

# **Challenges to Ubuntu and Social Cohesion in South Africa**

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## Abstract

Envisaged as vehicle for social cohesion in post revolutionary South Africa, ubuntu means ‘humanness’ and ‘goodness’; however, the optimistic post-apartheid discourse of ubuntu contrasts with the bleak post-apartheid fictions. These reflect a social and political landscape that does not live up to the optimistic ideology of the Rainbow Nation. This thesis argues that ubuntu – as a ‘return to tradition’ – is a problematic narrative of social cohesion because as an innate and essential aspect of African identity, ubuntu risks cultural simplification, it depends on ideas of racial polarization and the homogenisation of black African culture, and it legitimises the implementation of coercive social practices. The major literary texts examined are Zakes Mda’s novels’ *The Heart of Redness* (2002) and *Ways of Dying* (1995), Sindiwe Magona’s *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* (1991), *To My Children’s Children* (1991), *Forced to Grow* (1991) and *Mother to Mother* (1998), Kgebetli Moele’s *Room 207* (2011) and *The Book of the Dead* (2009), Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* (2008) and Kopana Motlwa’s *Coconut* (2007). Each of the four chapters addresses ubuntu in relation to differences that are already embedded in discourses of ubuntu: that is, ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’, gender, rural-urban migration, and the occult. These subject positions are then embedded in wider contemporary debates about a nation in transition: post-apartheid South Africa and where necessary the apartheid past. Ubuntu fails to offer a coherent programme for political change and now functions as a floating or empty signifier.

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## Introduction

### Ubuntu and challenges to social cohesion in South Africa

Ubuntu in *isiZulu* and *isiXhosa* first appeared in South African English literary and political discourse with the Black Consciousness Movement in the late 1970s and 1980s but its genealogy is much older. The origins of the term ubuntu in Xhosa and Zulu mean ‘humanity’ or ‘goodness’ and it is said to embody the qualities and virtues of an essential humanity, or of Africanness.<sup>1</sup> When compared to traditional European philosophy, it ‘serves to oppose European greed, selfishness and other dehumanising treatment of black South Africans, and to delineate a psychological dynamic in which each individual – whatever their status – is accorded dignity and personhood’.<sup>2</sup> Yet in 1991 Archbishop Desmond Tutu claimed that it seemed as though the black community in South Africa had lost their sense of ubuntu, a sense that ‘my humanity is bound up in your humanity’.<sup>3</sup>

Hein Marais argues that to create a new national consensus in South Africa requires that we ‘defend the integrity of the nation-state, combat racist and ethnic-exclusivist legacies and trends, and to establish in South Africans’ lives a sense of beneficial change, unity and common belonging while respecting diversities’.<sup>4</sup> The core foundations of the bid to build a nation-state ‘reside’ in the ‘terms and details of political settlement’, ‘post-apartheid political system’ and ‘the rights and liberties inscribed in the constitution which, at the political-juridical level, establishes the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* <http://www.dsae.co.za/#!/search/xref/e01176> [accessed 1 November 2015]

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Driver, ‘Truth, Reconciliation, Gender: the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Black Women’s Intellectual History1’, *Australian Feminist Studies*, 20, 47 (2005) 291–29 (p. 11) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0816464500090384>> [accessed 21 March 2014]

<sup>3</sup> Desmond Tutu, *Sunday Times* (26 May 1991) 2; quoted in *The Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles* <http://www.dsae.co.za/#!/search/xref/e01176> [accessed 1 November 2015]

<sup>4</sup> Hein Marias, ‘Shock of the new’ in *South Africa Limits to Change the Political Economy of Transition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), pp. 298-309 (p. 300).

principle of equality as the central axis of political and social relations'.<sup>5</sup> However, with the onset of democracy, buttressing these 'are specific compromises embedded in the settlement: the "sunset clause", the protection of minority rights at local government level, guaranteeing the expression of cultural diversity, the nominalist federalist character of the political system, acknowledgement of Afrikaners' right to seek self-determination, and the preservation of traditional leaders' authority'.<sup>6</sup>

In order to better understand these challenges, it is important to recognize that the fall of apartheid was influenced by a number of factors both local to South Africa and outside of the country's regional and national borders. Scholars including the Comaroffs and Rob Nixon illustrate how democracy in South Africa was affected by the major changes in the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 that catalysed cultural changes in South Africa. Jean and John Comaroff explain how South Africa has been described as one of world's last colonies; the country 'won the right to secular modern nationhood just as global processes were compromising the sovereignty and material integrity of the nation-state, *sui generis*'.<sup>7</sup> Rob Nixon expounds how without the collapse of communism, South African negotiations for democracy would not have gotten under way at that time. This caused a major shift in how both the left and the right could represent and conceive of their positions in the political and social landscape, says Nixon.<sup>8</sup> In short, the fall of socialism in Eastern Europe caused a crisis of ideology, idiom and idealism in South Africa. Building a harmonious future has been the challenge of the new democratic state but, unfortunately, the transition to democracy has been accompanied by 'surging lawlessness and the rise of syndicated

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<sup>5</sup> Marais, p. 300.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>7</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, 'Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony', *American Ethnologist*, 26, 2 (1999) pp. 279-303 (p. 287).  
<<http://amaXhosa.jstor.org/stable/647285>> [accessed 14 August 2015]

<sup>8</sup> Rob Nixon, 'Aftermaths', *Transition*, 72 (1996), 64-78 (p. 70) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2935361>> (DOI:10.2307/2935361) [accessed 26 June 2015]

crime'; furthermore, there remain underlying attitudes and social relations that remain unchanged in the post-apartheid socio-political landscape.<sup>9</sup>

Ubuntu played a major role in the construction of a hopeful and optimistic South African post-apartheid paradigm. It was used as the underlying ethical principle of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and a key political and legal notion in the transition towards and the establishment of the New South Africa. Structurally it was instituted in the preamble to the Constitution and was a key principle of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Ubuntu first appeared in the epilogue of the 1993 Interim Constitution as a way to provide the 'need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for ubuntu but not for victimization'.<sup>10</sup> According to its supporters, ubuntu was a necessary tool for social and political transformation because of its possibilities to get 'a handle on intellectual, ethical and cultural tools for nation building; to forge social cohesion; and implant shared values'.<sup>11</sup> The discourse of ubuntu was a part of a much larger South African prerogative: to reshape and redefine South African identity under the guise of the Rainbow Nation. The term 'Rainbow Nation', an ideology of multiculturalism, foregrounded difference and the coexistence of individual and collective groups in the hopes of cohesion in South Africa. This was especially necessary for black South Africans who were previously disenfranchised under the apartheid regime.

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<sup>9</sup> David Attwell and Barbara Harlow, 'Introduction: South African Fiction after Apartheid', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46, 1 (2000), 1-9, (p. 2)

<[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modern\\_fiction\\_studies/v046/46.1intro.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modern_fiction_studies/v046/46.1intro.html)> [accessed 12 May 2012]

<sup>10</sup> Christian B.N., Gade, 'What is *Ubuntu*? Different Interpretations among South Africans of African Descent', *South African Journal of Philosophy*, 3, 31 (2012), 484-503 (p. 485).

<[https://www.academia.edu/1928441/What\\_is\\_Ubuntu\\_Different\\_Interpretations\\_Among\\_South\\_Africans\\_of\\_African\\_Descent](https://www.academia.edu/1928441/What_is_Ubuntu_Different_Interpretations_Among_South_Africans_of_African_Descent)> [accessed 24 January 2015]

<sup>11</sup> Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, 'Building a New Society Using the Building Blocks of Ubuntu/Botho/Vhuthu', in *Religion and Spirituality in South Africa: New Perspectives*, ed. by Duncan Brown (Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, 2009), pp. 236-248 (p. 238).

Ubuntu was intended to provide the building blocks for a new post-apartheid nation and through its appropriation in the TRC and in the Constitution, the spirit of ubuntu promised social justice to those who had been dehumanised through centuries of colonialism and apartheid. As such, ubuntu promised considerable change. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a narrative of nationalist imagining based on the spirit of ubuntu; a structure for reconciliation, reparation and social justice in the country; and it was designed to defuse the threat of counter-revolution and to draw social and political forms into new forms of accommodation. The purpose of the TRC was to provide 'access to truth in order to lay the foundation for a more humane, just social order, passing resolute moral judgement on the past but in ways which reconciled a previously divided society to a common future rooted in a respect for human rights'.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the TRC promised to heal the past through dialogues between apartheid perpetrator and victim. Each dialogue was hosted in a hearing where through stories of physical, emotional and other traumas for men and women, both the victim and the perpetrator had the opportunity to tell their story of an atrocity of apartheid. At the end of the hearing, the TRC produced a 'truth' report based on these cases. In short, the commission became the 'official' truth acknowledgement of gross human rights violations in South Africa between 1960 and 1993 and through a process of hearings, trials and investigations the TRC produced a final report towards reconciliation and reparation in South Africa.

The application of ubuntu as an inherent form of African tradition proposes that there is an innate and essential African identity. Proponents of ubuntu as an inherent African 'tradition' argue that ubuntu is a meaningful part of everyday life for African people because ubuntu is seen to be a specifically African faculty, a way of

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<sup>12</sup> Deborah Posel and Graeme Simpson, *Commissioning the Past: Understanding South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (Johannesburg: Witswatersrand University Press, 2002), p. 149.

being in the world and of knowing the world or essence of being African; this is essentially inescapable. Ubuntu is therefore understood to be an affirmation of all things African: that Africans have a specific way of life and of living it. This can be described as an indigenous ontology, as Claire Laurier Decoteau suggests, one that rests on man as a four-part being: soul, body, spirit and shadow. However, critics of ubuntu – as an innate and essential aspect of African identity – argue that conceived of ontologically it fails to offer an effective programme for social change in South Africa because it depends on notions of racial polarization, legitimises coercive forms of social cohesion, is elitist and fundamentalist and supports cultural nationalism and negatively divisive ideas of cultural pluralism.<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, ubuntu side-steps real political and economic problems in favour of mystifying Africa and blinding those who are the most exploited by capital interests and favouring the black middle class elite.

As an innate and essential aspect of African identity, ubuntu personhood is defined as the self-realisation of an individual in terms of his or her organic relationship to the group. An organic understanding of ubuntu depends upon African ontology where being-is-force and force-is-being. Ubuntu is commonly understood as an inner disposition or spiritual foundation that is an interconnectedness between Self and Community: ‘no one can define ubuntu; one can only demonstrate its presence or absence in human affairs’ as it is ‘the clay from which to mould and the soul to breathe into the new man and woman in South Africa’.<sup>14</sup> Scholars such as Placide Tempels, M.B Ramose and John Mbiti argue that it is a dynamic force or being-as-force and a spiritual foundation and make a clear distinction between African and non-African people. Martin Prozesky and Mluleki Munyaka and

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<sup>13</sup> Claire Laurier Decoteau, *Ancestors and Antiretrovirals* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 233.

<sup>14</sup> Mzamane, p. 237.



Mokgethi Mtlhabi, argue that it is legitimate to speak of an African understanding of existence as an inner foundation or spiritual state. Mbiti contests that it is written on the hearts of African people. Mbulelo Mzamane, Kwasi Wiredu and Ali A. Mazrui similarly suggest that ubuntu represents an organic community. Here, ubuntu is essentially normative in terms of the fact that an individual's journey towards personhood is substantiated by an ethical obligation to the other.

For the ubuntu believer, belief in the 'other worldly' realm of the afterlife and in the power of spirit ancestors leads to a specific pattern of behaviour that implies an original set of moral principles with standards that determine wrong from right. This is understood as an organic and predisposed integrity. Ubuntu is also conceived of as a universalistic principle of humanity and through an organic constitution, an individual is compelled to act ethically towards the other. For example, in what Menkiti describes as an 'African' understanding of human society, collective groups are understood to be constituted organically; whereas, in Western egalitarian societies there is a non-organic organization of individuals that is more like an association than it is an African community. As an organic concept, ubuntu extends beyond what we understand as the 'real' or natural world, beyond what we can see, hear and touch with our physical senses because although ubuntu means humanity, it includes the spiritual realm and the world of the ancestors. As Felix Murove explains it, ubuntu as a purely African ethic 'arises from an understanding of the world as an interconnected whole whereby what it means to be ethical is inseparable from all spheres of existence'.<sup>15</sup> These 'spheres of existence' include the past, present, future and the 'other worldly' blurring 'the distinction between humanity and nature, the living and

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<sup>15</sup> Felix Murove, 'Beyond the Savage Evidence Ethic: A Vindication of African Ethics', in *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics* (Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2009), pp. 14-32 (p. 20).

the dead, the divine and the human'.<sup>16</sup> A human being's daily life and lived experience then depends on his or her relationship to the ancestral world and the afterlife. There is no dead-matter in African ontology.

In comparison to African ontology, the traditional philosophy of Europe is opposed to an African way of being and belonging; in fact, it has historically painted Africa in a negative light within a Eurocentric framework. Traditional philosophy of Europe is 'static, objective, dichotomic; it is, in fact, dualistic, in that it makes an absolute distinction between body and soul, matter and spirit'; whereas, in African ontology, the person and the community are founded on 'dialogue and reciprocity' that is perceived as harmony and balance between a person and a community. Achille Mbembe argues that against Western civilization, 'the African human experience constantly appears in the discourse of our times as an experience that can only be understood through negative interpretation'. The African from Mbembe's perspective is associated with things 'part' or half human and as such, African unfolds as either 'strange' or 'monstrous'.

Leopold Senghor explains how traditional European philosophy is diametrically opposed to a Europe that is 'static, objective, dichotomic; it is, in fact, dualistic, in that it makes an absolute distinction between body and soul, matter and spirit'.<sup>17</sup> Scholars like Martin Prozesky highlight that God plays a significant role in the ethical relationship of ubuntu personhood. In this context and in the life of the ubuntu believer, all life is said to flow out of God who is at the centre of an individual's reason and ability to act ethically.

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<sup>16</sup> Murove, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Leopold Sedar Senghor, 'Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century', in *African Literature An Anthology of Criticism and theory*, ed. by Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 195-202 (p.198)

The ethics of ubuntu is supposed to derive from ontology and the organic form of community that is created through reciprocal relationships in dialogue. Here ubuntu is apolitical and ahistorical and through a belief in ubuntu and the enactment of it in day-to-day life, continuity is created between the past, the present and the future; through a sense of community and not individuality ubuntu gives way to social justice. The implication of ubuntu to social transformation in South Africa relates to an ethics and to a moral law in terms of how this plays out in the daily-lived experience of South Africans.

The implication of ubuntu as a discourse of social justice is played out in the law, in cases such as *Port Elizabeth Municipality v Various Occupiers*. The case is an example of some of the challenges between government policy and its practical application in everyday living in South Africa. In the case, Constitutional Court Judge Mokgoro gave a group of Mozambiquens the right to 'illegally' squat on land that was not their own. The Court made the decision based on the ubuntu principle that every human being deserves the right to life and the right to dignity regardless of whether these people were legally recognised as citizens of the state or not. Mokgoro argued that it was necessary to apply the principle of ubuntu in this case. Likewise, in *The State vs. Makwanyane*, the perpetrator of the murder was not sentenced to death based on an ubuntu principle that the right to life 'unadorned'. The Constitutional Court explained that 'it was against the background of the loss of respect for human life and inherent dignity which attaches to every person that a spontaneous call has arisen among a section of the community for a return to ubuntu'.<sup>18</sup> In both cases, the court's decision reflected that the spirit of ubuntu should be a part of the deep cultural heritage of the majority of the population and should suffuse the whole constitutional

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<sup>18</sup> Gade, p. 485.

order.

There were three different constitutional court judges involved in the final decision of the *State vs. Makwanyane*, and each had an individual perspective on ubuntu and the way in which it should be applied in the context of the case. In Judge Langa's final decision, he recognised that all human beings are entitled to dignity, respect and value. Langa argued that ubuntu is a commendable concept and a political and social ideal that the nation should strive towards. Judge Mokogoro's decision was influenced by her desire for a type of African jurisprudence. Mokogoro referred to ubuntu as a way to create unity because of its capacity to function as a multicultural signifier. She also referred to ubuntu as an indigenous South African value. Judge Sachs did not view the death penalty as a part of African customary law but relied on an ahistorical image of the state with a compassionate African community.<sup>19</sup> Drucilla Cornell argues that Sachs allowed ubuntu to be 'an important ethical directive in the sense of the law underlying the entirety of the Constitution'.<sup>20</sup> The final decision in the *State vs. Makwanyane* supported a culture of responsibility in South Africa whereby each South African must be accountable for his or her behaviour in light of the consequences these have on the wider community. From this perspective, the community collectively carry the burden of its individuals.

Wilson argues that the final decisions in the *State versus Makwanyane* went against African ideals and the trajectory of punishment and customs active in African traditional communities regarding revenge and retribution. For example, given the actual historical record of collective and communal court cases in South Africa, 'courts administered by Africans have often applied the death penalty for certain categories of persons (informers, witches, and, in the 1990s, car hijackers) in

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<sup>19</sup> Richard A. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> Cornell, 'Exploring *Ubuntu*: Tentative Reflections', p. 198.

numerous successive historical contexts'.<sup>21</sup> Wilson's argument highlights the growing insecurity surrounding justice and punishment in South Africa's social and political landscape, especially in terms of vigilante activities against criminalities, discourses of punishment in relation to human rights issues and matters relating to witchcraft. Furthermore, Alfred Cockrell argues that 'human rights and constitutionalism require hard choices to be made between the positions of citizens who will inevitably disagree about the common good'.<sup>22</sup> However, Cockrell suggests that ubuntu will not work just because people are African. They must be subjected to 'the same kind of second-order moral and legal scrutiny that any societal values receive', must be commensurate on international human rights law.

Despite its laudable aims, Ubuntu has become a vague tool for social transformation. In the post-apartheid era, ubuntu emerges in the incommensurability of 'tradition' and 'modernity' in a neo-liberal post-apartheid space that, as some critics argue, may only serve to render the concept of ubuntu more fragile.<sup>23</sup> However, some theorists have attempted to reclaim Ubuntu for more specific purposes. Most notably, Drucilla Cornell argues that ubuntu is a 'bloated concept' that has come to mean everything to everyone but nevertheless she embraces an African jurisprudence for effective social and political governance that leans heavily on ubuntu. She argues that ubuntu is a politico-ideological concept referring to socio-political action enjoining the self and other through principles of harmony, respect, prosperity and community and, as such, it is viable to speak of African jurisprudence.

Cornell shows how ubuntu is not a definitive concept; rather, it is discursively constructed. Thus as an innate and essential aspect of African identity an inherent ubuntu is difficult to defend, while the weight of ubuntu as a tool for social cohesion

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<sup>21</sup> Wilson, p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> Decoteau, p. 233.

is undermined. Cornell proposes that we need to think of freedom as an ‘activist ethic that can only be realized in and through ethical relations to other people’: freedom through other people.<sup>24</sup> As Cornell suggests, ‘we are already ethically entwined with others, and they are in a profound sense a part of ourselves’.<sup>25</sup> Cornell, like Constitutional Court Judge Mokgoro, understands that ubuntu is a relational ethical demand that is put into shape and into practice by the demands it plays on its participants. According to Cornell, some citizens have to assume collective responsibility under a liberal notion of equal rights. This may seem unfair because they take on the additional burden of other members of the community without receiving reciprocal benefit.<sup>26</sup> The problem is that the state is unable to find a space where both its inhabitants and those from other countries feel safe. Constitutional Court Judge Yvonne Mokgoro argues that ubuntu could help to shape the future of South African jurisprudence because its general principles include collectivity, unity, group solidarity, encouraging peace and harmony between peoples. African jurisprudence would, as Ben Skosana suggest, realign crime as an injury to the victim and the community instead of simply an affront to the power of the state.<sup>27</sup> This could have positive effects in terms of solving difficult questions of xenophobia, corruption and gender and class discrimination. In some respects, this form of governance takes the onus off the state and back onto the people through a top-down approach.

Therefore, argues Cornell, Ubuntu cannot be simplified as an imagined social contract reducible to a discussion about rights and duties.<sup>28</sup> For Cornell, ubuntu is a forward-thinking concept and ‘future-oriented’; freedom is indistinguishable from

<sup>24</sup> Cornell, ‘Rethinking Ethical Feminism Through Ubuntu’, p. 130.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>26</sup> Albie Sachs, ‘Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Guidelines’, in *Spring is Rebellious: Arguments about Cultural Freedom by Albie Sachs and Respondents*, ed. by Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990), pp. 19-29 (p. 22).

<sup>27</sup> Tom Lodge, *Politics in South African from Mbeki to Mandela* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2002), p. 231.

<sup>28</sup> Sachs, p. 21.

responsibility allowing us to create a shared kind of life.<sup>29</sup> An individual has the responsibility to treat the 'other' as he or she would like to be treated. Cornell is one of the most outspoken advocates of the concept of ubuntu as she believes that it has the capacity to bring change to the everyday lives of many South Africans if ubuntu can be a greater part of the law and governance in South Africa. She reasons that the community is 'always being formed through an ethic of being with others' and that this ethic empowers people. In this discourse, the community and the individual are in a process of becoming and in this case it is assumed that through ubuntu people will become morally good and the community will become good too. The concept of thinking of the other in terms of what is right and wrong behaviour then is at the heart of ethical interactions according to ubuntu.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Failure of ubuntu: critical perspectives**

However, ubuntu may be too simplistic in that it poses a problem for a multicultural South African identity. It is an ontological understanding of South African identity based on the assumption that it is already a part of the deepest cultural heritage of the majority of the population in South Africa. This concept is problematic because of the incommensurability of 'modernity and 'tradition'. As an innate and essential aspect of African identity, ubuntu has been negatively described in terms of the following: prescriptive ethics, populist understanding, a 'magic concept', and dogmatic, elitist, and political myth. For these reasons, ubuntu can emerge as a destructive, exclusionary and coercive form of social cohesion. Ubuntu may have played a pivotal role in reconciliation and nation building but as a form of cultural

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<sup>29</sup> Cornell, 'Exploring *Ubuntu*: Tentative Reflections', p. 206.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

nationalism it was predicated on an essentialised black identity corresponding to an imaginary place and, therefore, this definition of ubuntu risks being a static and romanticised version of South Africa, black South Africans and the African continent. Generally speaking in the context of post-apartheid, critics argue that as an innate and essential aspect of African identity, the incommensurability of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ in the neo-liberal post-apartheid state challenges ubuntu. The primary problem is that through a dogmatic approach to tradition, ubuntu, argues Michael Eze, is an ‘appeal to historical rigidity’ as ‘an attempt to validate culture through homogenization of tradition’.<sup>31</sup>

Achille Mbembe has categorised the return to ‘tradition’ through violent forms of social cohesion as ‘naïve nativism’.<sup>32</sup> He talks about ‘class-oriented millenarianism and nativist revivalism [that] is fuelling mass disillusion’, ‘spear-headed’ by the trade unions, the ANC Youth League and the South African Communist Party (SACP) in South Africa.<sup>33</sup> Achille Mbembe argues that ‘the kind of political and cultural dislocation South Africa seems to be experiencing [...] is once again engulfing the country’, one that occurs during periods ‘of demoralisation and acute social and mental insecurity’.<sup>34</sup> Like ubuntu, both nativism and negritude emerged in and through a specific historical and cultural context and these serve as examples of narratives emerging in response to wider and oppressive social and political landscape; the notion of an essential and inherent African identity affirms the autochthonous self against outside forces. Nativism and negritude challenged Western

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Onyebuchi Eze, *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa* (Palgrave Macmillan: New York, 2010), p. 142.

