seems to inscribe the beginning of a thematic shift in post-apartheid writing that will create (in Ndebele's words) "the new possibilities of understanding and action" (Ndebele 1989: 50). In "How to Live in Post-apartheid South Africa: Reading Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*", Irene Visser suggests that she perceives here:

A new emphasis on the autonomy of art. For not only does the novel's focus on the experimental and the personal constitute a release from the former political demands of resistance literature, but in its eventual orientation towards the future of post-apartheid South Africa, it also invites an engagement with wider issues than the historical, local or personal. (Visser 2002: 40)

Mda's abundant description of "the details of ordinary life" in *Ways of Dying* takes the reader into two juxtaposed worlds, respectively the rural setting and the squatter settlement in the city where the narrator tells the stories of the two main protagonists, Noria and Toloki, by means of flashbacks. The representation of the village seems to display the patriarchal structure on which African traditional culture rests. Mda does not sympathise with the patriarchal emphasis in the culture of African tradition, which places women on the lower tier of a social hierarchy. He also asserts in an interview that his intentions in this novel are to reveal the truth about a South African reality concerning the status of women in his society. He maintains that:

It is something I invented but it is something that comes from the African reality... I come from a country where women traditionally are marginalised and oppressed, both by the system and the patriarchal society. So that is a reality in my culture as well. It's a culture now, in the modern

sense, where there are a lot of women abuses by men, which also includes a lot of rapes. My country is the rape capital of the world! So you can see that, in all respect, women are highly marginalised in that. (Mda 2002: 2)⁶

The Ghanaian critic Anthony K. Appiah in similar vein condemns a sentimental approach in the assessment of African traditions in post-colonial societies. He instead warns in his 1996 article “Against National Culture”, cautioning that “Post-colonial societies where nationalism is replacing earlier foundations of rule, an idealizing, if not sentimental, view of traditional culture may have a great appeal” (Appiah 1996: 23).

The revalorisation of African traditions has often been a central preoccupation in resistance literature of the apartheid era; however, Mda writes from a different perspective where he wants to dismantle any practice which perpetuates the subjugation of women. In *Ways of Dying*, the village is ruled under a patriarchal system, which allows black men to be domineering and cruel in their everyday relationships with their female counterparts. Jwara, Toloki’s father, takes draconian positions against the will and welfare of his own family. He rules his household with acrimony and ruthlessness. The communal narrator criticises Jwara’s cruelty towards his own child, whom he denigrates all the time because of his ugly appearance. Jwara’s attitudes soften whenever he sees Noria because her songs inspire him to shape his figurines. The following sentence amply illustrates Jwara’s egotistical and sexist attitude: “If Jwara ruled his household with a rod of iron, he was like clay in the hands of Noria. He bought her sweets from the general dealer’s store, and chocolate” (Mda 1995: 33).

Mda’s description of gender relations in the narrative shows that male characters in the rural areas seem to lack compassion for women’s predicaments. Xesibe, for instance, does not care to visit his dying wife at the hospital. The absence of his wife seems to make him feel happy simply

⁶ Zakes, Mda. “Interview”. <http://www.africacentre.org.uk/africanvisionsexcerpts.html> 26-11-2002, p. 2. 4.

because “he enjoys being master of his own compound” (Mda 1995: 86). To cap it all, he very soon takes his late friend’s widow, Toloki’s mother, to replace Noria’s own mother when the latter has died. Xesibe does not show any sign of grief after his wife’s decease. He rather seems to celebrate his own wife’s tragic demise and that of a close friend by shamelessly courting Jwara’s widow. His insensitive reaction when confronted by death is shocking because it transgresses moral values and shows him to be deficient in humane qualities.

Mda implicitly conveys scathing criticism against patriarchal or abusive paternal roles played by male characters in the novel. They all end up as tyrants towards both their wives and offspring. The author wants to highlight the strength of his disapproval of the abuses committed against children and women. Mda’s plot is set in a traditionally patriarchal environment where women’s individual rights are constantly violated. Noria, the heroine, goes through many taxing predicaments, which start with a twelve-month pregnancy, while his migrant work distances her from her husband, Napu. The latter has no choice but to leave her with his grandmother in another village. The novelist shows rural women’s entanglement in and enslavement to socio-economic oppression by pinpointing that both political and cultural structures contribute largely to the perpetuation of women’s social subjection.

Mda condemns male lack of compassion for the woman’s cause as well as the attitude of older women based on passivity and tolerance of patriarchal oppression. The description of Noria’s relationship with Napu’s grandmother evinces the clash between younger and elderly women. Napu’s grandmother opposes the idea of letting Noria join her husband in the city because the old woman is aware that Noria’s going to the city is detrimental to her own interests, since she will no longer receive financial assistance from her grandson if the latter discovers his grandmother’s misconduct towards his wife. The old woman uses masculinist discourse to convince her grandson not to take Noria with him by making the following statement: “She is not going anywhere, Napu. You cannot be controlled by a woman” (Mda 1995: 78).

Through the elderly woman's words, the narrator exposes the patriarchal view of women as the weaker sex, therefore controllable by men and not the other way round. Despite being herself a woman, Napu's grandmother is portrayed as a supporter of the patriarchal system with its oppressive principles vis-à-vis gender power relations. Mda's representation of Napu's grandmother as the guardian of traditions illustrates the participation of some traditional women in the perpetual denial of women's voice in the rural environment.

Although Mda's writing advocates the revalorisation of women, the author is also critical about other women's contribution to the perpetuation of patriarchal conceptions. Mda's depiction of the old woman shows that female characters can also feature as villains in his narratives despite his compassion toward and sensitivity regarding female characters' predicaments. In an interview published on the website <http://www.oup.com> the author acknowledges his tendency to 'write like a woman', justifying it as follows: "I don't deliberately try to write 'like a woman' or consciously create strong female characters, but I think that there's a very strong woman in me. Maybe it's just how women come across to me" (Mda 2006: 1).⁷ By acknowledging a tendency to "write like a woman" Mda wants to justify why foreign readers identify him as a female writer because he writes so copiously and convincingly about women's social experiences.

Like Mda, many African writers underline intergenerational conflicts in their texts. Among them, Lauretta Ngcobo is one of the most articulate black South African women's voices to have participated in the debate around relationships between younger and older women. In her novel *And They Didn't Die* (1990), Ngcobo fictionalises history by exposing social and political realities of the former dispensation. Margaret J. Daymond praises Ngcobo's dexterity in excavating the past through the representation of rural women in her text, seeing *And They Didn't Die* as a great contribution to post-

⁷ Mda, Zakes. "A Free State of Mind". <http://www.oup.com/za/resources/interviews/mda/21-02-2006>, p. 1.

apartheid discernment of contemporary and former conditions in South Africa:

And They Didn't Die is Ngcobo's powerful contribution to South Africans' post-apartheid understanding of their present, as well as the past which has shaped it. By foregrounding the experience of a young rural woman and by illuminating the complex position of family and sexual politics within the larger history of endurance and resistance, Ngcobo has created a novel which will earn its rightful place in South Africa's national literature. (Daymond 1998: 273)

By revisiting the past, Ngcobo situates the plot in a fictive rural setting in the area where she grew up. Ngcobo's heroine, Jezile Majola, finds herself in a similar position to Noria's when her husband, Siyalo, leaves her with his mother to go and work in the city of Durban. The author exemplifies the authoritative power that Siyalo's mother, Mabiyela, wields over her daughter-in-law in the absence of her son. When Jezile attempts to go out and get a pass in order to visit her husband in the city, the mother-in-law slanders her name. She is accused of infidelity to her husband, whereas her desperate decision to visit him is motivated by her yearning to have a child with him. Jezile is not entitled to make any decision without consulting her mother-in-law. The author seems to suggest that the female elders uphold masculine power, since they pressurize and force young women to comply with patriarchal laws that they see as normative customs. Jezile hopes to find comfort from her own mother who, in return, exhorts her to "make peace" with her mother-in-law. She says: "Mabiyela is the pillar of this home and you have to lean on her. You can have friends outside, but Mabiyela is the law and your support. With her by your side, few people will try to exploit you" (Ngcobo 1999: 156). The attitude of Jezile's mother highlights female elders' support for patriarchy.

Both Mda's and Ngcobo's characters, Noria and Jezile, are put in a beleaguered position where they have to take care of their children without their husbands' support. Noria's eviction from her father's house exemplifies Mda's denunciation of paternal oppression practised by some men against

their own daughters.

Mda's representation of Noria's sexuality in the course of the novel sometimes seems to betray a stereotypical 'male gaze' that objectifies/sexualises women. She is depicted as a gullible character who is constantly used by male characters as a sexual commodity in exchange for material comfort. Noria's decision to resort to a despised but better-paid occupation (prostitution) for survival reasons evinces the commodification of the woman's body.

Jezile, Ngcobo's heroine, by contrast has to seek for employment since her husband has been sentenced to lengthy imprisonment after stealing milk from a neighbouring white farmer's cows in order to feed their starving child. Jezile subsequently has no alternative: she leaves her children with her mother-in-law Mabiyela to work in Bloemfontein as a domestic worker in a white family's home. Jezile's fate is rather different from Noria's because she is raped and impregnated by her white employer, Mr Potgieter. Lauretta Ngcobo wants to explore black women's double oppression by depicting Jezile as not only a victim of male patriarchal attitudes but also of white oppression. In her Afterword to the novel, the South African feminist M. J. Daymond maintains that "Ngcobo shows extraordinary insight in depicting this man's cringing abuse of a helpless domestic servant and his wife's complicity in covering up a union which was – in terms of the laws governing interracial sexual relations – a crime" (Daymond 1998: 270).

Mrs Potgieter's silence as commented on in the above passage can serve to illustrate white women's cooperation (during the apartheid era) with their male counterparts to oppress black women, on the one hand, or alternatively, as testimony to the patriarchal superpower that apartheid inflicted upon white women, who were also silenced.

'Sexual politics' is depicted and analysed in the works of most post-apartheid writers. Their focus is often on the theme of violence committed against female characters. Writers re-create that day-to-day reality in their

imaginative writing in order to highlight the present position of women in South African society. Mda's novels always seem to mention a scene where a female character faces this abominable crime. In *Ways of Dying*, Noria's father, Xesibe, attempts to rape his grandson's baby-sitter on an occasion when they are the only two adults in the house. The refusal of the young woman to give in despite the sadistic man's threats is a sign of women's revolt against male domination. The young woman's decision to quit her job can be interpreted as a moral lesson Mda wants to convey in order to alter men's perception of women's bodies:

She said she was going to pack her things and go, since she was not prepared to stay in a home where the man of the house could not control his raging lust. She was a church woman, and a married woman with a husband and children. The fact that she was in need of a job did not mean that her body was for sale. (Mda 1995: 90)

Toloki, the only progressive male voice in terms of the relationships between men and women depicted in this text, despises rapists. He cannot do such a thing to a woman because "it would be like doing dirty things to a goddess" (Mda 1995: 153). The psychological growth of Mda's female characters (Noria, for instance, looks more mature when she meets Toloki in the city) shows a shift in the way they react against social stereotypes. Noria realises that she has been victim of male injustice and cruelty for too long and that it is high time she found "new ways of living" in the newly democratised South Africa. Mda uses an irony by depicting Noria in a victimised position in her relationships with male characters even in the city in order to give a broad picture of quotidian male abuse of women.

Noria's attitude towards men subsequently changes drastically, compared to the earlier days when she used to depend on men to make her living. After giving pleasure to taxi drivers who used to lavish their presents on her, and because of her experience of working as a prostitute, Noria sees men as selfish creatures. According to her, they offer poisonous gifts since they always expect to be paid back. In "Nongqawuse, National Time and (Female)

Authorship in *The Heart of Redness*”, Meg Samuelson comments on Noria’s decision to abandon prostitution in order to lead a more dignified life. Samuelson argues that the protagonist’s “shift from prostitution (suggesting incontinence) to asceticism (the “sealed fountain”) sees her resuming the role of muse” (Samuelson 2004: 18). Samuelson refers to Nokuthula Mazibuko’s paper on gender in *Ways of Dying* given at the 2004 “Postcolonialism: South / Africa” Conference that highlights the productive effects of Noria’s female body by explaining that it “becomes a vessel for the author’s message about the nation: it is made to speak both the terrible cycle of violence gripping the transitional state, and messianic hopes for a redemptive future” (Samuelson 2004: 18).

Before the conversion of Mda’s heroine to asceticism, she seems to have been acting out roles pre-established by a patriarchal dispensation. Noria’s awareness concerning the significance of liberating herself from the patriarchal image of a materially dependent woman indicates the author’s purpose of reaffirming that women’s resistance to all patriarchal forms of domination should start with women’s economic independence within the household. Thus, Noria confides in Toloki: “I accepted your help because I knew you were doing it from your kind heart. You did not expect anything in return. But I insist that when I have found myself, I’ll pay back” (Mda 1995: 71). Mda attempts to deconstruct the sexist representation of the female body as object of male fantasy. The author seems to suggest that the female body should not be seen as a commodity that can be bought or possessed by proffering material goods.

Like Noria, Ngcobo’s heroine Jezile in *And They Didn’t Die* also takes a defensive position against male sexist attitudes. Her awareness of the new struggle for women’s liberation from the patriarchal yoke comes from her transformed personal experience after her trips to the city. Both characters seem to import ideas of change from the city. Their insights about their new relationships with men within the familial structure are completely different from those displayed at the beginning of both plots. Jezile’s exasperation at

having to endure male violence against women is exemplified in the closing pages of the novel when she slays the soldier who intends to rape her daughter. One can interpret Jezile's action as a demonstration of her heroic agency that marks women's commitment to "opposing" or "resisting" any form of violence against them by using any means available.

Ways of Dying is not the only Zakes Mda narrative that I explore in order to analyse rural women in their domestic milieus. The portrayal of female characters is certainly one of the most predictable themes in most of this author's novels. *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) is the second Mda text to be explored in this chapter.

b. *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002)

The narrative of this text is an account of two juxtaposed epochs. Mda depicts rural women of both the older and new generation in the apartheid setting and in the context of a newly democratised South Africa. This account of past events highlights the politicisation of private life during the apartheid era. Although the scandal happened a long time ago, Mda shows the event still having an impact upon the present-day relationships between people in this small town. One may even venture to say that Mda uses what was considered the “sinful” story of the past in order to expose undeniable facts about the relationships across racial boundaries to promote the theme of reconciliation upheld by The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Mda’s narrative appears to endorse Michael Chapman’s viewpoint about the necessity of adapting post-apartheid writing to the holistic ideal of reconciliation. In his article “The Politics of Identity: South Africa, Storytelling, and Literary History”, Chapman suggests that “for the sake of reconciliation rather than vengeance our fictions have to be truer than the truth” (Chapman 2002: 228). Through this statement Chapman wants to show that if reconciliation is to occur writers need to expose facts about people’s individual stories by means of the power of art. Accordingly, fiction offers many interpretations which are conducive to the discernment of truth.

In an interview, Mda refers to the theme of reconciliation by maintaining that the story of this text can be a great contribution to the reconciliation process in post-apartheid South African society: “Today, the children [born from mixed-race parents] have grown up and the women remember. It’s a good lesson for South Africa, at least in terms of reconciliation” (Mda 2002:

1).⁸

The novel revisits the political laws of the apartheid system, particularly the Immorality Act, which banned sexual relations across the so-called “colour-line”. Mda fictionalises history by re-envisaging the period when miscegenation was forbidden and then linking that past to an imagined contemporary Excelsior to depict new relationships between race and gender within the post-apartheid dispensation. He successfully links and combines the past and the present in this text. The narrator occasionally uses a style full of humour to deride the insular side of apartheid thinking, as the following passage illustrates:

Then there was **Scope**, a magazine whose pages were full of white women with stars on their tits. If the Afrikaner men of Excelsior caught a black man reading **Scope**, they would beat him to pieces. Black men had no business ogling topless white women. But the brave men of Mahlatswetsa Location had no qualms about risking broken limbs by smuggling the magazine under their shirts. To this day, many of us believe that white women have black stars on their breasts instead of nipples. (Mda 2002: 76)

Mda makes use of a communal narrator who does not appropriate the story (since she/he always uses “we”, “our” and “us”) to excavate the African oral tradition of story-telling. The story does not belong to any one person, but to everyone. The narrator testifies that the Immorality Act intensified the curiosity about one another and the desire to break the law in the minds of both races. In other words, the law against miscegenation gave room to men from different races to project in their psyches an eroticised representation of both black and white women. The reader can explore the memories of the narrator who recalls that “Immorality” (or the legal transgression later so named) became “a pastime” ever since the first encounter of European explorers and Khoikhoi women (Mda 2002: 93) in Southern Africa. He/she situates the case of the “Excelsior 19” in the “Golden Age of Immorality in

⁸ Mda, Zakes. “Interview with Zakes Mda”.
http://www.africacultures.com/anglais/articles_anglais/int_mda.htm, 26-11-2002, p. 1. 1.

the Free State” (Mda 2002: 93) and describes the epoch as characterised by an epidemic of miscegenation in Excelsior:

But what we were seeing during this Golden Age was like a plague. In various platteland towns Afrikaner magistrates were sitting at their benches, listening to salacious details, and concealing painful erections under their black magisterial gowns. Afrikaners prosecuting fellow Afrikaners with cannibalistic zeal. Afrikaners sending fellow Afrikaners to serve terms of imprisonment. All because of black body parts. (Mda 2002: 93-94)

The quotation shows the appropriation of the domestic sphere by the public one. The apartheid system sought to control every facet of the social fabric, as the political system sought to interfere in the private lives of both whites and blacks. Accordingly, apartheid laws could be linked to an orthodox religious ideology. The presence of the character of the Flemish priest-painter Vader Claerhout highlights Mda’s purpose of fictionalising this real story because, the writer explains, the catholic priest’s art is “very descriptive of the Free State”.⁹ The priest is a particular painter who finds his inspiration only in the nude figures of black women. His art exhibits a “male gaze” perspective on the female body through the painter’s display of his male fantasy in portraying black women almost invariably stark naked. Although the vow of chastity is one of the rules by which the priest has to abide in his union with God, the priest’s work puts him in a position where his desire to express his artistic skills involves the contemplation of nude women. His project of portraying the Madonna obliges him to transgress one of his religious tenets, as the painting makes him draw the private parts of women. However, he does not touch women who display their bodies before him. Niki, who feels ashamed to take off her clothes in front of the old white priest, comforts herself with the thought that he is a bit different from the other white men she had known in the past: “It was not the first time a white man had seen her naked. But this one was different. He did not seem to see her nakedness, even though he painted it” (Mda 2002: 12). The irony in Mda’s description of

⁹ Zakes, Mda. “A Free State of Mind”. <http://www.oup.com/za/resources/interviews/mda/> 21-02-2006. P. 1. 1.

Claerhout's representation of black women contains diverse implications. Mda seems to reinforce the idea of white men's eroticised representation of black women. However, the author acknowledges the purity of art in the priest's painting. In a subtle way, Mda contrasts the priest's portrayal of black women with the male Afrikaner characters' salacious ways of seeing black women's nudity, exposing their phallogentric and racist plans simultaneously to satisfy their sexual fantasies and to reinforce white supremacy by having sex with black women whom they do not acknowledge publicly as partners.

In order to dismantle such colonialist discourse, Mda insists on the analysis of every detail that the priest's portrayal of black women can disclose. The description of the priest's paintings displays near pornographic features:

Brown madonnas with big breasts. A naked madonna lying on a bed of white flowers. Her eyes are closed and her lips are twisted. Her voluptuous thighs are wide open ready to receive drops of rain. A black pubic forest hides her nakedness. Her breasts are full and her nipples are hard. Under her arm she carries a baby wrapped in a white lace. A naked madonna holds a naked child against a blue moon on a purple sky ... Another madonna kneels, her head resting on the ground near the child in white lace, and her buttocks opening up to the sky. Ready to receive drops of rain ... The madonna of the cosmos and sunflowers and open skies. Like all the others, she is naked. (Mda 2002: 11)

The combination of colours in the painting is vivid and full of meaning. The narrator tends to convey the extent to which the painter's vision eroticises, displays, explores and exposes these women's bodies, despite their ostensibly maternal and religious (Madonna-with-child) function. The allusion to sunflowers recalls the location (the sunflower field) where Johannes Smit, the white farmer (Mda 2002: 18), rapes Niki. The attitude of the priest is similar to the curiosity that colonisers had concerning indigenous women's bodies.

Mda's reference to the character of the priest revives the updated debate

around the repatriation of the remains of Sarah Baartman to South Africa. Sarah Baartman is the Khoikhoi woman whose protruding posterior particularly attracted European explorers' and public as well as museum gawkers' curiosity. She was removed from her family and country (South Africa) to display her nakedness in museums in France and England. Ironically, the novel was published in the same year (2002) as that in which Sarah Baartman's remains were eventually returned to South Africa for a decent burial, and to be commemoratively honoured.

Mda's novel expresses not only a criticism against the patriarchal aspect of the apartheid regime but it also intends to challenge sexist aspects of Western discourse. He wants to rectify the empire's perception of post-colonial worlds. This seems to follow the project suggested by Bill Ashcroft, G. Griffiths & H. Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory & Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989). The writers of *The Empire Writes Back* point out "the silencing and marginalising of the post-colonial voice by the imperial centre; the abrogation of the imperial centre within texts; and the active appropriation of the language and culture of that centre". To which the authors add:

These features and the transitions between them are expressed in various ways in different [post-colonial] texts, sometimes through formal subversions and sometimes through contestation at the thematic level. In all cases, however, the notions of power inherent in the model of centre and margin are appropriated and so dismantled. (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1989: 82)

Mda's disapproval of colonialist discourse is illustrated through the character of the priest. In fact, the Flemish priest's interest in the portrayal of black women's nudity recalls imperialist discourse in the description of African people. In fact, the colonial representation of the colonised is entangled in a wide range of objectifying stereotypes. In *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Post-coloniality & Feminism* Trinh T. Minh-ha criticises stereotypical representation of the colonised people and she suggests the need

to achieve a total liberation from the colonial discourse. According to Minh-ha ethnic, racial and regional differences cannot circumscribe women's identity because, she explains, "*Difference does not annul identity. It is beyond and alongside identity*" (Minh-ha 1989: 104). The colonial discourse has often shown condescending, or rather demeaning, attitudes towards the "other" as analysed by influential post-colonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* can be used as an illustration of imperialist discourse because of the way the author dehumanises African people in the character Marlow's account of his experiences in the Congo, particularly in contrasting his depiction of the African and European women (distinctly 'savage' versus 'refined') with whom Kurtz has relationships.

The priest is so determined to paint the Madonna in the shape of the local black women that he pays all his models, who are required to pose in the nude, quite generously. The author displays the role of constraining socio-economical factors in black women's subjugation during apartheid. Mda seems to suggest that because of the rampant poverty these women face in their households they cannot turn down the priest's offer. The female candidates for modelling are in a position where it seems irrational to refuse such a lucrative offer. Niki is one of the women in that position. The narrator shows that after being dismissed from her job because she slept with her white boss, her second child's father, Niki has to take care of two children. But the lack of support from her husband and family (not to mention the child's father's family) leads to her taking up the priest's offer: "She had heard from the women of his congregation that he painted naked women. In all neighbouring townships and villages, women walked out of their skewed houses to pose in the nude for him. He paid his models well" (Mda 2002: 3).

The priest's artistic activity can be challenged from a feminist perspective for using black women's private parts as commodities that he can access and use by means of his money. This shows him participating in the patriarchal conception of the female body in terms of which sexists often try to define

feminine identity. In other words, even the priest's artistic project highlights many men's phallogocentric tendency to represent women's personality through their physical appearance.

Throughout the novel Mda exposes the issue of economic depression that South African black women have been facing since the apartheid era. The lack of financial independence has kept them in a position (generally) considerably worse than that of their black male counterparts (on a gender basis) or than white women's (on a racial basis). The novel unveils the predicament of black female characters who have few means of tackling the burden of poverty. The harsh situation obliges them to make decisions which, instead of establishing solidarity between them, divide them from one another. Betrayal of others can be a means of survival. In the rape to which she is subjected as a young girl, Niki is the victim of a plot set up by her friends who expect to get money for this from the white farmer, Johannes Smit. The naïve girls, Maria and Mmampe, seem to enjoy the game with the man, who pays them very little money for participating in a sexual game which they presumably see as harmless. Maria maintains: "His desire is only in the heart, but his manhood always fails him" (Mda 2002: 17). Mmampe confidently adds: "It happens like that with all the girls he has seduced with money" (Mda 2002: 17). However, the author describes these girls' naivety when they send their friend Niki into the claws of what Unity Dow calls (in *The Screaming of The Innocent*) a "ruthless predator" (Unity Dow 2003: 79) who will bear the responsibility for the loss of her virginity.

Niki's predicament is made even more painful when on the very same night her drunken father (who has left her no money for food) threatens to hit "her buttocks with a belt until they [are] sour" (Mda 2002: 16) if she does not provide him with food. The doubly victimised girl resorts to using the rapist's money to buy a loaf of bread and a big can of pilchards in tomato sauce in order to calm down her furious father. Niki's father can be seen as contributing to the prostitution of his young daughter to satisfy his own needs, as he expects her to provide food despite knowing that the girl has no

resources – and obviously without himself being an adequate provider.

The theme of violence is recurrent in post-apartheid writing and especially in that of Mda. However, in this particular novel the author looks back into a period in South African history when black women were sexually victimised by white men. Mda does not in any noticeable way in this text link violence committed against women at the earlier time with the persistence of this problem in ‘post-apartheid’ South Africa.

The South African writer J. M. Coetzee, the 2003 Nobel Prize winner for literature, conveys a different outlook in the way he tackles the issue in his novel *Disgrace* (2000). Coetzee foregrounds contemporary South African society and its abuses against women. He depicts a university lecturer at the University of Cape Town, David Lurie, with uncontrollable womanising urges. The story reaches its climax when the character performs a disgraceful deed. His lust for women’s bodies eventually leads him to have a sexual relationship with his own student. David’s former wife expresses strong disapproval to stress the gravity of his misconduct after he has consulted her: “Don’t expect sympathy from me, David and don’t expect sympathy from anyone else either. No sympathy, no mercy, not in this day and age. Everyone’s hand will be against you” (Coetzee 2000: 44). After confessing his misbehaviour, his dismissal follows and this leads him to seek refuge at his daughter’s place on a farm in another province.

Unlike Mda, whose approach is retroactive, Coetzee reflects the way the South African present has taken on different racial dimensions from its past, while patterns of gender abuse persist. He insists on the present situation and places his sexist male character, David Lurie, at the core of a violent event where both he and his daughter are victims. David receives a harsh beating and then remains entirely powerless while the gang rape of his daughter (by the black assailants) is occurring. Moreover, the victim bears a rapist’s child in her womb. Coetzee focuses his attention on violence in the New South Africa to highlight the reversal of the situation of the apartheid era, where

women are still being raped even though male power has changed hands from whites to blacks.

Unlike Mda's female characters, Coetzee's main female character in *Disgrace* (2000) lacks agency. Lucy can do nothing to fend off the rape, but she chooses to keep the child from the resulting pregnancy. In fact, the young woman resigns herself to carrying the unchosen or initially unwanted baby because she decides that she wants to keep the child and is prepared to lavish maternal love on it despite her father's suggestion that she should have an abortion. The author's portrayal of Lucy as victim of black men's violence gives hints about this character's approach to her forced impregnation as a way of coming to terms with the need for the expiation of the violent racist past. However, feminist discourse can challenge this position. In fact, the two male writers seem to perpetuate a long tradition in South African writing by black authors on the one hand and by whites on the other hand. Whites see the devil in the eyes of blacks and vice versa. In other words, one racial group seems to look at the other as a scapegoat to explain a social quandary. While Mda represents white men as oppressors of black women during apartheid, Coetzee sees black men as responsible for violence committed against white women to satisfy their demand for atonement for the apartheid system.