<sup>32</sup> Achille Mbembe, ‘South Africa's Second Coming: The Nongqawuse Syndrome’, [https://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa/democracy/southafrica\\_succession\\_3649.jsp](https://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa/democracy/southafrica_succession_3649.jsp) [accessed 15 June 2013] (para. 6 of 32)

<sup>33</sup> Achille Mbembe, ‘African Modes of Self-Writing’, *Public Culture*, 14, 1 (2002) 239-273 (p. 241) <[http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/public\\_culture/v014/14.1mbembe.pdf](http://muse.jhu.edu/login?auth=0&type=summary&url=/journals/public_culture/v014/14.1mbembe.pdf)> [11 March 2013]

<sup>34</sup> Mbembe, ‘South Africa's Second Coming: The Nongqawuse Syndrome’ (para. 13 of 32)



epistemology and Europeanised representations of Africa. Within the social and historical context of colonialism, nativism was a formal expression of Black Nationalist consciousness or Black Nationalism. In relation, ubuntu suggests a similar preoccupation with the black experience and as such it provides a desire for the singular African experience and the exultation of the black race and of a black South Africa. This means that the ideas, speech, action and thought patterns of an individual are then produced as if from a preconceived and natural state of being. In this discourse, family unity and wider political and social institutions are understood in terms of an innate union.

Kwame Appiah explains that nativism is the nation perceived of as an organic community bound together by a common spirit as a collective strives to throw off the oppression of a previous way of life or thought pattern.<sup>35</sup> Nativism became popular primarily through the work of Aime Cesaire and the term negritude was popularised by Leopold Senghor. Both intellectuals stressed an innate and essential black identity. Senghor believed that nativism was a 'just affirmation' of oneself rooted in the collective confirmation of one's being. Abiola Irele argues that these were reactions to the political, social and moral domination of the West.<sup>36</sup> For example, Peter Thompson argues that Senghor's view of black nationalism is 'nostalgic falsehood' and a 'non-rational and mystifying diversion from the class struggle' and Wole Soyinka argues that 'a tiger doesn't proclaim its tigritude', and Kwame Appiah argues that 'we need to transcend the banalities of nativism'.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'Out of Africa: Topologies of Nativism', in *African Literature An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, ed. by Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 242-50 (p. 249).

<sup>36</sup> Abiol Irele, 'What is Negritude?' in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, ed. by Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 242-50 (p.249).

<sup>37</sup> Peter Thompson, 'Negritude in New Arica: An Update', in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, ed. by Ato Quayson and T Olaniyan (London: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 210-218 (p. 213). Mbulelo Mzamane, *Where There is No Vision the People Perish: Reflections on the African*

Mbembe draws attention to violence that presents the incommensurability of 'tradition' and 'modernity' suggesting that reconciliation is almost impossible. It is evident that the Comaroffs are not the first South African critics to suggest that nationalism in the country is Janus-faced: reflecting a modern project while simultaneously trying to reflect 'authentic' cultural values and traditions.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, the binaries of 'modernity and 'tradition' were idealised tropes and proved to be more incompatible than anything else. In fact, as the Comaroffs argue, the nation and the state have been ruptured from each other. Narratives of belonging and of community only serve to sustain dichotomous distinctions between rural and urban, white and black, male and female and rich and poor. These distinctions limit the human rights of different groups and as a result are violent and coercive strategies for social cohesion.

The inefficacy of ubuntu as a tool for social cohesion in the country has led to further questions about the nature and the content of 'tradition' in South Africa, specifically in terms of how South Africans understand 'tradition' and 'modernity' and how these relate to sovereignty, citizenship, gendered identities and forms of patriarchy and an indigenous relationship to place. The 'primitive unanimity' or perverse myth that non-Western society is 'simple' and homogenous at every level, including the level of ideology and belief, may be enhanced by the concept of an innate and essential notion of African being especially because ubuntu is married to an imaginary place or at least the concept of an imaginary place.<sup>39</sup> For example, through structures of traditional authority, as Tom Lodge argues, African

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*Renaissance* (Hawke Research Institute, Working Papers Series, 2001), pp. 1-40 (p. 23).  
 <<http://www.unisa.edu.au/Documents/EASS/HRI/working-papers/mzamane-vision.doc>>  
 [accessed: 12 December 2014]

<sup>38</sup> Rita Barnard similarly refers to post-apartheid as Janus-faced. See 'Laughter, the Grotesque, and the South African Transition: Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*', *Novel*, 37, 3 (2004), pp. 277-302.

<sup>39</sup> Lodge, p. 230.

communities began to restructure themselves around Africanised concepts of tradition, legacy, heritage and other values and culture that characterised pre-colonial African institutions and values. These must be negotiated alongside technology, international markets and bureaucracies.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the urge to represent South Africa or Africa as unique presents a moral and political problem if it based on racially exclusive categories of difference that are caught up in neoliberal policies.

### **Neoliberalism and ubuntu**

In his infamous African Renaissance, Thabo Mbeki was one of the first outspoken political figures to call for a shift in consciousness of the South African people in the context of the modern post-apartheid nation-state. The African Renaissance was to 're-establish our diverse traditional values and in particular ubuntu, embracing the individual's responsibility to the community and the fact that he [sic] is, in community with others, [and is] the master of his own destiny'.<sup>41</sup> However, Mbeki's 'shift in consciousness' was problematic because it threatened a turn towards a conservative interpretation of the African form of communitarianism. In the reconstruction of the nation-state as the New South Africa, the country as a postcolonial state or postcolony sought to sustain and create unity and identity in the face of 'deterritorializing forces of globalization'.<sup>42</sup> A sentimentalized version of Africa cannot respond to the pressures of a global capital market.

The transition to democracy in the final negotiations between the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party (NP) was shrouded, as Richard A. Wilson argues, in controversy and scandal. Wilson argues that the final entreaty to

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<sup>40</sup> Lodge., p. 230.

<sup>41</sup> Wilkinson, p. 356.

<sup>42</sup> Comaroff, 'Occult Economies', p. 13.

human rights talk came to represent the final compromise in the negotiations because ‘in the postscript [to the Constitution], the invocation of human rights did not express the determination to protect individual rights in the name of ‘national unity and reconciliation’; that is, amnesty for the perpetrators of human rights violations came at the expense of more vulnerable members of society.<sup>43</sup> It was a ‘closed and secretive deal’ that replaced reconciliation through truth with ‘Reconciliation through Indemnity’.<sup>44</sup> From Wilson’s perspective, ubuntu was used to cover up the capitalist interests of the new emerging middle class elite and the TRC was a compromise between a demand for justice and a request for blanket amnesty.

As such ubuntu has been referred to as a ‘quasi-philosophical’ concept because it is supposed to embody a universalistic principle of humanity and cut across the cultural and socio-political spectrum but it has failed to do so.<sup>45</sup> Decoteau argues that ubuntu is ‘put to neoliberal use, in the post-apartheid era, as a means of promoting community self-reliance as an alternative to government dependence’.<sup>46</sup> It is possible that ubuntu serves the demands of the powerful and the elite exploiting the very people who put the black middle class majority into power.

Richard Wilson’s perspective highlights the class inequalities obscured by the strategic use of ubuntu. In 1994, almost half of the South African population lived in poverty: striking because these levels of poverty existed alongside great affluence. This financial gulf was partly a consequence of the racial discrimination of an oppressive apartheid regime where black South Africans had restricted access to job opportunities, poor education and were confined to some of the most impoverished

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<sup>43</sup> Wilson, p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> Eze, p. 7.

<sup>46</sup> Decoteau, p. 101.

parts of the country.<sup>47</sup> As such, in the first free and fair election, the African National Congress' promised 'a better life for all' in their 1994 election campaign and the road to democracy was marked by hope for radical change. However, change has not wholly come about.

As a form of national culturalism, ubuntu is criticised because not only does it drastically simplifies the complexity of the national culture and diverts attention away from political and economic pressures that divide the majority from the ruling class under the pretext of national unity.<sup>48</sup> Critics and scholars have discussed 'the limits to change', as Patrick Bond suggests. These include but are not limited to the financial cost of adequate social and economic redress is not wholly within the means of the new government and despite the governments extraordinary commitment to neoliberal economics (ironically, given the ANC's historic alliance with socialism), the global economy is not facilitating South Africa's growth, on which national reconstruction depends.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, although neoliberalism made it impossible to fulfil liberation promises and address legacies of racial and economic inequality, there remains a poor black underclass in South Africa whose day to day experience is not very different than it was during apartheid. These people are the portion of the population whose post-apartheid landscape grows increasingly bleaker.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass, *Policy, Politics and Poverty in South Africa*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 1-975 (p. 124).

<sup>48</sup> Paul Hountondji, 'True and False Pluralism', in *African Literature An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, ed. by Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 262-70 (p. 266).

<sup>49</sup> David Attwell and Barbara Harlow, Introduction: South African Fiction after Apartheid', in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 46, 1 (2000), 1-9, (p. 7).

<sup>50</sup> Lizeka Tandwa, 'University students to protest against fee increase', 21 October 2015 <<http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/University-students-protest-against-fee-increases-20151021>> and Simon Allison, 'South African students score tuition fee protest victory', 23 October 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/23/south-african-students-protest-pretoria-tuition-fees-rise>> [accessed 30 October 2015]

## Gender differences and ubuntu

The changes that South Africa experienced during the transition to democracy and post-1994 and what should have been grounded in reciprocity fuelled dissension and conflict. Gender difference is deeply embedded in the discourse of ubuntu. Dorothy Driver argues that the Black Consciousness Movement relied on the concept of women as the ‘bearers of national culture’ and this lay the ground for the deployment of ubuntu through the TRC, and that women helped by expanding on this role in their daily activities: ‘the TRC denied that women-in-community were women-in-themselves, and thus transgressed women’s own self-definition and practice as simultaneously and inseparably individual and community selves’.<sup>51</sup> In the TRC, for example, Women’s Hearings ideologically separated men from women; these divisions served to highlight the complex social formations of the historical context that problematise the maxim that ‘a person becomes a person through others’.<sup>52</sup> It is ‘as if in the social performance of ubuntu, ubuntu is to be bestowed by women, but not on women as well’. Therefore, ‘in the realm of the TRC where gender distinctions remain fundamentally oppositional, rather than provisional, situational and in flux’, in this realm, ‘neither men nor women can become fully human in the manner proposed by ubuntu’.<sup>53</sup>

As such, the political changes in the country made space for the exploration of gender. However, as an analytical category woman risks essentialism as women cannot be consider as a homogenous group; furthermore, ‘this could lead to another form of exclusion through which non-dominant groups, or groups within non-

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<sup>51</sup> Driver, p. 223.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 222.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 228.

dominant groups [...] become othered'.<sup>54</sup> Mbeki's African Renaissance was deep-rooted in a patriarchal traditional African order. Therefore, the turn towards conservatism is threatening for women because women here might be persuaded to assume traditional subservient roles in the name of performing and maintaining cultural values.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, the argument (however, illegitimate) may also incite other coercive forms of tradition such as polygamy, *lobola* and customary marriage which are also issues of social justice.

### **Social Justice and ubuntu**

Ubuntu is one way of organising people's relations to each other but if colonialism arrested African cultures by reducing their internal pluralism, diminishing discord and weakening tensions, ubuntu may be doing the same in post-apartheid South Africa: creating an exclusive political and social paradigm with no opportunity for social justice. An innate and essentialised concept of ubuntu in the Constitution, there is a danger that lies in naturalising 'cultural signs' as they are incorporated into the rhetorical repertoire of state discourse'.<sup>56</sup> In the 'myth' of the nation or the collective, there are certain motifs that national narratives adhere to. One of the main characteristics of nationalist ideology is to historicize and naturalize 'cultural' signs; especially, as Wilson argues, when these are incorporated into the rhetorical repertoire of state discourse. Brenda Cooper argues that in the 'oneness' of a people there must be a corresponding imaginary place.

Ubuntu is recognised as an ideological concept with multiple meanings 'that

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<sup>54</sup> Amanda Gouws, 'Introduction', in *(Un)thinking Citizenship: Feminist Debates in Contemporary South Africa*, ed. by Amanda Gouws (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 1-20 (p. 4).

<sup>55</sup> Jennifer Wilkinson, 'South African Women and the ties that bind', in *The African Philosophy Reader*, ed. by P. H. Coetzee and A. P. J. Roux (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 343-60 (p. 359).

<sup>56</sup> Wilson, p. 13.

conjoin human rights, restorative justice, reconciliation and nation-building within the populist language of pan-Africanism'; however, in post-apartheid South Africa, it became the Africanist wrapping used to sell a reconciliatory version of human rights talk back to black South Africans. For this reason, ubuntu is seen as exploitative, elitist and dogmatic. Ubuntu belies the claim that human rights would have no culturalist or ethnic dimensions.<sup>57</sup>

Kwasi Wiredu argues that through the concept of ubuntu people develop in association with each other 'as part of the ethical and moral training in our journey to become a person'.<sup>58</sup> However, Ifeanyi A. Menkiti recognises that these ontological collectivities that make up human groupings are essentialist categories and can run the risk of excluding non-Africans in participatory ethics.<sup>59</sup> 'Participatory difference' is central to Wiredu, Cornell and Mokgoro's perspective on ubuntu. As a form of participatory ethics, ubuntu is not perceived of in the strict ontological sense. The term 'participatory difference' is used by D.A. Masolo and can be described as a

form of participation that allows the community to strive for fidelity to difference and singularity. The togetherness we experience with one another from the beginning of life—as human beings—does not constitute who we are or who we become; rather, a person is obligated to enhance his/her community not as an 'abstract duty' but as a form of participation.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Wilson, p. 13.

<sup>58</sup> Cornell, "Rethinking Ethical Feminism Through Ubuntu", p. 136.

<sup>59</sup> Munyaka, M., and Mokgethi Motlhabi, 'Ubuntu and its Socio-moral Significance', in *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2009), pp. 63-84 (p. 298).

<sup>60</sup> Cornell, "Rethinking Ethical Feminism Through Ubuntu", p. 145.



Not only are we called to become a person but we are to make a difference towards the sustenance and creation of the community at large, as Cornell argues. In order for the community to function, it must be rooted in a spiritual foundation: the notion that ubuntu is an 'organic' relationship between individual and group and not simply as a maxim. Ubuntu is not a 'non-organic' relationship between individual and group. This is an organic ethical obligation towards the other is therefore conceived of as a predetermined demand that is placed upon each person. This exists 'inside' of the individual before or at his or her birth: it is 'a spiritual foundation, an inner state, an orientation, and a disposition towards good which motivates, challenges and makes one perceive, feel and act in a humane way towards others; such as the respect for the value of life of an individual.'<sup>61</sup> However, Ifeanyi A. Menkiti recognises that these ontological collectivities that make up human groupings are essentialist categories and, as such, can run the risk of excluding non-Africans in participatory ethics.<sup>62</sup>

Ubuntu can be conceived of as a communitarian or interactive ethic that can make way for social justice, as was the case in *The State vs. Makwanyane* and *The State vs. Occupiers*. For example, as Michael Eze argues that communitarian-ness is the 'underlying socio-ethical philosophy' of African-ness'.<sup>63</sup> In this discourse, an individual acts in accordance with overarching transcendental moral precepts. However, there is an argument that the concerns of the individual are lost within the greater welfare of the community. In terms of social justice, Kwame Gyekye believes that ubuntu must be conceived of in terms of a community that consists of individuals coming together out of their own free will instead out of an obligation to the community. Gyekye's version of ubuntu is more complex than an overtly essentialist version of ubuntu because he emphasises how it important it is to recognise that

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<sup>61</sup> Munyaka, and Motlhabi, 'Ubuntu and its Socio-moral Significance', p. 65.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>63</sup> Eze, p. 298.

individuals have the capacity for free will: ‘self-interested persons, each with private sets of preferences’.<sup>64</sup> Gyekye does not reject an organic or inherent concept of African belonging but his version of ubuntu requires that we ‘act in such a way that you always treat humanity, in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means but at the same time as an end’.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, our aspirations to collective belonging should understand that individual agency is a critical part of social functionality:

The evaluation [of the community] may result in the individual’s affirming or amending or refining existing communal goals, values, and practices; but it may or could also result in the individual’s total rejection of them.<sup>66</sup>

In comparison to Menkiti, Gyekye posits a political and social theory of belonging wherein the individual has the freedom and capacity to assert his/her rights regardless if these are congruent with communal values because ‘besides being a communitarian by nature, the human person is, also by nature, other things as well’.<sup>67</sup> Gyekye focuses on solutions for good governance: a dual responsibility and not a subservient one will support an affective moderate communitarianism.

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<sup>64</sup> Michael, Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009), p. 178-179.

<sup>65</sup> Kwame Gyekye, ‘Person and Community in African thought’, in *African Philosophy Reader*, ed. by P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (New York, London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 297-312 (p. 307).

<sup>66</sup> Gyekye, p. 305.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

## The occult and ubuntu

In the struggle for an independent nation, cultural simplification in and through ubuntu can distort political and economic problems that are 'strongly simplified' in spite of increasing anxiety and fear about growing instability and insecurity in the social and political landscape. In the context of her discussion on black diasporic identities, Cooper summarises Stuart Hall's five main elements of the 'narrative of national identity': the 'narrative of the nation' which includes stories, landscapes, image, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals which as a shared experience give the meaning the nation, 'the emphasis on origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness', 'the invention of tradition', 'the foundation of myth' and a 'pure, original people or folk'.<sup>68</sup> In these scenarios, culture is simplified as folklore, as Paul Hountondji argues.

The political and social atmosphere in South Africa has created the conditions for the emergence of all sorts of prophets, healers and occult solutions; as well as, mystification and mythology. Mbembe, like the Comaroffs and Ashforth, argue that these circumstances engender the attitude that 'anything goes'. For example, there is arguably a current and prevailing attitude amongst South African youth that is populist rhetoric and assumes that it is socially acceptable to be violent if circumstance allows it. Some critics see Ubuntu as a magical solution to the problem because its indigenous roots lie in an apolitical and ahistorical foundation; yet, its appeal to 'old world' traditions is the very aspect of ubuntu that has given it socio-political power in the transition because this has been presented in a hegemonic format, 'by way of an appeal to an unanimous past through which we may begin to understand the

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<sup>68</sup> Brenda Cooper, 'Cultural Identity, Cultural Studies in Africa and the Representation of the Middle Passage', in *Transgressing Boundaries New Directions in the study of culture in Africa*, ed. by Brenda Cooper and Andrew Steyn (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1996), pp. 164-83 (p. 166-7).

sociocultural imaginary of the 'African' people before the violence of colonialism'.<sup>69</sup>

However, an appeal to an indigenous apolitical and ahistorical concept of African is controversial because of the way in which ubuntu is all encompassing and the fact that it is biologically attributed towards blackness. There is a danger that ubuntu marginalises other races and other ethnicities. Yet, xenophobic attacks, over the past decade, demonstrate rising crime and violence in the country. As a result a 'vernacular praxis' emerged alongside the laws of the state. For example, the Comaroffs suggest that South Africa is in 'an epoch in which cultural rights have come increasingly to substitute for political and economic enfranchisement, no government – least of all one representing African empowerment – can afford to ignore the passions that inflame such forms of collective action, especially on the part of the majority that it strives to represent'.<sup>70</sup>

Adam Ashforth describes the feeling in South Africa, especially among the black underclass, as a space of 'spiritual insecurity' and similarly Jean and John Comaroff refer to the current climate in terms of the rise of 'occult economies'. Social justice in South Africa has to recognise the daily experiences of solving ritual and occult beliefs, indigenous claims to land inheritance and succession, corporal punishment and landholding in post-apartheid South Africa. For example, Deborah Posel's research on HIV and Aids in South Africa illustrates a practical way in which sick South Africans live and die according to occult economies and forms of witchcraft.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, as Deborah Posel's illustrates, the relationship between traditional culture and the condition of suffering and death in relation to contemporary

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<sup>69</sup> Eze, p. 92.

<sup>70</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, 'The Struggle between the Constitution and 'Things African'', *Interventions*, 7, 3 (2005), 299-303 (p. 300) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13698010500267918>> [accessed 30 December 2012]

<sup>71</sup> Deborah Posel, 'Democracy in a Time of Aids', *Interventions*, 7, 3 (2005) 310-315, (p. 312) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13698010500268080>> [accessed 30 December 2012]

democratic South Africa couldn't be more prevalent at a time where HIV and AIDS escalates. HIV and AIDS is a social and economic disaster in South Africa. The HIV and AIDS epidemic forces citizens to confront alternative narratives of healing in terms of identity and the afterlife, traditional versus medicinal cures and an inherent belief in God. These differences 'cannot be reconciled by any of the current ideals of liberal multiculturalism, including the liberal ideals read into the South African Constitution itself', argues Albie Sachs.<sup>72</sup> The Comaroffs argue that the newly democratic state is limited in term of the following: 'to make actual the entitlements it guarantees', the limited capability of its 'instruments of governance' to reconcile inequalities 'in an increasingly deregulated economy'.<sup>73</sup>

### **Ubuntu and post-apartheid literature**

It is in the context of these objections to the discourse of ubuntu that we turn to literature as a critical intervention into the imagining of South Africa's present, and its future. In the construction of the 'post-apartheid' narrative of the New South Africa, ambiguity seems to be 'a distinguishing feature of a transitional South Africa', argues David Attwell.<sup>74</sup> The construction of the New South Africa represents 'the complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of 'the people' or 'the nation' and make them immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narratives'.<sup>75</sup> In South Africa's case, this has been the homogenisation of African tradition in the pursuit of social cohesion towards an optimistic future. However, South African post-apartheid literature reflects a bleak social and political

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<sup>72</sup> Sachs, p. 23.

<sup>73</sup> Comaroff, 'The Struggle between the Constitution and 'Things African, p. 300.

<sup>74</sup> Attwell and Harlow, 'Introduction', p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Homi Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation', in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 140.

landscape. This demonstrates that South Africa is not the optimistic place it was so hopefully constructed to be. Scholars and critics of the post-apartheid political literature have tried to explain different post-apartheid subjectivities that emerge as a part of the ambiguity of dealing with aspects of a bleak transition in the socio-political landscape. Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe refer to theories of 'entanglement' to conceive of identity in the 'now' in relation to the past and the future; Mark Sanders similarly seeks 'human foldedness'; in his infamous ANC transitional speech, Albie Sachs represents the desire for representations of culture 'beyond the weapons of struggle'; Ari Sitas and Brenda Cooper emphasise that we 'energise the value of peoples ordinary agency in African socio-scapes of difficult transition' which Njabulo Ndebele did years before.<sup>76</sup> And Shane Graham suggests that many post-apartheid authors map space in terms of a palimpsest as a part of the reconstruction of the New South Africa.

If writers of the post-apartheid present seek to write in a fashion that is diametrically opposed to the past, then protest writing is a thing of the past. Most critical and literary critics emphasise how authors experiment with new forms and new ways of writing that are not limited by certain forms of representation or stereotypes surrounding race, gender or class. Furthermore, South African writer Zoe Wicomb claims that black South Africans have to take responsibility for their own condition because the trope of the 'we-the-oppressed-majority' does not carry the same weight, as it did in the past. Bermth Lindfors explains how the intellectual history of South Africa and her rapid cultural transformations can be measured in the changes evident in literature. The shifts in the socio-political landscape between 1989 and 1999 came to influence the literary agenda and political prospects for black South

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<sup>76</sup> Michael Chapman, 'Introduction', in *SA Literature and Beyond 2000*, ed. by Michael Chapman and Margaret Lenta (Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2011), pp. 1-18, (p. 4).

Africans especially. South African literature since the 1990s has had the task of articulating the changes of the shift from white minority rule into the post-apartheid era.

The trajectory of black writing from apartheid to post-apartheid saw the first major literary form from a black writer in the short story, which flourished in the 1950s but was later shut down by tough censorship in the 1960s. Black writers who got their start in South Africa started by writing for an African audience through newspaper and magazine publications aimed at the indigenous African population. After the second world-war, protest writing thrived.<sup>77</sup> Most of the outspoken writers were banned or forced to leave. Political writers were forced to be silent; lyric poetry that surfaced in the 1970s, birthed a literary movement of outspoken resistance that was also shut down later on, and those who took exile relied on autobiographical writing as a channel for their experiences. In the 1990s there was an upsurge of South African memoirs and autobiographies. Njabulo Ndebele explains how writers became so obsessed with reactionary unity that they ignored the every day experiences of black South Africans 'wherein their culture expressed belief in more mundane, Manichean terms'.<sup>78</sup> Therefore, the demilitarization of the literary culture and the focus on the ordinary as extraordinary has become a trope for the 1990s; however, Nixon argues that post-apartheid writers face 'crises of imaginative identity' within a framework of refusing to forget because the changes to democracy require that we do not forget but that we somehow move on. As such, the social, political, economic and structural changes affect the way in which South Africans are able to conceptualise self-identity.

The key pursuit of the 'post-apartheid narrative' since 1990s has been how to

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<sup>77</sup> Bernth Lindfors, 'Politics, Culture, and Literary Form', in *African Literature An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 22-30 (p. 26).

<sup>78</sup> Nixon, p. 69.

deal with difference but the legacy of apartheid is bleak and violent landscape shrouded in poverty, poor education and lack of justice for the majority. Attwell and Harlow argue that the militant youth culture of the 1980s left an uncomfortable legacy of seemingly apolitical crime and vigilantism in South Africa and the country's model Constitution is not always supported by widespread acceptance of the 'new' culture of rights; furthermore, the government does not have the means to adequately address all of the economic needs of the country and the country's commitment to neoliberal economics and the global economy is not facilitating the national reconstruction and rehabilitation that South Africa needs. The role of literature in this mandate, argues Attwell, has been since the 1990s to South Africa literature articulate this difficult situation. The hope of this writing has been to refashion identities, to enable new forms of being and belonging and to emphasise silent voices.<sup>79</sup>

However, the focus of the Rainbow Nation has been on creating a narrative 'we'. Carol Clarkson argues that the word 'we' invites expectations of communal endeavour and of some notion of community. In her study of post-apartheid fiction, she argues that reference to the 'we' might be a testament to the loss of community and that in each instance in the text where there is reference to the performative 'we', the novel inaugurates a new community and a new community of readers. From Clarkson's perspective, these novels look at the disintegration of communities and involve the lamentation of the erosion of communities and personal histories. Hence, the trope of the 'return to tradition' is immanent. The issue of belonging to a culture, a history and a place is an insistent question in post-apartheid fiction because 'it is

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<sup>79</sup> Attwell and Harlow, 'Introduction', p. 8.



through this question that each character confronts the contingency of his or her own cultural moment'.<sup>80</sup> The 'we', as she says, is a contested linguistic site:

Communal beliefs, histories and bonds are by no means infrangible, let alone presumed, so that any use of 'we' raises disturbing questions about the porosity of a contingent cultural limit, about acts of violence perpetrated against those excluded from the 'we' and, in some instances, against coercively included within it. 'We' does not simply reassert what we might like to take as being universally held.<sup>81</sup>

Clarkson's argument is that the force of the 'we' is more radical in an African context than it is in ordinary uses of the Western word. The challenge of the 'we' therefore is a challenge to the 'I' – 'to one's sense of the limit of one's self, to one's understanding of personal responsibility as the ability to respond'. There are ethical responses and implications in the 'we'. Therefore, the 'we' is not the simple grammatical operations but 'relations of complicity and distance in the 'we' and I'.<sup>82</sup>

The question is to what extent South African post-apartheid writers should be responsible for shaping a national consciousness through cultivating a historical consciousness in order to restore the dignity and humanity of black South Africans that was undermined by centuries of colonialism, segregation, and Apartheid. As David Attwell suggests this literature is as a whole, experiential, ethical, and politically ambiguous especially in terms of the transition and the tension between what South Africans want to remember and what we would like to forget.

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<sup>80</sup> Carrol Clarkson, 'Who are 'we'? Don't make me laugh', *Law and Critique*, 18, 3 (2007), pp. 361-74 (p. 362) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10978-007-9017-3>> [accessed 12 June 2015]

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 364.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 369.

Furthermore, he suggests that the ‘truth’ of history remains the least explored subject in African literature from South Africa, whose strength lies in examining more contemporary issues and as such, there are few contemporary novels, poems, and plays from South Africa that are informed purely by an essentially African worldview or who fully rely on orature as a source of inspiration.<sup>83</sup>

If ubuntu was employed as a vehicle for social and political transformation but contemporary fiction reflects ubuntu as polarizing, patriarchal and coercive, the question is whether or not it is possible to rely on ubuntu as form of social cohesion or whether it is too ambiguous and slowly becoming obsolete in the face of a bleak post-apartheid reality. It is in the post-apartheid era where younger black writers address these ambiguities, especially regarding the commensuration of ‘tradition’ with ‘modernity’, and, in doing so, they confront the reclamation and restoration of tradition that seems to be a primary concern of literary, cultural, political, and economic projects for African renewal. Post-apartheid literature is therefore well placed to intervene in the complexities of this debate.

## **Chapter Summaries**

This thesis engages with the arguments for and against ubuntu as a form of social cohesion in light of the irreconcilability of ‘modernity’ and of ‘tradition’. In the coming chapters, I have selected to focus on the fiction of Zakes Mda and Sindiwe Magona as two black South African writers who both experienced apartheid and exile. I have also chosen a series of young black post-apartheid writers who demonstrate that ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ are incommensurable in pursuit of the

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<sup>83</sup> Attwell and Harlow, ‘Introduction’, p. 8.

New South Africa and the construction of the ‘post-apartheid narrative’. What’s more, their narratives represent a bleak, xenophobic and violent landscape, especially for women. These narratives do not represent an optimistic transition and therefore highlight ambiguous implications of ‘tradition’ in the construction of the nation and its people.

Chapter one Zakes Mda and Sindiwe Magona address the role of tradition in the construction of the post-apartheid nationalist narrative in *The Heart of Redness* and in *Mother to Mother*. Magona and Mda have opposing ubuntu narratives in their fiction. Ubuntu unity is at stake in Magona’s text through her marginal temporalities that question ubuntu as an innate and essential aspect of African identity. Mda’s ubuntu narrative supports an innate and essential South African identity as a tool for social cohesion. However, *The Heart of Redness* (2002) homogenises African culture through cultural simplification. *Mother to Mother* (1998) highlights the dangers of cultural simplification where the return to ‘tradition’, as an inherent aspect of African identity, is envisaged as a tool for change in terms of social justice.

Chapter two discusses the ways in which gender difference is embedded in the discourse of ubuntu. A close look at the construction of gendered identities in domestic labour and motherhood in the Sindiwe Magona and Zakes Mda’s fiction, *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* (1991), *To My Children’s Children* (1991) and *Forced to Grow* (1991) and *Sometimes There is a Void: Memoirs of an Outsider* (2013) demonstrates the implications of a patriarchal ubuntu discourse in post-apartheid. Here women are objectified and exploited. Ubuntu is therefore complicit in the dehumanisation of black women through a ‘return to tradition’ in the post-apartheid landscape. Magona responds to the insecurity of the times with her illustrations of strong female-to-female bonds between maids and portrays that defy

patriarchal gendered stereotypes; whereas, Mda's women are alienated urban figures in apartheid South Africa.

Chapter three explores narratives of rural-urban migrants and African immigrants in ubuntu discourse and will argue that the urban experience for rural-urban migrants and African immigrants can be surmised as 'just another sad black story'.<sup>84</sup> Contrary to the optimistic discourse of the New South Africa, Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* (2011), Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001) and K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2008) represent a bleak post-apartheid reality that is far removed from an optimistic ubuntu narrative. 'Illegitimate cultures of entitlement' will focus on cultures of impunity and of blame that engender coercive forms of social cohesion and violence in the city, as well as alternative strategies of belonging in urban space. Special focus will be given to the experiences of young black male rural-urban generation who can be referred to as the 'born-frees', young men and women in their twenty's who move to the city to find fortune but who are met with difficult circumstances that lead to experiences of disillusion with the New South Africa.

The final chapter examines different representations of the occult and ubuntu as a part of the response to experiences of misfortune in Kgebetli Moele's *The Book of the Dead* (2009), Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995) and Kopana Motlwa's *Coconut* (2007). These include discourses of witchcraft, muti murders, generational cleavages over the accumulation of wealth and envy and jealousies. The pressures of an unstable landscape expose that the 'we' of the community is ambivalent, morally ambiguous and its diversity is a challenge to the state.

As a narrative of cohesion and humanness for a postrevolutionary nation,

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<sup>84</sup> Kgebetli Moele, *Room 207* (Johannesburg: Kwela Books, 2011), p. 11. All further parenthetical citations will refer to this edition.

ubuntu fits the mould. However, as these fictions demonstrate ubuntu risks cultural simplification, racial polarization and the homogenisation of African culture where the 'return to tradition' is envisaged as a tool for positive change. A bleak post-apartheid landscape reflects that gender, class and ethnic difference are embedded in discourses of ubuntu prevalent in rural and urban parts of South Africa. As such, this thesis argues that ubuntu now functions as a floating or empty signifier. For South African authors, it has failed to achieve the social justice it promised, and the unity that its meaning implies.

## Chapter One

### Ubuntu and cultural nationalism

#### *The Great Trek*

*The Afrikaner Great Trek* in the 1800s' is a model of rhetorical and culturally specific elements emplotted as nationalist narrative. The migration of approximately fifteen thousand pastoralists out of the Cape region subsequently 'came to be seen in the twentieth-century as the seminal event in South African history when it provided the symbolic images crucial to the ethos of Afrikaner nationalism'.<sup>85</sup> A deep sense of nationalism was embodied in *The Great Trek* and this fostered a narrative of belonging and a nationalist discourse that, as Homi Bhabha describes, '[filled] the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and [turned] that loss into the language of metaphor'. *The Great Trek* was used as a symbol of this strong sense of nationalist Afrikaner community.<sup>86</sup>

A century after its inception, the event was reconstructed around key characters and individuals. Signs and signifiers, such as books, flags, stories and memorial days, established a nationalist discourse. This nationalist discourse influenced the construction of the apartheid regime in South Africa. Apartheid has its roots in Afrikaner nationalism and the purity of the *volk*. The *volk* constructed a discourse of 'us' and 'them' through racial polarization, racist discourse and coercive methods of social cohesion and violence. Afrikaner nationalism was a narrative of belonging based the belief that Afrikaans people were an indigenous group originating from a specific part of South Africa. However, contemporary historians

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<sup>85</sup> Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994), p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> Bhabha,, p.145.

and historiographers argue that the ethos of Afrikaner nationalism actually only emerged much later on, in the twentieth-century. For example, some critics therefore challenge long held beliefs that the national purity of The Trek was 'a movement in constant opposition to African polities, as some traditional interpretations maintain'.<sup>87</sup> Thus, the story of *The Great Trek* shows how a singular story can grow into a powerful cultural narrative. An equally compelling nationalist narrative that emerged during the nineteenth-century is the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing in 1856 and the prophecy of Nongqawuse, the girl-child prophet. The Great Trek and the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing established nationalist narratives that rested on an indigenous identity or *volk*.

### **Nongqawuse and the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing 1856**

The story of the girl-child prophet Nongqawuse is a significant moment in the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing. Nongqawuse is the girl-child prophet who, in the mid-1850s, allegedly heard from and spoke to her ancestral spirits. These spirits are believed to have spoken to her about the salvation of the *amaXhosa* people, at the time. During the nineteenth-century, Nongqawuse lived in *Ngqika* the independent part of *kwa-Xhosa*, under the rule of King Sarhili the Chief Paramount of the *amaXhosa* nation.<sup>88</sup> While playing with her cousins Nombanda and Nonkosi along the banks of the *Gxhara River*, the ancestors were believed to have revealed the prophecy to Nongqawuse. The ancestors told Nongqawuse to tell the *amaXhosa* to outlaw witchcraft, to sacrifice their cattle and empty their granaries in order to save the nation from the Rinderpest. If they did this successfully, on the Promised Day a

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<sup>87</sup> Worden, p. 15.

<sup>88</sup> J. B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 10.

Blood Red Sun would rise in the East and set in the West, their grain and storage pits would overflow with blessings and ‘the dead would arise from the ashes and all the whites would be swept into the sea’.<sup>89</sup> The promise to the *amaXhosa* was that on the Promised Day a Blood Red Sun would rise in the East and set in the West, and their grain and storage pits would overflow with blessings. The *amaXhosa* who didn’t listen to the prophecies would be destroyed in a storm that would usher in the new millennium.<sup>90</sup> With the help of her Uncle Mhlakaza, Nongqawuse prophesied that the resurrection of the ‘new’ people would take place in mid-August of 1856. However, her prophecies were not only out of date – failing in November 1856 and in January, February and May of 1857 – but they never came true.<sup>91</sup> Her failed prophecy has been popularly referred to as ‘The Great Disappointment’. The nature of Nongqawuse’s prophecies and what followed from these is a sequence of events that allegedly left the *amaXhosa* nation in ruins to this day.

Widely accepted interpretations of the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing refer to the event as a ‘sacrifice’, a ‘national suicide’ and a ‘delusion’. An estimated 30,000 to 40,000 cattle were killed and some records show that the *amaXhosa* population decreased from 104,721 to 37,697 people through displacement or starvation and many entered the migrant labour system in neighbouring colonies.<sup>92</sup> The prophet Nongqawuse and the events of the Cattle Killing was a challenge to *amaXhosa* social cohesion. The accusations against African tradition in these events are similar to criticisms of ubuntu and African tradition embedded in the discourse of the New

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<sup>89</sup> Achille Mbembe, ‘South Africa’s Second Coming: The Nongqawuse Syndrome’, (2006) (para. 3 of 32) <[https://amaXhosa.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa/democracy/southafrica/succession\\_3649.jsp](https://amaXhosa.opendemocracy.net/democracy-africa/democracy/southafrica/succession_3649.jsp)> [accessed 31 October 2012]

<sup>90</sup> Sheila Boniface-Davies, ‘History in the Literary Imagination: The Telling of Nongqawuse and the Xhosa Cattle Killing in South African literature and culture (1891-1937)’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, St Johns College, 2010), p. 4.  
<<http://www.dspace.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/238313>> [accessed 30 October 2012]

<sup>92</sup> Peires, p. 10.



South Africa. The prophecies and the events that followed the Cattle Killing have been criticised for inciting a populist understanding of nationalism, prescriptive ethics, dogmatic tradition, elitism, African humanism, historical rigidity and the homogenization of tradition and the validation of culture.

The story of the Afrikaners and the *amaXhosa* and the split between the Believers and the Unbelievers reveal the wealth of diverse communities that emerged in the Eastern Cape region. These groups have the capacity to affect longstanding structural, political and socio-economic change in South Africa; yet, South Africans continue to experience uneven consequences of the dynamics of divergent cultural nationalisms that emerge from this region in terms of how these are incorporated in the construction of the New South Africa. Homi Bhabha argues that no political ideology can claim metaphysical or transcendent authority for itself. The complex time of national narrative is not linear or horizontal but complex contesting historical development of a group and an individual. Therefore, we are led to question the fullness of any narrative discourse posing as nationalist discourse as ever being fully representative (standing with authority) or with the capability to have authority; as such, it is not possible that culture can ever articulate an authority under the assumption that it exists as fully present or authoritative. Rather, 'people are 'subjects' of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the people as contemporaneity: as the sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as reproductive process.'<sup>93</sup> Therefore, there is constantly this divide between the pedagogical and performative, between what is assumed – the origin point or historical time – and how it is lived out or actualised in the everyday.

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<sup>93</sup> Bhabha, p. 145.

Zakes Mda and Sindiwe Magona address the role of tradition in the construction of the post-apartheid nationalist narrative in *The Heart of Redness* (2002) and in *Mother to Mother* (1999). At the time of writing, ubuntu was becoming an important part of the construction of the Rainbow Nation, especially through institutions like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In light of Bhabha's argument, this chapter will argue that ubuntu is a problematic form of social cohesion in the New South Africa. By discussing representations of ubuntu in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*, I will argue that Magona and Mda have opposing narratives of ubuntu in their fiction. If the unity of the nation depends on the displacement of plurality, cultural homogeneity is at stake in Magona's text through her marginal temporalities. She questions whether ubuntu is an effective tool for change when it is conceived of as an innate and essential aspect of African identity. In other words, she problematizes ubuntu personhood as an effective tool for social cohesion in South Africa. On the other hand, Mda produces a narrative of ubuntu that advances an innate and essential South African identity as a tool for social cohesion. This version of ubuntu personhood homogenises African culture through cultural simplification. In comparison, *Mother to Mother* highlights the dangers of cultural simplification where the return to 'tradition', as an inherent aspect of African identity, envisages social cohesion. According to Magona, ubuntu promotes racial polarization and an exclusive form of politics.

Both authors were born in Bantustans or 'ethnic' homelands under apartheid law during the 1960s. A Bantustan or homeland was a designated area for a specific group of non-white South Africans to live, under the guise of independent rule. A homeland was a Native Reserve where black South Africans were forced to live and govern themselves 'independently'. The implementation of this policy involved

massive removals of people into areas designated for members of their 'tribal' group. Bantustans were co-ordinated according to ethnic tribe but the accommodation provided was cramped, and families were torn apart by structural changes in the country.<sup>94</sup>

The Bantustan was a symbol of disunity because instead of confirming the naturalness of different identities – through strategies like race 'and the authentic occupation of the primitive landscape' – 'the inflections and stress at the margins meant that land and identity were experienced as fundamentally unstable forms'.<sup>95</sup> Separate development actually failed to perpetuate the myth of complete and distinct identities. Bantustans were really silent and alien, which made living there ambiguous. As such, segregation laws led to feelings of placelessness, homelessness, wandering and unbelonging for black South Africans, and in terms of ubuntu personhood, a severe disconnection between the individual and the ancestral community.

As the son of a leading anti-apartheid activist, Mda's upbringing was more privileged than Magona's and this afforded him the luxury of frivolity and choice at a time when choice and frivolity was not an option for black South Africans. Zanemvula Kizito Gatyeni Mda, more commonly known as Zakes Mda was born in South Africa in 1948 in the same year that the Afrikaner National Party came into power. His father is AP Mda who was a well-known apartheid activist, lawyer and advisor for Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) and the African National Congress (ANC). While growing up, Mda spent time in Johannesburg with his mother, who worked as a nurse at a clinic, but he moved to Lesotho when he turned 15 years old because his father was sent into exile. Unlike Mda, Magona lived in urban South

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<sup>94</sup> Zakes Mda, *Sometimes There Is a Void: Memoirs of an Outsider* (Johannesburg: Picador, 2013), p. 3. All further parenthetical citations will refer to this edition.