In "The Republic of Letters after the Mandela Republic" Lewis Nkosi makes a comparative study of texts published by white and black South African writers after the demise of apartheid. Nkosi points out thematic differences between white and black authors. He argues:

Black and white writers reflect different preoccupations in their choices of theme. While black writers remain somewhat stunned by the sudden change, seeming for the most part without a subject, a few like Mda and Wicomb have begun the necessary process of examining the ways in which our recent and distant past have shaped, and continue to exert their pressure, on the present. On the other side, white writers seem divided between those who wish to explore their own sense of guilt about the years of racial oppression carried out in their name (a writer like Antjie Krog is quite explicit about this) and those others, suddenly quite numerous, who see the

end of apartheid as an occasion for inventing black villains whose function is to serve as pawns in a game in which roles are suddenly, conveniently, reversed. Former white exploiters are transformed suddenly, and for the occasion, into “victims”, and former black victims become ... the new “exploiters”. (Nkosi 2002: 253)

Mda's *The Madonna of Excelsior* also seeks to reveal the relationship between black women and their white counterparts in the (white) domestic sphere during the apartheid era. The black women's economic hardship and the white women's desire for domestic help reinforce the relation of unequal interdependence between them. The black woman, who faces poverty and loneliness due to the absence of her husband doing duty as a migrant worker far from home, has to seek employment (for survival reasons) in domestic labour. Niki is without resources while her reckless husband, Pule, is away working in the mines in Johannesburg. Despite the disintegration of her family, she hopes to fill the economic gap when the Cronjes hire her to work at their place. Her presence in the household of the white couple at first helps to maintain the privileged life of her employers. She takes care of the domestic chores at the Cronje's home and plays with the couple's son (Tjaart Cronje), whose favourite game is to ride on Niki's back – a pastime known as the “horsey-horsey game” (Mda 2002: 41) – a type of play that not only has erotic undertones but duplicates the gender and racial power relations among the adults.

Despite the meagre remuneration she earns for the job, Niki is shown helplessly experiencing the disruption of a normal family life of her own. She is not only obliged to perform unpaid extra chores, but also sacrifices her own son's need for maternal attention whenever Tjaart Cronje wants to play with her. The socially legitimising political and economic forces seem systematically to shape the relationships between white and black women in the (white) domestic context. Domestic labour subdues the black woman and deprives her of any rights. She becomes something like the property of the white “madam”. Cornelia Cronje humiliates Niki after a scale test; she

accuses her of theft because Niki's weight has increased by a kilo:

Madam Cornelia was determined to teach Niki a lesson. And to teach the other workers by example. She ordered her to strip. Right there in front of everyone. When she hesitated, Madam Cornelia threatened to lock her up in the cold room with all the carcasses, as it was obvious that she loved meat so much that she had now become a meat thief. Niki peeled off her pink overall and then her mauve dress ... she stood there like the day she was born. Except that when she was born, there was no shame in her. No hurt. No embarrassment. (Mda 2002: 41)

Cornelia's not merely domineering but sadistic attitude towards Niki reinforces the perceived pattern of lack of sympathy that many white women displayed towards black women. Cornelia seems to enjoy oppressing Niki, who is under her control. However, the exhibition of Niki's nudity arouses Stephanus Cronje's sexual fantasies. The latter has a changed perception of Niki – as a sexual being – from this moment: “For Stephanus Cronje, Niki's pubes, with their short entangled hair, become the stuff of fantasies. From that day”, Mda writes, “he saw Niki only as body parts rather than as one whole person. He saw her as breasts, pubes, lips and buttocks” (Mda 2002: 42).

Stephanus's predatory, racist sexism leads him to commit the irredeemable South African domestic crime: he is unfaithful to his wife, but worse than that, he contravenes the Immorality Act with Niki. The relationship between the two women becomes bitter when everyone in Excelsior knows about the sex scandal. Cornelia's husband has cheated on her with his “own” black house-cleaner. This enhances the antagonism between Niki and Cornelia. The family life of the privileged (white) Cronjes is therefore destabilised both by the scandal and sin of a disloyal husband, and eventually by his suicide. Cornelia is doomed to assume widowhood and the solitary upbringing of her child due to the shameful behaviour of her husband.

Through the description of the psychology of Niki and other black women with light-skinned babies after they have been sent into custody, Mda seeks to reveal black women's oppression by the judicial institution. The narrator

shows that the blame is put upon the women because some think that “The Devil had sent black women to tempt [white men] and move [them] away from the path of righteousness” (Mda 2002: 87). The “Excelsior 19”, as they are also called, are portrayed by the author as victims of a repressive and unjust society which has inflicted a biased sentence upon them. Mda pinpoints the way the effects of prison life impinge on people’s social reinsertion. The author’s description of the conditions of the “Excelsior 19” shows them in a difficult position where they have to carry a double yoke. On the one hand, they will face economic hardship since they are aware that no white woman can risk offering them any job after the display of their sexual power over white men in newspapers and on radio. On the other hand, their own community will condemn them because they have brought shame on their families by bearing white men’s children. The celebration of their return to the community resounds with mocking ululations. The narrator describes these moments in the following way:

We jeered and cheered. The women were both heroes and villains to various sections of the crowd.

We mocked Maria: “Hello, Mrs Lombard”.

We taunted Mmampe: “Hello, Mrs Smit”.

We leered at Niki: “Hello, Mrs Cronje”.

We called each one of the women by the name of the lover with whom she had been charged. (Mda 2002: 98)

The public pressure of the black community takes control over women’s domestic relationships within their own family units. Relatives often marginalise light-skinned children. Maria’s brother, for instance, hates his own niece simply because she is Coloured. Public discrimination in the black township against light-skinned children born as a consequence of their mothers’ and their partners’ infringement of the Immorality Act is manifested in the derogatory name “boesman” by which the members of the community refer to these mixed-race children.

Mda's delineation of black women's sexuality in the novel evinces a positive change in the way female characters are taking control over their own sexuality. After all the hardships she endured in her life, Niki is shown as a careful mother who wants to teach her daughter Popi about the risks of not having control of her sexuality. Niki's behaviour can justify the precautions she takes to protect her daughter from the same mistakes she herself had made. The narrator reveals Niki's safety measures when Popi first menstruates. She advises Popi in the following words: "If you sleep with a boy, you will get pregnant ... Don't play with boys. Don't even touch a boy. As for white men, stay away from them. Don't even talk to them unless you are buying something at the store" (Mda 2002: 117). Mda attempts to demystify an African tendency to place a taboo on the discussion of sexuality in traditional settings. The author seems to suggest that only demystification of sexual issues in domestic and public milieus can help rural women to grasp their own sexuality in the context where contraception and precaution against sexually transmitted diseases become burning matters.

As she ages, Niki seems to relish solitude as she distances herself from the mundane issues of the location. By allowing his female character to lead a hermit-like life Mda wants to emphasise the tendency of senescent people to look for a spiritual activity. Niki's preference for the company of bees evinces her inability to function socially in an unjust society. Mda's protagonist tends to project herself into an ideal world where social justice prevails. Niki, indeed, tries to express the freedom that her society did not succeed in offering her. Her loneliness has strengthened her in the sense that she has discovered her strong personal centre and the independence that she could not enjoy previously, whether because of gender or racial roles prescribed by social laws. Popi is presented as the only person to have understood Niki's philosophy of female independence as she joins her mother in her mysterious communion with the bees.

Mda often seems to show his characters finding solutions to their dilemmas by recourse to natural or supernatural forces. The author's

exploration of the magical world is even more intense in *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), the next novel by Mda to be discussed here.

c. *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995)

The story revolves around two main protagonists, Dikosha and her “twin” brother Radison (in reality they are not twins; twin is simply a label given to them by the rural community because they were born within the same year). Mda chooses a new setting, different from his own country, to construct a narrative which takes place in Ha Samane, a village in mountainous Lesotho. The author worked in this country for a few years while in exile. As in a fairytale or myth, the story is full of eerie sequences, which recall Mda’s storytelling in *Ways of Dying* (1995). The depiction of rural women is particularly intriguing in the narrative as they are opposed to city (“lowlands”) women. Dikosha is the first female character who creates a centre of attention due to her “absurd” and peerless manners. Mystery tends to envelop her whole being. She was conceived at a night dance when her older brother was only four weeks old. If her birth is puzzling to her mother and the rest of the community, they also deem her attitudes extremely strange. Unlike other girls of her age, she radically opposes pre-established traditional conventions:

People of the village referred to Dikosha as a leftwa, a girl who had long passed the age of marriage. After all, she was eighteen years old, and at this age women of the village were either married or at high school somewhere in the lowlands. Even those who were at high school, when they came home during holidays and behaved in the uppity manner of the lowland people, were called spinsters by people of the village. It was supposed to be the worst insult that could be hurled in the direction of any woman. (Mda 1995: 5)

Dikosha, like most female characters in Mda’s narratives, shows an extraordinary determination in challenging social pressure. She builds her

own identity without the influence of popular judgment. The following passage can exemplify Dikosha's unbending determination to live according to her own principles: "Yet Dikosha did not mind such labels. She was determined to live her life in her own way. And her way did not include marriage. Boyfriends and courting did not feature in her world" (Mda 1995: 5).

We can draw a parallel between Popi (in *The Madonna of Excelsior*) and Dikosha (in *She Plays with the Darkness*) in the way both characters see men. Popi and Dikosha seem to have no interest in an intimate relationship with a man or with men. Despite her evident beauty, Popi privileges a relation with her family, especially with her mother Niki, with whom she goes to seek the company of bees. Dikosha, on the other hand, indulges herself in mesmerising dances with the "people of the cave". With her dance, she has the power to tame "the most poisonous snakes" (Mda 1995: 4). Mda seems to give his female characters supernatural powers in their ability to commune with or to have control over wild creatures such as bees or snakes.

Dikosha rejects Sorry My Darlie's proposals despite his wealth and his renown as a soccer hero. "Beauty queens of the world" (in the city) and "the village belles" (at Ha Samane – 20) have approached Sorry, the soccer star, but this does not change Dikosha's mind. Sorry hopes to get her by offering fancy gifts, including a tour to the lowlands (the city). However, material things and the luxuries of city life do not impress her. She despises materialism, but values ethics. Mda likes insisting on the beauty of his female characters while he often portrays men as ugly. Dikosha is represented as the epitome of unfading gorgeousness, and remarkably, she never ages:

Indeed, Dikosha was beautiful in the extreme. Hers was an irrational beauty, a crazy beauty. Beauty ran amok on her face, messing it up with ravishing but discomfoting features. It ran loose in the rest of her body; creating curves along its insane path that any red-blooded male would love to rub his body against. (Mda 1995: 71)

Mda consistently provides physical descriptions of his female characters'

beauty and moral qualities. This persistent style of description seems to take voyeuristic tendencies, as the above quotation illustrates.

Mda's female characters are not the kind of women who depend financially on their men to make their lives. They refuse to bear the label of women waiting for "easy money" from men. Male characters, in contrast, are villains in the story. Sorry, for instance, ends up poor and physically disabled. His repugnant stench increases Dikosha's rejection of this chauvinist character. He is increasingly ridiculed whenever he sits outside Dikosha's rondavel imploring her to take pity on him as her slave. Mda's portrayal of Sorry is to an extent similar to his depiction of Viliki, as both characters end up as unfortunates, excluded from society.

Mda condemns this unfair society that denies some people the right to fulfil their dreams solely because of socially established gender roles. Dikosha, for instance, is represented as a victim of women's exclusion from social circles promoting the emancipation of women. She cannot forgive the Good Fathers for their biased decision when they chose her brother, Radison, instead of herself to continue with studies - "on the grounds that she was a girl" (Mda 1995: 19). Although she had better credentials than anyone else in her school, the Holy Fathers tried to justify their choice of Radison:

After all Dikosha was a woman, and bound to find a good man of the church and settle down in blissful matrimony. Radison, on the other hand, even though he had received an unimpressive pass, showed promise as somebody who could be prepared for the work of the Lord. He was a man.
(Mda 1995: 5)

The description of Dikosha's psyche exhibits a scar she cannot easily recover from: the psychological shock she went through after her exclusion from school. The only thing she cannot be deprived of is recalling the good memories of her schooling days. Mda wants to articulate a criticism against the misogynist principles informing certain institutions of Christianity. In Africa, religious leaders have for decades carried out a marginalising gender policy, which has deprived girls of their right to education.

Next to the character of Dikosha, the narrator depicts other women in the village, such as Dikosha's mother (Mother-of-Twins) and Mother-of-Daughters, as playing more conservative roles in their households. The first one is a single woman with two children, "born of pleasure" (Mda 1995: 11), which she brought up without the assistance of their "fathers, [whom] she could not even point out" Mda 1995: (Mda 1995: 11). The description of Mother-of-Twins represents her as an irresponsible, sexually active person. Her wayward personality tends to convey Mda's criticism against women's promiscuity. At the same time the author condemns careless men who impregnate women without assuming their fatherly roles.

Another village woman depicted by Mda as a conservative person is Mother-of-Daughters, mother of a large family of girls with a rich and patriarchal husband who gained his wealth from his labour revenues in the mines and by inheritance from his father. In spite of his domineering side, Father-of-Daughters is an exception among all male migrant workers who have come back to settle in the village in that he is still healthy and able to take care of his progeny and business. Most women whose husbands are working in the mines are doomed to bear the heavy load of child care without adequate means of support while their husbands mischievously spend what little money they earn in orgies of drinking and on prostitutes. In Ha Samane, old women proudly tell their stories about how they used to "devour" "Russians" (in other words, make love to the maRashea gangsters) in the city. The stories of the city have a great impact upon the popular judgement of rural communities about city women. Rural women are shown as very suspicious about those in the city and see them as heartless people who take their husbands and destroy their families. Mda captures rural women's deprived condition in the context of male migrant labour. The author emphasises the psychological trauma women suffer in the absence of their husbands.

In fact, rural women are shown often to feel profoundly harmed, nearly destroyed by loneliness and economic depression. Matlakata, the woman to

whom Radison comes in order to inform her about the demise of her children's father in a car accident, is one among many rural women who endure the same predicament. Matlakata's case demonstrates that on survival grounds this woman is left with her only option that of advertising her femaleness to any man passing by in order to make money for her offspring's survival. The woman's emotionless response when Radison discloses the supposedly devastating news about a husband she thought dead and whose "passing" she had long ago mourned highlights the author's refusal to extend an attitude of male solidarity towards irresponsible men.

Both *Mother-of-Twins* and *Mother-of-Daughters* seem to enjoy their domestic roles in their families. *Mother-of-Twins* is the head of the family and wields an unchallenged power over her children. Mda is critical of women's contribution to the perpetuation of patriarchal rule. *Mother-of-Twins* provides a negative image of a woman who wants to remain in a socially prescribed female role. *Mother-of-Twins*' domineering attitude betrays the character's repressed hatred of her own personality. Her lack of tenderness towards Dikosha, whom she describes as a lazy "leftwa" for not making an effort to cook like other young women of her age, shows the insular attitude of some traditional women. Mda refuses to define female identity according to the domestic attributes assigned to women by traditional conventions. Mda's presentation implicitly ridicules *Mother-of-Twins*' commitment to traditional values which can make her act blindly according to the popular or accepted standards of her society. Her abusive language towards Dikosha displays this woman's inability to appreciate or praise her daughter's artistic talent and efforts at beautifying their home, exposing her as selfish and insensitive. She says to Dikosha: "What is this you have done to my house ... You want to make me a laughing stock of the village! You are not satisfied with making a fool of me by getting yourself conceived at a night dance!" (Mda 1995: 38).

Mda condemns women who refuse to take responsibility for their own deeds by looking for other people to be their scapegoats. *Mother-of-Twins*' criticism against her daughter for having been conceived at a night dance

shows her failure to accept her own responsibility for this event. Her mischievous attitude towards her elderly mother is even more shocking when she leaves her alone to die in her rondavel, accepting people's gossip around the old woman's supposed responsibility for her elderly husband's decease. Another influential post-apartheid text preoccupied with correcting the traditionally popular notion of 'appropriate' individual behaviour of female characters is Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001). In the novel, Mpe vehemently condemns communal rural thinking based on hearsay, prejudices and superstitions, as such thinking keeps women in a marginalised and subservient position.

The conflict of generations to which we referred earlier seems to appear again in *She Plays with the Darkness*. However, in this text Diksha's agency, achieved against the older generation's conservatism and the younger generation's corruption, is articulated in a different way. She withdraws from her mother and the rest of the village. She has discovered new ways of expressing her condemnation of and resistance to the values of her society. She adopts silence as a weapon in her struggle. She is resolute in her determination not to speak to anybody, not even to her brother who used to restore her joy whenever he came back from the lowlands. She despises him for his disgraceful behaviour in the city. She feels in some ways betrayed by Radison, who has resorted to evil practices such as reckless alcoholism, adultery and worst of all, corruption. Diksha's silence is powerfully meaningful and it is not a way of denying voice to a woman, but instead, a new way of articulating her agency.

In *Philosophy and the Maternal Body: Reading Silence* (1998), Michelle Bouldous Walker analyses the works of prominent theorists in philosophy concerned with the issue of woman's voice. She underlines Julia Kristeva's view of silence. In Kristeva's view, one should not consider silence as a mere absence or lack of sound or speech because it may be an "unquiet silence" embodying a meaning. Bouldous Walker maintains that Kristeva's work should help us "to rethink of silence as a metaphor for the otherness that inhabits the

logos, an otherness that is anything but quiet” (Boulous Walker 1998: 99). In other words, the speech act can be a choice of silence. A French theorist, Jean François Lyotard, goes further when he observes that “to be able not to speak is not the same as not to be able to speak. The latter is a deprivation, the former a negation” (Lyotard 1974: 10).

Dikosha chooses not to speak because she wants not only to avoid commonly used idioms with their normative forms, which she challenges, but also to introduce a new musicality and gesture into her language – effects of language that her people seem to neglect. This recalls the debate around the sign in the speech act. The relation between the signified and the signifier as the linguist André Martinet’s work demonstrates in *Le Langage* (1968), is arbitrary, because each language has its own words and meanings. However, to communicate, the sender and the recipient/s need a common frame of reference in order to decipher meaning.

Furthermore, silence can metaphorically represent resistance as a refusal to yield to any external pressure to make one speak. Dikosha’s mysterious muteness empowers her. Mother-of-Twins and the whole community have stopped attempting to understand the reasons for Dikosha’s behaviour as they are unable to decipher the mystery behind it. Through Dikosha’s silence Mda seeks to underpin the powerful aspect of women’s purposeful silence.

In an apposite expression, Wendy Woodward recognises that “Silence in the confessional may also signify strength, a refusal to divulge secrets, for it is the confessor who embodies power, the one who talks is undermined” (Woodward 2002: xxvii). Dikosha’s seclusion and silence highlight her refusal to cooperate with impurity. She condemns the decay of spiritual values in her society, which has been corrupted by materialism. Therefore she chooses a brave way to confront her mother’s oppression and the community’s labels and injustices. She does not take the route of suicide to overcome her predicament, but she opts for a non-submissive silence.

In *Re- Creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations*

(1994), Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie maintains that women can speak in diverse modes. She alludes to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's famous claim that the subaltern cannot speak by asserting that "Women also speak in words where we do not hear them. They also speak in silences" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 11). Another African feminist voice to have articulated the vocality of silence is the Nigerian critic, Grace Eche Okereke. She refers to Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism to highlight the relativity of meaning, maintaining that if any dialogue requires two distinctive bodies, therefore "silence can be loaded with meaning and in some spaces is more powerful than speech. But when silence is imposed as the destiny of a particular gender (female), it becomes oppressive, and dispossessive of talent and potential" (Okereke 1998: 136-137).

In "Imag(in)ing knowledge, power, and subversion in the margins", Obioma Nnaemeka, another Nigerian literary critic, also tackles the problematic of 'voice', 'representation' and 'agency' in African novels by focusing on women's interpretations of their own positioning. Nnaemeka particularly investigates the politics of silence in African narratives, pointing out that:

While some feminist analyses of the African novel conflate silence (the noun) and silence (the verb), the novels themselves make a distinction between "to be silenced" and "to be silent" (the former as an imposition and the latter as choice). One exercises agency when one chooses not to speak; the refusal to speak is also an act of resistance that signals the unwillingness to participate...female characters are silenced but at certain moments, they reclaim agency by choosing to remain silent and thereby gain the attention that initiates talk. Silence can, therefore, mean both a refusal to talk and an invitation for talk. (Nnaemeka 1997: 4)

Diksha's reaction towards her society's rules may suggest that Mda's narrative should be considered an example of absurdist writing. Mda's heroine seems to make the same decision as is taken by some characters in well known absurdist texts by writers such as Albert Camus (*The Stranger*) and Samuel Beckett (*Waiting for Godot*). Diksha's behaviour may make her

position sound incongruous in relation to the ordinary world, but the narrator wants instead to censure the character's social environment, characterized by its organisation according to absurd and destructive reasoning.

In other words, the established social order in which the heroine finds herself is stranger than her own reactions towards it (compare in this respect also Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in that he appears insane in the context of his uncle's criminal rule). The people of Ha Samane do not challenge or attempt to break Dikosha's silence because they dread her power of conjuring up misfortune in the village. Her union with the ancestors confers on her a goddess-like power to inflict punishment on the inhabitants of her village whenever they disturb her tranquillity. Silence in *She plays with the Darkness* is a deadly weapon that no-one wants to challenge except for Radison, whose life (in the closing pages of the novel) ends tragically because of his breaking his sister's silence.

Zakes Mda writes repeatedly about 'grassroots' people to whom he wants to give voice. He shows a particular interest in the depiction of rural settings and female characters. In an interview with *The Sunday Times*, Mda argues that the place in which he puts his characters is central to him. He maintains that he chooses the setting and "Then I build my characters, and in their interaction with that place, the story emerges" (*The Sunday Times* 11 / 26 / 2002: 2).

d. *The Heart of Redness* (2000)

In *The Heart of Redness* (2000), Mda takes the reader into the Eastern Cape village of Qolorha. Using a very intricate style, Mda weaves two intertwining stories into the novel. He first gives an account of historical events through a myth explaining the story of amaXhosa people of Qolorha when they were destabilised and then defeated by the colonialists after listening to the misleading prophecies of young prophetesses who supposedly received a message from the supernatural forces of the ancestors. The large-scale slaughter of cattle supposedly advised by the ancestors instead brought about starvation, disease, death and, most of all, division among the people - even within families - while the resurrection of the ancestors and the restoration of healthy cattle did not take place as foretold.

On the one side stood the Believers, staunch supporters of the prophetess, and on the other side, the Unbelievers, those opposed to Nongqawuse's prophecy. Mda juxtaposes the social division and opposition of that ancient time with the same (persistent) conditions prevailing in the modern period, still in the same village of Qolorha. For the descendants of the Believers and Unbelievers remain divided by their opposing views on the issues facing them in the present by referring these to their ancestral, inherited beliefs and affiliations.

Mda's novel explores a set of themes emanating from historical accounts as much as from present socio-political conditions, and including issues such as traditionalism, modernity, progress, poverty and (most of all) the place of women in this society.

Mda sets this story deep in *The Heart of Redness*, the controversial title of the novel that is intended to refer to the setting of the novel as well as to the

behaviour of its characters. The narrative takes place in a profoundly rural area, justifying the reference to the “heart” as the centre which everything stems from. The reference to “redness” reminds us of the amaXhosa women’s traditional make-up of red (and sometimes yellow) ochre and to Xhosa people’s own term for country people as “Reds” (in contrast with so-called “school people”). The Believers’ wives, among them Qukezwa, Twin’s wife, beautified themselves in order “to be seen in ochre and resplendent in ornaments at the celebration of the imminent arrival of ancestors” (148). It had ever since become a tradition for believers to adorn themselves in red clay. The battle between traditionalism (upheld by the Believers) and modernity or progress (defended by Bhonco and his headmistress daughter, Xoliswa Ximiya) reveals that redness alludes to traditional isiXhosa culture. Zim and the Believers see redness as their proud identity, while Bhonco and his peers take it as signifying their backwardness. Bhonco is determined to introduce modern views into his community and envisages the construction of the gambling city as a way to modernise Qolorha. He maintains that the project will bring progress to the village: “We want to get rid of this bush, which is a sign of our uncivilised state ... That will bring modernity to us, and will rid us of our redness” (105). Mda’s title is probably also a mocking evocation and inversion of Joseph Conrad’s (to some) notorious novella about Central Africa, “Heart of Darkness” (Conrad 1902), implicitly criticising Conrad’s representations of African life in that text.

Bhonco’s support for “civilisation” (as he calls it) seems to be limitless. He totally rejects traditional lore, even the traditional fashions of his people. Accordingly, he is resolute in wearing only suits and is about to convince his wife to get rid of traditional attire:

Do away with the red ochre that women smear on their bodies and with which they also dye their isikhakha skirts. When the villagers talk of the redness of unenlightenedness they are referring to the red ochre. But then even the isikhakha skirt itself represents backwardness. (Mda 2000: 79)

Mda’s text pinpoints the clash between traditional beliefs and modern

views in a very unusual way, as he makes the battle happen not in terms of a conflict between generations, but rather between two ideologies defended by two opposing groups within the same culture – irrespective of gender or age. The examination of rural women in their domestic spheres is of the utmost interest in this text, in order to see whether traditional conceptions still powerfully maintain women's subservience and/or whether the so-called "civilisation" of the other group also assigns a lower status to women in private life.

Mda's women characters seem to experience diverse types of treatment from their male counterparts, depending on the latter's individual beliefs. The depiction of Qolorha women of the mid-nineteenth century reveals that they once enjoyed a privileged public status, as they were the prophets of the community. However, in their domestic roles they remained subservient to masculine authority. Within the family unit, women had specific roles related to maternity and subordination to their husbands. Whenever a woman acted without her husband's consent, she was considered a rebellious and dangerous woman. She had to adopt her husband's religion and the contrary was inadmissible. Twin's conversion to the religion of the Believers, supposedly the belief of his wife's tribe, is a huge shock to Twin-Twin. The latter does not understand this unexpected change in attitude from his twin brother who is certainly (in his opinion) a victim of his wife's witchcraft.

Traditional society commonly suspects that healthy co-operation between spouses is (or must be) the consequence of a woman's witchcraft practices. Twin-Twin realises that his twin brother no longer follows every single custom of the amaXhosa, including the naming of his progeny, as Twin names his baby son Heitsi after the saviour and hero of the Khoikhoi, the people of Twin's wife, instead of after his own ancestors (as required by the isiXhosa culture). Twin-Twin reckons that his sibling has become "an absolute louse in the seams of his wife's isikhakha skirt" (Mda 2000: 88) and harshly condemns Qukezwa, Twin's wife: "It is you, woman, who has put these strange ideas in his head. Now my brother dreams of foreign prophets that have nothing to do

with the amaXhosa people. It is your ubuthi – your witchcraft – that has made him become like this” (Mda 2000: 85).

Ethics in the traditional world seem to depend on the masculine order, which establishes what is good or evil in the society. Women have to accept all male decisions, while men relish being at the centre of the decision-making. This masculine power is dominant in every aspect of life as its phallogocentric order takes women as the scapegoats of the society. Without proof and unhesitatingly, Twin-Twin accuses his sister-in-law of witchcraft. This is the same judgement the community expresses concerning one of his own numerous wives. Twin-Twin overtly shows his domineering behaviour when he expels his first wife from his house after the latter has rallied to the Believers’ side. Twin-Twin’s marital situation highlights the traditional view concerning women.