<sup>95</sup> Beningfield, p. 59.

Africa for most of her adult life.<sup>96</sup> By the time that Magona's father joined the rural-urban migrant system, the apartheid state had created fixed geographical and spatial boundaries for different races. This meant that whites had full political participation whereas black South Africans were confined to homelands, reserves, townships and other 'black-only' areas.

Sindiwe Magona was born in Umtata, which was the first 'homeland' that gained independent status in October 1976. The Transkei was one of the first official apartheid Bantustans. When Magona was 5 years old, her family relocated to Cape Town because of the 'forced' removals system. She grew up in the Western Cape in an area declared as a 'Coloured Preferential Area' and in 1960, her family was moved to Nyanga West later named Gugulethu meaning 'Our Pride': an urban homeland that is now one of the largest and dynamic urban townships in South Africa. However, Magona recalls her time spent there in 'bleak, same-looking matchboxes', which she describes as 'soulless and soul-destroying. Sub-standard. Uninspired. Hopelessly uninspiring' (*Children*, p. 14).<sup>97</sup>

Jennifer Beningfield argues that the association of ethnicity with bounded land and geographical borders has created displaced boundaries and fragmented identities in post-apartheid South Africa; therefore, the 'return to tradition' and ubuntu personhood was an important part of the construction of the Rainbow Nation.<sup>98</sup> Mda and Magona write about these experiences of belonging and of unbelonging, during

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<sup>96</sup> Sindiwe, Magona, *To My Children's Children* (London: Women's Press, 1991), p. 14. All further parenthetical citations will refer to this edition

<sup>97</sup> Sindiwe Magona spent most her life in urban South Africa and by twenty-three years old was married with three children. During the most tenuous era of the resistance movement, she was a young, single and pregnant black mom facing the hardships of single parenthood coupled with the limits that apartheid had already placed upon her as a black domestic servant working in Johannesburg. Her first novel was published in 1990 and her work is a series of autobiographical fiction: *To My Children's Children* (1991), *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* (1991), *Forced to grow* (1992), *Kubantwana Babantwana Bam* (1995), *Push-Push! and Other Stories* (1996) and *Mother to Mother* published in 1998.

<sup>98</sup> Beningfield, p. 139.

apartheid and post-apartheid. The fictions discussed in this chapter are therefore embedded with discourses of social cohesion and challenges to social cohesion as Mda and Magona negotiate ubuntu personhood against an oppressive regime that dehumanized black South Africans.

### **Ubuntu personhood**

#### ***The Heart of Redness***

In Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*, two anti-apartheid and anti-colonial movements are 'encapsulated' in the prophetic move of Nongqawuse and the emergence of democracy in 1994. Both are significant dates because 'they are moments of choice [and] as such, represent high water marks in the definition of agency in black historical and cultural identity'.<sup>99</sup> Achille Mbembe parallels the Cattle Killing and the prophecies with the socio-economic imbalances of post-apartheid South Africa identifying, what he refers to as, *The Nongqawuse Syndrome*—'the name for the kind of political disorder and cultural dislocation South Africa seems to be experiencing' and one that 'is once again engulfing the country'. According to Mbembe,

This is a syndrome South Africa has always suffered in times of demoralisation and acute social and mental insecurity. *The Nongqawuse Syndrome* is a populist rhetoric and a millenarian form of politics, which

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<sup>99</sup> Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), p. 10.

advocates, uses and legitimises self-destruction, or national suicide, as a means of salvation.<sup>100</sup>

Mbembe implies that South Africa is returning to a self-destructive phase through, among others, a 'return to tradition'. This, he argues, is a cyclical process. Through representations of the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing, nationalist narrative is revisited in Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and *Mother to Mother*. Both authors demonstrate different ways in which the Cattle Killing relates to the birth of the Rainbow Nation and to cultural nationalism in the New South Africa. *Mother to Mother*, for instance, as Renee Schatteman argues, responds to the hope for an optimistic future. Writing during the dispensation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Magona narrates the birth pains of the transition to liberation. In her narrative, she offers 'a model of understanding where guilt and innocence do not need to be assigned and where right and wrong are not easily identified'.<sup>101</sup> These are grey areas that complicate the optimistic discourse of the Rainbow Nation. Whereas, *The Heart of Redness* highlights the homogenizing effects of the appropriation of tradition and the power of tradition since the late 1980s and into the era post-1994, particularly in terms of how African tradition supports the ambitions of a neo-liberal state.

The Rainbow Nation was optimistic ideology that constructed one nation, out of many different cultures and ethnicities. Therefore, the discourse of the Rainbow Nation intended to homogenise different ethnicities into one nation. However, as Bhabha suggests, nationalist narrative incites a splitting. There is a splitting between the pedagogical and the performance or the lived out-ness of the pedagogical. This

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<sup>100</sup> Mbembe, 'South Africa's Second Coming' (para. 7 of 32).

<sup>101</sup> Renee Schatteman, 'The Xhosa Cattle-Killing and Post-Apartheid South Africa: Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*', *African Studies*, 67, 2 (2008), pp. 275-91 (p. 290) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00020180802242582>> [accessed 10 January 2015]

means that what we know as 'culture' and how we perform what we know as 'culture' is very different. The difference between the performative and the pedagogical introduces a splitting, between the self and other of the nation, and, as such, introduces an in-between space. The subject emerges in this in-between space. However, the nation is contested within itself because of the following: the performative of production and of the repetition of the self (the people) in the aim to achieve and repeat the signs of the nation as 'the people of the nation'; it is through this repetition that the subject and the nation are split.<sup>102</sup>

*The Heart of Redness* is set in two different time periods and it oscillates between the colonial past and the post-apartheid present. Mda establishes a strong sense of ubuntu personhood through his nostalgic image of the *amaXhosa* past. This past is constructed on the affirmation of all things 'traditional' through his encounter with the land and with 'a people'. Scholars have argued that Mda's work highlights the hybridity of 'tradition' and 'modernity' but this chapter will argue that his novels are resolute and sentimental in terms of a 'return to tradition'.

Splitting is a major theme in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*. This theme starts in Hillbrow, Johannesburg at Giggles nightclub in Hillbrow. At a rooftop vigil, he joins in to mourn the dead. While listening to the 'amens' and hallelujah's, Camagu's 'famous pangs of lust' attack him while the beautiful woman leads the mourning song. He finds himself split between his fleshy desires for the woman and the 'mothering spirit' that comforts him as she sings. Camagu feels that he does not belong in South Africa. He does not know how to dance the 'toy-toyi', 'the freedom dance that the youth used to dance when people were fighting for liberation' (*Heart*, p. 28). He was in exile for almost thirty years so 'the big men of the government' and

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<sup>102</sup> Bhabha, p. 147-9.

the corporate world ‘did not want qualified blacks’ (*Heart*, p. 30). Consequently, Camagu had decided to return to America, until he meets NomaRussia. He follows her to the rural Cape and in Qolorha, there is a feud between Believers and Unbelievers. The prophecy of Nongqawuse has divided the modern-day *amaXhosa* into two cults: the Unbelievers ‘spend most of their time moaning about past injustices [...] and the folly of belief’ and the Believers lament the time of the Prophetess and continue to practice *amaXhosa* rituals. Lastly, the novel shifts between postcolonial South Africa and nineteenth-century Qolorha-by-Sea. Mda faces the paradox of ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ in post-apartheid South Africa: how the Believers actualise tradition and how the Unbelievers reject a ‘return to tradition’. However, Mda does not remain split. In fact, he falls for the ‘split-tone’ singing of Qukezwa and marries her. As such, Camagu’s final choice at the end of the novel points to an originary culture through a ‘return to tradition’, which denies the possibility of hybridity by positing ‘a prior given original’.

As such, Camagu’s is the story of how he returns to his ubuntu personhood through his journey from the United States of America to Johannesburg and into a small rural village in the Eastern Cape, in post-apartheid South Africa. Instead of returning to America, Camagu helps the Qolorha villagers launch and sustain a community co-operative to protect the natural land. This natural land is a part of South Africa’s cultural heritage. He helps the local woman harvest the natural sea life to sell to the local traders and the neighbouring towns and so builds a community collective that mimics Mda’s real-life *The Bee People Co-operative* and promotes cultural tourism. In spite of the ambiguities in the text, his ultimate decision is to remain in rural Qolorha to marry a local ‘red’ girl and the subtext of these choices is



that he overcomes the bleak post-apartheid landscape by a 'return to tradition' located in an encounter with a indigenous people and his indigenous land.

### **Tradition, modernity and ubuntu**

The protagonist Camagu is a sojourner from Johannesburg. He meets NomaRussia, a beautiful woman, on a rooftop bar in Johannesburg and chooses to follow her from Hillbrow to rural Qolorha-by-Sea, in the Eastern Cape. David Attwell has described *The Heart of Redness* in terms of a meeting of 'modernity' and 'tradition':

[*The Heart of Redness*] is organised around two historical moments as well as two opposed social tendencies, one involving *ubuqaba* (conservatism, traditionalism, the 'Believers', their 'redness', from the red ochre with which the women adorn themselves and colour their skirts), the other involving *ubugqobokha* (literally 'piercedness', or enlightenment, the 'Unbelievers', with their faith in schooling and modernity).<sup>103</sup>

On his journey from city to rural village, urbanite Camagu encounters a series of mutual engagements. His experiences with people, animals and spirits do not simply frame his development as a character but become 'the process of negotiating Camagu's transition as a subject from a Western discourse of modernity to a counter discourse founded in tradition and empowerment [and] constituted in a series of dialogues with members of the village'.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Attwell, *Rewriting Modernity*, p. 196.

<sup>104</sup> David Bell, 'Embedded in History: Camagu's amaXhosa identity in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*', *Moderna språk*, 103, 2 (2009) 19-26 (p. 21)

<<http://ojs.ub.gu.se/ojs/index.php/modernasprak/article/view/346>> [accessed 20 December 2013]

Mda uses the trope of the prodigal son to illustrate Camagu's journey to person. He does not fit in, in Johannesburg, as 'he has no connection with anyone' and has 'just found himself there' (*Heart*, p. 26). As the prodigal son, Mda sets up the Camagu's later transformation or 'return to tradition'. In Hillbrow, 'his unquenchable desire for flesh is well known' but 'it is a shame he has to live with' (*Heart*, p. 28). At this stage, he has lost his ubuntu personhood having raped his maid 'again and again': 'a frumpy country woman who [had] come to the city of gold to pick up a few pennies by cleaning up after disenchanted bachelors' (*Heart*, p. 28). Camagu is ashamed to tell anyone about this. Secondly, he is not able to find his ubuntu personhood in the city because he feels displaced in the 'slummy flatlands' where he is among 'the gangsters and pimps', the 'dilapidated orphans of the night' and feels alone amidst 'the wanderers whose permanent homes are the tents of the nightly wakes' (*Heart*, p. 26). He implies that morality is lost in the city. His sense of spatial displacement is affirmed by NomaRussia, the beautiful makoti, who when referring to the inhabitants of Hillbrow, she says that 'everyone here come from somewhere else' (*Heart*, p. 35). Her comments imply that Camagu's peers have a sense of ubuntu personhood but he has none. This is emphasised when she challenges his vague knowledge of Nonqawuse.

However, on his journey towards rural Qolorha Camagu begins to find his ubuntu personhood. The first encounter he has with 'a people' is through his meeting with the brown snake. This is an important marker on his journey towards ubuntu personhood. Through his brown totem snake, he recognises that he belongs to a people: the *amaXhosa* with the clan name, Mpondomise. He claims that he has 'never been visited by Majola, the brown mole snake that is the totem of his clan' and 'the men understand' (*Heart*, p. 99). His black comrades recognise the start of his

transformation: the men who rush into Camagu's room to defend him are astounded that this 'man who has lived in the lands of the white people for thirty years, to have such respect for the customs of his people' (*Heart*, p. 99). Through this encounter with the totem snake, he gains access to the Qolorha community by participating in shared collective history. This is a recognised ritual practice. A totem is the reminder of ancestry and heritage. This is a moment that he embraces and one that reflected in his final choice and the closing chapter of the book when he marries Qukweza. A symbol of the unity he feels towards the prophecy and the past. Camagu figuratively receives the key to unlock his past, a collective memory and a shared history. Furthermore, he is entitled to join in a history that he can claim as his own.

Jennifer Wenzel has argued that 'neither Mda's imbrication of nineteenth – and twentieth-century plots nor his staging of Believers' and Unbelievers' disputes over 'redness' and 'civilization' can be read as a simple dichotomy between tradition and modernity' but blurs the lines between the two. Like the prophecies of Nongqawuse, Mda's narrative challenges to the hegemonic notions of time and historical change that undergird the European civilising mission because to assume the difference between modernity and tradition is to assume the linear limitations of time and place, as these narratives embrace spirituality and alternate temporalities.<sup>105</sup> Yet, the rapid way in which Camagu embraces ancestral spirits and his African heritage highlights 'what has always been a part of this complex picture' – the importance of African tradition in the concept of personhood – and therefore provides a powerful narrative to re-imagine personhood in post-apartheid South Africa.<sup>106</sup>

Camagu problematizes the commensurability of 'tradition' and 'modernity' but his ultimate choices in the novel suggests that 'tradition' wins out as a form of

<sup>105</sup> Jennifer, Wenzel, *Bulletproof: Afterlives of Anticolonial Prophecy in South Africa and Beyond* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 180-1.

<sup>106</sup> Attwell and Harlow, 'Introduction', p. 9.

personhood for the New South Africa. Rita Barnard has argued that Mda ‘celebrates the generative power of African people’ which is an urgent ethical and social agenda in contemporary South Africa.<sup>107</sup> She suggests that Mda helps to contemplate decolonization. In this discourse, Mda embraces the interconnectedness of the Self and the Community as an essential aspect of personhood rather than of self-determination.

Therefore, Camagu begins to change as he encounters his indigenous African tradition. His transformation is a re-awakening to an inner interconnectedness or ubuntu personhood between himself and the community. Adam Ashforth has argued that the interconnectedness of self and community is an essential aspect of ubuntu personhood and not of self-determination.<sup>108</sup> This makes ubuntu different to western notions of self-determination. As this feeling deepens through his encounters with the local people and with the land, his ubuntu personhood intensifies and more positive things begin to happen in his life. Later, Camagu begins to feel that he has a place and a people to call home. These are things that he did not have when he started his journey in Johannesburg. Ubuntu has afforded him a community, land and, later in the story, a wife and children.

As Rita Barnard has argued, Camagu’s is not a journey away from provinciality but a journey towards it.<sup>109</sup> Upon his arrival in South Africa from America, Camagu realises that ‘one needed to dance the freedom dance in order to get contracts’ and that ‘the corporate world did not want qualified blacks’ but ‘they

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<sup>107</sup> Rita Barnard, ‘Laughter, the Grotesque, and the South African Transition: Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying*’, *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 37, 3 (2004), 277-302 (p. 298).

<<http://web.b.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=c8ddc80c-698f-46e6-8982-b291d92c1c49%40sessionmgr114&vid=1&hid=102>>

(DIO: 10.1215/ddnov.037030277) [accessed 21 February 2012]

<sup>108</sup> Adam Ashforth, ‘Aids, Witchcraft, and the Problem of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa’ (n. pub., 2001) p. 7 <<https://www.sss.ias.edu/files/papers/paperten.pdf>> [accessed 29 June 2014]

<sup>109</sup> Rita Barnard, *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 45.

preferred the inexperienced ones who were only too happy to be placed in some glass affirmative-action office where they were displayed as paragons of empowerment'.<sup>110</sup> Consequently, Camagu quickly becomes disillusioned with the Rainbow Nation and the opulent black elite.

Camagu finds it easier to be at home in rural parts of the South Africa than urban Hillbrow. He is quickly mesmerised by the beautiful landscape in the Eastern Cape and the 'redness' of the people who live in the local villages but finds himself embroiled in a tug of war between two families. Bhonco and Zim are both ancestors of the headless one, Xikixa now living in Qolorha-on-Sea. The brothers are Mda's modern day version of the nineteenth-century feud between *amaXhosa* Believers and Unbelievers at the time of the Cattle Killing in 1856. Zim is an Unbeliever and Bhonco is a Believer. These feuding families continue to live out the prophecies of Nongqawuse and the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing in more modern terms. Upon arriving in Qolorha, the local Qolorha residents are debating over whether to forsake the land of Nongqawuse to commercial developers who plan to turn the area into a casino or a hotel, or give over the land as a cultural heritage and tourist site that will benefit the local residents.

His suggestion is that personhood requires that we re-awaken to a 'lost' and indigenous past that is revisited on the land. Camagu is in dialogue with the land and with Qukezwa, that Camagu is able to 'return to' Khoi-San and *amaXhosa*. Mda uses the story of the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing as the point of convergence for these two distinct histories with the prophet Nongqawuse at the heart of the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing. In Mda's depiction of the natural land, Qolorha is a 'place of wonders' where 'the rivers do not cease flowing, even when the rest of the country knells in drought',

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<sup>110</sup> Zakes Mda, *The Heart of Redness* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), p. 30. All further parenthetical citations will refer to this edition.

here ‘the cattle are round and fat’ (*Heart*, p. 7). Hilary Dannenberg suggests that ‘the local colour and very specific natural environment of Qolorha-by-Sea emerge as a positive cultural and natural force, which provides a firm ground against which the shifting cultural dynamics of the text are enacted’.<sup>111</sup> However, this mystical and esoteric landscape adds to a ‘mythical’ image of Africa and simplifies the cultural struggle that took place on that land during colonialism and apartheid, and has left a legacy of conflict today. For instance, he uses Camagu’s name as a symbol for political unity and national belonging because he draws attention to the fact that Camagu’s name evokes a singular African experience of a collective and shared past.

As such, I argue that the narrative suggests that ubuntu personhood can be found through the singular ‘African experience’ of time and of place. This is best expressed in the love triangle between Camagu, Xoliswa and Qukezwa. David Attwell argues that Qukezwa, Xoliswa and Dalton are the three primary dialogues that negotiate Camagu’s transformation as a subject: with Dalton, Camagu is in dialogue around issues of empowerment, with Xoliswa a dialogue ‘on the nature and relevance of civilization, progress and primitiveness’ and with Qukezwa in ‘the nature of traditional beliefs and indigenous plants and animals’.<sup>112</sup> He chooses to marry Qukezwa — the symbolic reincarnation of the girl-child prophet Nongqawuse. These two women symbolise two very different moments in *amaXhosa* history. Qukezwa embodies ‘tradition’ and Xoliswa embodies ‘modernity’. These two female figures are incompatible. They are worlds apart and their irreconcilability therefore represents the incommensurability of ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ in the post-apartheid nation-state. Yet, choosing Qukezwa over Xoliswa is a political gesture because

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<sup>111</sup> Hilary P. Dannenberg, ‘Culture and Nature in *The Heart of Redness*’, in *Ways of Writing: Critical Essays on Zakes Mda*, ed. by David Bell and J. U. Jacobs (Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2009), pp. 169-190 (p. 172).

<sup>112</sup> David Bell, ‘A Theatre for Democracy’, in *Ways of Writing: Critical Essays on Zakes Mda*, ed. by David Bell and J.U. Jacobs (Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2009), p. 21.

Camagu insists that a 'return to tradition' will bring a truer sense of identity to South Africans.

Xoliswa Ximiya rejects this version of the African subject. She denies her 'redness' and falls for Camagu simply because she believes he is a modern man. Unfortunately for Xoliswa, Camagu falls in loves with the physical beauty of Qolorha and with Qukezwa who embodies this physical land as she mirrors 'the nature, the locality, sensuality and colour of place'.<sup>113</sup> Qukezwa has a deep knowledge of the local environment, which is evident throughout the novel. This knowledge puts the elders to shame. For example, at the inkundla, one of the elders 'mutters his wonder at the source of Qukezwa's wisdom when she is but a slip of a girl' (*Heart*, 216). The elders argue over her punishment but Camagu is taken aback by Qukezwa's wisdom of the land and of the ancestors. Qukezwa's knowledge of the authentic practiced rituals, laws and/or African or *amaXhosa* custom stem from an underlying *amaXhosa*/San/Khoi ontology, which makes her attractive to Camagu.

On the contrary, Xoliswa embodies 'modernity' and as such, she is a static African subject. Xoliswa rejects one part of her history and of her relationship with her community when she denies her 'redness'. Xolisa Ximaya 'finds these habits disgusting' despite having thought that 'she had successfully weaned her parents from redness, until noPetticoat's rebellion' (*Heart*, p. 260). Xoliswa similarly turns her back on Camagu. Camagu is 'a lost cause' (*Heart*, p. 261) and Xoliswa's lost love. In response to this, the village people make fun of her: 'Has love driven her out of the village' or is it 'the places with streetlights' and 'the dermatologists and plastic surgeons' that attract Xoliswa to deny her 'redness'? (*Heart*, p. 262) Her desire to abandon her past in exchange for a 'new' modernised, Americanised life is

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<sup>113</sup> Dannenberg, p. 184.

paradoxical to Qukezwa. Xoliswa is the opposite of Camagu and Qukezwa. Xoliswa finds traditional ('redness') 'disgusting' and is persistently trying to wean her parents off theirs.' (*Heart*, 260) She cannot reconcile his love to her and as such, she symbolises wider social and political post-apartheid concerns about the space of 'tradition' in contemporary politics.

However, in a cruel twist of fate Xoliswa becomes the embodiment of 'her people's' past: redness, the Cattle Killing Movement and Nongqawuse's prophecy. She desperately tries to resist her connection to her past but finds that traditional *amaXhosa* personhood is as inescapable as her own limbs. Although she tries to resist it, her identity is bound to the collective in a being-becoming relationship that replicates ubuntu:

She wakes up one day and finds that the scars of history have erupted on her body. All of a sudden her ancestor's flagellation has become her flagellation. She rebels against her heathen scars. She refuses to believe that they are part of ancestral vengeance. She curses her father for resuscitating the Cult of Unbelievers. (*Heart*, p. 261)

In the eye of the Qolorha community, Xoliswa shows that she doesn't want to belong to the community. Unfortunately for Xoliswa, the consequence of her choice is social ostracization reflected in the 'wagging tongues' of the village whereby Xoliswa 'finds that she has to defend herself constantly, even to people she does not regard as deserving to walk the same earth with her' (*Heart*, p. 261-2). However hard Xoliswa tries to reject an indigenous ontological personhood, she is not able to escape. In the end, Xoliswa literally embodies the collective past. She is forced to face her past as



‘the scars of history have erupted on her body’ (*Heart*, p. 261). In response, Xoliswa ‘rebels against these heathen scars’ and although ‘she refuses to believe that they are part of ancestral vengeance’, Xoliswa ‘curses her father for resuscitating the Cult of Unbelievers’ (*Heart*, p. 261).

In the end, Xoliswa leaves Qolorha without a sense of personhood. Mda suggests that her ‘modern’ ways have caused her to feel anxious and isolated: all of a sudden her ancestor’s flagellation has become her flagellation’ (*Heart*, p. 261). These are the scars of Twin-Twin that is revealed through the framing story of the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing. The scars prevent Xoliswa from escaping her redness. Shane Graham argues that in *The Heart of Redness* there are ‘symbols of traumatic historical memory, which Mda conceives as deeply inscribed on both the body of the individual survivor and in particular places’.<sup>114</sup> In the eye of the Qolorha community, Xoliswa shows that she doesn’t want to belong to the community because she doesn’t embody her redness by wearing traditional clothes coupled with the fact that she openly dismisses African traditions. She leaves for Pretoria with a divided heart, bitter and hurt. Unfortunately for Xoliswa, the consequence of her choices is social ostracization reflected in the ‘wagging tongues’ of the village (*Heart*, 262) whereby Xoliswa ‘finds that she has to defend herself constantly, even to people she does not regard as deserving to walk the same earth with her’ (*Heart*, 261). Critics have argued that her scars demonstrate her continuity with her ancestral past; however, the fact that these appear in the same shape and form as Twin-Twin’s scars suggest that the past is a form of entrapment.

As an African subject, he is emergent and unfolding. He withdraws in the act and context of displacement and entanglement, according to Achille Mbembe. Yet,

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<sup>114</sup> Shane Graham, ‘Mapping Memory, Healing the Land: The Bells of Amersfoort’, in *Ways of Writing: Critical Essays on Zakes Mda*, ed. by David Bell and J.U. Jacobs (Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2009), pp. 57-72 (p. 60).

displacement in this case does not mean to exclude or to dislocate but to signify an ‘elsewhere’. Achille Mbembe argues that in African personhood there is a close relationship between ‘subjectivity and temporality—that, in some way, one can envisage subjectivity itself as a temporality’. In *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembe explains how in Africa ‘time is directly lived’ and that social theory has failed to account for time ‘not synchronically or diachronically, but in its multiplicity and simultaneities, its presences and absences, beyond the lazy categories of permanence and change beloved of so many historians’. He interprets the African present as ‘an experience of time’: linking the past with the present and the present with the future. In this discourse, ‘the present as an experience of time is precisely that moment when different forms of absence become mixed together: absence of those presences that are no longer so and that one remembers (the past), and absence of those presences that are yet to come and are anticipated (the future).’<sup>115</sup>

The ‘I’ in a name does not simply identify the self or create distance between other subjects but ‘it announces the self as an intersection of social relations’.<sup>116</sup> Ultimately this is significant because ‘the individual is thus at once the beneficiary and the bearer of the cultural resources of the community (figuratively speaking, a history, a collective narrative, a set of beliefs). Carrol Clarkson shows how in a traditional African worldview, then, the notion of liability, or responsibility, is intensified to result in an understanding of the self crucially as an agent of cultural continuity’. Camagu has name that represents the collective community and their relationship to the ancestral realm. This is the concept of the ‘we’ as Carrol Clarkson shows that ‘we’ is a word, which invites expectations of communal endeavour, of

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<sup>115</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley; Calif; London: University of California Press, 2001), p. 16.

<sup>116</sup> Carrol Clarkson, *Drawing the Line: Towards an Aesthetics of Transitional Justice* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 170.

some notion of community. The figure of Camagu and the journey that he takes towards personhood represents social cohesion through a return to tradition. His name illustrates the ethical engagements he is obligated to perform because he has a name that extends beyond the meaning of a name in the Western sense. From this perspective, Camagu already belongs to his African community and when the community cry out 'Camagu' in community agreement and to appease the ancestors it is as if they are proclaiming his personhood and their responsibility to each other.

Hilary P. Dannenberg argues that Mda shows how cultural narratives grow dynamics out of incongruous and chance elements; she argues that he underlines the basic human need to construct vital narratives of belief even when these are not true. In these narratives, she argues that Mda 'traces the developmental dynamics of the different strands of cultural narrative among the Xhosa people'. For example, there is hybridity in *The Heart of Redness* between Christian eschatology and San stories of Heitsi Eibib. Eibib is a saviour who 'parted the waters of the Great River so that his people could cross when the enemy of was chasing them [...] long before the white missionaries came to these shores with their similar story of Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea' (*Heart*, p. 249-50). Traditional clothing is another aspect of an innate and essentialised version of ubuntu personhood that is under debate in the novel. 'Red' clothing signifies an indigenous ontology versus more modern clothing that might represent globalising forces. Furthermore, as Dannenberg argues, the clothing choices that these characters make are bound up in 'a larger process of cultural intermingling and hybridisation [in terms of] the inevitable result of contact between different cultures'.<sup>117</sup> The same sentiments are echoed in the casino development in Qolorha. Hilary Dannenberg argues that Mda parallels Western globalisation with

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<sup>117</sup> Dannenberg, p. 178.

British colonialism in that both are an economic assault. Furthermore, she perceives the struggle between these two as occurring within Camagu's own consciousness and as such, his journey is a dialectic process through opposing forces. The traditionalists view the development from the perspective that it would not only destroy the natural resources and the livelihood of the *amaXhosa* in Qolorha but it would profoundly affect the spiritual development and the core of the *amaXhosa* people or their personhood.

### **Land and ubuntu**

The division of land according to race – during colonialism and apartheid – has led to the politicisation of the land and of bodies in post-apartheid South Africa. This has had a significant affect on black South Africans because of an oppressive and dehumanising colonial and apartheid epistemology. The spatial boundaries constructed in South Africa during colonialism and from 1910 onwards, consolidated the image of a white country rooted in an oppressive discourse based on race, gender and class discrimination that located black South Africans in diametric opposition to the rest of the world. Words such as 'native' traditionally associated with backwardness and inferiority were applied to inhabitants of a colonised territory. Here the term 'nature' and notion of a 'natural' identity were racially and politically mutating terms fundamental to the division of land and people.

In African tradition, a person's name is an important part of the 'we' of the community and carries an ethical weight in the terms of collective responsibility. The meaning of a name then extends beyond the meaning of a name in the Western or European sense. Contemporary African philosopher Kwasi Wiredu's observations of

an Akan proverb observes that primary responsibility for an action (positive or negative) rests with the individual doer and that a non-trivial secondary responsibility extends to the individuals family and, in some cases, to the wider community.<sup>118</sup>

According to Wiredu, one's proper name is a personal and social linguistic inscription of accountability. The name can be used to call the individual but it also recalls ancestral and kinship ties as well as those to the past. As such, to 'respond to the call of one's name, therefore, is to respond not only on behalf of oneself, but on behalf of those kinsmen and ancestors who are, of necessity, voiced in that name'.<sup>119</sup>

An individual's relationship to the land is therefore a crucial part of ubuntu personhood. The belief in the ancestors and in the spiritual realm implies a connection between 'a people' and their indigenous place of birth. As such, indigenous African ontology makes the claim that in the life of an African there is a fundamental connection between an individual's place of birth, their life and death. South African historian Leon de Kock argues that 'the physical body is irrevocably tied to the land through birth' but that for those living in urban areas, 'migration, urbanisation and the long-term consequences of apartheid policies have split and altered its stability'.<sup>120</sup> Marais suggests that 'modern' forms of development therefore disrupt 'traditional' forms of self and community development. During apartheid, for example, black South Africans were forcibly removed and re-established in ethnic homelands, also known as Bantustans or Homelands. Jennifer Beningfield has suggested that these 'ethnic' homelands were more divisive than they

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<sup>118</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, 'The moral foundation of an African culture', in *Philosophy from Africa: A Text with Readings*, ed. by P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 306-16 (p. 308-9).

<sup>119</sup> Kwasi Wiredu, 'How Not to Compare African Thought With Western Thought', in *African Philosophy: Selected Readings*, ed. by Albert Moseley (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995), pp. 153-92 (p. 164-7).

<sup>120</sup> Leon de Kock, 'People, power & culture and the ethics of historical representation', *South African Historical Journal*, 27 (1992), 243-253, (p. 13) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02582479208671749>> [accessed 12 March 2015]

were cohesive. As a result, belonging was ethnically determined but fragmented as separate development failed to perpetuate the myth of complete and distinct identities, says Beningfield. Therefore, instead of confirming the ‘naturalness’ of ethnic identity, an individual’s relationship to the land, his or her past and self-identity was experienced as ‘fundamentally unstable forms’.<sup>121</sup>

Camagu’s narrative implies that ubuntu requires an individual to conform to an indigenous place. This place is in turn connected to the ancestral realm. Mda uses the trope of the prodigal son to illustrate that Camagu’s journey towards personhood requires that he return to his homeland. Camagu is the sojourner who is not able to find peace until he returns ‘home’ to Qolorha. He is not able to find his ubuntu personhood in the city because he feels displaced in the ‘slummy flatlands’ where he is among ‘the gangsters and pimps’, the ‘dilapidated orphans of the night’ and feels alone amidst ‘the wanderers whose permanent homes are the tents of the nightly wakes’ (*Heart*, p. 26). NomaRussia who feels that same way about post-apartheid Hillbrow affirms his sense of spatial displacement. She says that ‘everyone here come from somewhere else’ (*Heart*, p. 35). This is furthered by his vague knowledge about the prophetess.

### **Ubuntu Personhood**

#### ***Mother to Mother***

In *Mother to Mother* the protagonist Mandisa addresses Linda Biehl, the mother of Amy Biehl, the white anti-apartheid American scholar who was stabbed to death by a group of black protestors in Gugulethu in 1993. She uses the passing of time to

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<sup>121</sup> Beningfield, p. 133.

discuss the way in which the past is understood in the present by drawing on the narrative of the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing and the prophet Nongqawuse. By doing so, Magona contests ubuntu personhood as a part of the construction of the New South Africa. She discusses black consciousness, social ostracization and the loss of ubuntu personhood.

### **Black Consciousness and ubuntu**

In comparison to Mda, Magona highlights dangers of cultural simplification where the 'return to tradition' is envisioned as a tool for change. She problematizes ubuntu personhood as her personal story of apartheid suggests that the community reject her. Secondly, that as an innate and essential aspect of African identity, ubuntu is a socially coercive as nationalist narrative. Paul Hountondji argues that through 'a return to tradition' posited in nationalist narratives, like the Rainbow Nation, 'culture is petrified in a synchronic picture, flat and strangely simple and univocal, and is then contrasted with other cultures which are also trimmed and schematized for the sake of comparison'. The complexities of culture are simplified as folklore and its contradictions are ignored.

In Magona's version of events, Mandisa is the mother of Mxolisi the young black man who is accused of murdering Amy Biehl. The novel is in a letterform. Mandisa writes to Linda Biehl, Amy's mother, as the mother of Mxolisi, the killer. Magona claimed that part of her motivation for writing *Mother to Mother* stemmed from her close identification with Evelyn Manqina (the mother of the real killer), fictionalised as Mandisa, whom she grew up with in Gugulethu. Through her narrative of grief, Mandisa begins to challenge the ubuntu personhood in the

construction of the Rainbow Nation because shared grief emphasises shared humanity and not shared ubuntu personhood. The community shun her because her son, Mxolisi, killed Amy Biehl. Mxolisi's mom does not subject herself to societal norms because, although she empathises with Biehl's mother, she is willing to risk ostracization for the love of her son.

She is fighting against social stereotypes of black people but she is also fighting against coercive forms of social cohesion within these close-knit collectives, of which she is complicit. The letter to Linda Biehl is an attempt to regain a her personhood and the personhood of her son and therefore her appeal to Amy's mother, as 'Sister-Mother' is an inadvertent plea for her humanity, having found no hope in her indigenous people. Siphokazi Koyana suggests that Mandisa is struggling 'to forge and maintain a healthy sense of self within an immediate community that is undergoing a cultural transition and a larger society entrenched in one of the most oppressive expressions of colonialism the world has ever seen, apartheid'.<sup>122</sup> Yet, Anne Whitehead suggests that as Mxolisi's mother she is already embedded in, and contingent upon, 'specific, social, material, and political conditions, and cannot easily be extracted or abstracted from them'.<sup>123</sup> The community want to make her ashamed of this love. Schatteman argues that Mandisa is a character

Who suffers the consequences for something she did and yet did not do,  
thereby creating another model for understanding Mxolisi's position in the  
novel as a person both responsible for the killing and yet also the victim of

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<sup>122</sup> Siphokazi Koyana, 'Why are you carrying books? Don't you have children?' Revisiting Motherhood, in Sindiwe Magona's Autobiographies, *English Studies in Africa*, 45, 1 (2002), 45-55 (p. 45) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00138390208691309>> [accessed 24 March 2015]

<sup>123</sup> Anne Whitehead, 'Reading with empathy: Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*', *Feminist Theory*, 13, 2 (2012), 181-95, (p. 188) <<http://fty.sagepub.com/content/13/2/181.full.pdf+html>> (DOI: 10.1177/1464700112442645) [accessed 12 March 2014]



mistakes made by the adult community and of the crimes penetrated by government.<sup>124</sup>

In an interview with Koyana, Magona has described Mandisa as ‘a perfect example of the success of apartheid – she is the perfect product of the system – her talent is stillborn; so is that of her children’.<sup>125</sup>

Magona discusses this plea for cohesion by challenging a ‘return to tradition’. Firstly, Tato’s paradoxical retelling of the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing foregrounds the uncertainty of the violent post-apartheid present for black South Africans in the post-apartheid present. Tato implies that ubuntu personhood, as ‘a return to tradition’, is a tool for social cohesion through his narrative of the girl-child prophet and of the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing. He does so by voicing the ‘unvoiced’ history of the *amaXhosa* and emphasises *amaXhosa* indigenous land and indigenous community. Mandisa’s grandfather, Tato, shares his account of the *amaXhosa* Cattle Killing with her. His story of events is remarkably different to what Mandisa is taught in school.

Tato also uses the story of the Cattle Killing to illustrate white society’s perspective on black South Africans. For example, according to Mandisa’s teachers, Nongqawuse ‘was a false prophet’ and the *amaXhosa* were ‘superstitious and ignorant’.<sup>126</sup> Tatomkhulu recites the story of the prophecy to Mandisa in the ‘voice of the *imbongi* or praise poet of the people’ and through Tato’s version of events, ‘he explained what had seemed stupid decisions, and acts that had seemed indefensible became not only understandable but highly honourable’ (*Mother*, p. 183).

<sup>124</sup> Schatterman, ‘The Xhosa Cattle-Killing,’ p. 281.

<sup>125</sup> Siphokazi Koyana and Rosemary Gray, ‘An Electronic Interview with Sindiwe Magona’, *Institute for the Study of English in Africa*, (Grahamstown: Rhodes University, 2002), pp. 99-107 (p. 101). <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40238944>> [accessed 12 March 2014]

<sup>126</sup> Sindiwe Magona, *Mother to Mother* (New York: Beacon Press, 1998), p. 175. All further parenthetical references will refer to this edition.

Furthermore, Tato uses patterns of oral African tradition, reference to *lobola*, chieftainship and the ancestors to emphasise that the *amaXhosa* are an indigenous people with a collective and shared past (*Mother*, p. 178). Tato may reject allegations of superstition and African backwardness replacing Eurocentric images of Nongqawuse and the *amaXhosa* but he does not replace these with spatially complex relationships between coloniser and colonised; rather, he emphasises blackness. Through the narrative of Tato she discusses how this discourse can breed violence in the present.

Yet, Tato's 'return to tradition' is haunted by centuries of black oppression. Tato addresses oppressive white rule, namely the Bantu Education system that imposed a uniform curriculum on black South Africans with an emphasis on preparing students for manual labour and subordinate form of living.<sup>127</sup> However, Tato's ideology bares a very close resemblance to the Black Consciousness Movement that emerged in South Africa during that time. The consensus, as Tato argues, is that Bantu Education stripped each black South African of his or her opportunity to 'become a person' but he connects this with Amy Biehl's death but suggesting that the only way to assume personhood is to take it back (*Mother*, 50-1). He does this in a subtle way: Tato laments Black Consciousness Movement whereby one 'could only become an agent of political change by assuming a positive identity that was both empowering and reflexive' (*Mother*, p. 50-1). Therefore through Tatomkhulu's version of events in the Cattle Killing he explains how 'what had seemed stupid decisions, and acts that had seemed indefensible became not only understandable but highly honourable' (*Mother*, p. 183). The danger in Tato's narrative is that it relies too heavily on the value of blackness that revisits racial

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<sup>127</sup> Michael Onyebuchi Eze, *Intellectual History in Contemporary South Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 27-33.

polarization and a form of exclusive politics.

In this respect, Tato's story relies on a pre-determined black consciousness framework as a legacy or a heritage of what has gone before us. Dennis Walder argues that recalling the past means recalling history and memory, which are elements that are already part of a cultural framework and that to some extent 'preselects imagery' and 'predefines remembering'. The transformation and building of the 'new' South Africa has been '[preoccupied] with the relation between present and past, between individual and collective memory, and between nostalgic longing for things lost or devalued on the one hand and a struggle to reconcile and reshape a whole society on the other'.<sup>128</sup> As such, Tato's version of events should be seen to shape Mandisa's social memory. Tato enables Mandisa, as Schatterman argues, to 'comprehend her father's rage after a hard day at work or her mother's fury on payday when counting her husband's wages'.<sup>129</sup> The oppression of black South Africans is implicated in this image.

Therefore, when Mandisa returns to the moment with her grandfather to make sense of Amy Biehl's death she is forced to envision Mxolisi's behaviour in terms of Tato's depiction of the collective heart condition of the black South Africa community. Tato speaks about the 'deep, deep, deep' hatred in the hearts of black people, since their first encounter with whites on the Cape. Mandisa suggests that black South Africans harbour bitterness towards white South Africans because of centuries of racism and colonial oppression. Jennifer Wenzel argues that Mxolisi did just as 'Nongqawuse had but voiced the unconscious collective wish of the nation: rid ourselves of scourge'.<sup>130</sup> In the novel, Magona explains that an innocent young girl is

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<sup>128</sup> Dennis Walder, 'Writing, representation and postcolonial nostalgia', in *Textual Practice* 23, 6 (2009), 935-946 (p. 940) <<http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/23/7-8/263>> [accessed 9 November 2013]

<sup>129</sup> Schatterman, 'The Xhosa Cattle-Killing', p. 279.

<sup>130</sup> Wenzel, p. 210.

murdered by ‘an agent, executing the long-simmering dark desires of his race’ which the author tells us is ‘the resentment of three hundred years plugged into his ears; deaf to her pitiful entreaties’ (*Mother*, p. 210). Mxolisi is this agent of dark desire – ‘only an agent’ – it was not he who ‘wielded the knife’ but ‘[hatred] saw through his eyes; walked with his feet and wielded the knife that tore mercilessly into her flesh’ (*Mother*, p. 210). This comparison implies that colonialism was the meeting of two distinct and homogenous people, rather than the interpellation of cultural practices and performance. Furthermore, his comparison claims that individuals are pre-social because of the innate heart condition that is implied in this narrative. According to Tato, black South Africans harbour deep resentment towards white South Africans:

The storm in the heart of a person is more dangerous than howling winds and raging waves. You can run from those and seek shelter elsewhere, perhaps escape them altogether. How does one run away from the heart, one’s own or that of another? (*Mother*, p. 209).

This heart condition is paralleled by Mandisa in Biehl’s murder in ‘the enactment of the deep, dark, private earnings of a subjugated race’ and ‘the consummation of the inevitable senseless catastrophe’, which is carried out by Mxolisi (*Mother*, p. 210). In this discourse, Mxolisi is the product of an originary moment between black and white people and Amy Biehl’s murder is the inevitable outcome of the binary relationship between black and white. Therefore, through Tato’s ‘return to tradition’ he foregrounds the justification of racial polarization and exclusionary politics in the present.

The novel suggests that ubuntu plays an ambiguous role in post-apartheid

South Africa. Schatterman has argued that Tato's reference to the Cattle Killing 'reinforces the concept of moral ambiguity' in the post-apartheid landscape.<sup>131</sup>

Whereas, Wenzel has discusses the novel in terms of joining the

Post revolutionary retrospection to the unrealized vision of the cattle killing prophecy, which offers a matrix of memory through which the anticipations, achievements, and disappointments of the antiapartheid struggle can be reconstellated without losing sight of the exigencies of the transition.<sup>132</sup>

As such, Jennifer Wenzel argues that the novel is not life affirming. There is no openness to the future and a 'blotting out' of the democratic transition 'that forces us to weigh the costs of the struggle against dreams of liberation that have never yet been attained'. Post-apartheid South Africa has not lived up to the high moral ground that the Rainbow Nation based on ubuntu had envisaged: 'doctrine of eternal hope' teaching people to uphold and uplift each other by showing generosity, solidarity, mutual regard, compassion, concern, care, mercy, pity, peace, love, redemption, healing, restoration, justice, love and catharsis 'implanted' in the heart throughout life.<sup>133</sup> In place of this, culture underscores Magona's narrative by 'its own symbol-forming activity, its own interpellation in the process of representation, language, signification and meaning-making'.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, the novel is not open to change and unlike the prophecies of Nongqawuse, there is no hope for Amy's killer just as there is little hope for a lot of young black men and women post-apartheid.

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<sup>131</sup> Schatterman, 'The Xhosa Cattle-Killing', p. 278.