Unlike his brother Twin, Twin-Twin has several wives and children. His wives’ roles in the house are almost entirely restricted to productive and reproductive functions. The scene where Unbelievers volunteer to challenge the prophetess for preaching lies discloses the patriarchal mindset of the community. In fact, one of the Unbelievers maintains that he can make the prophetess stop proclaiming lies by having sexual intercourse with her. The man seems to assert his manhood by focusing on the body and neglecting the holistic dimension of a human being in the woman’s body. This patriarchal reasoning recklessly identifies women merely as sexual beings.

The delineation of contemporary female characters of Qolorha shows a set of changes in their lives as compared to the women of the mid-nineteenth century. However, despite the improvements, traditions are still predominant in Qolorha, precluding women from complete enjoyment of their rights. The narrator exposes issues affecting women’s private lives by adopting the techniques of African oral traditions, revealing how those matters are dealt with in rural areas. The reference to adultery in the text, for instance, displays women’s predicament in this community.

Although men are most of the time originators of adultery, nobody dares to blame them for their deeds. They rather relish the privilege of seeing women destroying themselves on their [the male's] behalf. Zim, the Believer, ignores his daughter's remarks concerning the pain that he caused NomaRussia, the dying woman that Zim's wife, NoEngland, ordered the diviner to curse after discovering that her husband had had an affair with NomaRussia - her own employee. Zim carelessly rejects the reproach for the entirely inadequate reason that it is an old story. His sexist ideas and manners are described more fully in the following passage:

But the girl had a roving eye which landed on Zim. This interest was quite mutual, for it boosted Zim's ego. Here he was, an undistinguished ageing man, the object of desire of a twenty-two-year-old girl of exceptional beauty. His thirst knew no bounds, and he found himself drinking occasionally from the forbidden well, especially on those days when NoEngland went to Butterworth to buy material. (Mda 2000: 43)

However, the disclosure of this secret relationship is detrimental to NomaRussia, as the diviner has used NomaRussia's underwear on NoEngland's request to punish the former by means of malign magic because of her love affair with Zim:

Since that day the girl has never been able to have another tryst with anyone. Lovers have run away from her because whenever she tries to know a man – in the biblical sense, that is – she sees the moon. Things come in gushes, like water from a stream. (Mda 2000: 44)

The abundant use of metaphors in the passage underscores Mda's deliberate employment of the techniques of the oral tradition of storytelling in his narratives. Many women in the village harshly condemn both NoEngland and NomaRussia for destroying "each other just because of a man" (Mda 2000: 44). They maintain that "Ukukrexeza", the word for adultery in the community's language, has existed in Qholorha since creation; therefore, they are resigned and uninterested in any attempt to change men and women's behaviour in this matter.

Traditionally, in the households, rural women depend financially on their husbands. In Mda's *Heart of Redness*, women seem to earn more money than their male counterparts do. Conservative men do not admit the new, reverse tendency in their community, considering it to be shameful. To the Believers, for instance, the woman should not build a house on her own; instead, she has to depend on a man to do so. Zim the Believer hopes to denigrate Bhonco the Unbeliever whenever they argue by referring to his opponent's financial dependence on his daughter and wife. Zim mocks Bhonco because he does not receive any "nkamnkam" (or old-age pension) from the government and relies on his wife's earnings from her job at the hotel and then at the co-operative. The following quotation illustrates the opposing views of the Believers and Unbelievers on the issue of women's financial position within the family:

Xoliswa Ximiya has built her father a second house – a four-walled tin-roofed ixande – saving him from the ridicule of having only one pink rondavel at his compound. The Unbelievers see this as a wonderful gesture from a daughter who has obviously been brought up well. The Believers, on the other hand, think it is a shame that a man who should have worked for himself to fill his compound with many roundavels, hexagons and at least one ixande has to depend on a girl to build him a house. (Mda 2000: 166)

Women's financial independence seems to threaten masculine power. Mda's commitment to the idea of women's freedom is embedded in the way he depicts his female characters. Male characters are often given the role of villains. The narrator derides a sexist man in a scene where he wantonly beats up his wife for reasons of jealousy. The man is a mine-worker whose wife is involved in Camagu's co-operative society. He comes back home and finds that his wife earns more money than he does in the mine. This makes him feel uncomfortable and he realises that he is losing part of the power which he used to wield over his wife and children in every field. He finds excuses to abuse his wife by accusing her of infidelity when she refuses to perform one of her "duties", requiring her husband to take a shower first before going to bed. Then the furious man uncontrollably assaults his wife. The scene

highlights the power relations in the rural household as legitimated by patriarchal norms. As in many traditional societies, the whole community unreservedly recognises the authority of men, who represent themselves as protective forces for their communities (in the public field) and families (in the domestic field). Tina Sederis in her article “You have to change and you don’t know how!: Contesting What it Means to be a Man in a Rural Area of South Africa” scrutinizes the psychology of rural men regarding the submission of women:

Duties and obligations accompany paternal authority, including the responsibility to provide for the needs of the family, the task of protecting the family unit against external threats, and the obligation to maintain the family’s reputation in the wider community. Physically violent forms of control, though sanctioned, are regulated. (Sideris 2004: 38)

The legitimacy of any form of violence (physical or verbal) meted out to women underpins the submission of women in the domestic arena. However, Camagu, like Toloki in *Ways of Dying*, is perceived by female characters as the only man to understand the necessity of granting equal opportunities to women in the society. Camagu uses his American experience to help the women of Qolorha enjoy their financial independence by focusing on the appropriate use of their potential to eradicate poverty. By presenting Camagu as the only man committed to women’s progress in society, Mda seems to suggest that, in contrast with some male writers, his writing advocates gender equity, starting with the empowerment of women in the household. Camagu is the main male protagonist whose indirect involvement in the feud between the Believers and Unbelievers brings about substantial changes in the community. Camagu comes to Qolorha in search of NomaRussia, a beautiful woman he saw at the gathering to mourn the death of an anonymous artist in Johannesburg. Camagu has returned to South Africa full of hope with a doctorate in communications after several years of exile in the United States of America in order to carry out one of the most fundamental citizen’s rights formerly denied to black people by the apartheid regime. In fact, he comes

home to cast his vote during the first democratic and non-racial elections. Subsequently disenchanted with the new elite in power, he decides to go back to America. Before departing, he embarks on a quest for the mysterious NomaRussia, which leads him to Qolorha, the “Heart of Redness”. Camagu, the city man, encounters the rural setting and its marvellous history and he eventually falls in love with the environment and its people. He shows particular interest in so-called “grassroots” people, especially women who display evident potential to alleviate poverty and to ensure peace in the community. Therefore, Siphokazi Koyana in her “Qolorha and the Dialogism of Place in Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*” makes the following analysis:

Camagu’s decision to settle in Qolorha underscores how a place, or the reading of it, can change the course of a person’s life ... His subsequent constructive engagement with the rural women suggests that even highly-educated cosmopolitan citizens have the potential to add value to rural development, especially if they become involved at grassroots level. (Koyana 2003: 53)

Camagu’s encounter with this remote village has helped him to construct a new identity, bridging from his acquired western values back to African ones. Village women’s social and economic activities bring him to change his perception of women. Camagu’s search for the mysterious NomaRussia ends with the discovery of Qukezwa, his soul mate, in Qolorha. Thanks to this influential female character Camagu relinquishes his disgraceful, womanising behaviour of the past (as described below):

His unquenchable desire for the flesh is well known. A shame he has to live with. Flesh. Any flesh. He cannot hold himself. He has done things with his maid – a frumpy country woman who has come to the city of gold to pick up a few pennies by cleaning up after disenchanted bachelors – that he would be ashamed to tell anyone. Yet he did these things with the humble servant again and again. (30)

Despite his age, Camagu has never experienced real love, as he is still single and childless before meeting Qukezwa. This is a domain where he needs her guidance in order to compensate for his ignorance, since his

academic achievements are unable to provide him with the necessary knowledge in this regard. Qukezwa is a strong female figure who does not hesitate to express her views even though they may appear hurtful. Her reaction following Camagu's love confession underpins the uniqueness of Mda's female characters in confronting masculine power. Before walking away, she plainly replies: "You know nothing about love, learned man! Go back to school and learn more about it!" (224). Although Qukezwa is an uneducated woman, she insists on being treated respectfully by both male and female literates. For instance, she can fearlessly confront her former school headmistress, Xoliswa Ximiya, and her white employer's wife, Mrs Dalton, who thinks of her as a "bumptious girl" (43). Xoliswa Ximiya, the unmarried headmistress of Qolorha School, looks down upon her colleagues and the villagers because of her American experience. She despises them for being rural and supporting "backwardness". According to her, Camagu is the right man she can fall in love with because he can meet her standards. She thinks him adequate because Camagu is a highly-educated city man who has been to the United States of America. Ironically Qukezwa, Xoliswa's own student whom she regards condescendingly as an uneducated child, wins the competition by marrying Camagu.

Qukezwa's devotion to traditional values has played an important role in inducing Camagu's enthusiasm to learn local cultural practices. Despite his ignorance of local customs, Camagu is determined to celebrate his wedding in accordance with traditional ways. To do so, he invites Dalton, the white shopkeeper of the village, to speak on his behalf as a representative of the groom's family for the simple reason that Dalton's indisputable stock of lore concerning isiXhosa traditional beliefs and/or customs and his close relationships with local people will make things easier when he asks for Qukezwa's hand in marriage. Siphokazi Koyana's comment on Dalton's interest in his native soil and its inhabitants, regardless of race or ethnic group, seems to romanticise a novel way of expressing an African identity: "In short, by identifying so strongly with Africa and her people, Dalton epitomises the

‘new’ African white man who genuinely engages with the spirit of the place of his birth” (Koyana 2003: 58). Koyana seems to redefine the question of what it means to be an African.

Unlike Dalton, Camagu is the paragon of Western values, the only culture he seems to know well. His union with Qukezwa illustrates the bridging of cultural differences between two people with different cultures. Camagu sees appealing qualities in Qukezwa, which are not only somatic but also spiritual. He realises that Qukezwa’s perfect knowledge of traditions and her mastery of the mysteries of nature can help him retrieve his African identity. To borrow the words of a prominent Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Qukezwa will assist him in “decolonis[ing] his mind”. After his journey into the mysteries of Qolorha, led by Qukezwa his wife, Camagu’s ancestral totem visits him. His belief in Majola, the mole snake, underscores his total conversion to traditional beliefs. The appearance of the snake is an omen, symbolising Camagu’s retrieval of his African identity through his reunification with ancestors. He appears at the end of the novel as a hybrid character after succeeding in reconciling two cultures, which are based on intellectualism or science, on the one hand, and faith and beliefs, on the other. Qukezwa is represented as the catalyst of Camagu’s successful retrieval of his identity.

Camagu has discovered a new way of appreciating life thanks to Qukezwa, who teaches him the traditional beliefs of amaXhosa people and their spiritual nexus with their environment. She shows him their ways of harvesting from the sea and the relationship between elements of nature (birds, wild trees) and the people of the village. Thus, the Believers, for instance, value environmental conservation with a view to maintaining the crucial interaction between nature and human beings. To Camagu, Qolorha is a place of opportunities and prosperity. The “wild” beauty of the place deeply impresses him when he tries to compare Qolorha’s landscapes with other parts of the Eastern Cape: “He feels fortunate that he lives in Qolorha. Those who want to preserve indigenous plants and birds have won the day there. At least for now. But for how long?” (Mda 2000: 319).

Despite being an uneducated domestic worker, Qukezwa epitomises spiritual life centred on the preservation of nature and communal interests. She inspires Camagu to set up the women's co-operative after displaying the resources of the sea to him. Qukezwa shows that men can also depend on uneducated women because they can assist their male counterparts in different ways, for instance, in decision-making, business planning and spiritual knowledge, etc. Therefore, men would do better by listening to women. Through the character of Qukezwa, Mda reviews the materialist feminist stance with its monolithic orientation towards gender and class relations without addressing the concerns of uneducated and poor women of rural areas. Xoliswa Ximiya epitomises the educated "feminist", and in particular "Western-style feminist" who is more concerned with the improvement of her own position in the society than with the general welfare of all women. She pretends to talk on behalf of all women; meanwhile she fails to grasp the genuine preoccupations of 'grassroots' women in her rural environment.

Mda resorts to magic realism as a trope to romanticise the union between Camagu and Qukezwa. Mda's tendency to blend magic and reality in most of his narratives derives from an African tradition of story-telling. Mda seeks to revive traditional African aesthetic devices. The novelist claims to appropriate the style of African oral literature by asserting the power of the sacred in African customs. Mda argues:

I wr[i]te in this manner because I am a product of this culture. In my culture, the magical is not disconcerting. It is taken for granted. No one tries to find a natural explanation for the unreal. The Unreal happens as part of reality. The supernatural is presented without judgement. A lot of my work is set in the rural areas because they retain that magic, whereas the urban areas have lost it to westernization. (Mda 1997: 281)

Mda characterises some of his female protagonists as guardians of supernatural force. Mda's attachment to magical realism in his delineation of women evinces the author's endeavour to add a mythical dimension to the representation of women in traditional society. In fact, magical realism

appears in Mda's texts as a 'structuring device', which foregrounds metaphorical representation of reality to give more possibilities of comprehending social facts. Marita Wenzel, for instance, scrutinises the central role of Mda's artistic device in *Ways of Dying* and infers that magical realism gives more sense to the text. She writes: "*Ways of Dying* illustrates how the postcolonial lack of boundaries, translated into literary space and defined by the magical realist mode, ascribes an additional dimension of meaning to the text" (Wenzel 2003: 321).

As in most of his texts, Mda's *The Heart of Redness* is characterised by the fusion of the supernatural with the natural. The magical conception of Qukezwa's son Heitsi (the God-hero of the Khoi people) seems to confirm the idea of Qolorha as "a place of miracles". The conception night is unique in the way the narrator presents it. A combination of various elements of nature is needed to make it happen. The powerful effect of Qukezwa's singing (her singing induces Camagu's orgasm) and the presence of the moonlight set up the appropriate atmosphere to conceive a deity. The abundant allusions to many symbols of fertility, maternity, beauty and hope, in the description of the sexual act when Qukezwa becomes pregnant, highlight the perfect conditions of Heitsi's conception:

Qukezwa sings in such beautiful colours. Soft colours like ochre of yellow gullies. Reassuring colours of the earth. Red. Hot colours like blazing fire. Deep blue. Deep green. Colours of the valleys and the ocean. Cool colours like rain of summer sliding down a pair of naked bodies. (Mda 2000: 223)

The mysterious aspect of this conception is more dramatic when we learn that it happens on the back of Gxagxa, Qukezwa's horse (without any sexual penetration). This exemplifies the sexual and spiritual functions that the inhabitants of Qolorha perceive this particular animal to have. The older women of the village inform us about Qukezwa's Immaculate Conception when they find out at the delivery that her hymen is still intact. The narrative echoes the story of Jesus' birth in the Bible. We can refer to a title of a novel

by a famous Ghanaian writer, Ayi Kwei Armah *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* to comment on Heitsi's birth as symbolising the arrival of the "beautiful one". Armah's novel criticises the new elite in power just after Ghana retrieved its sovereignty from the British colonial empire. Armah in this text expresses his scepticism concerning the new Ghanaian elite, while he projects hope onto future generations. Heitsi in Mda's text seems to represent the "beautiful ones" who will satisfactorily restore cohesion among all Africans regardless of colour and gender. Through the divine character of Heitsi, Mda wants to underscore his optimistic faith in the ability of future generations to bring beneficial changes to the society.

Although the depiction of women characters is a striking feature of Mda's narrative, the development of certain female protagonists tends to be connected to an important male figure. Qukezwa's husband, Camagu, is responsible for many changes in the social fabric of Qolorha. Camagu, the educated man from the city of Johannesburg, a man who has been to the USA, the most 'developed' country in the world, decides to establish himself against all odds in one of the most 'backward' places on earth. His presence in the village has influenced domestic relationships between men and women. He has used particularly women's potential to infuse progressive ideas into people's minds regarding relations across genders. Camagu represents the new African man who reconciles both tradition and modernity. He is a hybrid character who in a syncretic manner combines good values of both African traditional and modern practices. Camagu's surprising decision to stay in Qolorha and his determination to assist women are reminiscent of the step taken by Julie Summers, the heroine in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pick Up* (2001), to live in a North African village. Comparable also is the South African black male character Makhaya who works similarly with Batswana women to bring about transformation in agriculture with the help of a British [white] male character in Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969), a book from which Mda might have taken some ideas.

2. Exploring the Private Realm of Rural Women in Gordimer's Narratives

a. *The Pick Up* (2001)

Gordimer's novel is a romance built upon a public issue of emigration/immigration, highlighting the dilemma in the representation of public and domestic environments in post-apartheid texts. The narrative takes the reader into the exploration of the phenomenon of relocation and/or displacement experienced not only in post-apartheid South Africa by the North African Muslim immigrant, Ibrahim, but also by the white South African woman from a wealthy background, Julie. She marries Ibrahim and goes to live with him in a poor, remote rural area in his unnamed Arab country in North Africa. Nadine Gordimer resorts to artistic devices to turn a political issue into a domestic one.

Like most of Gordimer's post-apartheid texts, *The Pick Up* distances itself from "the spectacular forms" of narration. In fact, Gordimer seems to be latterly more preoccupied with domestic issues than political ones, which were more dominant in her apartheid-era writing. Gordimer's shift of focus is not surprising, as she has often explained her politically-oriented texts of the apartheid era as related to the needs of history: "I am not a politically-minded person by nature. I don't suppose if I had lived elsewhere, my writing would have reflected politics much. If at all" (Gordimer 1965: 23).

Ileana Dimitriu in her paper "The End of History: Reading Gordimer's Post-apartheid Novels" reasserts Gordimer's determination to investigate the intricacies of the private realm of her newly democratised society through the portrayal of her protagonists. Dimitriu's analysis of *The Pick Up* shows her interest in scrutinising the domestic sphere in the novel, as she maintains the

following:

Gordimer does not pursue the social or political causes of immigration to a great extent; instead, she pursues the human story of Julie's following her evicted lover to his desert country. It is through Julie's eyes that we come to understand the traumatising process of trying to adjust to, and being accepted by, the cultural codes of a new place. (Dimitriu 2003: 24)

Dimitriu comments on Gordimer's novelistic shifting of her centre of attention towards private issues as a way of responding to the requirements of post-apartheid literature, claiming that the change involves "bold re-imaginings of people's lives [because] the shift values the 'individual' above the 'typical', the 'meditative' above the 'statement', 'showing' above 'telling' (Dimitriu 2003: 17-18). Dimitriu's analysis of Gordimer's post-apartheid texts teaches us that Gordimer's orientation towards the individual endorses Simon During's "Civil Imaginary", a literary outlook foregrounding the portrayal of civil society, or (in Njabulo Ndebele's words) a writing emphasising "the rediscovery of the ordinary" in the post-struggle and/or post-colonial context.

Julie's love for Ibrahim breaks down the past taboos of a racist political system. Julie relinquishes her suburban, claustrophobic life-style to embrace the outside world where she gets to know many people from different backgrounds in terms of culture, race, education and ideology. She spends most of her free time with her friends at the L. A. Café, where they discuss burning issues of their society, among them AIDS, homophobia, etc. Sue Kossew points out the cross-cultural resonance of the café's name following the explanations given in the text: L. A. Café's "capitals stood for Los Angeles" (5). Kossew goes further in her analysis and insightfully comments:

The café is referred to throughout the rest of the novel as the EL-AY Café; transformative spelling that seems to recall an Arabic or Middle Eastern derivation. Thus, the specificities of the national reference point are lost and the seemingly unbreachable division between West and East is undermined. The Café itself and indeed The Table (in capital letters) where Julie and her friends meet are emblematic of the social freedom and mobility of the new South Africa. (Kossew 2003: 23)

Julie has understood that discrimination of any kind should not be accepted in the new dispensation. She indeed transcends social stereotypes, which ascribe identities to people with regard to their place of birth, colour of skin, family status, etc. Julie seems to make her own choice independently from her social background. She redefines individual freedom, rejecting any influence from family demands or popular thinking. Julie does not care about people's judgement regarding her "picking up" of Ibrahim, her Arab lover from an unknown North African country. Julie's autonomous choice of a partner highlights her liberation from old social constraints that she and her friends are determined to break by "distanc[ing] themselves from the ways of the past, their families, whether these are black ones still living in the old ghettos or white ones in the Suburbs" (Gordimer 2001: 23).

Julie's agreement to be "picked up", in her turn, by her partner appears to be a big shock to her wealthy father in so far as a young suburban woman such as Julie is, *prima facie*, supposed to marry a rich man of her class. The following passage of the text endorses the idea: "She could sum up – the well-brought-up girl with her panda who would marry a well-brought-up polo player from her father's club; the public relations gal with personality plus, set to make a career; the acolyte of the remnant hippie community" (Gordimer 2001: 197). However, she refuses to change her mind, despite her father's insistence on the tough challenges awaiting her in the society where men treat women "like slaves". Through Julie's choice of going with Ibrahim to his 'backward' country, Gordimer seems to suggest that committed love can transcend geographical, racial and cultural boundaries.

In this section, we are more interested in analysing the domestic arena of women's lives in Ibrahim's rural village, which represents the second setting of the plot. In fact, this love story reaches its climax when Julie falls in love with Ibrahim's supposedly backward place. This is the place where she finds her genuine centre. Ileana Dimitriu extols Julie's controversial decision to establish herself in the desert, an environment she deems a place for spiritual growth:

The second part of the novel focuses on Julie, the youthful rebel without a cause from the affluent northern suburbs of Johannesburg. We participate in Julie's growth, in her struggle to come to terms with a new culture, new language, and new religion. In the process, she learns that none can accompany her on her journey towards a redefinition of her self; in fact, nothing but the desert, which becomes a character in its own right. The desert is an echo of, and companion to, Julie as she challenges her own seemingly secure white South African experience of love, location and independence ... For Julie, the vastness of the desert provokes her longing for self-knowledge, for reassessment of the past. Contrasted with its silence's effect on her, Julie's early privilege in South Africa seems frivolous and insignificant. (Dimitriu 2003: 31)

A love affair takes the character to a foreign land where she embarks upon a second journey, which is, this time, oriented towards self-affirmation or self-discovery. In other words, Julie's quest for love gives her an opportunity to delve into her own psyche in order to construct her personal identity. Both Julie and her partner, Ibrahim, show dissatisfaction with life in their homelands. They rather orient themselves towards other horizons. They resort to a quest for a foreign land where they want to assume the kind of life they yearn for. There is a kind of mirror-resemblance in the way Ibrahim and Julie look at their own cultures. Both Ibrahim and Julie reject their supposedly "own" identities that they in fact do not feel comfortable with. Ibrahim's adoption of a fake name (Abdu) is an illustration of a man who has "shed [his] identity and taken an assumed name" (Gordimer 2001: 79) to fit into a place that will reject him for who he actually is.

Moreover, Ibrahim cannot think of his future in "the cursed village in the sand, his home" (Gordimer 2001: 173). He shuns his place of birth by all possible means because its 'backwardness' or poverty is so intense that he assimilates it to a dead milieu that he describes as "this dusty hell of my place" (Gordimer 2001: 173). Despite the advantages that he enjoys from his uncle, Yakub, a businessman who is determined to bestow his wealth on his prodigal nephew, Ibrahim renounces all these privileges.

There are similarities between both characters because, like Ibrahim, Julie leaves her homeland despite her massive family inheritance that she abandons to look for something missing in her life. It seems that her own place cannot offer what she needs to fill the gap in her life. Julie is not comfortable with the high-class suburban life-style that she despises. Her memories of her well-off origins (articulated at the dinner hosted by her father) conjure up shame, according to the narrator, because of “the shame of being ashamed of them; the shame of him [Abdu] seeing what she was, is” (Gordimer 2001: 45).

The relationship between the two characters romanticises transcultural and transnational experience in the novel. The union between Ibrahim and Julie inscribes the beginning of the eradication of stereotypical conceptions about miscegenation in post-apartheid South Africa. Moreover, Julie transcends not only the colour bar, but also her country’s boundaries to express her Africanness in choosing to follow her lover to his own country, regardless of his identity. She is aware that an identity affirmation can no longer be defined by the way other people think or behave, because “there are no caging norms in a pure and free society” (Gordimer 2001: 370) such as her imagined, ideal ‘homeland’. She extols her African identity when she attracts Ibrahim’s attention: “you forget that I’m from Africa” (Gordimer 2001: 110).

Julie’s establishment in the Arab country and her adjustment to Muslim culture can be read as indicative of her desire to get rid of many Western prejudices. The character realises that she is accorded a proper place in that society, which allows her to lead a humble life. Her satisfaction is much more complete when she works for the benefit of others. Julie learns Arabic, the language of the community, in order to feel absolutely integrated in it. In return, she not only teaches English to the women, but also shares “her rich girl’s Café ideas of female independence” (Gordimer 2001: 256).

Julie changes women’s perception of themselves in this very patriarchal society. She amazes older women, the custodians of traditional beliefs, by the way she easily adopts their culture, breaking all their stereotypes around white

women's supposed incapacity to adjust to their customs. After Julie has announced her decision not to go with her husband to the USA, Ibrahim's mother realises that Julie is, in fact, the right person who will eventually bring her son back home. The change of opinion of the matriarch is very striking and significant, as she starts softening in her attitude towards her daughter-in-law.

Moreover, Julie brings urban ideas that can free women from masculine power in a cultural context where women are denied rights of inheritance. For instance, she restores joy and hope in Ibrahim's sister-in-law, Khadija, whose husband (a migrant worker) has left her for years with no news. Khadija is strongly impressed by Julie's self-assurance with regard to Ibrahim's eventual return. Julie's attitude brings back life to Khadija who has been living in a state of depression for years. To some extent, Julie revives Khadija's "thinking of her man at the oil fields" (Gordimer 2001: 268). Khadija realises that it is high time she enjoyed life instead of complaining all her life about a reckless husband. This cross-cultural exchange between Julie and the women of the village confirms Maria Pia Lara's view about identity. According to Pia Lara, building an identity requires recognition, that is to say, understanding and being understood by the other. In *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in The Public Sphere* (1998), Pia Lara defines the construction of identity along the following lines:

Transformations entail a fusion of horizons, a new and novel way of seeing the other that also becomes a new way of understanding oneself. Recognition is a struggle, a struggle that must be fought in relation to others and in the permanent tension of changing prejudice and transforming the social order ... it is through others that one can define one's own identities and no solidarity is possible if the discourse does not form a bridge to the other's understanding of what are considered to be worthy features and needs of human beings. Recognition, in this sense is a performative process of acquiring identity. (Pia Lara 1998: 157)

In Gordimer's text, *The Pick Up*, Julie's domestic, village activities nevertheless achieve public results, changing her own and the other village women's self

perception and their recognition by others, for the better.

Mandla Langa's depictions of rural women's domestic conditions could have been mentioned in this section, but to avoid repeating the points analysed in later sections of the thesis they are not discussed at this stage.

B- The Private Realm of Urban Female Characters

The previous section of the chapter has focused on the representation of rural female characters in their domestic arena by revealing miscellaneous experiences of women's lives in selected examples of new writing from South Africa. The next section will also look at the individual lives of *urban* female characters in the domestic field as portrayed literature of the transition. Firstly Nadine Gordimer's texts will be analysed, followed by other narratives exploring the private milieu of city women (in texts by Mda and Langa).

Many literary critics investigating the writing of the transition in South Africa predictably show an interest in the literary manifestations of changes introduced by the new dispensation both in fiction and actual life (in comparison with the previous dispensation). The retrospective approach, that is to say the reference to the past, is quite inevitable because considering contrasts with and similarities to past circumstances helps us better to understand the present. The retrospective and prospective approaches are both suitable for the analysis of post-apartheid texts. It is, indeed, common knowledge that the public field deeply affected the private world during the apartheid era.