<sup>132</sup> Wenzel, p. 162-3.

<sup>133</sup> Mzamane, 'Building a New Society', p. 241.

<sup>134</sup> Jonathan Rutherford, 'The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha', in *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 207-21 (p. 209).

## Conclusion

The observations made in this chapter on the challenges of an innate and essential ubuntu as an aspect of African identity provide the basis for the analysis of the subject position of gender in the following chapter. Gender differences embedded in discourses of ubuntu pose a challenge to social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa. The female body – as the primary site of gender inscription – reflects an oppressive and patriarchal apartheid and post-apartheid order in the faculties of domestic labour and motherhood. Here women are objectified and exploited in a ‘return to tradition’.

## Chapter Two

### Gender difference and ubuntu

*“Leaving a woman in that state [of sexual arousal] was the worst thing a man could do” – Jacob Zuma*

Jacob Zuma, South Africa’s “100% Zulu Boy”, was dismissed as deputy president in June 2005 after he was charged with corruption and allegedly charged with raping a thirty-one year old family friend. He told the South African court that his culture had taught him not to leave a woman in a state of sexual arousal. Zuma denied the rape charge because he said that the sex was consensual. He explained to the court that, as a part of his cultural duty, he had been taught to satisfy the woman and therefore he had acted in accordance with his education as a youngster growing up in Nkandla, in northern KwaZulu-Natal. In the *State vs. Zuma 2006*, Zuma was acquitted. During the trial, he referred to his accusers private parts as ‘*isibhaya sika bab ‘wakhe*’ meaning her father’s kraal. Kraal is the *isiZulu* word for ‘home’. Zuma admitted to ‘entering this kraal without *ijazi ka mkhwenyana* – the groom/husband’s coat, known to non-Zulu speakers as a condom; he later confessed to having had a shower after sexual intercourse as a way to prevent contracting HIV.<sup>135</sup>

In the *Mail & Guardian* article, Lisa Vetten argues that the case was not about impartial judgement but that the Zuma rape trial was ‘a storytelling contest, with the final judgement acting as the authoritative or master narrative’.<sup>136</sup> Reports from the trial show that Zuma embraced *isiZulu* speaking throughout the court case. *isiZulu* is

<sup>135</sup> Fikile-Ntsikelelo Moya, ‘100% Zuluboy’, *Mail and Guardian Online* (6 April 2006) <<http://mg.co.za/article/2006-04-06-100-zuluboy>> [accessed 24 November 2014] (para. 6-13 of 38)

<sup>136</sup> Lisa Vetten, ‘Losing the Plot in Zuma’s rape trial’s stories’, *The Mail and Guardian* (14 August 2014) <<http://mg.co.za/article/2014-08-14-losing-the-plot-in-zuma-rape-trials-stories>> [accessed 12 December 2014] (para. 5 of 26)

Zuma's mother tongue. The *Mail & Guardian* stated that he allegedly invoked *isiZulu* culture and spoke in such a serious idiom that Zuma corrected the court interpreter for missing nuances. Zuma addressed the judge as '*nkos'-yenkantolo* (king of the court)' and he allegedly waited for even the most mundane English phrases to be translated into *isiZulu* before responding'.<sup>137</sup> Claire Laurier Decateau describes the trial as 'the perfect example of the way in which the tropes of 'traditionalism' and 'modernity' are pitted against each other in public sphere debates about sexuality'.<sup>138</sup>

Likewise, in 1997, former president and ANC leader Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance speech was criticised by feminists because of the role it assigned to women: Mbeki's African communitarianism, Jennifer Wilkinson argued, forced women into subservient roles in 'the name of preserving cultural values'.<sup>139</sup> Wilkinson's argument reflects growing concerns about violent patriarchal discourse masquerading as 'tradition' in the country. Statistics show that in the fifteen years since, 1994, 'official statistics record over 328 000 murders, over 750 000 incidents of rape, close to 1.6 million incidents of aggravated robbery, and 3.6 million incidents of assaults with intent to inflict grievous bodily harm'.<sup>140</sup> The high rape statistics indicate that women are at the forefront of violence in the post-apartheid landscape.

Women are oppressed in ways that are not as obvious as physical violence. In fact, gender differences embedded in African tradition and ubuntu are equally violent if less obvious. For example, practices of customary marriage, *lobola* or polygamy also threaten the freedom and equality of women in a globalized world. This chapter

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<sup>137</sup> Moya, (para. 6 of 38).

<sup>138</sup> Claire Laurier Decateau, *Ancestors and Antiretrovirals* (Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 2013), p 170.

<sup>139</sup> Jennifer R. Wilkinson 'South African Women and the ties that bind', in *African Philosophy Reader*, ed. by P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J Roux, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 402-422, (p. 359).

<sup>140</sup> David Bruce, 'Our burden of pain: Murder and the major forms of violence in South Africa', in *New South Africa Review 1 2010: Development or Decline?* ed. by John Daniel and others (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010), pp. 389-409 (p. 390).

<<http://witspress.co.za/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/NSAR-1 Watermark.pdf>>  
[accessed 21 January 2015]



will take a close look at gender differences that are embedded in ubuntu discourse through the construction of women in the fiction of Sindiwe Magona and Zakes Mda. The construction of gendered identity in *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* (1991), *To My Children's Children* (1991), *Forced to Grow* (1992) and *Sometimes There is a Void: Memoirs of an Outsider* (2013) is implicated in a patriarchal order. This is demonstrated in two core areas: domestic labour and motherhood. These narratives suggest that women are objectified and exploited through an ahistorical and apolitical version of ubuntu as an innate and essential African tradition. Here ubuntu personhood is attained through objectification and exploitation of women. This makes the concept problematic for social cohesion, gender equality and women's rights because a patriarchal version of ubuntu is complicit in the dehumanisation of black women in the post-apartheid landscape.

This does not mean to say that Magona and Mda's stories of South African life between 1970 and 1994 do not draw from ontological expressions of African being. In fact, each author leans on oral tradition, ancestral belief and an indigenous relationship to place. These elements reflect the fluidity of African oral tradition and the onto-triadic notion of being: the ancestral realm, the living and the yet-to-be-born. This form of collective consciousness implies a shared African history as each constructs a normative image of African being based on narratives of African unity through a nostalgic image of African family life and of ubuntu. However, comparatively speaking, Zakes Mda images of women are misogynist whereas Magona's images of women are more complex. Magona's female figures defy patriarchal stereotypes of rural servitude and sacrifice without rejecting a deep sense of responsibility towards the community and towards children and therefore intervene in oppressive ubuntu discourses.

Mda and Magona's stories demonstrate that ubuntu is a discursive construct affected by outside social forces that make the experience of ubuntu equally individual. The ubuntu personhood of an individual is therefore shaped within the expectations of the community and the historical and social context within which the community is shaped and shaping itself. Mda and Magona's characters are often torn between their nostalgic past and the expectations of a politicised anti-apartheid collective struggle coupled with what it may or may not mean to be black at the time. A gendered reading of these complexities as illustrated in this literature allows us to gain deeper insight into ubuntu as it is lived out on a local and national level for both men and women. Ubuntu is lived differently for men in comparison to women.

The first part of this chapter – 'Domestic Labour – will discuss the role of the black domestic servant in white apartheid households. Sindiwe Magona's narratives of black female domestic labour during apartheid highlight the ways in which domestic labour exemplifies the complexities of gendered politics within black South African communities. Her stories illustrate how the gender relations of wider society are magnified in the close and intimate household domain. Here, black maids are dehumanized and jobs are scarce but Magona responds to the insecurity of the times with her illustrations of strong female-to-female bonds. These relationships defy patriarchal gendered stereotypes. The second section of this chapter examines representations of family life and ubuntu. Here, the female body is objectified and exploited female body is a trope of national belonging and masculinity and therefore a text upon which men are able to re-write the past. Therefore, through the subjugation of women men reconstruct their identity, attempt to form the nation and recuperate nationalist agendas because the female body is used to embody the ideals of

wholeness, subjectivity, history and the state.<sup>141</sup> Here women are objectified and exploited at the expense of self-worth and dignity.

### **Domestic Labour and ubuntu**

At present, the legacy of the past has enacted a structural disadvantage for black women in South Africa. Magona suggests that women create strong female relationships and these provide a network of support within a wider patriarchal and misogynist landscape. The women in *To My Children's Children* understand that 'amongst people, themselves poor, wealthy in their knowledge that their own security lay in lending a hand' (*Children*, 182). She is talking about the pressures of apartheid life because Magona was writing during the 1970s at a time when violence was rife in South Africa. Mda similarly illustrates that women are a powerful force in *Ways of Dying*. *Ways of Dying* is a post-apartheid novel about the period nearing the end of the apartheid. In the story Toloki the Professional Mourner comes to the city to find fame and fortune but unfortunately loses all that he has and invents a new profession as a 'Professional Mourner'. Toloki describes the role of women as 'the salvation of the settlement'.<sup>142</sup> Mda's women 'are never still'. For example, Noria and the women of the urban settlement partner with each other to make sure that their local community is cared for. Mda, like Magona's, women 'are always on the go,

they are always doing something with their hands. They are cooking. They are sewing. They are outside scolding their children. They are at the tap

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<sup>141</sup> Elleke Boehmer, 'Endings and New Beginnings: South African Fiction in Transition', in *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy 1970-1995*, ed. by Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 43-56, (p. 48).

<sup>142</sup> Zakes Mda, *Ways of Dying* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 176. All further parenthetical citations will refer to this edition.

drawing water. They are washing clothes. They are sweeping the floor in their shacks, and the ground outside. They are closing holes in the shacks with cardboard and plastic. They are loudly joking with their neighbours about children who have beaten up their own children. They are preparing to go to the taxi rank to catch taxis to the city, where they will work in the kitchens of their madam

They are always on the move. They are always on the go.

In comparison to women, men 'sit all day and dispense wide-ranging philosophies on how things should be' (*Dying*, p. 75). In the face of circumstance, women are portrayed as sound, strong and influential in comparison to men who are often brooding, emotional and lacking ambition in post-apartheid landscape.

However, Sindiwe Magona shows how domestic labour was a space of resistance, liberation and self-expression that can be considered as a form of political agency. The community only emphasise this feeling. Here she is able to explore 'the experiences of and factors influencing the practices of black working-class and white middle-class mothers in apartheid South Africa between 1960-1980' and she explores 'the opposing tensions inherent in motherhood as an essential part of her self-definition or identity', argues Koyana.<sup>143</sup> *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* demonstrates three strong female figures: Hilda, the black maid and the two mothers. For example, Magona argued that children in white homes were not brought up but 'grow up' (*Children*, p.120). She insinuates that white children did not have the same disciplined upbringing as black children and emphasises the absent role of both mum and dad; a gap filled by many black maids. stories are of women who prepare their

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<sup>143</sup> Koyana, 'Why are you carrying books?' p. 45.

own households and family and then leave to prepare the households of white families (day and night) and return home to do the same for their own family in the ‘soul-less world of white madams who employ them’ (*Children*, 140).

Magona’s fiction shows the state of mind of women forced to labour in an oppressive and patriarchal system but her novel starts in a regressive space where she looks back longingly at her past. Magona’s detailed account of her experiences as a domestic worker exposes the horrendous working conditions of black working women during apartheid. These are experiences of dehumanization, an oppressive patriarchal order and a competitive job market. However, Magona’s women respond to this insecurity and defy patriarchal forms of oppression with strong female-to-female relationships. In *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, Magona narrates life as a domestic worker through the experiences of a range of different maids living and working in Johannesburg. Magona’s maids work in an intimate and therefore their experiences of exploitation are intensified by closed space. Each fictional maid has a different story to tell about her experience of oppression as a domestic worker during apartheid. Yet, in Mda and Magona’s fictions through domestic work, each maid is introduced to ‘the fundamentalism of racism’ where ‘in my body beat the heart of a mother whose own were left untended’ (*Children*, p. 145-6). Black maids raised white children. Black maids read white children’s bedtime stories when black children had no books or bedtime stories. The close proximity of maid and madam fosters an oppressive space for the domestic servant. White working class mothers are complicit in the exploitation of black working class women. ‘Joyce’ in *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* argues that a black maid enables the white medem the ‘freedom to become whatever she would become’ (*Living*, p. 45). Furthermore, Patricia Collins identifies linguistic techniques that structured the relationship

between ‘maid’ and ‘madam’ and she explains that employers felt that it was their right to ask employees private and often interrogative questions about their personal lives and lifestyle choices. The content and form of ‘gifts’ given to maids such as old clothing or expired food items also demonstrates how maids were seen simply as servants or ‘outsiders’. Nonetheless, Magona’s stories also show how maids became confidantes, complicating employee and employer relationships.

This argument plays out in the experiences of dehumanization in the novels. The black maid is constructed in a discourse of “we” and “they”. Sindiwe Magona’s *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* dramatizes and exposes the discourse of ‘us’ and ‘them’ implicit in the construction of a maid and her madam. Her stories reflect an inner turmoil that Magona implies many black women experienced: the way in which each character is stripped of their intelligence and self-worth through menial domestic tasks. Domestic Labour such as this would create ‘a sense of inadequacy [that] would engulf’ her at work (*Children*, p. 139). ‘Lillian’ in *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, is forced to clean ‘shit [sic]’ out of the toilet of her madam’s family home: ‘These people – when they pay you they think you are not a human being’ just a servant who is ‘not supposed to have eyes to see when someone pushes [her] into a coffin and calls it a maid’s room’ (*Living*, p. 47). These were ‘whole’ women who ‘would be transformed, the minute they opened the gates of the houses where they toiled’ (*Children*, p. 139). ‘Vivacious, knowledgeable, interesting people’ would be transformed and ‘change to mute, zombie-like figures who did not dare to have an idea, opinion, or independent thought about anything, anything at all’ (*Children*, p. 140). Madams went to so far as to ensure that the colour of the maid’s uniform to matched the décor in the house.

Hill Collins identifies the way in which language structured the relationship

between maid and madam. These include techniques of linguistic deference such as calling a maid 'girl' and the employer 'madam', employers felt it was their right to ask employees private and often interrogative questions about their personal lives and lifestyle choices. Collins suggests that the content and form of gifts given to the maids were often old food or clothing items that were often already used or past the expiry dates. White madams used their maids as confidantes, complicating the employer and employee relationship, and reinforcing the notion of the maid as 'outsider'. Here domestic work introduces the fundamentalism of racism where a person's one sense of self worth breaks down. It is the madam who decides the colour of the maid's uniform, what she has for lunch and her leisure time. It is the black maid who raises the white children while her own are left untended by their mother. And in this discourse, black women often become like children in the sight of their white employers. The use of space was a major weapon as domestic workers were confined to certain spaces within the household such as the kitchen or outhouse. Maids were treated as if they were invisible and conversations often centred 'around' the maid or about the maid as if she were not even in the same room.

Maids were confined to certain spaces in the house such as the kitchen or the outhouse. Shireen Hassim comments on the spatial isolation that women can experience in the household that 'militates against the development of a common consciousness of oppression and exploitation'.<sup>144</sup> Hassim refers to the place of women in terms of the division of labour, which left many women at home while their men left for work in urban areas. In the context of domestic labour in South Africa, her theory of 'isolation' and 'exit' explains why some of these maids found it difficult

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<sup>144</sup> Shireen Hassim, 'Gender, Social Location and Feminist Politics in South Africa', *Transformation*, 15 (1991) pp. 65-82 (p. 69)  
<http://kznass-history.net/ojs/index.php/transformation/article/view/554/370> [accessed 30 January 2015]

to organise and mobilise themselves. “Sheila” in *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* is confined to her maid’s room: the dark and mysterious room, with hardly anything in it. Similarly, Noxolo and Nosisa living quarters at the Smith’s are ‘small squalid narrow thing at the back of the house’ ‘where no light penetrated, ‘summer or winter, rain or shine’ (*Living*, p. 88). Sheila and Noxolo, like many other maids, are underpaid and overworked because like the others, Atini and Lillian, these women are seen as ‘not a [people] in [their] own right but one of a group; and not a good group at that’ (*Living*, p. 34). When Virginia is told that she stinks, her ‘medem’ hands her a fresh bar of Sunlight soap and Mum cream to clean herself. Virginia argues that ‘it is the blackness in us that makes white children not respect us’ (*Living*, p. 38). Her maids argue that ‘there are so few good white people that the bad ones swallow them and we don’t see the good ones. And then we forget they are there’ (*Living*, p. 34).

According to Hassim, the private sphere – domestic labour – is an oppressive space for women because women were often isolated and were therefore not able to organise or to mobilise effectively. This is reiterated in Zakes Mda’s *Ways of Dying* where, women are alienated from political issues and the political realm through their alleged political passivity or conservative in the masculine realm of politics. Women are similarly excluded from a male-dominated political realm in Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*. ‘Women’s culture’ develops in what Shireen Hassim calls a ‘safe space’. Here women constitute a homogenised group and a form of political resistance that is relegated to the private, passive sphere, like the township women of *Ways of Dying*. Similarly, Camagu, in Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*, is able to reconcile ‘tradition’ with ‘modernity’ while his female figures remain trapped in what Hassim identifies as passive ‘women’s culture’: cooking, sewing and looking after the children. Likewise, his township women in *Ways of Dying* can be found cooking food for political



meetings in the townships; these women are active members of co-operative groups and church-based campaigns.

Black maids were treated like children by their white madams: 'the madam of the house makes the decision about the interior décor. Her likes determine, therefore, what colour overalls shall be donned by the maid. Yes, she who will never, not once, be in those overalls, chooses what colour they will be' (*Children*, p. 145). In the eyes of the white 'medem', her black maid had to be of 'sober habits' because of the general societal expectancy that domestic workers would lie, steal and cheat the 'medem'. In contrast, Magona reveals that it is the white madams who are so lazy that they cannot clean their own underwear but leave their 'panty' in the empty and drained bath. The story of Nosisa, in particular, represents the evils of dehumanization and the wider effects this had. Nosisa experience of her mother's dehumanisation causes her to take her own life. Nosisa internalises her mother's plight because 'nothing separates [Nosisa] from Mother's work. Nothing separates her from the place where she works. It is her work, her home, and the only place where she can be' (*Living*, p. 85). Her mother is enslaved to the white family and Nosisa is too. The life of the maids is therefore 'soul-less' as Nosisa is not afraid to kill herself (*Children*, p. 140).

The stories of the maid's in *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* show how (in some ways) women are complicit in their own oppression. For example, women may oppress each other when they unthinkingly adopt cultural norms and resent freedoms claimed by other women. In response to these moments of dehumanization, the women of her fiction build strong female-to-female bonds. She finds that she is able to build relationships with the other women who live and work in the homes of white women as domestic workers. However, Collins finds that the

social bonds between black women are tendential and fleeting. As a result, women lose sense of their identity and are susceptible to such an extent that she had felt that she had lost track of her own identity. She is a complex character who having left her rural village to find work in the city is forced to face a new kind of community.

## **Motherhood**

### **Family relations and ubuntu**

Mda's *Memoirs* establishes a sentimental picture of African family life. In the novel, he claims that family life is 'one of the traditional African retentions which enabled the survival of black people in the socially, economically, and politically oppressive apartheid South Africa of yesteryear' (*Memoirs*, p. 28). Similarly, Sindiwe Magona describes African people as family-oriented with families 'gloriously more inclusive than those of white South Africa' (*Forced*, p. 89). Yet, Mda and Magona's image of family life during apartheid is shown to be disorganised and unstructured in comparison to their nostalgic depictions of pre-apartheid family relations. These stories suggest that the breakdown of the family unit occurred between 1970 and 1994 during the oppressive apartheid regime. Ato Quayson has argued that because of 'the nature of lineage and family arrangements in Africa, the idea of the nuclear family is never allowed to solidify into a clear-cut category in opposition to more traditional forms'.<sup>145</sup> There is an overlap between nuclear families and the extended family that emphasises the significant role that extended members of the family play in the familial relations. However, these novels show how apartheid disrupted the unity of

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<sup>145</sup> Ato Quayson, 'Feminism/Postcolonialism/Contradictory Modernity', in *African Literature An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 585-91 (p. 588).

black South African families.

Shireen Hassim speaks about the 'reality of Africa' where men were forced to work away from home and motherhood became about fatherhood where women had to learn to become 'loving, protecting and counselling in turn'.<sup>146</sup> The role of the man as head of the household radically changed for black families during apartheid. Men were torn between familial demands and the repressive apartheid state; women were also implicated in this order. Both men and women were humiliated and oppressed. Men were undermined as breadwinners, protectors, husbands and fathers, and many families were dumped in ethnic homelands. As a result, men were robbed of their masculinity and were forced to reclaim it through alternate avenues. Rural-urban migrant workers were alienated, commodified, repressed and isolated.

The position of men forced women into roles that patriarchal African communities considered to be typically masculine. In the 1970s, the family structure for many black African families changed rapidly; many women were forced to provide for their families as the men left for work in urban parts of South Africa or got involved in the conflict. Ultimately, the family structure had to be reorganised because of the gap that migrant workers had created. As such, the role of the female within the household also changed. Women became disciplinarians, breadwinners and mothers in an oppressive environment. Mda focuses on the negative effect of this shift implying that women were not able to fulfil this gap and that children were left vulnerable because their fathers were not present.

The most common trope used to signify this disruption is the image of the absent father figure. He embodies displaced black families during apartheid. Mda explains, in *Memoirs*, how he is forced to follow his father into exile into Lesotho.

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<sup>146</sup> Lauretta Ngcobo, 'African Motherhood – Myth and Reality', in *African Literature An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 533-41 (p. 536).

He doesn't have a close relationship with his father; what's more, in Lesotho, he feels like he doesn't belong. His journey to Lesotho foreshadows this sense of displacement: on his journey across the river, a nameless and faceless friend of his father accompanies him. When he arrives in Lesotho to live with his estranged father, Mda is separated from his peers in South Africa who join the anti-apartheid resistance campaign. According to Mda, the youth revolution was a 'flurry of activity' that 'revived [his] creative juices' (*Memoirs*, p. 235). 'Hope bloomed in us once more as we heard of what the fearless young leaders who were emerging out of the universities were doing through the South African Students Organisation' (*Memoirs*, p. 235).