This chapter will now explore the urban domestic arena in order to establish whether it has been de-politicised by the new dispensation. In other words, women's position in the family environment (the household being the first place of discrimination against women and of abuses perpetrated by patriarchy) will be analysed in order to establish whether the adoption of a new political system is perceived by selected authors as having succeeded in changing individual and cultural/social conduct and attitudes regarding gender equality in society in the domestic sphere. Moreover, narratives portraying the

private world reveal previously concealed truths about women's domestic lives.

Zazah Khuzwayo's *Never Been at Home* (2004) exemplifies the new tendency towards the exposure of private truths (kept hidden from the public by oppressive practices) in post-apartheid writing. Khuzwayo's autobiography is a poignant account of her abusive policeman father who is respected in the township because of his social status and due to the sense of duty and humaneness he displays in the public sphere. However, at home he becomes a ruthless torturer who physically and sexually abuses his own wife and daughters. Khuzwayo speaks out about the atrocities she and her family suffered from her father's despicable conduct by condemning some African traditions and Christian conceptions which are used to validate human rights abuses in the domestic sphere.

South Africa is a country where the process of social transformation is not restricted to the political level, as it necessarily also addresses the need for a profound change in people's ways of looking at their old habits. In *Literary Feminisms* (2000) Ruth Robbins analyses the images assigned to women in fiction and reality by denouncing the chauvinistic approach dictated by society. However, she bases her optimism about change upon the power of literature by stating the following (in an important passage I have previously invoked):

And if literature is one of the privileged sites of representation, if the images presented in literary and artistic texts are powerful because of the power accorded to literature, images of women are the obvious starting point to begin a critique of the place of women in society at large. Representation is not the same thing as reality, which is, of course, part of the problem. It might also be seen, however, as part of the solution. The analysis of literary representations of women and their differences from real women's lives might well be a fruitful place to begin a politicised analysis of that reality, through the means of representation. Furthermore, representation might not be the same thing as reality, but it is a part of reality. The images we see or read about are part of the context in which we

live. If we can read these images differently, against the grain, as it were, we can go some way to altering our perceptions of reality, we can see a need for changes: and when we have seen the need, perhaps we can bring it about. (Robbins 2000: 51)

Through these words, Robbins seems to exhort readers to adopt new approaches suitable for “an adapted criticism” regarding the representation of women in fiction. Michael Chapman, one of most prolific figures in Southern African literary criticism, also suggests a re-visioning of hermeneutics in the local post-colonial context:

In literary analysis, the change involves the interpretation and evaluation of moral and aesthetic perception in relation to societal claim. The literary impact of a work is thus allowed its pragmatic purpose, and a tension - both problematic and necessary - characterises the approach. There is, at the one pole, a need for a hermeneutics of suspicion: a re-reading of authorities, a questioning of positions, reputations, traditions and influences, as texts are set in the contexts of controversy in which terms such as major/minor, functional/aesthetic, the West/Africa, are held up to discursive investigation. (Chapman 1996: 5)

However, this tendency to look for new perspectives in the analysis of imaginative works echoes the introduction of new ways of writing in the transitional context of South African literature. In Gordimer’s case in particular, consideration of her pronouncements on her changing attitude to feminism and women’s issues throws light on her depiction of female characters in her texts of the transition period.

1. Nadine Gordimer

Nadine Gordimer is one of the South African writers of the transition to have swiftly adapted her writing to the demands of the new social order. During the apartheid era she gained indisputably worldwide recognition for her anti-apartheid activism by means of her writing. She argued that the urgency of history was the most imperative concern that needed more attention. Therefore, as a writer, it was her mission to fight against injustices in her society by using artistic weapons to dismantle the oppressive regime.

Questioned about gender issues at that time, Gordimer, despite being a woman and liberal, refused to identify herself with the feminist movement that she took as a white middle class women's concern, excluding or neglecting the demands of women of colour. Recalling the novelist's controversial assertion made in the 1970s about feminism, describing it as 'piffling', Karen Lazar in *The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer* (edited by Bruce King) explains the ambiguities in Gordimer's perspective on feminism:

Gordimer has never set herself up as a systematic foe to feminism. There are occasions when she displays a high degree of sympathy for women and an indignation against their social position. In summary, Gordimer's approach to gender questions is highly variable, and her fluctuating sympathy with or hostility to feminism follow no neat chronological patterns. Her public statements on feminism are not reproduced in any simple, one-to-one fashion in her fiction, but some complex near-correlations are noticeable. Her variation in approach to sexual questions makes it difficult to read her stories either as 'feminist' or 'anti-feminist' representations, and this ambiguity of interpretation is heightened by her frequent usage of the ironical voice. (Lazar 1993: 216)

During an interview with Karen Lazar, Gordimer responds to the question concerning her unexpected alignment to the feminist movement after the collapse of the apartheid system by maintaining that the political change has

made her change her views about feminism. Thus, she explains her position of the eighties as follows:

My views have changed and they've changed because the situation has changed. It's interesting. I can't see any vestiges of that trivial feminism that I was talking about so disparagingly because I think it deserved to be disparaged in the early times. Because of the tremendous division that arose in the mid-seventies, around about '76, between the concerns of white women and the concerns of black. I'll never forget the attempts of Women for Peace which was a good idea although it came out of a White Lady Bountiful thing. They did have some meetings and some sort of contact with black women. It was based on the idea, you see it again and again, that we all have children and what happened in '76 was a threat to children. (Lazar 1994: 433)

Gordimer's overriding treatment of politics in her narratives has often obliterated her apolitical nature. In fact, Gordimer confesses that she sees herself not as a political person per se (though historical circumstances obliged her to embark on the political battle), but as an artist who needs to adapt to the civil imaginary of post-modern times, hence the novelist's new interest in writing about women's issues, in particular.

Gordimer's post-apartheid novels show new features, displaying basically new social phenomena. One of the most striking features of her more recently published novels is the privileged place she has allocated to the private field over the public, even if politics has not entirely disappeared from her writing. However, politics has ceased to be the leitmotif in her texts. Gordimer's shift of discourse confirms Dominic Head's predictions:

New social forms, inevitably, will elicit new fictional forms. Only Gordimer's subsequent novels will reveal whether or not her recent self-conscious phase is fleeting, or a sustained engagement with postmodernist tendencies, and whether or not a new creative phase will characterize her work in the post-apartheid era. (Head 1994:193)

a. *None To Accompany Me* (1994)

None To Accompany Me (1994) is the first text by Gordimer I will analyse in this section. This is the author's first published post-struggle text. It contains an array of novel conditions featuring a transitional course of events occurring in the newly democratized South Africa. The novel explores the myriad changes taking place on the macro and micro levels of social life. On the macro-level (i.e., in the public sphere), the novel shows the transformations following the dismantling of the apartheid regime, among them the homecoming of waves of former exiles and political prisoners; the establishment of new habits (ranging from the relocation of people in formerly 'whites only' suburbs to a public recognition of new relationships across race and gender) as well as land redistribution.

The social changes of the public realm also affect human existence at the micro-level. In other words, domestic or individual habits also go through a transformational process due to the crucial political mutations taking place in the public sphere. The novel reflects the transformation process of Gordimer's society as the reader is exposed to the changes happening in the public arena and then introduced to the intimate lives of characters. In this regard, Caryl Phillips identifies the overriding of the public by private life in the text and he points out that "Gordimer's new novel is really two ill-matched novels in one" (Phillips 1993: 1). In other words, Phillips seems to suggest that the author could have split the novel into two so as to have the first book dealing with the public life and the second one portraying the private realm.

However, I am more inclined to endorse Ileana Dimitriu's perception of the text by extolling Gordimer's artistic talent for her dexterous portrayal of public and domestic post-oppressive conditions and for her ability swiftly to adopt a writing style suitable to more 'civilian times'. Dimitriu appositely

describes *None To Accompany Me* as

... a response to the vexed question of the value Gordimer's fiction has as the society seeks to extend its concerns beyond those of overtly political struggle. As all of the actions are set in the climate of civilian as opposed to revolutionary times, the novels [Gordimer's first three after-1994 novels] help clarify Gordimer's interest in matters that have emerged from the socio-political imperative. In the last decade racial issues, for example, have not disappeared, but have become more entangled in the wider functioning of the society. (Dimitriu 2003: 18)

Although the depiction of the political context is still significant, the most striking feature of the novel is its orientation towards the private sphere of two powerful women characters, the white lawyer, Vera Stark, and her friend Sibongile Maqoma, who epitomizes the new elite of black women with important positions in the new government. The depiction of the public life seems to shift towards the private one. Thus, as the plot evolves, the reader notices that the private story of Vera, the heroine, takes precedence over her public one.

None To Accompany Me (1994) provides a painting of a starkly new domestic power structure within the family unit, more precisely the household. Two couples exemplify the reformation of the traditional relationship between a woman and her husband. Gordimer through the couple Sibongile and Didymus Maqoma takes the reader into the transformation process taking place in black families. Sibongile (or Sally) and her husband are Vera's friends from the struggle. They return home to participate in what Barbara Harlow calls "the post-apartheid nation-building" (Harlow 2002: 175).

Both Sally and her husband are influential figures in public life because of their political engagement in the struggle. After facing some difficulties in order to settle in their formerly only dreamed-of homeland, the Maqomas quickly find economic stability thanks to Sally's achieved status in the political arena. Sally is preferred over her husband, Didymus, to take up a

position in the new government. Didymus's political record jeopardizes his chances of being elected as they reveal that he was once involved in the circle of informants against the revolutionary movement. Sally's public life will influence her private one by redefining domestic roles within the couple's marital relationship.

The Maqomas exemplify the transformation process taking place in the domestic sphere of black couples in the new dispensation. The old domestic power structure is reversed in this novel. Sally is represented as a strong woman, whereas Didymus exemplifies the weak man who is dependent on his wife. This dependence is not only emotional, but also material. The woman has a better income than her husband. Sally's public life takes her away from the former socially established duties of a woman's private life. She is always on missions abroad while Didymus stays at home. Sally does not have enough time for her husband any more because she is completely immersed in her public role. As a result, her sexual life suffers a great deal and she confides in Vera that she does not enjoy having sex with her husband any more. Women's acquisition of power both in the public and domestic fields is a situation men need to adapt to in the new dispensation, otherwise the relationships within the intimate sphere of the couple will turn cold. Didymus is so aware of his weak position vis-à-vis his wife that he starts losing his biological power to ensure Sally's sexual satisfaction.

Gordimer's narrative also shows particular interest in the nature of relationships existing within the family unit. The Maqoma daughter Mpho's pregnancy, for instance, takes the reader towards examining a novel relation between parents and daughter. Sally pinpoints her refusal to see her daughter bearing an undesired child in her teenage years by demanding the abortion of the foetus. Despite her anger, she tries to engage in an intimate dialogue with her daughter to persuade her to accept the need for having an abortion, using the argument that she herself has gone through the same operation before. Therefore, there is nothing to worry about, because the operation is not that painful. Through this attitude the narrator categorizes Sibongile (or Sally) as

“belong[ing] to the generation and the experience that saw emancipation in burdening their half-adult children with the intimate life of their parents” (Gordimer 1994: 182).

Unlike Sally, Didy’s mother welcomes the foetus in her granddaughter’s womb. She takes a stand against abortion and volunteers to mother Mpho’s child. Through fully depicting this family matter, the narrator exposes the differences in attitudes between two or three generations of women who have different approaches to sexuality and attendant matters. The grandmother is the representative of traditional ideas and values. Sally, on the other hand, is a woman of the liberation movement, who has been in contact with the European feminist movement. Eventually, Mpho is the epitome of the new generation of women who live in a social environment characterized by its sexual liberation. Gordimer’s investigation of the domestic sphere discloses a wide range of new dilemmas facing any ordinary family in the new dispensation.

Vera and Ben are in a similar position to the Maqomas, but in different circumstances. Like Mpho (Sally’s daughter), Annie (Vera Stark’s daughter) startles her parents by revealing her homosexual orientation to them. Vera tries to sympathize with her friends (who are disturbed by Mpho’s pregnancy) by telling Didy about Annie’s lesbianism. In some ways, she seems to say, Mpho is still located within a social norm, whereas Annie has transgressed that by choosing a lesbian lifestyle, which Vera’s generation sees as so unconventional as to be nearly unacceptable.

Through dialogue between Didy and Vera, Gordimer broadens her readers’ understanding of new social realities that need to be taken into account for the formation of a society based on the new South African Constitution, which has rescinded any form of discriminatory law governing sexual relations. Vera, who is not morally perturbed by her daughter’s homosexuality, tries to find a reason why Annie has chosen a female partner instead of a man. Thus, she comes to the following conclusion: “I suppose we

believe we're responsible for what we think has gone wrong with our children and in their judgment hasn't gone wrong at all" (Gordimer 1994: 177). Vera seems to suggest that the older generation should not negatively assess the younger generation's deeds. However, the old should search for what they did that made the youth look for other ways of living, which are different from those of their parents.

Next to the Maqomas, the narrator gives an account of the heroine, Vera Stark, and her family. Like her friend Sally, Vera has an influential status in her public life. She is a brilliant lawyer working for the Legal Foundation and is dedicated to dealing with land redistribution problems, violence in townships and other legal issues. In this part of the dissertation I will focus mainly on the private aspect of her life, however. Vera's story takes the reader to her past, by means of flashback, highlighting her determination to embark on a sort of pilgrimage towards self-discovery.

Vera is endowed with a strong personality which shows itself both in her work environment and in her family. The description of the domestic power structure of the Starks' household reveals that Vera is the person who wields power. Unlike her husband Ben, who is shown to be a weak character, Vera deals with family matters with more wisdom and authority. She is presented as an individual with a moral vision. Unlike Ben, Vera is ready to face any kind of event philosophically without being destroyed by the hurtful truth. For instance, Vera tries to understand her daughter's homosexual orientation while Ben stubbornly rejects the truth. Vera feels guilty and admits that her own sexual life could be one of the reasons why Annie has become a lesbian.

In fact, Vera thinks that her excessive love for men and the failure of her marriages have driven Annie to look for a different sexual life-style. Vera attempts to satisfy her grandson Adam's curiosity about his aunt's unorthodox sexuality in the following terms:

Sometimes I think I know, but of course it's nonsense. Maybe the 'cause' – can you call it that, gays themselves are furious if you suggest it's an abnormality – maybe it's physical. Maybe psychological. There are many

theories. But Annie would say: choice. Free choice. (Gordimer 1994: 273)

Also, Vera resolutely refrains from putting any blame on Annie and acknowledges: “I’ve loved only men” (Gordimer 1994: 273). Gordimer tries to find answers to people’s choice of sexual orientation, which could be related to physical or psychological reasons, or merely to individual volition.

None To Accompany Me unveils a large range of sexual behaviour, which was deemed unconventional and inadmissible under the previous political dispensation (ranging from homosexuality to interracial marriage). The politics of sex is so abundant in this text that Gordimer’s new writing, which is oriented towards more intimate issues, stuns many critics because of her previous foregrounding of politics during the apartheid era. But the author has often claimed that the urgency of the times made her attempt to become a voice of the masses through her public denunciation of the oppressive regime in her creative work.

In the post-liberation context, Gordimer adapts to the new demands of her society where new social phenomena are emerging. In *None To Accompany Me* the author takes a close look particularly at new relationships built upon the democratic principle of total respect for individual freedoms. The author depicts the new South African society in its behavioural mutation. She enters the intricacies of private life, which is also affected by the changes in the public arena. Gordimer evokes the up-to-date domestic issues such as homosexuality, interracial relationships, adoption and AIDS.

In *None To Accompany Me* the reader can observe that Gordimer’s characters enjoy the sexual freedom of the post-oppressive times. Annie, Vera’s daughter, exemplifies the category of people who publicly unveil their homosexual orientation. She transgresses traditional standards not only by choosing a lesbian partner but also by deciding to live in the same household with her partners, evincing publicly the novel kind of couple that society now allows and accepts. Vera accepts her daughter’s free choice but raises a new

problematic, which bothers her a great deal. She does not hesitate to inquire whether Annie's sexual desire is totally fulfilled in the absence of a penis:

Yes. I love men. I mean exactly what I'm saying: how can there be love-making without the penis. I don't care what subtleties of feeling you achieve with all those caresses – and when you caress the other partner you're really caressing yourself, aren't you, because you're producing in her, you say, exactly what you yourself experience – after all that, you end up without that marvellous entry, that astonishing phenomenon of a man's body that transforms itself and that you can take in. You can't tell me there's anything like it! There's nothing like it, no closeness like it. The pleasure, the orgasms – yes, you may produce them just as well, you'll say, between two women. But with the penis inside you, it's not just the pleasure. (Gordimer 1994: 158)

Ileana Dimitriu, a very articulate Rumanian-born critic of Gordimer's work, makes the following comment on Vera's attitude:

Just as Vera's lesbian daughter, Annie, finds an identity in a transgression of bourgeois codes, so in her own way does Vera [by moving to live in her black lover's household]. The fact that what really troubles her about Annie is not so much the 'unconventionality' of lesbianism, but her belief that penetration by a penis is an essential satisfaction. (Dimitriu 2000: 113)

Annie tries to change women's mindsets regarding their sexual satisfaction by challenging Vera's metaphorical representation of the penis as the fundamental source of women's sexual fulfilment. Both characters highlight two opposing perspectives about sexual orientation. On the one hand, Vera represents the heterosexual woman whose sexual fulfilment depends on the presence of the penis. Annie and her partner Lou, on the other hand, maintain that their total independence from the male gender does not impede them from reaching orgasm.

In fact, the author represents two categories of women. The first group of women acknowledge that the presence of a man is crucial for their sexual fulfilment. Despite its attachment to traditional standards, this conception, as Denise Brahimi (a French critic) demonstrates in her *Nadine Gordimer: la*

femme, la politique et le roman (2000), does not sustain masculine power. Simultaneously, it does not express any antagonism towards feminism. According to Brahim, Gordimer restores the balance in the society where these two categories of women really exist without criticizing any of the two practices. She adds that

Women are not always unhappy, frustrated or mistreated in the heterosexual relationship; therefore, it will be unfair to deny that many women get absolute satisfaction out of it, whereas a simple idea about homosexual relationship seems discouraging and joyless. (Brahimi 2000: 74, my translation).

The second group of women, on the contrary, rejects the traditional definition of the couple and finds their joy within the same-sex union. Gordimer shows that new sexual orientations such as lesbianism have become legitimized or normal practices in the new South Africa. Gordimer herself seems to enjoy the freedom of her characters for the simple reason that in her more recent texts she also crosses the boundaries of traditional South African narratives. In fact, she has shifted her narrative from the most public issues to the very intimate ones, starting with sexuality. But this tendency to explore the thematics of sexual orientation is already present in Gordimer's early novels (for instance *Burger's Daughter*) in which she often writes extensively about (hetero-) sexual experience.

After having for decades stood strongly against racial discrimination, Gordimer remains an advocate of a fair society where injustices and discrimination of any kind are not tolerated. Her public reference to the most intimate questions seems to show that the author wants to acknowledge that domestic issues such as sexuality should not be neglected in public debates if the individual is to be liberated from social or cultural constrictions.

Gordimer depicts new forms of sexual relationships to educate people about the value of tolerance at all levels in a free society. Therefore, the author condemns homophobia the way she denounces xenophobia or discrimination against people affected by AIDS in her other post-apartheid

texts. Gordimer rejects these post-racially based prejudices, which still perpetuate discrimination and division between people in the so-called 'Rainbow Nation'.

Gordimer's text displays a wide range of newly legitimated relationships. The reader is taken into the changes taking place in the new South Africa. *None To Accompany Me* depicts new and different types of couples, which were not accepted during the apartheid era. Homosexual relationships are juxtaposed with interracial ones. Vera's love affair with Zeph Rapulana, the black man with whom she has decided to spend the rest of her life, exemplifies the transformation process in personal relationships. Vera breaks sexual taboos of the past by choosing as her partner a black man, whom she sees as the catalyst for her happiness.

In *None To Accompany Me* Gordimer re-asserts her opinion on sexual liberation, a theme she has already explored in her apartheid novels such as *A Sport of Nature* and *The Lying Days*. The character of Vera is reminiscent of Hillela, the heroine in Gordimer's *A Sport of Nature*, as both characters transgress the traditional mindset about considerations of race in sexual choices. These two characters' sense of freedom reveals Gordimer's strong belief that the liberation of her people should have an impact on the domestic sphere by breaking old sexual taboos. In her analysis of Gordimer's female characters in the novelist's pre-1994 texts Kathrin Wagner explores female characters' sexuality and makes the following comment:

The extent to which sexuality is a primary signifier – both a powerfully recurrent motif and a centrally determining metaphor – in Gordimer's narratives of personal and political transformation deserves closer analysis to illuminate the complexity of her vision as 'both a citizen and a woman'. To begin with, the willingness to transgress certain sexual taboos, in particular those which are centred on religious and racial distinctions, becomes an indicator throughout the ten novels of the white protagonist's potential for political redemption. (Wagner 1994: 90-91)

None To Accompany Me depicts new interracial relationships establishing

themselves in the newly democratised South Africa. The after-effects of the repeal of the Immorality Act, the law forbidding miscegenation, allows the open emergence of racially mixed couples which, consequently, characterise the new types of families in society.

Skin colour no longer determines kinship relationship. The adoption of a black Xhosa girl by Annie and her lesbian partner, Lou, illustrates the kind of families we can see in society today. Annie's free choice of adopting a black child instead of a white one highlights how public changes have transformed the domestic field by expanding people's freedoms. Annie's lesbianism does not prevent her from expressing a profound need to have a dependent child in her household along with her partner. Annie's sexual orientation and her adoption of a Xhosa girl show that the character builds her own identity, disregarding traditional conventions.

Annie is even proud to introduce her adoptive daughter to her mother, Vera, as any ordinary mother will do with her biological child when her mother visits her. Gordimer raises a problematic issue of motherhood and adoption. The author seems to show that the adoption of a child of any colour cannot impede an individual from savouring the joy of motherhood.

Vera's grandson is another character who shows a particular interest in a mixed-race relationship. In a conversation with Vera, Adam confesses his love for Mpho to his grandmother who, in return, attempts to discourage him. Vera tries to explain her opposition to this union by persuading her grandson that race has nothing to do with her position. But she stands against this relationship because she wants to avoid the previous incident where Mpho was involved with Oupa, fearing that the Maqomas might think she encouraged her grandson in his love affair with Mpho. Vera is determined to preserve her long friendship with the Maqomas and to shun any further personal trouble being added to them on top of the assassination threats faced by Sally. Moreover, in order to avoid embarrassing Adam, Vera clarifies her position to him: "You know I'd never have done this if it had been any other

girl you want to sleep with. It's not that which matters. It's the Maqomas" (Gordimer 1994: 271).

Vera is portrayed as a liberal character whose sexual freedom has formerly been denied by social constraints. Now, she tries to understand her children's and grandson's sexuality because she herself suffered the imposition of social norms upon her own sexuality. She tells her grandson (Adam) that when she was young, having sex meant getting married. This explains Vera's multiple marriages, but mostly her first wedding at a very young age with an inexperienced boy. Vera condemns some social norms which drive people to make reluctant decisions merely because they feel obliged to act in accordance with social standards. Vera values the sexual freedom of the present, something she was denied during her younger age, and she states the following: "Looks like there's no such a thing as sexual freedom. Well, perhaps one generation, at least, had it – Ivan and Annie. Between the end of the necessity to marry and the arrival of the disease [AIDS]" (Gordimer 1994: 272).

Despite her recognition of the advantages of the sexual freedom this era can offer, Vera points out that divorces or love problems still prevail. She also mentions the AIDS pandemic as a new factor affecting people's sexual lives. The author uses irony in conveying her heroine's insight about the deadly disease to sensitize young people about the dangers of today's sexual freedom. Gordimer's text goes beyond the evocation of the dangers of AIDS, which is a serious global health concern, and alludes to the negative psychological effects of the disease upon the family unit. For instance, the narrative hints at the disease-related issues such as AIDS orphans and their need of adoption. Gordimer's propensity to address such newly arisen social questions underscores the idea that the most vulnerable victims of the disease are children.

In *None To Accompany Me* Gordimer introduces a new form of writing - depicting sexual experiences by means of highly realistic descriptions. The

narrator takes the reader deep into the privacy of Vera Stark's sexual life, exposing every detail of her emotions and reactions. The narrative techniques of realism used in this text reminds us of *Thirteen Cents* (2000), a recent novel by K. Sello Duiker. However, the comparison is partial because unlike *None To Accompany Me*, *Thirteen Cents* shifts into what may be described as a hallucinatory super-naturalism in its closing sections.

Like Gordimer, Duiker gives a factual description of street life in Cape Town by exposing in detail the complexities of street children's sexuality and the abuse they suffer from gang leaders. The great similarity between Duiker's and Gordimer's texts is the interest both novelists present in the way they address the issue of sexual orientation in South Africa. Both writers use a realistic approach to show the different aspects of their characters' sexual lives. The delineation of homosexuality in their texts, for instance, can explain the dynamics of a society which is inclined to speak out about the realities of modern life. In fact, in order to achieve national cohesion in a post-struggle society, old norms need to be redefined and the truth exposed to the public.

Gordimer's heroine is determined to embark on the journey of self-discovery by delving into her unconscious to dig out the stark truth about herself. Although the national process of change is still a public concern for Vera, who commits herself to the resolution of other people's problems, she nevertheless becomes aware of the necessity to attend to her own domestic concerns.

In the process of self-discovery Vera confesses what she decides is her responsibility for her children's sexual orientation. Vera acknowledges that her promiscuous love for men probably turned Annie, the daughter, into a lesbian. Moreover, she does not blame Ivan, her son, for divorcing Adam's mother because she herself had divorced her first husband before getting married to Ben. The narrator describes Vera's contrition by exploring her introspection and her thoughtful reassessment of her life choices.

The narrator informs the reader about a deep secret concealed in the

heroine's mind regarding Ivan's biological father. In fact, despite being married to Ben, Vera kept having sexual relations with her ex-lover at the time when she became pregnant with her first child, Ivan. Ironically, the newborn closely resembled Vera without showing any features of either Ben or Vera's ex-lover. The reference to Vera's infidelity highlights the heroine's determination to face the naked truth about herself in order to get rid of a psychological burden. She realizes that in order to redeem herself, she needs to sacrifice her marriage with Ben. In any case, she admits that the marriage has been an absolute failure for the reason that she can no longer stand a union with "someone [who] cannot live without [her]" (Gordimer 1994: 310) – in other words, Ben's complete emotional dependence on Vera makes him unsuitable as her husband. This may be Gordimer's way of establishing a distinction between society's notion of a "domineering" woman and her own concept of a truly strong woman, who desires an emotional balance between herself and her partner.

The story of Vera shows that the heroine has led a promiscuous life sexually even if the narrator refrains from clearly saying it. But Vera is proud to assume personal responsibility for the mistakes she made in the past, refusing to allow anybody else to carry her psychological burden. She refuses to condemn her own past conduct even though she acknowledges that social constraints urged her into a kind of clandestine perversion. She was perhaps not ready for a marriage, but the society imposed that on her. The reader needs to look beyond Vera's loose morals to comprehend her attitudes. Despite her determination to insist on her culpability, Vera informs us that her society used to define women's sexuality. Social norms required that, for girls, having "sex meant getting married" (Gordimer 1994: 272).