The youth represent another disruption to harmonious family life. Firstly, the suggestion in *Memoirs* is that absent father's left young men and women to wayward lifestyles. For example, Mda's life is the opposite of his father's. Mda is self-confessed gambler and drinker and has multiple sexual partners. On the other hand, his father is stoic and lives by ubuntu principles. Secondly, and significantly, the youth revolution posed a challenge to family life and the community collective. Yet, mothers are described as being the first to counter this violence. Magona does not allow her children to join the revolution.

Mda interrogates the role of children and the nature of collective agency during the anti-apartheid campaigns. In *Ways of Dying*, Noria refuses to let her boy join the Young Tigers who are the fictionalised militant wing of the ANC. Her response to the mobilisation of youth during the 1970s is ambivalent. During the violent uprisings in 1980s, South African youth faced pressure to join violent insurrections, to break curfew and to abandon their passbooks. Likewise, in *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, her character stresses that she never fully

understood what was happening in the townships in 1976, 'they "ayed" whatever the comrades said. Some of the 'comrades' didn't even know how to write that word. Students they were certainly not. Reformers! Don't make me cry for my beloved people' (*Forced*, p. 161). Magona is afraid for her children and the children of others. In her mind, the mobilisation of the youth in the anti-apartheid struggle was 'cowardice, corruption and colonisation' because many people were forced to support township violence as brutal and inexperienced new leaders stepped into the available leadership roles. In an interview with Renee Schatteman, Magona states the reason for not joining the education boycotts of the youth revolution in the 1970s:

The most stressful experience, in my own life, was when black education ground to a halt, because of the schools boycotts. [...] No one was going to die and give them an inheritance; how were they ever going to be responsible, upright, contributing members of society without an education? For the first time I stood up against the popular voice when I disagreed with the idea of not sending children to school.<sup>147</sup>

And this is reflected in her novels because set in 1977, Magona described the atmosphere in South Africa as 'gone haywire':

The order of things, cause and effect, the relationships I had learnt while growing up, had gone haywire. I would not have been the least surprised to hear that the ancestors had gone mad and were paying homage to humans. Life had turned upside down, inside out.' (*Forced*, p. 175).

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<sup>147</sup> Renee Schatteman, 'Interview with Magona', *Scrutiny*, 12, 2 (2008) 154-164, (p. 155-7) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/18125440701752073>> [accessed 13 March 2015]

The effect these had on her is telling as ‘suddenly, [she] did not know what [she] knew or who [she] knew’: ‘with the exception of my mother, my own sisters and brothers, and my own children, I did not know anyone at this time (*Forced*, p. 162). Therefore, Magona’s choices do not represent the popular voice. Magona claims that ‘the collective was something [Magona] profoundly loved and appreciated [and her] writing is, therefore, an attempt to put to record some of the collective consciousness...or, at least, a slice thereof’.<sup>148</sup> It was ‘not enough for me to mother my own biological offspring.

The interconnectedness inherent in community living is inescapable. One does well, of course, by minding ones own children. However, neither the children nor the parents live/will live/can live/ will even live in isolation. If not all the children are being responsibly raised, the child being raised responsibly will suffer: her very life and lifestyle will be jeopardised by the children who have not been prepared for responsible, respectful, productive living.<sup>149</sup>

Like Magona, Noria faces accusations of being ‘counter-revolutionary’ by refusing to allow her children to join the revolution but her story serves to expose coercive forms of social cohesion in concepts of ubuntu community. Magona is seen as ‘counter-revolutionary’ (*Forced*, p. 163). The community do not respond well to this. Mda creates a similar image of a rejected women and mother in his portrayal of Noria in *Ways of Dying*. He sympathises with Magona’s view about the role of children in the revolution. In *Ways of Dying*, Noria’s eight-year-old son is necklaced for ‘selling-

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<sup>148</sup> Schatteman, ‘Interview with Magona’, p. 155.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

out' to the revolution. Noria is a rural-urban migrant who abandons her rural village for the lure of the city but when she moves to the townships, Noria faces challenge after challenge. The death of her son by necklacing in the townships causes Nora to transform into a 'mad woman' roaming around the settlement at night calling out for 'the bastards who had killed her son' (*Ways*, p. 190). The 'bastard' is her son's little girl-child friend who is forced to necklace Noria's son because of peer pressure. She interrogates the nature and form of collective unity instigated by implications of culture like ubuntu: 'I am a person through others'. In fact, her son's murder is an example of vigilante justice and the community is revealed to practice inhumane forms of social cohesion at the expense of the most vulnerable.

In spite of this and more often than not, women and children are the most vulnerable members of South African society and women are at the bottom of the hierarchy discussed in this chapter. Post-apartheid literature suggests that women and children do not receive full citizenship status. Renee Schatteman argues that the lives of young people in South Africa are overshadowed by the country's troubled past. This has caused youth to feel trapped between the status of 'victim' and 'problem'. AbdouMaliq argues that in comparison to men, women and children are the ones 'without any prospect of employment, [have] no platform to signal progression from youth to adulthood' or 'little likelihood of viable social reproduction – of family, cultural value, memory'; the lives of the most vulnerable are 'analogous to those of people who inhabit refugee camps' without meaning or purpose and without access to politics, human rights or citizenship.

As such, her main character experiences inner turmoil: 'the centre shifted', says Magona, and 'suddenly, I did not know what I knew and who I knew', 'some neighbours sprouted horns that could gore me. Colleagues I had known and trusted

grew tails. And friends had the Devil's own fire roaring, ready to fry me to brittle bone' (*Forced*, p. 160): 'I reluctantly look at myself in the mirror and what I saw frightened me even more. Where was I? Who was I? For the mirror showed me someone I was not, someone I remembered as from a past long ago.' (*Forced*, p. 163). These choices led to social ostracization.

Her family blame her for her bad choices. Her family and her community blame her for her 'bad' choices and abandon her because they believe that her choices have led to her deplorable social position. She married a man who they believe was unworthy of her love. If ubuntu is an inherent part of African identity then in spite of her faults, the community should accept her. Yet, 'the centre shifted during that dividing year' (*Forced*, p. 163). When she moved from rural South African to the city, she, like many others, was forced to live in 'matchbox' style housing with 'friends and family scattered in the merciless dispersal' of forced removals (*Forced*, p. 14). Now that her family has left her, there are only one or two people who are willing to care for her. She is forced to be the provider, father and mother to her husband and labelled as an *idikazi* or outsider. *Idikazi* is a term of reproach for women who are husbandless and Magona illustrates that in her African culture, there is no equal term for a man: 'more than twenty years later, not only have I not discovered it in Xhosa, it has eluded me in the three other languages I speak (*Forced*, 1). Her experience of guilt and shame is instigated by the way in which her family reject.



## Forms of patriarchy and ubuntu

Between an oppressive apartheid order and a patriarchal ubuntu discourse, at the height of a violent resistance movement during 1970s-1990s, black women were possibly the worst oppressed of all South Africans:

The problem of being minor in the eyes of the law, under the permanent tutelage of a male relative; the problem of being “endorsed out” on one’s home on marriage and forced to depart for the strangeness of one’s husband’s Bantustan often hundred of miles away; the problem of being ineligible for residence rights without the signature of a male relative; the problem of carrying babies to term, giving birth and raising children under the most perilous of circumstances; these are problems that are not faced by white men or white women.<sup>150</sup>

In Sindiwe Magona’s *Forced to Grow and Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, she illustrates the extent to which ‘race and sex combined to put her at the bottom of the dung heap, and only her child was more pitiable’.<sup>151</sup> She joined the hordes of women ‘the bearers and nurturers of the human race whom no government or institution recognises or rewards, and no statistician captures and classifies’ (*Children*, p. 175). In *Forced to Grow*, she suggests that ‘women, the bearers of these national treasures, are at one and the same time praised for bringing forth babies and devalued for that very act’ (*Forced*, p. 20).

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<sup>150</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 304.

<sup>151</sup> Sindiwe Magona, *Forced to Grow* (London: Women’s Press, 1992) p. 145. All further parenthetical citations will refer to this edition.

Her novels highlight the fact that the political realm remains a masculine space in South Africa and that women have been alienated from political issues and the political realm. In the gendered political landscape in South Africa, women have not been key actors in the political sphere. Shireen Hassim's theory of gendered politics is based on her rejection of the three-fold theory of women's oppression or what has been referred to as the 'triple bind': gender, race and class. She argues that the concept of the 'three fold oppression' lacks depth and is cliché. Instead, she proposes her theory of 'exit' and 'isolation' that make it possible to think about the shape of indigenous feminist politics. Furthermore, there are issues that are viewed as 'soft politics' and need to be regarded as primarily moral and not political issues: such as reproductive rights, their right to control their bodies, their concerns about childcare and children, have been regarded on South Africa as 'soft' political issues. This has effectively led to the delegitimation of women's concerns in the political sphere'.<sup>152</sup>

In her teenage years, the expectations of her gender are weighty; so much so that she feels it is easier to be genderless. The expectations of gendered identity of the mother figure is explained in *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, Magona explains the ostracization her husband Tolo felt when he arrived in Cape Town. He arrives in Cape Town and has to live in the migrant housing in urban townships. But he is soon disillusioned with the promises of city life because it is in the city where he experiences alienation:

[Tolo] seeking everything but his own humanity. That, he had sucked from his mother's breast. It had been nourished by his people. He had not yet

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<sup>152</sup> Hassim, p. 79.

learned it was in dispute. That lesson he would get in Cape Town where he would find, for the first time in his life, that there were people not quite convinced of the black person's humanity' (*Living*, p. 117).

In *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, Magona feels that in her teenage years she has to be like a man in order to be socially accepted. She expresses how it was simpler to be 'genderless'. At first she shows the ways in which her characters perpetuate gender-stereotypes submitting to the myth of the feeble and forlorn woman 'wallowing in her own misery' and self-pity. Later, in her teenage years she looks for spaces of obscurity to escape from her own gender, especially when she is around her male peers. For example, among her brother and his friends, she finds a space to be 'genderless'. Her brother Jongilizwe is 'one of her anchors' and although, he studies abroad when Magona is with him and his friends desires to be like a man (*Forced*, p. 21). As a genderless person, she is able to affirm her own sense of personhood: 'I don't know if that was flattering, but at the time their acceptance of me as an equal was both a novelty and a balm' (*Forced*, p. 21-2) against a society where 'the laws and regulations that govern every aspect of the lives of Africans make it almost impossible for African women to get redress when the man fails to support his children' (*Forced*, p. 22). Magona describes, these friendships were 'unencumbered with sexual overtures, rare in [her] time as a woman' (*Forced*, p. 21) and Magona finds comfort here because 'these men took [her] seriously, liked and respected [her]', 'they often forgot [she] was a woman' (*Forced*, p. 21). Being genderless, for example, was a way to refract from wider social and political pressures. She raises questions about the way in which men treat women within paradigms of African tradition. For

example, women are often punished for being sexually ‘loose’ or are, in the least, frowned upon.

Magona challenges the myth that motherhood is different for white and black families therefore subverting the uniqueness of black motherhood and therefore complicating a patriarchal version of ubuntu. Koyana claims that Magona emphasizes that motherhood and work are inseparable for black families and in black communities. Feminists who have given this scholarly attention include Patricia Hill Collins whose notion of ‘Motherwork’ breaks down the dichotomy between private and public where black women’s work is future-oriented as they ‘work for the day to come’; whereas, Samuelson reads Magona’s gesture as ‘rigid adherence to Black Consciousness principles, whereby attention to the individual was defined as shameful self-indulgence’.<sup>153</sup> Where white people had the option of choosing whether or not to work, blacks did not:

Later I was to learn of the white South African woman’s anguish upon becoming a working mother. Mine was not the choice of being a working mother or [of being] a not working mother. No. I could choose between being a working mother and having no children left. Whose mother would I have been had my children died from starvation (*Children*, p. 150).

Historically white women are complicit in the exploitation of black working class women. In *To My Children’s Children*, Magona reflects on the way in which for black women, work affected the conjugal role of the women in marriage to such an extent that ‘the glamour of marriage and the heat of desire [thin] faster than a dog

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<sup>153</sup> Koyana, ‘Why are you carrying books?’ p. 48.

with mange loses its hair' (*Children*, p. 150). The way in which Magona combines issues of race and class was bold, says Koyana because Magona defies the expectations of gender patriarchy representing women as moral and strong.

The same parallel (between mothers) is constructed *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, two worlds are paralleled: the life of a black child in an urban township and that of a white child in the privileged suburbs of urban Cape Town. In the hellish heat of the red brick Single Men's Quarters in Cape Town, Magona tells the story of a young black mother who has brought her daughter to visit her husband in Cape Town. Her husband stays in a vibrant but cramped urban township. On the other side of the Mountain, there is a white South African family who live in the leafy suburbs. Nina and her two children get ready to visit the beach while Hilda, the black maid, dresses Nina's children for the beach while her 'madam' gets ready. Both little girls wander off and are later molested and raped by a stranger. However, the death of the two girls strengthens the bonds of each community. Patricia Collins suggests that in these instances, the 'emotional colour line' is crossed allowing black and white enter into the same discursive space.

Koyana argues that Magona's exploration of these two worlds 'demythifies the socially accepted white notions of a domesticated motherhood, the supremacy of the nuclear family structure and the primacy of the institution of marriage, and consequently questions the father's necessity in the child's development'. Ultimately, the identity of a woman as a mother is in part self-constructed and in part it is individualised and personalised but grounded in historical and social context. On the other hand, Wilkinson argues that Magona's novels seek after 'white' values:

The pressure of the search for individual excellence with personal value often measured in terms of success; on the other hand, there will be the need to be an integral part of a community where one's values as a person depend on responding to communal responsibilities and performing one's community desires.<sup>154</sup>

On Wilkinson's part this may be explored in terms of Magona's desire to continually improve her education or to seek a better life for herself and her children at the expense of the community. In other words, when Magona refuses to allow her children to participate in the youth revolution against apartheid this combined with her efforts to improve her individual life or personhood does support Wilkinson's argument. However, this argument is inconclusive because ubuntu is so vague.

### **Tradition and ubuntu**

Contrary to the stereotypical image of the African rural woman, who is portrayed as a woman of servitude, sacrifice and oppression, Magona's black women are strong and self-sufficient. These are women face the gendered expectations of rural-urban migrant life but do not conform to gendered standards. Instead, her women adopt 'new' forms of identity. In her expressions of ubuntu identity she is not unsympathetic to tradition because her writing is nostalgic and draws on African folklore, ubuntu-style narrative flow and ancestral beliefs suggesting there is an ahistorical and apolitical aspect to her ubuntu identity. However, she resists a stereotypical reading of female identity by rejecting a dogmatic appeal to tradition

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<sup>154</sup> Wilkinson, p. 356.

and to ubuntu as a prescriptive ethics. Rather, her ubuntu is practiced in terms of 'humanhood' and not ubuntu personhood in the strict or rigid sense. Magona's version of ubuntu is therefore not homogenised. To sum up, she shows that it is possible to claim a traditional version of ubuntu identity located in a specific place and time while at the same maintaining equal gender rights in a modern liberal state through female bonds. Her humanhood therefore offers an alternative to ubuntu personhood because it appeals to gender equality and resists masculinised forms of coercive forms of social cohesion found in innate and essentialised versions of ubuntu.

In Sindiwe Magona's *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* and *To My Children's Children*, she reveals how initially, tough circumstances drove her to draw from ubuntu in order to deal with the feelings of loss and oppression she faced as a black woman in apartheid society. In *Forced to Grow*, Magona illustrates how her life is 'an abysmal hole of hopelessness' because she internalises the rejections she faces in an 'eked out existence'; she blames herself for the situation she found herself in which is without a husband and without a job, estranged from her family (*Forced*, p. 18). Siphokazi Koyana argues that Magona's writing are expressions of her struggle 'to forge and maintain a healthy sense of self within an immediate community that is undergoing a cultural transition and a larger society entrenched in one of the most oppressive expressions of colonialism the world has ever seen, apartheid'. Magona's journey through motherhood is her rite of passage says Koyana where she learns the power of self-definition and becomes a community role model. She is able to explore 'the experiences of and factors influencing the practices of black working-class and white middle-class mothers in apartheid South Africa between 1960-1980' in way that subverts gender stereotypes and patriarchy. She

‘explores the opposing tensions inherent in motherhood as an essential part of her self-definition or identity’ by identifying the challenges of being working mother:

Later I was to learn of the white South African woman’s anguish upon becoming a working mother. Mine was not the choice of being a working mother or [of being] a not working mother. No. I could choose between being a working mother and having no children left. Whose mother would I have been had my children died from starvation?<sup>155</sup>

Yet against an oppressive regime and in spite of the rejection she faces, Magona maintains a quiet spirit of ubuntu because she draws from African tradition to deal with the insecurity and unbelonging she feels.

In each of the novels discussed this far, Magona laments the suffering of her ‘people’. She does so in two ways that belie an innate and essential aspect of African identity. Firstly, she claims ‘a people’ when she argues that ‘in the suffering of each, Noxolo saw a little of her own’ (*Living*, p. 84). Secondly, that the right to life and the dignity of an African can be violated (*Living*, p. 84). Magona’s interpretation of ubuntu discourse is loyal to the onto-triadic notion of being and her life is narrated as ‘a part of the stream of life – a continuous flow of those who are still alive, and the spirits, our ancestors. I knew I would never be alone. Know this too, child of the child of my child...you are not alone’ (*Children*, p. 183). Furthermore, she blames ‘other’ forces for the ‘evil’ in the world: there was ‘so much that was wrong, evil even, with the world’ because ‘the whole country was an ogre that had swallowed too much, even for an ogre. Now it writhed and groaned, not knowing how to put out the

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<sup>155</sup> Koyana, ‘Why are you carrying books?’ p. 45-9.



fire burning deep inside its cavernous body' (*Forced*, p. 175). These are all symbols of the way in which Magona leans on African tradition.

Similarly, Zakes Mda's reminisces about a 'beginning when time began' in *Memoirs*. In this image of family life, Mda and his loved ones sit cramped together in a rural hut while smoke streams into their eyes from the open fire. Mda stresses the importance of ubuntu:

When someone needs help from you she is in fact asking you to make her into a person. We are not people, my grandmother used to instil in us, until somebody makes us into people by being generous towards us. [...] The more acts of generosity and compassion we receive from others, the more human we become. [...] When you make others human, you enrich your own humanity as well. Thus goes the cycle of humanity and humaneness. Thus it expands as we make one another human. It is for that reason that the forebears composed the saying: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. A person is a person through other people' (*Memoirs*, p. 223).

If the community play a critical role in the journey of an individual towards personhood, as Menkiti suggests, then Magona's experience of ubuntu is isolated and displaced. She struggles to get support from her urban community because there are only one or two people willing to lend her a hand when she has no money to clothe herself or to feed her children; both her family and her community abandon her, as they believe she made wrong choices. In comparison to Mda's frivolous spending and partying during his time of exile in Lesotho, Magona has to find a job because 'crude basic needs demanded attention, refused to be deferred or to give deferment to

matters of national importance. I had to get a job' (*Forced*, p. 162). When her husband left her, she realised that her family could not support her. The government would not help either.

During apartheid, women were not allowed to move house or to leave their homelands without permission from their husbands and so she is oppressed by the gendered stereotypes of the post-apartheid landscape. Yet, she relies on underground economies to make a living such as selling liquor and drugs and lending money from the local butcher to cook and sell boiled sheep heads for twenty cents apiece. These skills are also associated with her mother because it is her mother who taught her how to brew traditional ginger beer (*ebaleni*) in 'a time of blissful ignorance' (*Forced*, 11). It is important to recognise that she turns to forms of trade that are deeply rooted in African tradition. When she draws from ubuntu and African tradition, we see that her character is strengthened and she is able to survive; however, her discourse of ubuntu does not correspond to the way in which her community and her family treat her. This implies ubuntu is discursively constructed.

Rural women are seen to be less civilised than urban women. This is a trope that Mda uses in *Memoirs*. His nanny, Nontonje, rapes Mda. Nontonje is a 'red girl'. 'Red' refers to those who wear 'traditional red-ochre clothes'; she is therefore considered to be a 'rural' girl who lives by traditional African principles (*Memoirs*, p. 17). However, Nontonje fumbles with her sexuality and damages his innocence. This suggests that she is uncivilised.

## Mother figure as national symbol

Rita Barnard argues that the imagined community of the nation has traditionally been thought of in familial and domestic terms and its myths have been gendered ones. These have included images of the Mother Land and of the founding fathers. One of the primary assumptions of the nation as a collective unit is that its origins are born and are natural. In other words, that there is a collective people and a community from which the nation emerges and a collective social consciousness predicated on a shared history to which the entire community can return. In terms of the representation of women in post-apartheid fiction, women have been the site of struggle in terms of the way in which the portrayal of women in these fictions reassert patriarchal and heterogenous gendered norms. These discrepancies illustrate the gendered political post-apartheid landscape.

Mda and Magona's novels the figure of a woman is mythologised in national discourse to serve a masculine national agenda. Elleke Boehmer's critical work accounts for the prevalence of the mother as nationalist symbol because the image of the mother 'invites connotations of origins'. The female figure is central to the 'symbolic economy of nationalism' where a man's role is metonymic and a female's is metaphoric. This suggests that 'women bear men's messages through their bodies and are firmly discouraged from seizing the tools of writing themselves'. In this portrayal of 'traditional' life, women are child-bearers, they are wives and are required to maintain sexual prowess. Secondly, the maternal line in *The Heart of Redness* confers autochtony. However, as Achille Mbembe argues that the celebration of autochtony belongs to an impoverished African nationalist intellectual tradition that sees politics as the recovery of the past and an essential but lost nature.