This text, set in the transition period, highlights the sense of responsibility that people at this time begin to seek. Gordimer teaches us that in the post-struggle era, it is necessary to embark on self-analysis concerning one's past actions in order to introduce change in society. Vera knows, for instance, that her sexual life lacks ethical values. Therefore she begins to search for ways to

correct her mistakes in her own style. In this regard, Gordimer summarizes her heroine's personality:

Vera is a strange woman because in some ways she is unconventional. She attacks her daily work; even though it is unconventional work she goes about it in this rather strict, direct way, rather authoritarian. She doesn't seem to belong to any women's movement. She's a woman's movement in herself, I think. And she bluntly asserts her sexuality. She even quotes Renoir at one point –“I paint with prick”. But she has her fill of sexuality, she works her way through it. She's had a very active kind of sensual life, she hasn't cared too much about the morality of it. (Gordimer 1994: 436)

Vera has reached the stage of life where an individual is more concerned about spiritual questions. If the psychological development of a human being starts with the fundamental questioning of her/ his own identity (Where am I from? Or Where am I going?), the ageing process, on the contrary, makes the individual revisit his/ her failures and successes in life. Indeed, Vera has embarked on a retrospective journey to assess her own past. This process helps an individual to achieve the status of a wise person concerning their social environment. Vera is in the position where she realises the need for self-evaluation. Her re-orientation towards achieving an autonomous centrality is defined by Ileana Dimitriu as “a psychological process of house-cleaning”, on which she comments as follows:

As exiles return, she embarks on her own kind of secular retreat. What captivates the reader (at least, this reader) are not the 'national' appendages of the story, but Vera's initiation into the art of self-discovery. As her name suggests, Vera Stark is the seeker of the stark truth, one who has the courage to discard those stages of her life that have exhausted their challenge or significance. She allows neither colleagues nor family to interfere with her new sense of freedom. (Dimitriu 2003: 22)

Dimitriu's analysis of Vera's decision to withdraw from the world around her to embark on a journey towards self-knowledge, endorses Gordimer's insistence that the political change-over has impacted upon Vera's mindset.

To quote the writer's own comment about her character's attitude: "Perhaps the passing away of the old regime makes the abandonment of the old personal life also possible" (Gordimer 1994: 315). Gordimer admits that the end of apartheid has brought about changes not only in the political arena but also in people's habits. In other words, the old practices are being replaced by new ways of living.

Vera's behavioural alteration in her relationship with Ben is extended to her children and grandson. Her new sense of independence explains the more aloof relationship she wants to establish within her family. The age factor and the political change can account to an extent for the transformations taking place in the heroine's mind. David Kertzer in his article "Household and Gender in a Life-course Perspective" highlights the ongoing interaction between public transformation and ageing process of individuals. He maintains the following:

People begin their lives in one historical period distinguished by a characteristic set of cultural norms and perceptions and institutional arrangements, and as they age, these larger forces change. Individuals begin to develop ideas of normative family behaviour and the proper trajectory of their lives at an early age, but when they come to face life later it may be in a society very different from the one from which these ideas and norms first sprang. For example, they develop their ideas of what the life of a grandparent is like and what the relations between grandparents and their children and grandchildren are like when they are children, yet when they later become grandparents themselves they may be living in a very different society, where being a grandparent could have a very different significance. (Kertzer 1991: 19-20)

Vera's shift from the public field to the domestic one parallels Gordimer's new interest in domestic issues in her country. In this text, Gordimer's thematic frame transcends her social environment as she addresses fundamental questions of human existence, mainly sexuality and senescence. For instance, Gordimer exposes the effects of ageing upon women's sexuality. In fact, Vera has reached the last stage of her sexual life, a stage in a woman's

life commonly referred to as menopause. Being herself a woman who has reached the stage of menopause, the author shows us, with particular attention, how her heroine faces the challenges of ageing related to her sexuality. After a very active sexual life, described through her two marriages and her sexual affair with her ex-lover while being married to Ben, Vera decides to withdraw from the outside world. Nevertheless, she chooses a black partner, Zeph, who seems to be the only person able to understand her vision of this inward journey, which requires nobody to accompany her. Vera feels more comfortable with Zeph's distant relationship as she refuses from this time to carry anyone else's psychological burdens. In an interview with Karen Lazar, Gordimer makes the following comment on Vera's rejoinder concerning the effects of ageing:

Yes. And of course, who can say? People's sexuality dies down at different ages. Some people seem to be finished with sex in their mid-forties, or fifties. Terrible! Others take on lovers, both male and female, at seventy. It's a matter of the glands, I suppose. Vera genuinely doesn't want another sexual relationship and doesn't resent the fact that Zeph has his little pleasure on the side. (Gordimer 1994: 436-437)

None To Accompany Me examines the relationship between sex and power. The narrative presents a profound alteration of the traditional definition of power between sexes. The Maqomas and the Starks are two families ruled by two strong women while their husbands exhibit weak personalities. The text highlights the possible interchangeable structure of power between genders. The female person, often referred to as being the weaker sex in terms of the patriarchal mindset, becomes in this particular text the stronger sex. Gordimer assigns lofty roles to her female characters while men occupy subservient positions in the plot.

Despite her proto-feminist outlook (as conveyed in this text), Gordimer does not claim to be a feminist per se because her perspective goes beyond feminism. Vera, Gordimer's heroine, clarifies the author's vision about sex and power relationships. In fact, Vera is represented as a strong woman while

Ben, her husband, is the epitome of the weak man. Vera's steadfast and zealous determination to embark on a self-discovery process makes her realise that there is no need to live with a man who cannot live without her.

Gordimer's heroine wants to redefine her relationship with her husband, starting with the power relation between them. Thus, Vera refuses to hold so much power any longer in a couple characterised by its unbalanced power relationship between the wife and her husband. In a conversation with Annie, her daughter, Vera does not hesitate to unveil the genuine reason why she decides to withdraw from Ben: "when someone gives you so much power over himself he makes you a tyrant" (Gordimer 1994: 310).

Vera provides an unusual perception of power between genders. She does not adopt a radical feminist approach which claims that women should be stronger than men. So, the dichotomy of strong women and weak men is transformed into a parallel axis of power between genders. In other words, Vera advocates a power relationship based on equality between the genders (in sexual partnerships).

She decides to change her relationship with her husband, in order to give him a chance to resurrect his life. Ben's love for Vera has overrun the boundaries of human affection for another human being. Vera has become a sort of goddess that Ben worships, as the text reads:

Ben had created Vera for himself as body, a torso without a head. As such it was (indeed, connoisseur Lou had observed) exceptionally explicit of the power of the body. It had no identity beyond body, and so the body that was Vera, that Ben could not live without, was transformed into the expression of desire between woman and woman. In Annie's house the headless torsos became household gods. (Gordimer 1994: 228)

Ben has even sacrificed his artistic talent to devote himself to a sort of irrational love for his wife. Vera refuses to bear this heavy burden represented by Ben's love for her. She rather wants to liberate him from the claws of this irrational love which prevents him from seeing beyond her body. Actually, despite his age Ben still displays juvenile attitudes regarding his feelings. He

seems to appropriate Vera for himself as if she were born for him only. Ben's immaturity does not allow him to reflect on the fact that one is born alone and dies alone. Therefore, according to Vera, Ben should think of the possibility of living without her.

In the closing stage of the novel, the narrator shows a transformed image of Vera. She seems to have reached the finishing line of her retrospective assessment of her 'self'. The learning process for Vera is not of a conventional type as in most *bildungsroman* novels, where the character's psychological development is linked to the process of growing. In fact, the heroine is freed from the burden that Ben represented in her consciousness as he has relocated to England where he has joined Ivan, his problematic son. Vera's satisfaction is much more complete for the simple reason that Ben will not be totally distraught by the long distance separating them. Ben can still behold his icon, Vera, through the presence of Ivan who strongly resembles his mother.

In other words, one part of Vera is present within Ivan's body while part of Ben is within Annie who has remained in South Africa with her mother. Ironically, Annie has her father's features but not Vera's. The advantage of this 'splitting' is that both Ben and Vera will learn more about life since they have each embarked on a personal journey.

Gordimer's post-1994 texts display the novelist's overt adaptation to the civil imaginary, as she seems to privilege the delineation of day-to-day experiences of individuals in her narratives. *None To Accompany Me* for instance, bifurcates from Gordimer's previous writing, which highlights the struggle for liberation in overtly political activism. This particular text gives an overview of the transforming society while the notion of self is replacing the outdated discriminatory mindset.

The novelist explores the cultural shock of the exiles relocating in their mother country. But in the meantime, she closely investigates the dismemberment of a family such as the Starks' by using a story-telling device

based on the evocation of a difficult (stark) truth. She pinpoints sexuality as the core factor in the break-up. Gordimer, for instance, does not use euphemism to dramatise her characters' sexuality (heterosexuality; homosexuality and the menopause stage).

b. *The House Gun*

Gordimer's new interest in probing the intimacy of her characters is even more overt in her second post-1994 novel, *The House Gun*. The text portrays people's private lives, around which the narrative is woven. The thematic of sex is once again present in this novel. In this text Gordimer is intrigued to reflect on domestic issues, starting with the recognition of a revolution in sexual mores, in which her main character, Duncan, is involved as he gets caught up in a triangular sexual relationship. In fact, Duncan has a bisexual life. He has homosexual partners with whom he shares the same house. But he shifts towards a heterosexual orientation when he meets Natalie, a woman he saves from suicide. Natalie and Duncan become lovers and decide to live together.

The turning point of the narrative begins after a party when "something terrible" occurs. Duncan finds Natalie and his former gay partner, Carl Jesperson, having sex; something he could not have expected as Carl has never shown any inclination towards women. Moreover, Carl has always expressed publicly his revulsion towards women as "he talked distastefully, even disgustingly, about their sexual characteristics and their genital organs" (Gordimer 1998: 233).

In this story the narrator seems to describe Natalie as the main source of the incident because she has brought chaos into the peaceful house of gay friends. This situation makes the reader question whether Natalie has seduced Carl or whether he has just been driven by curiosity to discover the reasons why this woman has succeeded in making Duncan, his gay partner, relinquish

his former sexual lifestyle.

The portrayal of Natalie discloses the character's complete indifference concerning this act of unfaithfulness. In fact, the narrator pinpoints the aspect of indifference by showing Natalie and Carl deliberately performing their act in the presence of Duncan. They seem to relish, in a cynical way, the unbearable scene they offer Duncan, who cannot control his emotions. Therefore Duncan is driven by jealousy and eventually takes "the house gun" at his disposal to end the upsetting action as he re-imagines it occurring before him. He ends up committing a crime of passion by shooting and killing Carl, his present sexual rival and former sexual partner.

Gordimer seeks to highlight the irony in this act of sexually motivated violence. The novelist seems to investigate the reasons why these gay partners have never expressed jealousy between themselves since it was no secret that they were exchanging partners of the same sex in the same house. Through Natalie's indifference, Gordimer wants to explore the psychology of a bisexual man when he is the victim of a female partner's infidelity. Duncan's jealousy (per se) can be deemed an acceptable or at least understandable human reaction. But the paradox lies in his total indifference when Carl and Khulu, for instance, have a sexual relationship compared to the intensity and eventual violence of his jealousy when Natalie is involved.

Natalie's presence in the narrative is particularly significant because she helps the reader to understand the bisexual person's mindset. Her act can be considered from a different angle, that of social orthodoxy. Through her act of unfaithfulness Natalie has completed Duncan's social re-adjustment, by making him react according to conventional social expectations of a heterosexual 'triangle'.

This crime of passion affects a wide range of conceptions concerning both the familial and the national dimensions. It also brings into question a variety of domestic principles in a formerly privileged white liberal family, on a small scale, by redefining customs and relationships within the family unit. In Ileana

Dimitriu's words, Duncan's murder has contributed to the "emotional house-cleaning" (Dimitriu 2003: 29) of the Lingards, as the parents begin to experience the different kinds of emotions to which the new society brought them.

In fact, during the apartheid era the Lingards never experienced certain emotions due to their aloof attachment to the struggle. Their suburban life-style in the city of Johannesburg established a variety of principles which could not allow them to see life from a different angle than their own. The Lingards did not have any idea about moral and physical suffering, not even death. Although Claudia's medical career exposed her to the sick and the dead in hospital, she could not identify herself with many black mothers who had to go through agonising emotions during the apartheid era. André Brink in his article "All's Unfair in Love and War" underlines the new challenges set by the post-struggle climate requiring the discovery of what used to be seen as the other by each different racial group. Brink uses the example of Claudia and Harald and makes the following comment on the attitudes of this white couple, both of whom are from a non-racist, liberal background:

All these images from The Other side, and the way in which they impinge on our own South African consciousness where most whites still have little or no conception of how The Others lived, or continue to live. It is the breakdown of this wall which makes living in the New South Africa so exciting, so challenging, to the writer as much as to any individual, black or white, prepared to open a mind's eye to it. (Brink 1998: 422)

Gordimer's text can be seen as an initiation process into 'real life' for white South Africans who have never experienced the binary duality of life. In other words, the author wants to show that success in one's career is not enough in life. One needs in addition to look for psychological maturity as a vital force in order to face with courage other circumstances in life. Gordimer shows that, despite being respectively a successful businessman and a brilliant doctor, the Lingards are very inexperienced and brittle in the beleaguered position in which their son has put them.

The narrator takes the camera away from Duncan despite his being initially the main character in the novel and focuses on the psychology of two main female characters, Claudia and Natalie. The narrator makes a psychological analysis of Claudia, whose son is on trial for murder. Despite being a talented and privileged medical doctor, she is represented as a fragile mother who is confronted with a terrible and to her, initially, inexplicable crime committed by her son. She is presented as a victim of social change as she is in a state of profound dismay due to Duncan's action. But she is also worried about the verdict of the trial, because her son might be sentenced to death.

Natalie is the second female character who occupies a central place in this narrative, as she is deeply involved in the crime. Natalie in fact represents the third person involved in the crime, the two others being Duncan (the murderer) and Carl (the victim). The narrative is particularly important for my analysis of the representation of women as it makes space for the depiction of women's approach in tackling family crises, as exemplified by Claudia, Duncan's mother.

Another powerful aspect of the represented image of women is highlighted by the social clichés set around Natalie. As a matter of fact, Natalie embodies the traditional role ascribed to women in texts by many male writers. She epitomises something like the evil flower described by the French poet, Charles Baudelaire. In his collection of poems entitled *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Baudelaire maintains that the woman is responsible for evil in society due to her dual role: she represents the beauty of a flower in terms of her seductive qualities, but she conjures up a capacity for destruction at the same time. This viewpoint coincides with conservative Christian ideology that takes literally the assertion in the book of Genesis that sin was introduced into the world when Eve ate the forbidden fruit and offered it to Adam.

In fact, throughout the trial, Natalie is demonised by the Lingards and Motsamai, Duncan's lawyer, as being responsible for Duncan's emotional

reaction that led him to commit the crime. Gordimer shows how the woman is used as a scapegoat to explain criminal behaviour by a male protagonist. As the trial proceeds, Natalie is completely alone and suffers the harsh assessment of her personality based on patriarchal concepts.

Denise Brahimy in *Nadine Gordimer: La femme, la politique et le roman* analyses the patriarchal attitude of this society towards Natalie, who is condemned without anyone's probing her deep reasons for her sexual betrayal of Duncan. Brahimy criticises the fact that Natalie is accused by the public as the main person responsible for Duncan's act. Therefore, she is looked upon as someone who deserves to have punishment inflicted on her. Brahimy maintains that men discharge their own responsibilities upon women's shoulders to carry the can. This is how men justify their own mistakes, even though women are sometimes only slightly involved in the action. In fact, the starring roles remain reserved for men, and women have passive or secondary roles (Brahimi 2000: 87).

Natalie James is a very controversial character who does not receive any sympathy from her society, not even from the novelist herself, who makes complex observations about Natalie and declares the following in an interview with André Brink:

I think in a way she represents the kind of person who frightens me ... They are always immensely attractive in every way, but they are very dangerous, they are such a danger to themselves ... they resent being looked after, yet they need to be totally looked after. There is nothing you can do with them, yet the guilt remains ... (Brink 1998a: 423)

Gordimer acknowledges that in Natalie she depicts a dubious character that she deems dangerous, since such a personality is uncontrollable. Despite there being little mention of Natalie in the story, Gordimer exposes the reader to her to deepen his/ her imaginative grasp in order to comprehend the psychology of this controversial character. Brink unhesitatingly extols the aesthetic dimension of this novel, due to the diverse possibilities of analysis the text offers:

Gordimer's achievement is that what little the story does reflect of Natalie James, suggests all the weight and complexity of a life lived below the surface of the words; and the same goes for Duncan's black friend Khulu, who voices one of the central questions of the book, 'Who of us can say what it means to love?' (Brink 1998b: 423)

The story raises a problematic issue around the degree of premeditation involved in the irrevocable act of murder. The description of the circumstances in which the murder is committed by a male character helps the reader to understand the complex motivation behind Natalie's actions.

Duncan, who is completely distraught at being sold out by his two bisexual partners, apparently comes back to the scene not to use violence but to make sure his eyes have not betrayed him as well. Despite the absence of premeditation in this act of violence, Duncan assumes responsibility for the murder. Gordimer's text echoes Homer's *The Odyssey*, which is a text Duncan later reads (while in custody). In both texts, the heroes seem to value the elimination of a rival and the suitor of one's wife (the case in *The Odyssey*). This act of violence is used by Gordimer and Homer's Odysseus as a means of ending their emotional suffering. However, the destruction of a rival can be comprehended as an ambiguous affirmation of self-worth.

The crime of passion performed by Duncan in Gordimer's text is completely different from the one represented in Shakespeare's play, *Othello*. Instead of killing his female partner, Duncan chooses to end his rival's life. In fact, killing Natalie would have appeared a meaningless and fortuitous act to Duncan because he would be allowing Natalie to complete the suicide that he had earlier prevented her from accomplishing. Natalie owes her life to Duncan, who saved her from suicide. However, Natalie sees life from a different angle, since she has shown the courage to end her life by her own hands. Consequently, being slain by her saviour will appear as a simple accomplishment of an act which has been delayed by circumstances.

The House Gun shows how the public and private realms can be interwoven through a narrative examining an individual's crime. Through this

act of murder, the novelist highlights Natalie's position in Duncan's mind. Natalie seems to represent an object of irresistible and possessive desire for Duncan. She becomes a kind of property to Duncan that he cannot allow anyone else to touch.

Although this male character has been motivated by irrational emotions, the society is also to be blamed for determining the means of revenge. The judge's embarrassment displayed during the trial of Duncan's case demonstrates the complexity of assessing an individual's controversial case which seems to share responsibilities with the society at large. Without at this stage disclosing the verdict, the judge makes the following statement:

The court takes into full consideration certain mitigating factors, albeit that the accused has shown no remorse for his crime. Firstly, he did not carry any weapon when he went to the house. Secondly, he could not have known that the deceased would be lying on the very sofa where the sexual act had taken place before his eyes the previous night. Thirdly, the gun *happened to be there*, on the table. If it had not been there, the accused might have abused the deceased verbally, perhaps even punched him in the usual revenge of dishonoured lovers of one kind ... or both. (Gordimer 1998: 266-267)

The narrator describes the judge's attitude in revealing expressions before the latter proceeds with his speech: "He seems now to abandon his text, to accuse the assembly and himself, the streets and suburbs and squatter camps outside the courts and the corridors, the mob of which he sees all as part, close up against the breached palace of justice" (Gordimer 1998: 267).

Duncan's crime has forced his parents to reflect on issues related to crime and violence. Claudia and Harald have little knowledge of either physical or moral suffering related to violence because it has never before directly affected their family. Therefore they are trying to identify themselves with "the other side of privilege", because "neither whiteness, nor observance of the teachings of Father and Son, nor the pious respectability of liberalism, nor money, that have kept them in safety - that other form of segregation - could

change their status” (Gordimer 1998: 127).

The Lingards’ behavioural change is overtly seen through their new relationships with the outside world. The Lingards’ open-mindedness is demonstrated by Claudia when she receives a female black patient whose son is in detention: “Claudia is not the only woman with a son in prison. Since this afternoon she has understood that. She is no longer the one who doles out comfort or its placebos for others’ disasters, herself safe, untouchable, in another class” (Gordimer 1998: 17). Claudia has grasped another meaning of motherhood which crosses barriers of class and race and discloses the state of mind of a woman whose progeny is affected by a profound kind of trouble.

The restoration of the relationship between Harald and Claudia evinces mutual understanding between a man and a woman on their revised principles. They seem to have learned from each other. Harald, Claudia’s husband, helps his wife to review her approach to spiritual matters.

In fact, Harald has given a novel significance to his religious faith which is no longer based on the ideal of happiness and tranquillity distant from the world of suffering. Harald believes that God is not only for blissful and fortunate people because he has realised that “out of something terrible something new, to be lived with in a different way, surely, than life was before? This is the country for themselves, here now” (Gordimer 1998: 278). It is on these novel principles that Harald has established “a new relation with his God, the God of suffering he could not have had access to, before” (Gordimer 1998: 279).

The analysis of the Lingards’ review of their fundamental moral values exemplifies Harald and Claudia’s awareness of the necessity of giving a new meaning to some of the values in their lives. Gordimer’s novel appears as an illustration of the notion of change in a sector of society where ethical values tended to derive from the old social order.

The narrative represents Claudia, a middle class white, grappling with the new social order in a transforming society. She goes through a kind of harsh

initiation into the new ways of living by shedding her old principles in order to settle into the new dispensation.

The House Gun is a narrative which highlights many transformations within the lives of characters. The Lingards are not only concerned with adjusting their relationships with the outside world, but also within their family unit. They try to soften their criticism of their son's unusual life-style by imploring human and divine forgiveness so that Duncan can be spared the death penalty. Moreover, in these troublesome moments Claudia and Harald succeed in strengthening their ties after having had a distant conjugal relationship for a period:

The sorrow that it was the shameful degeneracy, sickness of this conspiracy of rejection that had revitalised the marriage brought a collapse into grief. He lay with arms around her, her back and the length of her legs against him, their feet touching like hands, what she used to like to call the stowed fork-and-spoon position. (Gordimer 1998: 129)

Natalie's assessment of Duncan's character underscores her inability to end or change her lover's possessiveness by kinder or more humane means than by sexual betrayal. Natalie's act can suggest her refusal to be a male possession even though she owes her survival (after an attempted suicide) to Duncan.

Duncan has discovered the deep meaning of life in prison. He comprehends the great value of life since he has violently ended someone's life in the past and now he is about to experience the start of a new life – the child he conceived with Natalie. Duncan stands on the same footing as his girlfriend, Natalie, as both characters have approached death and life in nearly similar ways. Duncan has killed Carl and saved Natalie from suicide. They also share in and are connected through the child Natalie is carrying.

Natalie, on the other hand, bears some responsibility for Carl's death and she had earlier tried to commit suicide after she failed to retrieve her first child that she gave up for adoption. Her attempted suicide indicates a sense of loss and guilt and a capacity for deep feeling belied by her apparently amoral

later conduct. In addition, Natalie is about to give birth to another child.

The resemblances between Natalie and Duncan are better established at the end of the novel. If their participation in the diverse events which connect them is clearly conspicuous, their psychological growth is not therefore to be neglected. After attempting suicide Natalie seems to have abandoned this path as a way of solving her problems. The death of Carl, which has taken her to court with her partner, also has an impact on her psychology. She is resolute about not giving up her second child for adoption; therefore she wants to restore life by giving life to another child on whom she wants to lavish her care and affection.

Gordimer's portrayal of ordinary lives in contemporary South Africa is often set in the city or the suburbs of Johannesburg where the novelist lives. She focuses in these more recent texts on the Marxist dialectics of a class binary with slighter reference to the politicised racial dialectics of her earlier writing. Gordimer shows the transition from racial dialectics to the dichotomy of class. The novelist pays particular attention to women to depict this binary conception. Unlike some characters who are more concerned with material stability, female protagonists look for a spiritual re-birth. Claudia, for example, is preoccupied with achieving moral salvation in her life while Motsamai, the black male lawyer, is trying to make his mark in his career so as to make money from the work he is doing. The description of the dichotomy of class in the city is also apparent in Gordimer's *The Pick Up* - in a different way, though.

c. The Pick Up

In *The Pick Up*, Gordimer explores the behaviour of city women in their private realm by exemplifying the difference between urban female characters and rural ones. The narrative describes the city as a place where the struggle for women's rights is well established because Julie and other female characters display their pride in being independent.

However, many women still relish their dependence on men and for them life in the city seems to be steered by the search for material wealth. Julie's step-mother epitomises the woman who admits her dependence on men. She is delighted to organise dinners at her husband's house and to host many business people. During these gatherings the main topics are their businesses and their fortunes. Julie's stepmother defines power in terms of material possessions, neglecting the spiritual aspect of her humanity. Her distant relationship with her step-daughter, whom she regards as a rival due to the disputable, massive family inheritance Julie may get, underlines this woman's callous character.

However, Julie leads a humble life and refuses to drive her father's extravagant cars. She prefers her old car and enjoys her meetings with her friends at LA Café where they explore the particular contemporary issues concerning their community. Julie is represented as the opposite of her parents in the sense that both her mother and father value material possessions while she despises an expensive life-style.

Julie's mother, also in contrast with her daughter's choices, has relocated to the USA where she is married to another rich businessman. Julie's father stays in Johannesburg with his new wife and still runs his business, but he has an aloof relationship with his daughter. For him, his socialite wife and

business success seem to come first. Gordimer shows how this kind of city life is distinct from life in rural communities. People in urban areas and of this wealthy class seem to forget family values and they ground their lives on more individualistic principles.

It is made clear that Julie has been deprived of parental affection all her life. The only person who shows affection towards her is Uncle Archibald Summers, her father's brother. Archie's philanthropic character is however challenged by unscrupulous forces which attempt to debase his image. In fact, Archie, the altruistic gynaecologist and obstetrician, is accused by "two black women, wives of the new upper class" (Gordimer 2002: 69) for basely lucrative purposes in a case that Peter Blair calls "an unconnected, and rather superfluous, subplot in which Uncle Archie is wrongly accused of sexual harassment" (Blair 2003: 179). In the minor side-plot concerning the two black women's scheme the author seeks to raise criticism against a category of women who use corrupt means to achieve financial profit.

The women accusing Uncle Archie of sexual harassment attempt to take advantage of the law to make money in a dishonest manner. The irony is that these women are black. The novelist here seems to highlight corruption scandals within the new black elite. The two black women involved in the scandal and Julie's step-mother's black (and white) female friends are presented as exhibiting common features based on their greedy quest for material wealth and are depicted as resembling her step-mother and mother in the superficiality and brittleness of their values.

Although Julie's parents could provide their daughter with massive material wealth, they fail to fulfil their daughter's deeper needs because something is missing. The missing part represents all those human values that Julie discovers in Abdu's village, where communal interests are more important than individual ones. She infuses into the village women's minds ideas about feminism, an 'urban' ideology that she has imported into the rural setting; in return, the community helps her discover her identity and acquire

spiritual fulfilment.

Gordimer's perspective in depicting the urban setting as opposed to the distant, desert rural area shows city life, on the one hand, as more oriented towards material possessions and focused on individualistic interests, while poor North African rural life is depicted as centred on ethical or spiritual values. Through her heroine, the writer wants to bridge these two ways of living in order to promote a social ethics or greater moral awareness.

In fact, feminist ideas taught by Julie to rural women underscore Gordimer's vision concerning the need for deference to human rights which nevertheless fully include women's emancipation. Similarly, the novelist confers the utmost importance on humane principles by emphasising family values, which are decaying in the urban world. Conversely, she shows rural settings where these values, based on mutual support and love, represent the cornerstone of communal life (in the village).

2. Zakes Mda

a. *She Plays with the Darkness*

Gordimer's approach to representing rural and urban women in *The Pick Up* resembles Mda's in *She Plays with the Darkness*, as both writers insist on ethical values, highlighting the difference between female characters living in distinct social environments. Mda shows great admiration for rural women who value their family attachment and communal vision. As for city women, he generally portrays them from a more negative perspective, highlighting the collapse of those ethical values which are fundamental to people's dignity. The city (or the 'lowlands', as the city is referred to in the novel) is a place of political instability and moral decay.

In her examination of "Silence and violence in *She Plays with the Darkness*", Nokuthula Mazibuko points out that the text centres the drama of the political and historical narrative in the lowlands or urban area. She comments:

Mda goes back and forth between the lowlands and the mountains reinforcing the contrasting political and social climate between the city and the village. As a space inhabited mainly by women, the village is relatively peaceful, and productive. However, [Mazibuko recognises that] the mountains are not utopia; many of the villagers are short of food, especially during drought. (Mazibuko 2004: 7)

Mazibuko admits that, despite being isolated from the political violence described in the novel, the rural setting "also harbours a less visible form of violence against women in not according them the space to advance" (Mazibuko 2004: 7). Mazibuko identifies this form of violence prevailing in the village as representing the effects of urban influence upon the domestic

lives of villagers. According to her, “as the violence from the lowlands starts to encroach upon the village, the society’s patriarchal violence escalates and is exposed when Mother-of-the-Daughters is raped” (Mazibuko 2004: 7). The example of this form of violence committed upon an elderly woman underscores the contemporary fading of moral values as having spread to rural settings.

Mda also portrays the acts of violence in the city where the perpetrators of violence and its victims are identified across genders. Trooper Motsahi is depicted as a cruel policeman who physically abuses civilians on the pretext that they have broken the curfew. An initially inexplicable event occurs when he humiliates and severely beats his drinking partner, Radisene. The latter feels completely helpless when he tries to report his case to a policewoman who, in her turn, wants to inflict more punishment on him, threatening to incarcerate him. Mazibuko identifies two kinds of perpetrators of violence; she maintains that women in Mda’s novel also perform violent acts upon male characters:

By depicting the malicious policewoman, Mda makes the point that violence is not only perpetrated by men. In fact, the vicious policeman Trooper Motsahi is a victim of violence perpetrated by his wife Tampololo. The more Tampololo beats Trooper Motsahi, the more viciously he enforces the curfew. Mda shows the links between different forms of violence and the ways in which violence causes itself to escalate. (Mazibuko 2004: 4-5)

Mda’s portrayal of Tampololo, the ill-tempered woman who always beats up her husband, the policeman Trooper Motsahi, shows that domestic and political violence are intertwined because they produce the same effects on victims, who always belong to the powerless side. Motsahi’s cruelty can be understood as the twisted expression of his need to heal his own psychological wounds inflicted by his wife, Tampololo, in administering a daily beating on him. Motsahi feels profoundly emasculated by the current beatings his wife gives him. He pleads with her: “If you must beat me at all, my love, please don’t do it in public. You make me the laughing stock of my friends” (Mda

1995: 27). The loss of his dignity in public is so unbearable that Motsahi vents his wrath on innocents. In similar vein, N.S. Zulu's analysis of "*The Cry of Winnie Mandela*: overturning the 'monster image' of Winnie Mandela" shows that Winnie Mandela became a perpetrator of violence because she was herself a victim of violence and its lingering after-effects. Zulu argues that:

the reader [of Ndebele's text] admires the Winnie Mandela who is redeemed as a heroine who does not fall because her life is dominated by hamartia, but who falls because the apartheid security forces strip her of humanity and dignity and apprentice her to hate and violence. But it is when she becomes a law unto herself and turns into the perpetrator of violence and destruction that she evokes hate. (Zulu 2005: 5)

Zulu's scrutiny of the heroine's violent character is based on psychological explanations set forth by prominent theorists such as Du Preez Bezdrob whose research on post-war victims' mindsets reveals that:

people who have suffered trauma, victimisation or violence and suffer from post-traumatic stress are, ironically, at high risk of becoming perpetrators of violence, including torture and rape - and even murder or massacre. Experts believe that for some people, the pain of being a victim becomes unbearable, and they attempt to 'shift' their own pain onto someone else. And thus they become perpetrators, and create other victims. (Bezdrob 2003: 217, quoted in Zulu 2005: 9)

Mda teaches us that the police-led violence during the state of emergency after the 1970 coup d'état in Lesotho brought about many casualties. As any civil war lists a great number of innocent and harmless people as its main victims, Mda's narrative presents us with exactly the same pattern by focusing particularly on the abuse of women. The rape of Cynthia, Radisene's female colleague, illustrates this tendency of soldiers to choose targets indiscriminately, violating the individual human rights of their victims.

My analysis of political violence in this section of the thesis is necessary because political violence interferes in the domestic environment of some characters. The pressures and seduction of political power have corrupted some characters, who have relinquished their individual principles to adapt to

new ways of living. Radisene epitomises the transformed individual who has discovered a new means of survival in a corrupt society.

Mda criticises male characters' patriarchal attitudes, especially migrant workers' mischievous behaviour for deserting their families and establishing new relationships with city women. On the other hand he denounces female characters' loose morals as exemplified by Tampololo, the former wife of Motsahi. She abandons her husband because he has lost his job as a policeman and is left without resources. She decides to move into the apartment of Radisene, her husband's employer, to become his wife. Tampololo is the prototype of city women as seen by Ha Samane women because she displays dissolute and faithless tendencies and shows no respect for her husband. Father-of-the-Daughters, Tampololo's father, is irritated and disappointed to hear the news about his daughter's abandonment of her husband for Radisene. The narrator clarifies the reasons for the patriarch's confusion in the following lines:

Not because he particularly liked Trooper Motsahi, but because he believed in the good old-fashioned family values. He considered it a sin that the two children were living together, and yet they were not married. It was shameful that his daughter, who had been brought up so well, had run away from her husband to live with another man, whoever that man was. (Mda 1995: 131)

Tampololo exhibits the stereotypical image of the unprincipled city woman in her promiscuous behaviour. She is depicted as an adherent of the so-called modern urban lifestyle. Tampololo rejects traditional values to adopt western ways of living. Through this female character, Mda criticises women who use their own bodies as a commodity in order to improve their economic situation. This tendency, Mda seems to say, perpetuates male negative stereotypes about women's unscrupulous use of sexuality.

Mda's narrative exposes a clash between city and rural women. In fact, women in the village regard their counterparts from the city as 'spinsters' who 'steal' their husbands. Matlakala, the woman to whom Radisene comes to

inform her of the death of her husband in a car accident, disseminates the negative image of city women among the villagers. She does not conceal her own experience in the city of Johannesburg, boasting that “she was a whore who had devoured many men, who continued to tell the story of her prowess in their graves” (Mda 1995: 58). Matlakala is not affected by her husband’s demise because, according to her, he died a long time ago in her mind after deserting his family to settle in the city, where he used to “spend his money with the whores there [and] did not send his children a single cent” (Mda 1995: 60). Mda makes clear that some women can be sympathetically regarded despite their promiscuous behaviour because their husbands deserted them and their children and they had to fend for themselves. Thus, the author contrasts Tampolo’s abandonment *of* her husband with Matlakala’s abandonment *by* her husband.

The recurrent image of the "whore" used to describe city women in Mda's novel underscores rural women's misconceptions about their city counterparts. The distinction between urban from rural women on moral grounds is also highlighted by Cyprian Ekwensi, the Nigerian writer, who depicts Jagua Nana, a female prostitute, in the eponymous novel published in 1975. This tendency in male novelists' characterisation of women has been vehemently criticised by feminist critics such as Grace Eche Okereke who, in her “African Gender Myths of Vocality and Gender Dialogue”, is satirical about Ekwensi’s “ghettoization” of the female character. She argues:

Cyprian Ekwensi in his Jagua Nana series relegates the woman to the sexual ghetto of prostitution where her looks, speech and desires, revolve around men’s sexual organs and pockets. Jagua - a visual symbol of feline and technological sexuality that appeals to the male conquistadorial sensuality - is the name that man gives woman. And so, it is understandable that in the Ekwensian world, the woman will starve the day she ceases to be man’s plaything, sexual object and punch-ball. (Okereke 1998: 147)

However, Mda’s representation of the prostitute figure echoes Ekwensi’s, as both novelists are critical about *both* female and male urban characters’

sexuality detached from social mores. Mda's position (as reflected in his representation) is closer to rural women's perception of their city counterparts in seeing them as women who fail to commiserate with the rural women's predicament by accepting the latter's irresponsible husbands as their own.

Matlakala is not the only example of a rural woman to have been abandoned by her husband who vanished into the city. The majority of women in Ha Samane are lonely because their husbands migrated to the city in order to survive and eventually built new unions with city women. Thus, the forlorn village women are obliged to bring up their dependants single-handedly because of their male partners' marital and parental irresponsibility. Some of these women, who have realised that it is useless to count on their men to make their lives liveable, have initiated self-help projects. The condition of these women is described in the narrative, which depicts the majority of women working for these community projects as lonely:

Women who held families together and single-handedly brought up children to manhood or womanhood. They were known as the gold-widows, for their husbands spent all their lives working in the mines, coming home for a few days only once or twice a year. Some were real widows whose husbands had died like rats in the deep dark holes of the land of gold. Others were women whose husbands had been conquered by the world, and had established new families in the slums of Johannesburg or even Maseru.
(Mda 1995: 108)

The different reasons for rural women's loneliness evoked in the text account for the antagonism between rural and urban women. The antagonism is exemplified when former city dwellers tell of their sexual escapades in the city in their younger years. The elderly mother of *Father-of-the-Daughters* relishes telling her stories about the time when she was a prostitute in Johannesburg, long before *Father-of-the-Daughters* was born. This is an attitude displayed not only by a city woman who wants to impress rural people about her life in the city, but also by an ageing person who wants to revive with praise the image of her own gorgeous looks in her youthful years. In similar vein, the father of

Mother-of-Twins, in other words Nkgono's husband, feels emasculated in his old age. In addition, he wants to repress the humiliation of being taken care of by his wife, therefore he proudly recounts the sexual life he led in his youth to his visitors. The narrator describes the scene:

He felt humiliated having to depend on a woman. He thought he could assert his manhood by boasting to all who came to see him about his exploits as a lover who had had a string of women breathlessly running after him in his youthful days. (Mda 1995: 40)

Callously, Nkgono's husband is completely indifferent about hurting his wife through his revelations, and tells his stories in her presence. Through the male character's attitude Mda seeks to illustrate patriarchal attitudes concerning power relations across genders. Nkgono is depicted as a powerful woman, while her husband epitomises the weak man who feels disempowered and uncomfortable because of his dependence on her. His references to his sexual activities in his younger years exemplify men's tendency to emotional instability when women with whom they are linked are in a more powerful position than they themselves are.

Through the description of female characters Mda shows how patriarchy is still dominant in the village as well as in the city. He is also critical about the erosion of ethical values among city women, whose sexual behaviour perpetuates the society's archetypal image of women's commodified bodies. However, Mda sympathises particularly with female characters of the rural area as he praises them for their efforts to handle their domestic tribulations single-handedly and for their significant contribution to the development of their communities.

3. Mandla Langa

a. *Tenderness of Blood* (1987)

The last text to be explored in this section analysing portrayals of women in the domestic sphere is Mandla Langa's *Tenderness of Blood* (1987). This text is a significant contribution to this dissertation because it exemplifies the transformation of male authors' ways of conceiving of female characters, specifically in the way the author assigns positive attributes to black women for their resistance against patriarchy and racism.

Langa's novel transcends the framework of the time when the text was first published as it projects itself into a free world where the hero finds himself after being released from prison. Despite the fact that the novel was published seven years before the official abolition of apartheid, Langa's text can be registered as having played a role in the transitional course of South African history because, like many texts of the transition, it is characterised by its orientation towards healing the wounds of the past.

The narrative is woven around a political prisoner, Mkhonto, a photographer. He has just been released from custody to be reintegrated into his society. His friend Max goes to pick him up at his release and tries to hearten him by encouraging him to enjoy his current position as a free man.

However, Mkhonto cannot easily erase or forget the difficult events he has had to endure in the course of his life, as many memories still haunt his mind. The narrator takes us into a sequence of flashbacks highlighting the retrospective process the character has embarked on in order to flick through the harsh moments he went through in his existence both in the private and public spheres. The evolution of the story follows the psychological healing of the character as the retrospective process, based on a re-assessment of self,

underscores the protagonist's need to cleanse the haunting nightmares from his mind. Mkhonto's pilgrimage into his past takes him back to his childhood and continues until the most recent past in his adulthood when he is released from prison. The imprisonment of his elder brother, John, and the departure of his (Mkhonto's) girlfriend, Nomakwenzi, to join the liberation movement outside the country, urge him to get involved in the struggle against racial segregation.

The novel evokes the recruitment of both men and women to fight against the racist political dispensation of the time. Mkhonto starts supporting the students' movement; denouncing the education system of the apartheid regime. But the climax of the story is reached when Mkhonto's wife, Ntombi, is the victim of a rape plot planned by her white boss and his friends at his house. After rescuing Ntombi from the white rapists' claws, Mkhonto (whose name means "spear" and who is hence associated both with the pre-colonial image of the 'supremely masculine' Zulu warrior and with the name of the armed wing of the liberation movement) feels absolutely emasculated by the humiliating scene to which he has just been exposed. Then he decides to cross the border to join the movement in Botswana. It is from there that he is informed that Ntombi has given birth to their daughter. Mkhonto's brother John (now called Khulu by his comrades) persuades him to reconcile with his wife who, according to John, needs Mkhonto's support after enduring the psychological trauma caused by rape. However, his decision to go home to see his family is cut short by the police at the Zeerust border post because of his political affiliation. Eventually, the police change his destination by sending Mkhonto to Robben Island.

My analysis of this text will focus on the victimised figures of women in order to exemplify Langa's representation of various forms of oppression women suffer in their private lives. However, the image of victimhood will be contrasted by the picture of powerful women who, by means of dialogue with male characters and by their attitudes and actions, show their resistance against sexist and racist laws and rules which deprive them of appropriate (or their *deserved*) status within the family structure. The social environment used as

the main setting in the plot is the urban milieu, which is my interest in investigating the private realm of female characters in this section of the dissertation. In fact, the most germane instances illustrating the lives of female characters in the text depict city dwellers, as emphasised by the narrator's recurrent reference to the city of Durban.

Langa's text captures the social and political environment of his country during the final years of apartheid. But the novel has a lofty aesthetic aim in terms of adapting to post-colonial and postmodernist discourse. The distinctiveness of Langa's narrative can be seen in the way the author successfully delves into the domestic structures of black families in order to expose the position of a black woman in a society where she is entangled by what Buchi Emecheta calls a "double yoke" (to employ the title of her novel published in 1989).

Langa identifies two forms of oppression meted out to black women. Black women share with their male counterparts the first type of oppression, dictated by an institutionalised, segregationist system denying them their fundamental human rights because of their skin colour. The second form of domination black women endure is the form of patriarchal tyranny under which they live in black communities. The writer has the merit of engaging with both forms of human exploitation to show the correlation between racism and sexism. The link between these two forms of oppression is well demonstrated in the text, as women's private lives are profoundly affected by the constraints of the established social structure. Mkhonto's (at the time) girlfriend, Nomakwezi, who also attends the same university as Mkhonto does, energetically condemns women's double oppression by using a womanist/feminist (or humanist) discourse:

I'm aware of the fact I'm black and I'm a woman. Perhaps not necessarily in that order ... And I don't need anyone to tell me that being black and female poses so many conundrums for one that you might as well have been deaf, dumb and blind. Anyway, that is how we are treated by both our men (black men) and the whole stinking system of this sick country. It's

like you suffer from a terrible disease. (Langa 1987: 64-65)

A society ruled by patriarchal and racially discriminatory laws can legitimate serious abuses of women's rights. Langa shows how political laws can impact upon women's private lives. He distinguishes between physical and moral violence that women can endure in this kind of society. Moreover, Langa describes how political violence can stimulate domestic violence, illustrating that the first form of oppression tends to lead to the second one. In similar vein, in *This is No Place for A Woman: Nadine Gordimer, Nayantara Sahgal, Buchi Emecheta & the Politics of Gender* (2000) Joya Uraizee examines the woman's place in a post-colonial environment by studying the sexual and physical relationships of women with men and politics. She comes to the conclusion that colonialism and imperialism have rekindled many traditional forms of patriarchy in post-colonial countries. Uraizee acknowledges Katrak's view, which denounces the way "capitalism/colonialism and patriarchy have joined hands to control women" (Katrak quoted in Uraizee 2000: 97).

The political environment can, indeed, affect people's actions in their private lives. In the accounts given to Mkhonto by Majombozi, the Second World War veteran who left South Africa to fight the "white man's war" in Italy, the latter tells the young student (Mkhonto) about Maria, his Italian girlfriend with whom he cheated on his wife, Nomvula, during the war. His heroic story finishes on a sad note when he recounts how they were kept in captivity by the Nazis who ruthlessly emasculated all black prisoners, including himself. However, they were eventually liberated thanks to the American Army and then Majombozi and his colleagues returned home. The old man tells how dismay haunted him because of his sexual disability; he then made an offer to Nomvula, the mother of their two children, that she might marry another man. Majombozi's selfless co-operation with his wife made her decide to stay with him, affirming that in their union "there are other things more important than making love" (Langa 1987: 112-113). Majombozi shows great gratitude towards his wife for taking care of the children while he

was at war. His tolerance is exceptional, as he does not mind when he discovers that Nomvula has taken a lover - perhaps in acknowledgement of himself having had a love affair (with Maria) while out of the country. Unlike Majombozi, another soldier who suffered the same fate acted in a vindictive way by “shoot[ing] his wife and then turn[ing] the weapon on himself” (Langa 1987: 113). Majombozi considers his friend’s deed sheer selfishness and cowardice and condemns the use of violence in the domestic milieu in order to appease someone’s suffering related to political oppression. Majombozi stigmatises the cycle of violence in black communities and acknowledges that “our [black] people got very good at turning the violence the white man had taught them against themselves and their loved ones” (Langa 1987: 113).

Majombozi’s friend epitomises the selfish and sadistic aspects of sexism. Despite having dated other women in Italy during the war, Majombozi’s friend shows irrational jealousy towards his wife, whom he represents in his mind as his property, so that he cannot imagine himself sharing her affections or body with someone else. These patriarchal views exemplified by the reaction of Majombozi’s colleague make this wise man pose vital questions with regard to the marital bond:

What is love, honour, fidelity? What is this thing? What is the meaning of all these words we utter in the snarling silence of the midnight hour, in the arms of a loved one? Men, betrayed by their flesh, attribute this treachery to the people closest to them and nights become the hours of wailing. These men, divested of all the crutches of respectability in our society, what becomes of them? What happens to them when they turn their eyes inward and look deep into themselves in the screaming hour of loneliness? (Langa 1987: 113)

Like a philosopher, Majombozi raises moot points by interrogating his society’s principles which seem, according to him, to define love, honour and fidelity in such terms as continue protecting men’s privileges and ‘right’ to abuse women. In other words, the above-mentioned questions highlight how determination of the validity of social values can be skewed to achieve

conventional definitions in a language or discourse created and manipulated in order to serve one's own interests. Langa wants to teach us that society should not be lenient towards one gender in defining certain attitudes and actions when the other gender is treated with strictness; he recognises the appalling consequences of gender injustice. Thus, social norms, for instance, seem to admit men's infidelity while the definition of fidelity is applied very strictly with regard to women. True love and care for maintaining honour and fidelity in a matrimonial union should not be the responsibility of women only. This theme has recently been taken up by another male South African novelist, Njabulo Ndebele in his *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003) in his depiction of a number of married women who had to live for long periods without their husbands.

Langa explores a wide range of domestic issues in order to explain women's subjugation. The author is also concerned with widowhood, because patriarchal laws are often extremely harsh towards widows. In traditional societies, a widow is frequently labelled a witch by the husband's family because she is accused of having caused the death of her husband in one way or another, or of having willed his death – indicating an imbalanced attribution of the value of male as against female lives and wellbeing.

Langa exposes the predicament of widows in the urban areas. Ntombi's Aunt Martha is depicted in a way that illustrates the role of the widow in society. Despite Aunt Martha's current status of financially independent woman - thanks to diligence and her strong character – Ntombi analyses the more customary conditions of a black widow's life as she lists the harsh moments her aunt went through after the death of her husband:

She's gone through an experience which could have put a lot of us in a madhouse. Losing a husband in a traffic accident, getting gypped out of her money by insurance companies, getting evicted out of her house by the administration board, and with two children. (Langa 1987: 82)

The overriding image of victimised women in the narrative ranges from physical to psychological oppression. Aunt Martha epitomises the

psychologically abused woman who is on the verge of losing her mind because of oppressive social laws.

The narrative lists numerous cases of physical abuse of women's bodies through the description of female characters in their domestic lives. As in much South African writing, the politics of rape appears again in Langa's text. References to sexual violence meted out to women seem to have become the leitmotiv of writing the conditions of women in this society. Maisie, Mkhonto's home girl, exemplifies the immaculate woman whose dreams have been shattered by male cruelty. In fact, Maisie is a lovely and virtuous girl who has vowed to devote her life to Christ by becoming a nun. However, she cannot fulfil her dream because Father Daniels, the priest of her church, has raped her. The traumatising ordeal she went through has left deep wounds in her psyche; therefore she is driven to lead her life as a prostitute. The narrator describes her courage through her revelations to Mkhonto:

Mkhonto came across her near the *Scala* cinema in Durban. She informed him with a straight face that she was a client catcher, a prostitute, plying her trade on the Marine Parade and The Point, giving comfort to sailors who roamed the streets of the city. (Langa 1987: 74)

Maisie is unashamed in telling Mkhonto about her job - judged by social ethics to be a disgraceful activity. The narrator, through Maisie's courage, wants to raise a paradox in order to express contempt towards those who teach notions of virtue or ethics in society and fail to be the best examples for other people. Maisie's story should change people's perception of women's prostitution because male oppression can turn the most virtuous of women into the supposedly most deprived of beings.

Rape committed upon a woman appears more sadistic and dehumanising when the rapist's urges rest on both sexist and racist grounds and not on sexist beliefs only. Although violating any woman's body implies abusing her physically, when the crime is committed across colour boundaries it often connotes a double abuse, conflating sexism with racism. Mkhonto's wife Ntombi is raped by Welman, her white boss, in company with his friends at a

party he organises at his place. The crime committed against Ntombi appears to be more racist rather than sexist, as she is the only woman to be raped while other (white) women at the party do not suffer the same predicament. When Mkhonto arrives to fetch his wife, he is steered towards Welman's flat by the "laughter of a [white] woman which sound[s] harsh" (Langa 1987: 357). Meanwhile, Ntombi has fainted with pain and her body is smeared with the rapists' semen and blood gushing out of her genitals. This contrasting description of two women attending the party shows a delighted white woman on the one hand and a suffering black woman, on the other.

The politics of racial segregation in South Africa has contributed significantly to discrimination against women within the divided ethnic groups. The introduction of the Immorality Act, a law forbidding sexual relationships across races, contributed immensely to the subjugation of women in the sense that each ethnic group claims the ownership of their women. Breaking the Immorality Act, for a woman, is seen by her "own people" as bringing shame into the family or the community. This attitude is reinforced by male phallogocentric ideology as the "crime" (of a voluntary sexual relationship across the "colour line"), when committed by women, puts men in a position where they feel robbed of their power by men of a different race. In other words, they feel betrayed by their women and believe that their "masculine pride" has been affected. However, men committing the same "crime" seem to feel empowered by their crossing of racial barriers. In her "Historical Introduction" to Zoë Wicomb's novel *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, Marcia Wright condemns this oppressive law and shows how the apartheid regime succeeded in controlling every single detail of South Africans' everyday existence – especially that of people of colour. In this regard, Wright makes the following comment: "Clearly the ideologists [of the Immorality Act] aspired to control the most intimate relationship, leaving no sanctuary in private life. Anyone associated beyond the prescribed racial boundaries became criminalized" (quoted in Zoë Wicomb 2000: xii).

Although miscegenation was illegal during the apartheid era and

considered a crime deserving imprisonment, the woman tended also to be ostracized by her close friends. Ntombi exemplifies such a black woman as she is oppressed by her community because she has a relationship with Steve, a white South African man she met in America when she was studying there. She explains how her community stares at her with disbelief and contempt for daring to cross the colour line:

I have not been treated with extreme kindness when it comes to my relationship with Steve ... I'm sure people seem to think we're involved in one long gig where we're doing things just to shock them, to be unconventional. They don't seem to think that people of different colours... can have a meaningful relationship. It's way beyond the realm of their possibilities. (Langa 1987: 178)

Ntombi's report about people's behaviour towards her with regard to her intimate relationship with a man of a different skin colour from her own highlights the variety of oppressive conditions under which women live in a racist society. The general mindset of black men refusing to admit a relationship between black women and white men is unveiled by Mkhonto as he accounts for black men's anger and suspicion:

You're asking too much of people... We all know that the Immorality Act is wrong, but we're not ready to deal with situations where black and white sleep together. Our prejudices become more entrenched when we notice, as is the usual case, that it's black women who are involved in these relationships. I don't see a lot of white women breaking down doors to make the integration headlines. So we see this as the exploitation of our women. Naturally we have to look at this with anger and suspicion. (Langa 1987: 178)

Noticeably in the above passage is the use of a possessive ("ours"), homogenising ("women"), hegemonising ("naturally"; "have to") and masculinist ("we") discourse. This extract exemplifies the way the masculine voice intends to silence women by attempting to subjugate and possess the woman's mind and body.

Langa's portrayal of female characters in *Tenderness of Blood* reveals the

conditions under which women live within oppressive social structures. The image of victimised women seems to dominate the representation of black women's private lives. However, close perusal of the text informs the reader concerning a different perspective the author might have deliberately chosen to include.

Langa attempts, indeed, to redress a prevalent male tendency when depicting women in writing by representing his female characters as active persons who do not passively accept their fate. He gives voice to his women characters as they articulate their complaints about masculine domination. Langa employs dialogue between female and male characters in order to provide a vehicle for women's protest against patriarchy. Many powerful images of women emerge in this text as they voice their views about women's rights.

In her "African Gender Myths of Vocality and Gender Dialogue", Grace Eche Okereke analyses what she considers the transformations in African literature by emphasising the alteration from the representation of women as silenced and subdued to the depiction of audible women. Okereke asserts that the value of dialogue between members of different genders will foreground an environment where views can be exchanged through speech, writing or action. This Nigerian critic (Okereke) uses the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism to highlight various ways of exchanging views. She maintains that language or articulated communication is not the only way to establish dialogue between people of different genders. By referring to Bakhtin, Okereke concludes that "dialogue, in the Bakhtinian theoretical framework, transcends speech to include other signifying systems, such as acts and ideas" (Okereke 1998: 134).

The redefinition of gender relations is successfully depicted in narrative. Through women's gestures, actions, ideas and speech, the narrator shows the determination of women to break down patriarchy. Gender dialogue discloses significant results, as in the novel *I Speak to the Silent* Mtutuzeli Nyoka's

male protagonist reminds us: “a man who does not listen to his wife cannot have a family” (Nyoka 2004: 108). In fact, listening is very important in a conversation because the more one listens to someone else the more s/he can grasp and assess the other person’s insights and personality. Langa uses his female characters to sensitise their male counterparts. The interventions of women in the text sometimes appear in terms of complaints directed against male characters with a view to correcting their attitudes towards women. Women can also adopt revolutionary demeanour to express their agency in opposition or resistance to masculine behaviour.

Ntombi epitomises the powerful woman who does not passively accept her husband’s misconduct and *voices* her complaints. The narrator enters the couple’s realm to study a set of problems affecting the relationship between man and woman. Ntombi does not falter in showing her husband Mkhonto her disapproval of and exasperation with his permanent drunkenness and irrational jealousy. The relationship between Ntombi and Mkhonto deteriorates when the wife becomes the breadwinner while the husband is jobless. This situation destabilises the couple as Mkhonto sees his manhood threatened and plunges into a cycle of nightly drinking. He comes home drunk and brutally demands sex from his wife. Ntombi cannot condone her husband’s misconduct for not respecting her and courageously tells him:

Mkhonto, I’m not a refrigerator. I have my own feelings as a woman. But for me it becomes very difficult to sweep things under the sexual carpet and just hump away. I have to deal with a whole range of things. And please don’t tell me about what a normal woman wants because few women would stand for a full-grown man wetting the bed in drunkenness. You must realise that things haven’t been going too well between us and I cannot make love when there’s still something unresolved in a relationship.
(Langa 1987: 333)

Ntombi exemplifies the image of a woman who refuses to be treated as a sexual object by her husband, who shapes his image of female attributes with reference to his sexist conception of “mainstream” women to try and persuade her to submit to his will. She is adamant in refusing to resign herself

to her husband's incessant demands, because she wants him to "learn [how] to respond to a woman's words cerebrally and not carnally" (Langa 1987: 60). Therefore, she refrains from having sex with Mkhonto, who assumes that she is having an affair with another man. The relationship between husband and wife becomes distant due to Mkhonto's jealousy. Ntombi advises her husband to overcome his jealousy because "no relationship can survive if the foundation is suspicion and nightly recriminations" (Langa 1987: 328). Langa deals with the problem of jealousy, which is one of the causes of serious arguments within couples that often lead to divorce. He condemns negative emotions resulting from passionate jealousy – an attitude which cannot consolidate but will undermine any relationship between a man and a woman.

The narrator deliberately chooses direct speech to narrate the story by allowing female characters to speak for themselves. This authorial tendency, of representing dialogue to carry narration, gives a clear indication that female characters are actors rather than spectators. Langa empowers his female characters by endowing them with voice, which they use to assert their power in their families or communities.

Among a wide range of domestic issues explored in the novel, the problem of family planning seems to be a preoccupation for the author. Langa presents the problematic of birth control in black families as an important factor that can alleviate poverty. The narrative indicates how important contraceptive measures have become for black women who are struggling for the right to limit the number of children they give birth to for both health and economic reasons. The author portrays Mkhonto as the prototype of some oppressive men who desire to have many children merely as the mark of their masculinity - even though they lack a comfortable financial position. The relationship between Mkhonto and his wife becomes more and more distant when they have an argument about conceiving their first child. Despite being unemployed, the husband reckons it is high time he had a baby, seeming to forget that his wife, the only breadwinning spouse, is not ready to carry the baby because of her harsh working conditions. However, Ntombi makes no

attempt to conceal her disagreement with Mkhonto about the idea of having a child at this moment. She points out in no unmistakable terms:

In all fairness ... I did say to you that I have no fight with having your child ... What I pointed out was, at this stage things could become very difficult at my workplace. I'm basically a field worker, having to traverse the length and breadth of the townships, interviewing people for this research. If I'm pregnant now, it means after four or five months I'd have to slow down. Quit my job. (Langa 1987: 335)

Through Ntombi's lucid protest and objections, the author shows how the demands of the domestic realm can impact negatively upon women's public lives – as often as not, through the men with whom they have intimate relationships.

This section of the thesis has examined the three authors' depictions of women's private lives by pinpointing in particular the difference in representation of village and of city women. Rural women are more likely to be subjected to patriarchal oppression while city women tend to achieve self-assertion due to the adoption of modern values in the urban environment. However, city women are not idealised as some of them are depicted as callous characters devoid of fundamental human values. The three authors seem to delineate positive as well as negative female characters in both rural and urban settings by showing that both categories of women need to learn from each other in order to achieve the existence of a strong womanhood endowed with both traditional and modern good values. This in turn is depicted as a prerequisite for the redefinition of domestic roles across genders.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

In the course of the foregoing analysis of fictional representations of women in selected novels of the South African transitional period a wide range of issues in relation to women's lives both in the present and past dispensations has been discussed. In fact, some of the texts under scrutiny present narratives exposing women's conditions during the apartheid era while others tend to focus on the contemporary realities affecting women's lives in the post-liberation context. Although fictional representation does not always reflect reality because of each author's subjectivity and imaginative choices, the depiction of female characters in the works of the three chosen South African novelists displays the features of a society in transition.

In fact, despite the collapse of apartheid the past still influences post-apartheid literary representations of women as well as people's behaviour and actions in the changing social environment. The reference to the past in contemporary narratives and the impact of history on lifestyles and social practices in the post-liberation society justify the presence of the past in the new writing emanating from South Africa. However, one can identify in my primary texts (of the transition) the authors' endeavour to adapt their narratives to the current socio-political changes in the so-called Rainbow Nation by projecting new images of women in the transforming society.

Before undertaking this research work I was expecting to find in these particular works of the transition depictions of women in the traditional roles in which they are shown in a majority of African literary texts. In fact, the dominant features of the portrayal of women in African novels have often been idealisations of women in their traditionally domestic roles such as motherhood or wifehood and the display of women's political or public passivity as they are often represented as resigned victims of social oppression. Similarly, in many African male writers' narratives female

protagonists seem to occupy secondary or subservient roles and the delineation of their active participation in social dynamics shows their total dependence on men's direction of their lives. Depicting women from this perspective denies female characters autonomous leadership roles in their involvement in social and political action. Persistent depictions of female characters in passive roles can exacerbate or contribute to the denial or blocking of female agency. Maria Pia Lara therefore suggests the importance of emancipatory narratives in the struggle for public recognition. The Mexican theorist argues that:

Women's narratives show how this [public recognition] can be done. They have reordered understandings of what the public sphere is, by casting doubt on previous views of the reasons for cultural, social and political marginalization. These feminist 'illocutionary forces' have fought imaginatively, building a bridge between the moral and the aesthetic validity spheres across the rigidly traditional gendered division between private and public. This bridging-building provides a critical example of how questions related to self-determination and questions related to self-realisation have been redefined as specific historical linkages between autonomy and authenticity. (Pia Lara: 1998: 3)

Pia Lara shows the power of narratives to conceive new understandings of the public sphere by allowing many possibilities of social transformation. This theorist seems to suggest that by promoting cultural change emancipatory narratives tend to redraw the frontiers between the private and the public in order establish public recognition of individual rights.

However, in the course of my research I have discovered a novel perspective in the characterisation of women in the African novels selected as the main focus of this study. In the texts by Nadine Gordimer, Mandla Langa and Zakes Mda discussed in the dissertation, these authors diverge from the overriding tendency of depicting women either in the idealised image of motherhood or the archetypical role of the victimised female figure in order to display women's actions and the ways in which they are challenging prevalent assumptions about gender in this transitional phase of South African society. Women are increasingly being depicted as active agents of social

transformation. Through resistance, the novelists show, women have shifted from the status of victims to become responsible for their own lives. Therefore, some women are now shown to play leadership roles in social and economic activities and depicted acting independently of male characters' assistance.

Although the three writers still tend to portray their female characters' physical beauty, they have broken away from the general tendency in too many novels from the continent of eroticising female protagonists' bodies. Nor do they hesitate to criticise patriarchal structures which continue to violate or exploit women's bodies. Thus, the issue of domestic violence is recurrent in most of the primary texts. This testifies to the authors' acknowledgement of the ongoing presence of abuses perpetrated against women in post-apartheid society. The common feature in the three writers' depiction of women is the resilience with which they endow their female protagonists' characters in order to portray their resistance to oppressive structures convincingly.

Gordimer, Langa and Mda also insist on the description of women's leadership qualities which allow them to achieve social recognition. Through the intelligence, diligence and commitment to the confrontation of social injustices with which they equip female characters in these selected works of the transition, the authors epitomise women's new social prerogatives and opportunities.

It has been worthwhile studying this topic because of the opportunity I have had to examine literary representations of women in order to evaluate the effects of social and cultural transformation in post-apartheid South Africa by analysing these portrayals of women's circumstances both in the private and public spheres. In my opinion the thesis contributes to a greater recognition of women's crucial, catalytic functions in the achievement of social development as well as a better understanding of their militant involvement in the struggle against all forms of discrimination in society. In other words, this research project has been a fascinating undertaking in providing the opportunity to

investigate the different attributes assigned to women in these particular novels of the transition on the assumption that these texts reflect something of the way women are perceived and are playing new roles in the changing society.

The analysis of textual representations of women in the works of the three post-apartheid novelists focuses on the portrayal of female characters in the domestic and public fields and in addition examines differences in the portrayals of rural and urban women respectively. The dissertation also evaluates descriptions of women's degree of commitment to political activism, since women's political actions have a great impact on the current socio-cultural transformations taking place in the post-apartheid environment. Pia Lara cites Hannah Arendt's observation that "Only the actors and speakers who re-enact the story's plot can convey the full meaning not so much of the story itself, but of the "heroes" who reveal themselves in it" (Pia Lara 1998: 93a). One might add in "and readers who re-imagine" after "re-enact" in the above quotation to link with the larger purpose of a dissertation like the present thesis. Pia Lara herself adds: "the storytellers are women themselves becoming the subjects configuring a new conception of 'moral agents' (Pia Lara 1998: 93b). She makes a further telling point in saying:

Narratives draw on the materials of everyday life, but, as the stories unfold in the public sphere, they return to and reconfigure life itself. In this way, complex webs of narratives emplot action, experience and speech, and stimulate further levels of those same categories in the subsequent readings and self-understandings of the subjects. (Pia Lara 1998: 93c)

The study of Zakes Mda's texts has identified the author's commitment to delineating of women's domestic conditions in both rural and urban settings. Mda's narratives reveal that rural women's private lives are generally more crucially affected by patriarchal laws than those of urban women. The description of Niki's predicament in *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), for instance, differs from the depiction of Tampololo's personal life in *She Plays with the Darkness* (1994). Niki, the rural woman, seems to be deprived of choices and suffers harsh patriarchal oppression. Unlike Niki, Tampololo's

private life in the city reveals that she is freed from patriarchal oppression. However, Tampololo's behaviour and actions highlight differences in women's treatment whether in rural or urban environments. Judging by Mda's delineation of the lives of women in the private realm, the rural setting remains the most conservative environment with regard to patriarchal practices such as sexual violence and the perception of women as second class citizens.

Nadine Gordimer's depiction of women's domestic experience parallels Mda's perspective, as both novelists' narratives reveal that the rural environment is still very strongly dominated by patriarchal traditions while in the urban milieu women's emancipation has proceeded much further. In *The Pick Up* (2001), Julie the heroine is depicted as an emancipated woman who commiserates with rural women's cause by teaching them "her rich girl's Café ideas of female independence" (Gordimer 2001: 256). Yet the success of her venture indicates that female independence achieved through the recognition of female interdependence may be feasible also in a poor and rural environment. The analysis of Gordimer's post-apartheid texts shows the writer's interest in exploring issues affecting the domestic lives of women of the newly democratised society.

Gordimer underlines the importance of changing traditional conceptions within the family unit in order to understand the complexities of modernity. Through the delineation of women's private lives the author exposes the immediate consequences of the adoption of democratic values in her society. In *None to Accompany Me* (1994) Gordimer evokes the revolution of sexual mores as well as the alteration of people's kinship patterns in a society with a long history of racial, class and gender discrimination.

In *The House Gun* (1998) Gordimer uses her account of a crime of passion to evoke the maternal emotions of a woman whose son is the murderer of his (former) homosexual partner and sexual rival. In this narrative Gordimer explores the themes both of sexual violence and homosexuality. Through the psychological analysis of Duncan's mother, Claudia Lingard, the author seeks

to draw the attention of the whole nation to the significance and consequences of deconstructing traditional principles in order to come to terms with new social realities.

Mandla Langa also shows interest in the depiction of women's domestic lives. His writing pinpoints his criticism against the double oppression of black women in the domestic field. The author establishes a link between patriarchy and apartheid since the two oppressive institutions work together to deprive black women of recognition of their human worth. For instance, in Langa's *Tenderness of Blood* (1987) the reference to Ntombi's sexual abuse by her white employer and her husband Mkhonto's subsequent lack of compassion for her predicament justify the above allusion to the conspiracy between sexism and imperialism. Although Langa explores women's domestic conditions, his narratives focus more distinctly on their participation in the public life as well as their political activism.

The critical analysis of individual texts by Mda, Gordimer and Langa identifies the authors' various depictions of women as active moulders of social development. Mda's female characters play pivotal roles in private entrepreneurship or communal cooperatives to achieve economic and social fulfilment. In *She Plays with the Darkness* (1994) the example of the public roles played by Mother-of-Twins and Mother-of-the-Daughters in their involvement of their communal cooperative in the construction of roads indicates the active role women can play in the achievement of social progress. In *The Heart of Redness*, Mda also represents rural women whose domestic and public status changes because of their economic independence achieved through their participation in women's cooperatives. Mda seems to argue that the liberation of women in both the private and the public arena depends on women's financial empowerment.

Unlike Mda's female characters, Gordimer's women achieve public recognition through their educational qualifications and their dynamic participation in public social activities. Although the centre of attention in Gordimer's post-apartheid texts is the introspection of characters' individual

lives, one can identify the author's determination to depict her female protagonists successfully occupying professions such as those of medical doctor, lawyer and politician. Gordimer's descriptions of Vera, the lawyer and Sibongile, the powerful politician in *None to Accompany Me* accord with her evocation of Claudia, the medical practitioner in *The House Gun*. Gordimer seeks to highlight the significance of education in the liberation of women in the public sphere. Moreover, Sibongile's public position indicates Gordimer's recognition of possibilities available to educated black women in the new dispensation.

As for Mandla Langa's texts, he indicates that women's self-affirmation in the public arena depends on their involvement in the decision-making of their communities as well as on their political activism. Langa empowers his female characters by allowing them leadership roles in society. For instance, in *The Memory of Stones* (2000) Zodwa becomes the chief of Ngoza Village after her father Baba Joshua's decease. The description of Zodwa as the appropriate replacement for her father because of her intellectualism and capacity for good leadership highlights Langa's optimistic consideration of the possibilities of women's leadership as an alternative solution to social problems following so many African men's failure to take their people towards sustainable development and peace.

Langa's delineation of women's public activities is more vivid in his description of women's commitment to the political struggle than in other professional roles. In both *Tenderness of Blood* (1987) and *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (1989) the author's representation of female characters' political activism emphasises women's contribution to political resistance against the apartheid regime. In *The Memory of Stones* (2000) Langa's interest in evoking women's political activism shifts from his persistent delineation of women's resistance against racial and gender discrimination in his previous novels to pinpoint women's new political agenda based on the struggle for the transformation of existing socio-economic structures in the post-liberation environment.

Women's political activism is described in a different way in Zakes Mda's novels. In *Ways of Dying* (1994) the author shows that women are very productive and dynamic when they participate in politics. However, Mda deplores the fact that their work is still so often not well rewarded, since men still occupy central positions – although men's leadership can be problematic. The writer suggests that women's empowerment in the political sphere would benefit South Africa because they have proven their efficiency through their social activities.

Although politics is not a dominant theme in his texts Mda seems to adopt a metaphorical language to give recognition to women's political achievement in the newly democratised South Africa. In *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002) the author depicts two powerful female political figures playing pivotal roles in political decision making such as the promulgation of new laws and in devising projects for social development. Popi Pule and Lizette de Vries are depicted as active politicians who are committed to serving their people by initiating the promotion of social development and reconciliation. However, the novelist refuses to represent an idealised picture of women given adequate recognition because of their present political achievements. He also exposes a category of women who have ascended to important political positions without performing their task effectively. He depicts lazy and corrupt women who, like a number of their male counterparts, represent real impediments to social and economic development.

The study of the depiction of women's political activities is concluded with the analysis of Nadine Gordimer's post-apartheid narratives. Although Gordimer's writing has shifted from descriptions of the political struggle against apartheid, her narratives still inform the reader about socio-political transformation process taking place in South Africa. In *None To Accompany Me* (1998) the author represents Vera, a white lawyer who has played a prominent political role by committing her life to the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. Gordimer seems to suggest that with the collapse of apartheid women's political actions have adapted to the demands of post-

apartheid modernity. Hence, evocations of women's participation in resistance against racial oppression are succeeded by the author's representations of women's new political roles in South African society. Gordimer chooses to depict Sibongile as a clear illustration of black women's affirmation in the new South African political arena.

In *The Pick Up* (2002) Gordimer depicts a category of women without political prerogatives. However, they are not apolitical figures because, as members of civil society, they express their political views regarding state politics and actions. Through articulating her heroine Julie's political opinions the writer seems to convey her own judgement on the post-apartheid government's policies concerning issues of immigration and HIV and AIDS in South Africa. Gordimer also gives political voice to her character in order to challenge imperialist discourse with its clichés concerning other people's cultures.

The dissertation has expanded existing analyses of the works of the three chosen South African novelists who oriented their narratives in comparable directions in order to highlight the place of women in the new South African society as well as exploring novel ways of representing female characters in fiction of the transition. Thus, I can argue that writing objectively about people from different cultures and gender does not imply stressing either the exclusively unappealing or only the positive aspects of the conduct of the represented people. Both white and black writers, regardless of gender, make constructive criticism across cultural differences with a view to building a new national identity. In the post-apartheid texts under scrutiny I attempt to explore the relationships between black and white women in order to ascertain what it means to be an African woman in a transcultural or nation-building society. I can argue that socio-political transformations occurring in South Africa indicate that ethnicity can no longer be an obstacle to South African women's claim to public roles or recognition in the new society. Thus, the thesis accords with Trinh T. Minh-ha's view about the fact that ethnic or racial differences cannot restrict the construction of a transcultural identity. In

Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism (1989), Minh-ha argues that “Difference does not annul identity. It is beyond and alongside identity” (Minh-ha 1989: 104). This quotation has been referred to in earlier sections of the dissertation in order to suggest that cultural transformation or the construction of a national identity in this formerly segregationist society needs to redefine all cultural and skin colour differences. Minh-ha’s theoretical work is highly relevant to the dissertation’s attempt to illustrate aspects of national identity formation beyond racial or cultural differences by highlighting the worth of cultural plurality as an invaluable asset.

This study of fictional representations of women has allowed me to discern the shift necessary of interest apparent in both men and women writers’ work towards giving critical attention to women’s issues in their contemporary texts, as proof of the critical need for redefining domestic and public roles of women in the transforming South African society. The thesis underlines the significance of literary representation of women in creating and transforming new images of women in society. The analysis of the primary texts makes use of Maria Pia Lara’s intriguing insights concerning the value of literature in changing the perception of women in both public and domestic spheres. Thus, the study of women’s socio-political activities in the particular novels of the transition discussed here accords with Pia Lara’s view of the power of art to claim public recognition for women through the portrayal of compelling images of women. Pia Lara insists:

Most of all, they [women] empowered themselves by performative effectiveness of their claim to recognition and, in doing so, they reversed the self-defeating images of women as ‘victims’. By presenting themselves as strong women they became validated. This was accomplished through the crucial interconnection between the creation of fictions and the moral demand that was implicit in them. By relating aesthetic and normative spheres, women [and male] writers expanded the boundaries of subjectivity and recovered ways of being perceived that in the male world were considered purely ‘feminine’. In representing life as an authentic struggle,

they were capable of making effective claims for recognition. (Pia Lara 1998: 77)

Pia Lara shows how narratives can play an important role in changing the perception of women in society. She writes (with reference to Hannah Arendt's vision) in a passage cited earlier that what "new stories" do is to "bring to life a variety of different meanings and experiences and thereby provide new possibilities for action", adding that "the appropriation of stories has been an empowering technique aimed at the recovery of 'women' and their intentional capacities" (Pia Lara 1998: 17). The "institutional frame of language", this theorist notes, needs to be appropriated for new narratives, thus "project[ing]" them "into a moral sphere" (Pia Lara 1998: 16). Lara's claim that emancipatory writing creates a field of conflict where the redefinition of meanings is contested and change can be achieved is a valuable insight validated by the present study. Thus, redefining women's social roles in fiction has a powerful function of promoting public recognition of new images of women – a current of change that has begun in South Africa in fiction and in fact, but which needs to be taken much further still.

Bibliography

Adams, Anne V. & Janis A. Mayes (eds). 1998. *Mapping Intersections: African Literature & Africa's Development*. Asmara: Africa World Press.

Adams, Anne. 1993. "Claiming her Authority from *Life*: Twenty Years of African Women's Literary Criticism". *African Literatures in the Eighties* (Matatu number 10). Eds. Riemenschneider, Dieter & Schulze-Engler, Frank. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 155-172.

Aegerter, Lindsay Pentolfe. 2000. "Southern Africa, Womanism, and Postcoloniality: A Dialectical Approach". *The Post-colonial Condition of African Literature*. No. 6. Eds. Gover, Daniel; Conteh-Morgan John; and Bryce, Jane. Asmara: Africa World Press, 67-73.

Alessandrini, Anthony C. 1999. *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Alexander, M. Jacqui & Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. 1997. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. New York: Routledge.

Andrade, Susan. 2002. "Gender and 'the public' in Africa: writing women and rioting women". *Agenda* 54: 45-59.

Appiah, K. Anthony. 1996. "Against National Culture". *English in Africa* 23, no. 2: 11-27.

Arndt, Susan & Spitzok Von Brisinski, Marek (eds). 2006. *Africa, Europe and (post)colonialism*. Bayreuth: Bayreuth African Studies 77.

Arndt, Susan. 2002. *The Dynamics of African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African Feminist Literatures*. Asmara: Africa World Press.

Ashcroft, B., G. Griffiths & H. Tiffin. 1998. *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies*. London & New York: Routledge.

Ashcroft, Bill. 2001. *Post-Colonial Transformation*. London: Routledge.

- Ashcroft, Bill; G. Griffiths & H. Tiffin. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back*. 2nd ed. London & New York: Routledge.
- Attridge, D. and Jolly, R. 1998. *Writing South Africa: literature, apartheid, & democracy, 1970-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Attwell, David. 2005. *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in black South African literary history*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press.
- Attwell, David. 1993. *J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. Berkeley and Cape Town: University of California and David Philips.
- Auga, Ulrike. 2003. "Intellectuals between Resistance and Legitimation: The cases of Nadine Gordimer and Christa Wolf". *Current Writing* 15 (1). Durban: University of Natal, 1-13.
- Austine, Gayle. 1992. *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*. 3rd ed. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press.
- Awkward, Michael. 2000. "A Black Man's Place in Black Feminism Criticism". *The Black Feminist Reader*. Ed. Joy. James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 87-108.
- Baderoon, Gabeba. "Young Voices". 2004. http://www.litnet.co.za/youngwriters/gabeba_baderoon.asp, 22-11-2004, p. 1.1.
- Balseiro, Isabel. 2000. *Running to us: a new writing from South Africa*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Bambara, Toni Cade. 1996. *Deep Sightings & Rescue Missions: Fiction, Essays, & conversation*. New York: Vintage.
- Barnett, Ursula. 1993. "South African Literature of the Eighties" *African Literatures in the Eighties*. (*Matatu* number 10). Eds. Riemenschneider, Dieter & Schulze-Engler, Frank. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 139-153.
- Bekker, Simon, M. Dodds & M. Khoza (eds). 2001. *Shifting African Identities*. Pretoria: HSRC.

Bell, David. 2003. "The Persistent Presence of the Past in Contemporary Writing in South Africa". *Current Writing* 15(1). Durban: University of Natal, 63-73.

Belsey, C. & Moore, J. 1997. *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. 1994. London & New York: Routledge.

Bhabha, Homi K. 1991. "Conference Presentation" *Critical Fictions: the politics of imaginative writing*. Ed. Philomena, Mariani. Seattle: Bay Press, 62-65.

Bhavnani, Kum-Kum. 2001. *Feminism and 'Race'*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Blair, Peter. 2002. "The Anxiety of Affluence Gordimer's *The Pick Up*". *Current Writing*. 14 (2): 178-182.

Bobo, Jacqueline. 2001. *Black Feminist Cultural Criticism*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Boehmer, Elleke. 2005. *Stories of Women: Gender and narrative in the postcolonial nation*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Boehmer, Elleke & Gaitskell, Deborah. 2004. "Writing the New, or Now, in South Africa". *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30 (4), (December): 725-730.

Boehmer, Elleke. 1998. "Endings and new beginning: South African fiction in transition". in *Writing South Africa: literature, apartheid, & democracy, 1970-1995*. (Eds) Derek Attridge and Rosamary Jolly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 43-56.

Booth, Chris; Dark, Jane & Yeandle, Susan (eds). 1996. *Changing Places: Women's Lives in the City*. London: Chapman.

Boyce Davies, Carole & Anne Adams Graves. 1990. *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. 2nd ed. New Jersey: Africa World Press.

Brahimi, Denise. 2000. *Nadine Gordimer: la femme, la politique et le roman*. Paris: Karthala.

Brahimi, Denise. 1998. *Les Femmes dans La Littérature Africaine*. Paris: Karthala.

Brink, André. 1998. "All's Unfair in Love and War". *A Writing Life: celebrating Nadine Gordimer*. London: Viking, 419- 425.

Brink, André. 1998. "Interrogating silence: new possibilities faced by South African literature". *Writing South Africa: literature, apartheid, & democracy, 1970-1995*. In *Writing South Africa: literature, apartheid, & democracy, 1970-1995*. (Eds) Derek Attridge and Rosamary Jolly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 14-42.

Bryston, Valerie. 1992. *Feminist Political Theory: An introduction*. London: MacMillan.

Bungaro, Monica. 2005. "Male Feminist Fiction: Literary Subversions of a Gender-Biased Script" in *Body, Sexuality, and Gender Versions and Subversions in African Literatures* Vol. 1. (Eds) Flora Veit-Wild and Dirk Naguschewski. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 47-61.

Carter, April. 1988. *The Politics of Women's Rights*. London: Longman.

Castle, Gregory. 2001. *Post-colonial Discourse: An Anthology*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Chapman, Michael. 2006. *Art Talk, Politics Talk*. Scottsville: University of Kwazulu-Natal Press.

Chapman, Michael. 2002. "The Politics of Identity: South Africa, Story-telling, and Literary History". *Journal of Literary Studies* 18: ¾: 224-239.

Chapman, Michael. 1996. *Southern African Literatures*. London: Longman.

Clayton, Cherry. 1990. "Post-colonial, Post-apartheid, Post-feminist: Family and State in Prison Narratives by South African Women". *Commonwealth Literary Cultures* (13): 136-144.

Clayton, Cherry. 1989. *Women & Writing in South Africa: a critical anthology*. Marshalltown: Heinemann.

Coetzee, J. M. 1999. *Disgrace*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Collier, Gordon; D. Riemenschneider & F. Schulse-Engler (eds). 1998. *ACOLIT Special Issues: Postcolonial Theory & the Emergence of a Global Society*. No. 3. Frankfurt: ASNEL.

Cooper, Pamela. 2005. "Metamorphosis and sexuality: Reading the Strange Passions of *Disgrace*". *Research in African Literatures* 36.4. (Winter). Ed. John Conteh-Morgan. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 22-39.

Conrad, Joseph. 2006. *Heart of Darkness: authoritative text, backgrounds and contexts, criticism*. Ed. Paul B. Armstrong. New York: w. w. Norton & Co.

Davis, Y. Angela. 2000. "Women and Capitalism: Dialectics of Oppression and Liberation". *The Black Feminist Reader*. Ed. Joy. James and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 146-182.

Daymond, M. J. 2003. "Gender, Liberated Signs, Deepened History". *Current Writing* 15 (1). Durban: University of Natal, 151-168.

Daymond, M. J. 1998. "Afterword" in Laretta Ngcobo's *And They Didn't Die*. Durban: University of Natal Press.

Daymond, M. J. 1996. *South African Feminisms: Writing, Theory & Criticism, 1990-1994*. New York & London: Garland.

De Fina, Anna. 2003. *Identity in Narrative: A Study of Immigrant Discourse*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

De Kock, L. 2001. "South Africa in the Global Imaginary: Introduction". *Poetics Today* (22: 2): 263-298.

Diala, Isidore. 2002. "Nadine Gordimer, J. M. Coetzee, and André Brink: Guilt, Expiation, and the Reconciliation Process in Post-apartheid South Africa". *Journal of Modern Literature* xxv. 2 (Winter 2001-2002): 50-68.

Dimitriu, Ileana Şora. 2003. "The End of History: Reading Gordimer's Post-apartheid Novels". *Current Writing* 15 (1). Durban: University of Natal, 17-37.

Dimitriu, Ileana Şora. 2002. "The Civil Imaginary in Gordimer's First Novels". *English in Africa* 29: 1 (May): 27-54.

Dimitriu, Ileana Şora. 2000. *Art of Conscience: Re-reading Nadine Gordimer*. Timișoara: Hestia.

Duiker, K. Sello. 2000. *Thirteen Cents*. Cape Town: Kwela.

During, Simon. 1999. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge.

During, Simon. 1990. "Literature – Nationalism's Other? The Case for Revision." In Bhabha, Homi (ed). *Nation and Narration*. London and New York: Routledge, 138-153.

Durix, Jean-Pierre. 1998. *Memesis, Genres and Post-Colonial Discourse: Deconstructing Magic Realism* London: Macmillan.

Eagleton, Terry & D. Milne. 1996. *Marxist Literary Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Elia, Nada. 1996. "Violent Women: Surging into Forbidden Quarters". *Fanon: A Critical Reader*. Ed. Lewis R. Gordon, T. D. Sharpley-Whiting & Renée T. White. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 163-169.

Evans, Jennifer. 1987. "Women and Resistance in Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross*". *Women in African Literature Today*. Ed. Jones, E. Durosimi, Eustace Palmer & M. Jones. London: James Currey, pp. 131-139.

Evans, Mari. 1983. *Black Women Writers (1950-1980)*. New York: Anchor Press Doubleday.

Felman, Shoshona. 1993. *What does a Woman Want? Reading Nadine Gordimer*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.

Ferguson, Moira 1993. *Colonialism & Gender Relations from Mary Wollstonecraft to Jamaica Kincaid*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Fester, Gertrude. 2001. "Another world conference - another fallacy?" *African Feminism I Agenda* 50 (20 November): 118-123.

Francesse, Joseph. 1997. *Narrating Postmodern Time and Space*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Frank, Katherine. 1987. "Women without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa". *Women in African Literature Today*. Vol. 15. Eds. E. Durosimi Jones, E. Palmer & Marjorie Jones. Trenton: African World Press, 14-34.

Gagiano, Annie. "Adapting the national imaginary: Shifting identities in three post-1994 South African novels". *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30: 4 (December 2004). 811-824.

Gagiano, Annie. 1996. "Encountering African Novels in English". *Cultural Synergy in South Africa: Weaving Strands of Africa and Europe*. Eds. Melissa, E. Steyn and Khanya, B. Motshabi. Pretoria: Knowledge Resources, 131-145.

Galgut, Damon. 1992. 'An Extended Cry Against Male Mythology'. Interview. *Weekly Mail* (14-20 August): 34.

Galgut, Damon. 1992. *The Beautiful Screaming of Pigs*. London: Abacus.

Garritano, Carmela. 2000. "A Feminist Reading of Ellen Kuzwayo's *Call Me Woman*". *The Post-colonial Condition of African Literature*. No. 6. Eds. Gover, Daniel; Conteh-Morgan John; and Bryce, Jane. Asmara: Africa world Press, 49-66.

Gaylard, Rob. "Story and Storytelling in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*". Accessed 31. 03. 2006.
<<http://www.uwc.ac.za/arts/auetsa/gaylard.htm>>

- Geertsema, Johan. "Ndebele, Fanon, Agency and Irony". *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30 No. 4 (December 2004): 749-764.
- Gikandi, Simon. 1987. *Reading the African Novel*. London: Currey.
- Goodman, Lizbeth. 1996. *Literature and Gender*. New York: Routledge.
- Gordimer, Nadine. 2005. *Get A Life*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.
- Gordimer, Nadine. 2001. *The Pick Up*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Gordimer, Nadine. 1999. *Living in hope and history: notes from our century*. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux.
- Gordimer, Nadine. 1998. *The House Gun*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Gordimer, Nadine. 1994. *None To Accompany Me*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Gordon, Lewis R; Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean and White, Renée T. (eds). 1996. *Fanon: A Critical Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gover, Daniel; Conteh-Morgan John; and Bryce, Jane. 2000. *The Post-colonial Condition of African Literature*. No. 6. Asmara: Africa World Press.
- Gugler, Joseph; Lusebrink, Hans-Jurgen and Martini, Jurgen. 1994. *Literary Theory and African Literature =Théorie Littéraire et Littérature Africaine*. Munster: Lit Verlag.
- Harasym, Sarah. 1990. *Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty: The Post-colonial Critic, Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. New York: Routledge.
- Harlow, Barbara. 2002. "Writers and Critics on South Africa's Transition". *Current Writing*. 14 (2): 174-177.
- Harrow, W. Kenneth. 2002. *Less Than One And Double: A Feminist Reading of African Women's Writing*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Harrow, W. Kenneth. 1994. *Thresholds of Change in African Literature: The Emergence of a Tradition*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Hawley, John C. 1996. *Critical Studies: Writing the Nation: Self and Country in Post-Colonial Imagination*. Vol. 7. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Head, Dominic. 1994. *Nadine Gordimer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Heilbrun, Carolyn G. & Nancy K. Miller. 1986. *Reading Women: Essays in feminist criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Helgesson, Stefan. 2004. *Writing in Crisis: Ethics and History in Gordimer, Ndebele and Coetzee*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.

Heyns, Michiel. 1998. "A Man's World: South African Gay Writing and the State of Emergency" in *Writing South Africa: literature, apartheid, & democracy, 1970-1995*. (Eds) Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 108-122.

Hill Collins, Patricia. 2000. "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought". *The Black Feminist Reader*. Ed. Joy. James and T. Denean, Sharpley-Whiting. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 183-207.

Hill Collins, Patricia. 1991. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Vol. 2. London: Routledge.

Hlongwane, Gugu. 2002. 'What Has Modernity To Do With It?: Camouflaging Race in the "New" South Africa'. *Journal of Literary Studies* (18: ½.): 111-131.

hooks, bell. 2000. "Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory". *The Black Feminist Reader*. Ed. Joy. James and T. Denean, Sharpley-Whiting. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 131-145.

hooks, bell. 1991. "Narratives of Struggle". *Critical Fictions: the politics of imaginative writing*. Ed. Philomena, Mariani. Seattle: Bay Press, 53-61.

hooks, bell. 1991. 'Postmodern Blackness.' In *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. London: Turnaround, 23-31.

Horn, Peter. 1994. *Writing my Reading: Essays on Literary Politics in South Africa*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Hosseini, Mohammed. 1975. *Women for women. Bangladesh: University Press Limited.*

Huggan, Graham. 2005. "(Not) Reading Orientalism". *Research in African Literatures*. 36.3. (Fall). Ed. John Conteh-Morgan. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 124-136.

Huggan, Graham. 2001. *The Post-colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. London: Routledge.

Hutcheon, Linda. 2002. *The Politics of Postmodernism*, 2nd Ed. London: Routledge.

Ibinga, Stéphane Serge. 2006. "Post-apartheid Literature Beyond Race". *This Century's Review*. (Issue 04. 06). www.thiscentury.com

Jacobs, Shaun & H. Wasserman (eds). 2003. *Shifting Selves: Post-apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Jacobus, Mary. 1986. *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Keet, Verenia. 2005. *Colored Hill*. South Africa: Dynamic Printers.

Johnson-Odim, Cheryl. 1991. "Common Themes, Different Contexts: Third World Women and Feminism". In Mohanty, Chantrey Talpade; Russo, Ann and Torres, Lourdes (eds.). *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Joy. James and T. Denean, Sharpley-Whiting (eds). 2000. *The Black Feminist Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

King, Bruce. 1993. *The Later Fiction of Nadine Gordimer*. London: Macmillan.

Koboekae, Martin. 2004. *Taung Wells*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Kolawole, Mary M. Modupe. 1998. *Gender Perceptions and Development in Africa*. Lagos: Arrabon Academic Publishers.

Kolawole, Mary M. Modupe. 1997. *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Trenton: Africa World Press.

Kossew, Sue. 2003. "Beyond the national: exile and belonging in Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*." *Scrutiny* 2. (vol 8:1): 21-26.

Kossew, Sue. 2001. "'Something Terrible Happened': Gordimer's *The House Gun* and the Politics of Violence and Recovery in Post-apartheid South Africa". *Re-Imagining Africa: New Critical Perspectives*. New York: Nova, 133-143.

Kossew, Sue. 2000. "White South African Writing and the Politics of Resistance" in *Anglophonia / Caliban 7: French Journal of English Studies*. (Ed.) Christiane Fioupou. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 179-188.

Kossew, Sue. 1996. *A Post-colonial Reading of J. M. Coetzee and André Brink*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Koyana, Siphokazi. 2003. "Qholorha and the Dialogism of Place in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*". *Current Writing* 15 (1). Durban: University of Natal, 51-61.

Kozain, Rustum. 2002. "The Old in the New". *Pretexts: Literary and Cultural Studies* (11: 2): 196-203.

Kumah, Carolyn. 2002. "African Women & Literature". *West Africa Review*. (Vol. 2. 1. (Nov. 2002). <http://www.westafricareview.com/war/vol2.1/kumah.html> 08-11-2002. Pp. 1-10.

Kuzwayo, Ellen. 1985. *Call Me Woman*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Langa, Mandla. 1987. *Tenderness of Blood*. Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.

Langa, Mandla. 1989. *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*. London: Kliptown Books.

Langa, Mandla. 2000. *The Memory of Stones*. Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Philip.

Langan, Mary & L. Day. 1992. *Women, Oppression and Social Work: Issues in anti-discriminatory practice*. London & New York: Routledge.

Lee, Hermione. 2004. "Nadine Gordimer with Hermione Lee". *Writing Across Worlds: contemporary writers talk*. London: Routledge, 315-326.

Lewis, Desirée. 2001. "Constructing Lives: Black South African Women and Biography Under Apartheid" *Apartheid Narratives: Studies in Literature* (31). Ed. Nahem, Yousaf. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 163-191.

Lyotard, François. 1988. *The Différend: Phrases in Dispute*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Magona, Sindiwe. 2000. "Freedom of Expression for Women: Myth or Reality" *Women & activism: ZIBF Women Writers' Conference 1999*. Harare: Zimbabwe International Book Fair, 19-22.

Mandela, Nelson. 1994. *Long Walk to Freedom*. Johannesburg: Macdonald Purnell.

Mapanje, Jack. 2002. *Gathering Seaweed: African Prison Writing*. Oxford: Heinemann.

Mariani, Philomena. 1991. *Critical Fictions: the politics of imaginative writing*. Seattle: Bay Press.

Marsden, D. Frances. 1994. "Changing Images: Representations of the Southern African Black Women in Works by Bessie Head, Ellen Kuzwayo, Mandla Langa and Mongane Wally Serote" (November). Durban: University of South Africa, 51-100.

Martinet, André. 1968. *Le Langage*. Paris: Gallimard.

Maughan Brown, David. 1994. "Politics and Value in South African Literature: Some Thoughts on Recent Interventions by Albie Sachs and Njabulo Ndebele". *Literary Theory and African Literature*. Eds. J. Gugler, H. J. Lüsebrink, J. Martini. Hamburg: Lit, 143-161.

Mazibuku, Nokuthula 2004. "Silence and violence in *She Plays with the Darkness*". Unpublished paper delivered at the "Postcolonialism: South / Africa" Conference (5-7 July). Durban: University of Kwazulu Natal.

Mbembe, Achille. 2001. *On the Postcolony*. London: University of California Press.

Mbilinyi, Dorothy A. & Omary, C. K. 1996. *Gender Relations and Women's Images in the Media*. Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press.

Mda, Zakes. 2005. *The Whale Caller*. Johannesburg: Penguin Books.

Mda, Zakes. 2002. *The Madonna of Excelsior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mda, Zakes. 2000. *The Heart of Redness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mda, Zakes. 1995. *Ways of Dying*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mda, Zakes. 1995. *She Plays with the Darkness*. Florida: Vivlia Publishers & Booksellers.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. 2001. "Bold Omissions and Minute Depictions". *Feminism 'Race': Oxford Readings in Feminism*. Ed. Bhavnani, Kum-kum. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 161-170.

Minh-ha, Trinh T. 1989. *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Post-coloniality & Feminism*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Mkhize, Jabulani. 2001. "Literary Prospects in 'post-apartheid' South Africa". *Alternation* (8: 1): 170-187.

Modupo Kolawole, Mary. 1998. *Gender Perception & Development in Africa*. Lagos: Arrab Academic Publishers.

Mohanty, Chandra-Talpad; Ann Russo & Torres Lourdes (eds). 1991. *Third World Women & The Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Molope, Kagosi Lesego. 2002. *Dancing in the Dust*. Toronto: Tsar.

Mongo-Mboussa, Boniface. 2002. "Interview with Zakes Mda" (26 November). [http://www.africultures.com/anglais/articles_anglais/int_mda.htm]

Morton, Stephen. 2003. *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. London: Routledge.

Mostung, S. Pultz. 2003. *Making Use of History in New South African Fiction: an Analysis of the Purposes of Historical Perspectives in Three Post-apartheid Novels*. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.

Mpe, Pheswane. 2001. *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. Scottsville: University of Natal Press.

Muthwa, Sibongile. 2003. "Breakthrough Leadership: A Review of Women's Positions in the State and Social Impact on Everyday Lives of Women". *Journal of Literary Studies*. 19 (3/4) (December): 123-134.

Nasta, Susheila. 2004. *Writing Across Worlds: contemporary writers talk*. London: Routledge.

Nasta, Susheila. 1992. *Motherlands: Black Women's Writing from Africa, the Caribbean and South Asia*. New Jersey: Rutgers.

Ndebele, Njabulo S. 2004. "An Approach to Viable Futures". *Writing Across Worlds: contemporary writers talk*. Ed. Nasta, Susheila. London: Routledge.

Ndebele, Njabulo S. 1991. "Redefining Relevance". *Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. Johannesburg: COSAW. 58-73.

Ndebele, Njabulo S. 2003. *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*. Claremont: David Philip.

Ndebele, Njabulo S. 1991. *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*. Johannesburg: COSAW.

Ngaboh-Smart, Francis. 2004. *Beyond Empire and Nation : Postnational Arguments in the Fiction of Nuruddin Farah and B. Kojouhar*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Ngcobo, Laretta. 1999. *And They Didn't Die*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.

Ngcobo, Laretta. 1990. "Images of Women in South African Black Literature" *Commonwealth Literary Cultures: New Voices, New Approaches*. Ed. Giovanna Capone, Claudio Gorlier & Bernard Hickey. Lecce: Edizioni del Grifo, 143-157.

Ngugi, Wa Thiong'o. 1986. *Decolonising the Mind: the politics of language in African literature*. London: Curry.

Nkosi, Lewis. 2002. "The Republic of Letters after the Mandela Republic". *Journal of Literary Studies* (18: ¾): 240-258.

Nkosi, Lewis. 1998. "Postmodernism and black writing in South Africa" in *Writing South Africa: literature, apartheid, & democracy, 1970-1995*. (Eds) Derek Attridge and Rosamary Jolly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 75-90.

Nnaemeka, Obioma. 2002. "Locating Feminism/Feminists". In Susan Arndt (ed.). *The Dynamics of African Feminism: Defining and Classifying African Feminist Literatures*. Asmara: Africa World Press, 9-15.

Nnaemeka, Obioma. 1997. "Introduction: Imag(in)ing knowledge, power, and subversion in the margins". *The Politics of (M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity, and Resistance in African Literature*. London: Routledge, 1-25.

Nussbaum, Martha. 2000. *Women and Human Development -The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nussbaum, Martha and Jonathan. Glover. 1995. *Women, Culture and Development: a Study of Human Capacities*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Nuttall, Sarah. "City Forms and Writing the 'Now' in South Africa". *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30 No. 4 (December 2004): 731-748.

O'Brien, Anthony. 2001. *Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ogude, James. 1999. *Ngugi's Novels and African History: Narrating the Nation*. London: Pluto Press.

Ogundipe-Leslie, Molara. 2001. "Moving the Mountains, Making the Links". *Feminism 'Race': Oxford Readings in Feminism*. Ed. Bhavnani, Kum-kum. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 134-144

Ogundipe-Leslie, Molara. 1994. *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.

Ogundipe-Leslie, Molara. 1987. "The Female Writer and her Commitment". *Women in African Literature Today*. Vol. 15. Eds. E. Durosimi Jones, E. Palmer & Marjorie Jones. Trenton: Africa World Press, 5-13.

Ogunyemi Chikwenye, Okonjo. 1985. "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English". *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. Vol. 11: 1. (Autumn 1985). Chicago: University of Chicago, 63-80.

Oliphant, Andries Walter. 2003. "Introduction: Special Issue Aspects of South African Literary Studies". *Journal of Literary Studies*. 19 (3/4). (December), 234-236.

Oliphant, Andries Walter. 1991. *Ear to the Ground: Contemporary Worker Poets*. Fordsburg: Congress of South African Writers.

Oliphant, Andries Walter. 1998. *A Writing Life: celebrating Nadine Gordimer*. London: Viking.

O'Reilly, Christopher. 2000. *Post-colonial Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Oswusuah Larbi, Madonna. 2000. "New Gender Perspectives for the Millenium: Challenges & Successful Models of North-South Collaboration" *West Africa Review*. [<http://www.westafricareview.com/war/vol2.1/larbi.html>] 20-02-2003. Pp. 1-10.

Oyewumi, Oyeronke. 2002. "Conceptualing Gender: The Eurocentric Foundations of Feminist Concepts & the Challenge of African Epistemologies" *Jenda: A Journal of Culture & African Women Studies*.

[<http://www.jendajournal.com/jenda/vol2.1/oyewumi.html>] 20-02-2003. Pp. 1-7.

Parker, Michael & Starkey, Roger. 1995. *Post-colonial Literatures: Achebe, Ngugi, Desai, Walcott*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd.

Pechey, Graham. 1998. "The post-apartheid sublime: rediscovering the extraordinary". In *Writing South Africa: literature, apartheid, & democracy, 1970-1995*. (Eds) Derek Attridge and Rosamary Jolly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 57-74.

Pechey, Graham. 1994. "Post-Apartheid Narratives". In Barker, F. et al. (eds) (third edition): *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*. 3rd ed. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Peck, Richard. 1997. *A Morbid Fascination: White Prose and Politics in apartheid South Africa*. Westport: Greenwood Press.

Phillips, Caryl. 1993. *Crossing the River*. London: Bloomsbury.

Pia Lara, Maria. 1998. *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Piercy, Marge. 1976. *Woman on the Edge of Time*. New York: Knopf.

Pieterse, Edgard & Meintjies Frank. 2004. *Voices of the Transition: The Politics, Poetics and Practices of Social Change in South Africa*. Pretoria: Heinemann.

Plasa, Carl 2000. *Textual Politics from Slavery to Post-colonialism: Race & Identification*. London: Macmillan.

Pope, Rob. 1998. *The English Studies*. London: Routledge.

Reddy, Vasu. 2001. "Homophobia, human rights and gay and lesbian equality in Africa". *African Feminism I Agenda* 50 (November): 83-87.

Reynolds, Hilary & Richards, Nancy. 2003. *Women Today: A Celebration: Fifty Years of South African Women*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Rich, Adrienne Cecile. 1977. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Toronto: Bantam.

Riemenschneider, Dieter & Schulze-Engler, Frank. 1993. *African Literatures in the Eighties*. (Matatu number 10). Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Robbins, Ruth. 2000. *Literary Feminisms*. London: Macmillan.

Rowbotham, Sheila. 1992. *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action*. New York: Routledge.

Rowbotham, Sheila. 1973. *Women's Conscience, Men's World*. New York: Penguin Books.

Russ, Joanna. 1995. *To Write like a Woman: Essays in Feminism & Science Fiction*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Sachs, Albie. 1998. "Preparing ourselves for freedom". *Writing South Africa: literature, apartheid, & democracy, 1970-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 239-248.

Said, Edward. 2003. *Reflexions of Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Said, Edward. 1994. *Culture & Imperialism*. London: Vintage.

Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge.

Sakamoto, Toshiko. 2006. "Black Women in Nadine Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*". *Africa Update Archieves*. [<http://www.ccsu.edu/afstudy/upd8-2.htm>] Pp. 1-5.

Salo, Elaine. 2001. "Talking about feminism in Africa". *African Feminism I Agenda* 50 (20 November): 58-63.

Samin, Richard. 2000. "Marginality and History in Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*". in *Anglophonia / Caliban 7: French Journal of English Studies*. (Ed.) Christiane Fioupou. Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 189-199.

Samuelson, MA. 2005. "Remembering the Nation, Dismembering the Nation, Dismembering Women: Stories of The South African Transition". Ph. D. Thesis, Cape Town, University of Cape Town.

Samuelson, Meg. 2002. "Rainbow Womb: Rape and Race in South African Fiction of the Transition" in *Kunapipi: Journal of Post-colonial Writing*. Vol. xxiv. No. 122. (Ed.) Anne Collett. Wollongong: Kunapipi Publishers, 88-100.

Sarinjeive, Devi. 2002. "Transgression/ Transitions In Three Post-1994 South African Texts: Pamela Jooste's *Dance With a Poor Man's Daughter*, Bridget Pitt's *Unbroken Wing* and Achmat Dangor's *Kafka's Curse*". *Journal of Literary Studies* (18: ¾): 259-274.

Sastry, Sailaja. 2002. "Assuming Identities: *Kafka's Curse* and the Unsilenced Voice". *Journal of Literary Studies* 18: ¾. Pp. 275-283.

Sévry, Jean. 2002. "South African Literatures and Problems of communication?" in *Palavers of African Literature: Essays in Honor of Bernth Lindfords*. Vol. I. (Eds) Toyin Falola & Barbara Harlow. Asmara: Africa World Press, 285-299.

Sewlall, Harry. 2003. "Deconstructing Empire in Joseph Conrad and Zakes Mda". *Journal of Literary Studies*. 19 (3/4). (December): 331-343.

Schulze-Engler, Frank. 1993. "Discourses of Arrested Modernization: African Literary Theory in the 1980s". *African Literatures in the Eighties*. (Matatu number 10). Eds. Riemenschneider, Dieter & Schulze-Engler, Frank. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 9-26.

Schwab, Gabriel. 1996. *The Mirror & The Killer Queen*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Sherry, Ruth. 1988. *Studying Women's Writing: an Introduction*. London: Edward Arnold.

Sideris, Tina. 2004. "You have to change and you don't know how!: Contesting What it Means to be a Man in a Rural Area of South Africa". *African Studies*, 63: 1 (July). Johannesburg: Carfax Publishing, 29-49.

- Smith, Rowland. 1990. *Critical Essays on Nadine Gordimer*. Boston: Hall.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana: University of Illinois.
- Steyn, E. Melissa & Motshabi Khanya B. 1996. *Cultural Synergy in South Africa*. Pretoria: Knowledge Resources Ltd.
- Strathern, Oona. 1995. *Africa: A Literary Guidebook containing over 250 extracts from Novels, Poems and Short Stories*. Chicago: Passport Books.
- Stratton, Florence. 1994. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London: Routledge.
- Sunder Rajan, Rajeswari. 1993. *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*. London: Routledge.
- Tamale, Sylvie. 2001. "Think globally, act locally: using international treaties for women's empowerment in East Africa". *African Feminism I Agenda* 50. (20 November): 97-104.
- Thornton, Robert. 1996. "The potentials of boundaries in South Africa: steps towards a theory of the social edge", in Werbner Richard & T. Ranger (eds), *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*. London: Zed Books, 136 - 161.
- Tickner, J. Ann. 2001. *Gendering World Politics: Issues and approaches in the Post-Cold War Era*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tiyamba Zeleza, Paul. 2005. "The Politics and Poetics of Exile: Edward Said in Africa". *Research in African Literatures*. 36.3. (Fall). Ed. John Conteh-Morgan. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1-22.
- Uraizee, Joya. 2000. *This is No Place for A Woman: Nadine Gordimer, Nayantara Sahgal, Buchi Emecheta & the politics of Gender*. Asmara: Africa World Press.
- Van Der Merwe, Chris N. & Viljoen, Hein. 2004. *Storyscapes: South African Perspectives on Literature, Space & Identity*. New York: Peter Lang.

Visser, Irene. 2002. "How to Live in Post-apartheid South Africa: Reading Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*". Wasafiri no. 37 (Winter 2002): 39-43.

Visvanathan, N; Duggan, L; Nisonoff, L. & Wieggersma, N. 1997. *The Women, Gender and Development Reader*. Cape Town: David Philip.

Wagner, Kathrin. 1994. *Rereading Nadine Gordimer: text and subtext in the novels*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Walker, Alice. 1984. *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company.

Walker, Cherryl. 1991. *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. 2nd. Ed. Cape Town: David Philip.

Walter, Cherryl. 1982. *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. London: Onyx.

Walker, Michelle Boulous. 1998. *Philosophy and the Maternal Body: Reading Silence*. London: Routledge.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. 1993. *Moving the Center: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.

Wedeven Segal, Kimberly. "Pursuing Ghosts: The Traumatic Sublime in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*". *Research in African Literatures*. 36.4. (Winter). Ed. John Conteh-Morgan. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 40-54.

Wenzel, Marita. 2003. "Appropriating Space and Transcending Boundaries in *The African House* by Christina Lamb and *Ways of Dying* by Zakes Mda". *Journal of Literary Studies*. 19 (3/4). (December): 316-329.

Werbner, Richard & T. Ranger (Eds). 1996. *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*. London: Zed.

White, Hayden. 1987. *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse & History Representation*. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins Press.

Whitlock, Gillian & Helen, Tiffin. 1992. *Re-siting Queen's English: Text & Tradition in Post-colonial Literatures*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Wicomb, Zoë. 2000. *You can't get lost in Cape Town*. New York: Feminist Press.

Wicomb, Zoë. 1998. "Shame and Identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa" in *Writing South Africa: literature, apartheid, & democracy, 1970-1995*. (Eds) Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 91-107.

Wicomb, Zoë. 1993. "Culture Beyond Colour? A South African Dilemma". *Transition 60*. New York, 24-33.

Wisker, Gina. 2000. *Post-colonial and African American women's Writing: a critical introduction*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Woodward, Wendy; P. Hayes & G. Mickey. 2002. *Deep Histories: Gender & Colonialism In Southern Africa*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Woodward, Wendy. 2003. "Postcolonial Ecologies and the Gaze of Animals: Reading Some Contemporary Southern African Narratives". *Journal of Literary Studies*. 19 (3/4). (December): 290-315.

Young, Robert J.C. 1995. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge.

Yousaf, Nahem. 2001. *Apartheid Narratives: Studies in Literature* (31). Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Zulu, N.S. 2005. "*The Cry of Winnie Mandela: overturning the 'monster image' of Winnie Mandela*". Unpublished paper delivered at the Writing African Women Conference (January 19-22): University of the Western Cape.