In Mda and Magona's novels, the 'old' and 'new' are symbolic and constitute a textual celebration of autochthony that reveals an investment in the politics of origin, argues Samuelson. Helen Bradford agrees that nationalist claims are established Xoliswa's body and conferred to men.<sup>156</sup> McClintock argues that in *The Heart of Redness* Camagu travels forward in space but backward in time. Like the colonial men, Camagu moves into a dangerous zone of racial degeneration where the man enters into a primitive state which, as McClintock suggests, is accompanied by 'sexual degeneration to the 'female' condition, and both states are attended by linguistic degeneration to an infantile state of preverbal impotence'. Here the landscape is feminised, the man experiences the crisis of representation which is a ritualised moment in the colonial narrative 'whereby the colonised land rises up in all its unrepresentability, threatening to unman the intruder'.<sup>157</sup>

The black female body is inscribed into the narrative of racial degeneration. Qukezwa is untameable, loose and 'uncivilised'; she is the idle native represented as indolent, lazy, wanton and fighting. Her only knowledge is that of the natural land. Camagu chooses the history of the Khoi-san and a woman whose looks resemble that of Khoi women. Qukezwa's features are therefore whiter than Xoliswya's. McClintock suggests that this may have gendered or racist undertones because Camagu chooses a more 'superior' race than the *amaXhosa*. It is clear from Mda's narrative that communal values are inflexible for female individuals; men, on the other hand, have flexible values.

The TRC illustrates this concern. The hearings, women often spoke as relatives and dependents and men as victims. Women were only able to speak as 'suffering mother' and these 'gendered patterns consolidated the national narrative of

<sup>156</sup> Meg Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the South African transition* (Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, 2007), p. 67.

<sup>157</sup> McClintock, p. 242.

sacrifice and redemption, and underwrote the TRC's goals of reconciliation and nation building'.<sup>158</sup> Samuelson now traces the 'iterative performativity of the subject position of mother-witness both reproduces and subverts the grand narrative of nationalism'. The TRC became 'a public theatre of memorialisation and the re-making of nationhood'. By drawing on Butler's theorizing of gender, Samuelson views the hearings as the 'ritualised repetition of norms'. Mother-witness produced social norms and national subjectivities that brought into being the position of women as secondary. Women were subjects of discourse and subjected to gender norms. The paradox that Samuelson draws on is Butlers' conclusion that subjectivity is produced through subjection to a set of regulatory norms. Unfortunately, for a woman, agency is therefore located in the iterability of the subject position into and through which one has been produced'. However, as Butler suggests, subversion actually lies in this subjected position, 'in the instability of performativity'. Magona complicates static positions of women in society through her complex characters.

Men are 'the bearers of a body-transcendent universal personhood', argues Simone de Beauvoir, in a discourse where women are Othered. Here, as Luce Irigaray argues:

Women can never be understood in the model of a 'subject' within the conventional system of Western culture precisely because they constitute the fetish of representation and, hence, the unrepresentable as such women can

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<sup>158</sup> Meg Samuelson, 'The Mother-As-Witness: Reading *Mother to Mother* alongside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission', in *Sindiwe Magona: The First Decade*, ed. by Siphokazi Koyana (Pietermaritzburg: KwaZulu-Natal University Press, 2004), pp. 127-144, (p. 134).

never 'be', according to this ontology of substances, precisely because they are the relation of difference, the excluded, by which that domain marks off.<sup>159</sup>

For Irigaray, women are neither subject nor other. Gender is performative and culturally established as 'there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results', says Butler. As such, woman is not a fixed category; however, much of the writing by black South African male authors perpetuates misogynist and oppressive narratives of women. The boys in *Room 207* share lovers and address their lovers as 'whores' sleeping with the same women in the same room, only days apart. What's more, the women accept this narrative.

Butler's performed gender identity is not a return to an existential theory of the self as constituted through acts; rather, 'it is precisely the discursively variable construction of each in and through the other'.<sup>160</sup> Within in African culture, Magona confronts the trope of the 'fallen' women by criticising androcentric views on 'fallen' women in African tradition. Her picture of rural-urban migrant life in *Living Loving and Lying Awake at Night* testifies to this narrative: a young migrant labourer impregnates a younger township girl but years later he unknowingly sleeps with the daughter of the girl he raped. This story exposes how it can be culturally and socially acceptable for men to objectify women. Similarly, Qukezwa in *Ways of Dying* seduces Camagu away from Xoliswa by using her sexualised body. Camagu begins to fall in love with her and enters into his ubuntu personhood through eroticised experiences with Xoliswa on his horse in rural Eastern Cape.

This patriarchal masculine agenda establishes the love triangle between

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<sup>159</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), p. 23.

<sup>160</sup> Butler, p. 195.

Camagu, Xoliswa and Qukezwa. Xoliswa is barren and career oriented; in contrast, Qukezwa is fertile and fun loving. Xoliswa desires to live in the city, she is independent and she rejects her traditional African roots or *amaXhosa* 'redness'. On the other hand, Qukezwa embraces her 'redness', she is carefree, uneducated and has an inherent attachment to and knowledge of Qolorha-by-sea, her indigenous land. As a cheeky immature village girl, Qukezwa seduces worldly Camagu with her traditional ways. These ways are reminiscent of village and therefore traditional life. He literally ejaculates on Qukezwa's back as they ride a horse through mythologised Eastern Cape landscape. Following their visit to the pool of Nongqawuse, Camagu has an epiphany about his identity that represents his spiritual and traditional re-awakening, at the expense of his female companion who he claims with his masculine virility. She is 'a mothering spirit', 'more like a spirit that can comfort and heal his pain' (*Heart*, p. 28). Qukezwa gives birth to a miraculous child through a virgin conception. She is therefore portrayed as mystical and almost holy. Mazibuko argues that in *The Heart of Redness*, women are 'symbols and agents of a spiritual renaissance, operating at the margins of an overtly materialist and male-dominated discourse'.<sup>161</sup>

The virgin birth in *Ways of Dying* is literally and metaphorically the site of the nation's rebirth but, again, this is enacted on Qukezwa's body. Qukezwa, and her child, is the space where the restoration of an innate African identity can be restored, the place of rebirth. Qukezwa's child is can be identified as an abiku child. Feminist scholar Brenda Cooper identifies abiku children as '[representing] the plight of a nation that refuses to be born and that spirals through bloody cycles of violence', which is an image, she argues, that 'represents circularity and repetition rather than

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<sup>161</sup> Nokuthula Mazibuko, 'Love and Wayward Women in Ways of Dying', in *Ways of Writing* (Scottsville: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2009), pp. 115-131, (p. 116).

change and growth'. An abiku child is a human being who masquerades as a baby only to die and be reborn. Furthermore, as she argues, the recurrent theme in the novel is that women are 'an empty vessel for the words of others'.<sup>162</sup> Women in *The Heart of Redness*, says Samuelson, 'are cast as vessels for the messages of men, and they speak loudest through their bodies, which stand in symbolic contradiction to the novel's efforts to inscribe time as entangled and heterogenous'.<sup>163</sup> It is Camagu's identity that is reborn through his abiku child but even so, his masculinity does not implicate him in issues that would sally the image of the community. In other words, he does not have to take responsibility for the birth of the child but is portrayed as the hero: he rescues Qukezwa from her 'fate' by marrying her; a position the narrative suggests saves a woman from herself.

Furthermore, Qukezwa's body, Helen Bradford argues, figures authorial desires in a different respect: indigenous belonging and narratives of redemption. Her body is marked by Khoi heritage. It claims autochthony to the land and to a people and dreams of redemption. Her redemption symbolises the salvation of the amaXhosa people. This transformation functions symbolically as the nation is reclaimed and redeemed through recovery of an authentic cultural tradition. Therefore, redemption is signalled through the main female character.

The female is 'the conservatory repository of the national archaic'.<sup>164</sup> Qukezwa occupies a role of conservation, preserving the temporal aspect of nationalism. Shireen Hassim explains that in the political gender discourse of South Africa women have not been key political actors:

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<sup>162</sup> Brenda Cooper, 'Cultural Identity, Cultural Studies in Africa and the Representation of the Middle Passage', in *Transgressing Boundaries New Directions in the study of culture in Africa*, ed. by Brenda Cooper and Andrew Steyn (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1996), pp. 164-83 (p. 166-7).

<sup>163</sup> Meg Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p. 79.

<sup>164</sup> McClintock, p. 359.



Women are in general alienated from political processes. Issues that are important to women, such as women's reproductive rights, their right to control their bodies, their concerns about children and childcare, have been regarded in South Africa as 'soft' political issues. They have been regarded as primarily moral rather than political issues.<sup>165</sup>

There are other figures of women from the past that have been retrieved to rewrite the narrative of nationalist belonging in other post-apartheid novels, such as Duikers's *Thirteen Cents*. In this narrative, the male hero saves the female. She signifies the restoration of a nation in a narrative where women are conserving figures who protect the spiritual and cultural identity that their menfolk lack or leave.<sup>166</sup>

Meg Samuelson argues that *The Heart of Redness* is where Camagu sets his 'African Renaissance' and 'as the renaissance is figured through a literal rebirth, female bodies become implicated in a nostalgic restoration of African identity'.<sup>167</sup> In this trope, a woman is 'Mother Africa' and Mda shifts the authority of the female prophet represented in the form of Qukezwa as Nongqawuse to the male author. Camagu finds his identity on and through Qukezwa. By doing so, he restores the salvation of the community and in a wider context, the nation. Mda does the same with Noria and Toloki in *Ways of Dying*. Here Noria, as the mother figure, is in need of saving from a cruel world. She also needs to be saved from herself: a bitter woman who has got herself into difficult situations. Her own abiku child is a sign of the unending cycle of oppression she faces because of outside social forces. Toloki, on the other hand, is her salvation. Not only is Noria's beauty attached to an African essence located in the village but through the bond that Toloki and Noria sustain,

<sup>165</sup> Hassim, 'Gender, Social Location and Feminist Politics', p. 70.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>167</sup> Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, p. 59.

Toloki revives Noria to her former 'village' self. As their relationship develops, the couple reject the commercial and capitalist demands of modern urban life in favour of more 'traditional' ways: they are content to 'teach each other how to live' in simple ways. Therefore, in both narratives the man must save the women: the tainted woman must be redeemed by the man, just like the character of Qukezwa who is redeemed from obscurity by Camagu so poor Toloki saves lonely Noria.

K. Sello Duiker similarly represents the rebirth of the nation through the trope of the mother figure. Here his mother figure represented in the form of Sara Baartman is an image where the female body is represented as a national symbol and a redemptive national narrative. In *Thirteen Cents*, Azure meets Saartje in his dreams on Table Mountain. Saartje is the image of Sara Baartman, the Khoi-San woman who was exploited and objectified in the nineteenth century in Europe. At the time of Sara Baartman, black women became closely associated with 'unbridled, lascivious sexuality' and as McClintock suggests.<sup>168</sup> Her remains were brought back to South Africa after Mandela was released and the African National Congress was instated in the 1990s. Fetching her remains was a legal process that took just under ten years to complete but when her remains were returned to the Gamtoos, she received a ceremonial burial. This became a national holiday. Duiker includes her in his image of the 'new' South Africa. In *Thirteen Cents*, Sara is Azure's mother. She is at home in her cave and is surrounded by symbols – 'carved bones, clay animals and lots of other small beautiful things' – she 'doesn't like the city' (*Thirteen*, 119). He draws from elements of African tradition as he places her among the mythical or folkloric creatures on Table Mountain (shape-shifters, the gods of San and Khoi tradition, Cagn and Mantis). By doing so, he associates the feminine with tradition.

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<sup>168</sup> McClintock, p. 113.

However, in this discourse she is oppressed. Mda revives the image of an ‘uncivilised’ Saartjie Baartman: she doesn’t know where she is or where she has come from but she is ‘a woman who looks like she lived a long time ago, [...] short and her bum is big, [...] breasts like fruit, like fat pears’ (*Thirteen*, 119). Sara is the stereotypical image of a weak female: she is lost, knowing that she has ‘come from very far’ but has not ever actually known where she has come from as she waits patiently for her husband, her hero, crying, lost and need of rescuing – she cannot talk through her ‘sobbing’ (*Thirteen*, p. 119). Therefore, Duiker reinforces the oppressive post-apartheid narrative that Azure experiences through colonial stereotypes and uses Sara’s body as a text to write his own story of the ‘new’ South Africa.<sup>169</sup>

### Conclusion

This chapter has shown how gender differences are embedded in African tradition and ubuntu. In this discourse, women are figured in a number of ways: mother, healer, artist, muse, virgin, whore and witch. These are oppressive ‘intersecting racial and patriarchal economies’, argues Mazibuko. The next chapter will discuss rural-urban masculine identities embedded in ubuntu and traditional African culture.

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<sup>169</sup> Michael Chapman, ‘The Problem of Identity: South Africa, Storytelling, and Literary History’, *New Literary History*, 29, 1, (1998), 85-99, p. 90. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057469>> [accessed 01 March 2012]

## Chapter Three

### Ubuntu and the city

*'Black betrayal is when a Xhosa fat cat tries to intellectualise our suffering and reasons away our liberty. Worse still, black betrayal is when you cant criticise a government of Xhosa people, a government elected by black people for white people'*

– Matome, *Room 207*

One of the most significant case about citizenship in South Africa was the *Khosa Case* where a decision of the court overrode that of the state regarding state policy and state argument concerning the rights of foreign nationals; yet, as Pumla Dineo Gqola argues, from that one judgement, the South African community resonates as that of an ubuntu community: responsible and caring towards the well-being of others.<sup>170</sup> In contrast, of the sixty-two people killed in the xenophobic violence in Alexandra Township on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 in different locations around South Africa, one third were South African and the majority were immigrant populations from African countries. Xenophobic attacks do not represent the spirit of ubuntu.

These immigrants were living and working in urban South Africa when violence against foreigners intensified. Alexandra Township is notorious for violence primarily because its people posed the first serious challenge to exclusionary politics in a white apartheid state in the 1980s through protesting and stay-aways against the ruling party at the time. Two decades later, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2008 it cradled the spread of violence where overnight more than sixty people were murdered, many were raped, close to seven hundred people were wounded and more than one hundred

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<sup>170</sup> Andile Mngxitama, 'We are not all like that: Race, Class and Nation after Apartheid', in *Go Home or Die Here: Violence Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, ed. by Shireen Hassim and others (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), pp. 189-205 (p. 189).

thousand Africans and South Africans were displaced. A reporter from *The Star* commented that ‘heads were swollen and the skin had broken from the beating[s]’ and ‘like bags of trash’ people were dragged and dumped.<sup>171</sup> *Indololwane*, the *isiZulu* word for elbow, was the linguistic facility used to define ‘them’ from ‘us’. Some South Africans forced suspected immigrants to pronounce the word as a tool to discern nationality. Those who couldn’t pronounce it accurately were believed to be immigrants. The logic behind the ‘elbow tests’ was used to identify foreigners in South Africa. The ‘traitors’ identity can be found through skin colour, linguistic facility or through violent coercion such as rape or torture. Local inhabitants were categorised into ‘bona fides’ or insiders, and outsiders or foreigners were called *amagoduka*, also known as newcomers or riffraff.

The media has shown that public reactions to xenophobic violence and discourses of xenophobia in South Africa are mixed. People have their own opinions about what counts as a refugee or an asylum seeker and groups or individuals can be displaced due to poverty, security, opportunity or residency. There are a number of arguments about the reasons for xenophobia. Overall, xenophobia is understood as a recognised fear of outsiders. It engenders a narrative of ‘us’ and ‘them’ in South Africa. Critics argue that people are dissatisfied due to failed service delivery, micro-politics and lack of state patronage, the exclusive concept of South African citizenship and the gendered component of violence and violent masculinities. South Africans are also disillusioned over post-apartheid nationalist sentiment that engenders a discourse of insiders and outsiders. This may be caused by the increasing diversification and dynamism of non-South Africans in South African cities. This is true for cities like Johannesburg and these changes add to the city in as much as it

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<sup>171</sup> Alex Eliseev, ‘A torn narrative of violence’, in *Go Home or Die Here: Violence Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, ed. by Shireen Hassim and others (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), pp. 27-40 (p. 36).

challenges growth. As the population grows it puts pressure on resources, especially for the poorer classes but, on the other hand, an increasing immigrant population has altered the number and variance of city collectives making space for innovative forms of identity and belonging. Patrick Bond argues that cities are ‘where a society’s capacity to reproduce itself – politically, economically, socially, culturally – is on display’.<sup>172</sup>

Xenophobic discourse assumes ‘alien’ populations within the spatial and geographical boundaries of the borders of the nation-state because political identity comes with borders. Worby, Hassim and Kupe argue that the effect of xenophobia ‘has been both to enable and to incite people to talk about things that have been suppressed or forbidden in post-apartheid discourse’.<sup>173</sup> In the South African case, xenophobic fighting is arguably increasing because of conflict over the land claims, the desire to assert the ‘truth’ of the past, indigenous claims to land and to ‘a people’, and rights to citizenship in South Africa. Achille Mbembe speaks of a ‘chain of complicities’ to suggest that South Africans in general are responsible for xenophobia. The justificatory discourse, he argues, surrounding forms of xenophobia starts with the usual stereotypes: they are darker than us, they steal our jobs, they don’t respect us, and they are used by whites who prefer to exploit them rather than employing us, therefore avoiding the requirements of affirmative action. The irony surrounding xenophobia, he highlights, is the ‘moral debt’ South Africa owes to countries, like Nigeria, who contributed towards the anti-apartheid struggle.

Although xenophobia is a highly charged and politicised discourse that leads to violence, recent publicised xenophobic attacks in 2008 and in 2015 show that it is

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<sup>172</sup> Patrick Bond, *Cities of Gold, Townships of Coal Essays on South Africa’s New Urban Crisis* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2000), p. 7.

<sup>173</sup> Eric Worby, Shireen Hassim and Tawana Kupe, ‘Introduction’, in *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, ed. by Shireen Hassim and others (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), pp. 1-26 (p. 17).

also an active form of social cohesion in South Africa. For the perpetrators and victims, it can be a form of 'community cohesion' because xenophobic discourses separate people according to difference and therefore categorise people in groups. As such, an individual can claim to belong to 'a people' and not to belong to another set of people. However, gender stereotypes, race and class closely influence these discourses of difference. Difference is also embedded in the terms of a neo-liberal capitalist South Africa state. For the poor, xenophobia helps to render the social landscape intelligible yet it makes it unintelligible for the wealthier classes, argues Glaser.<sup>174</sup> In his argument Glaser suggests that class determines nationality in as much as groups of elites map their world in terms of class, and the poor in terms of nationality or ethnicity.

Xenophobia is a discourse of 'self and other' or 'sameness' and 'difference' that governs day to day activities and is a way of knowing and being in the world but for the poorer classes, lack of job opportunities, housing insecurities, lack of basic civil services, poor health and sanitation services makes day to day living harder. For the underclasses, the most basic test might be to make it through the day alive. In light of the most recent xenophobic attacks, this may also be true for refugees who have no basic income, no housing and no security. Therefore, a coercive form of social cohesion, such as xenophobia, would help to make sense of an insecure social and political landscape by creating a scapegoat: foreigners. Foreigners – African immigrants in particular – are blamed for the bleak post-apartheid landscape because South Africans perceive that foreigners steal jobs and resources and break apart families. Therefore, fear and insecurity become apparent among the black underclasses. These tensions then manifest in terms of a nationalist discourse that is

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<sup>174</sup> Daryl Glaser, '(Dis)connections: elite and popular 'common sense' on the matter of 'foreigners', in *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, ed. by Shireen Hassim and others (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), pp. 53-62 (p. 57).

based on the notion of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

However, for the wealthier classes outbreaks of xenophobic violence are less frequent because the richer portion of the population are not threatened in the same way that the poor are: ‘there are no white *kwerekweres* in our country’, states Andile Mngxitama.<sup>175</sup> The implication here is that white South Africans remain in the upper income bracket of the nation and are therefore exempt from any form of xenophobia because their livelihood is not threatened. Many South Africans feel threatened and non-nationals become scapegoats deflecting the harsh realities of urban living for many. A discourse of citizen and non-citizens develop and to counter these threats, the xenophobic discourses of ‘self’ and ‘other’ create ways of belonging for nationals and non-nationals. For example, the novels discussed in this chapter reveal how groups of African nationals, immigrants from Nigeria or Somalia, might congregate together: living and working in close-knit protected communities. South Africans may displace their own feelings of insecurity on these non-national groups of people.

This chapter will examine ubuntu narratives of rural-urban migrants and African immigrants in three post-apartheid novels. The predominant narrative in each novel is that the urban experience for rural-urban migrants and African immigrants can be surmised as ‘just another sad black story’.<sup>176</sup> Contrary to the optimistic discourse of the New South Africa, these novels represent a bleak post-apartheid reality and a discourse that is far removed from optimistic ubuntu narratives. The first part of this section is called ‘Illegitimate cultures of entitlement’ and will focus on cultures of impunity that engender coercive forms of social cohesion and violence in the city, as well as alternative strategies of belonging in urban space. This part of the chapter focuses on the experiences of post-apartheid South Africa for the young black

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<sup>175</sup> Mngxitama, p. 189.

<sup>176</sup> Kgebetli Moele, *Room 207* (Johannesburg: Kwela Books, 2011), p. 11. All further parenthetical citations will refer to this edition.



male rural-urban migrant generation. This generation can be referred to as the ‘born-frees’. ‘Born frees’ are young men and women who move to the city to find fortune but who, when met with difficult circumstances, become disillusioned with the New South Africa.

These feelings are often directed towards those who are perceived to have ‘made it’ in the New South Africa, namely African immigrant men. In Kgebetli Moele’s *Room 207* (2011) and Phaswane Mpe’s *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001), the boys draw from complex moral reference points and create deceptive identities as a result. In the absence of fundamental forms of protection from the state and under threat from the state, the boys are abandoned to form their own collectives. The rural village is not exempt from the pressures of urban life. In competitive conditions, a deep suspicion between rural-village inhabitants and rural-urban migrants emerges. This happens when those who have left for the city see themselves as better than the villagers who they ‘left behind’; in the same respect, the villagers perceive the rural-urban migrants to have indulged in all of the immorality that the city is alleged to represent and therefore to lose their sense of ubuntu or village ways. The divisive discourse between peoples in these novels suggest that South Africans are far removed from experiencing or performing ubuntu as an innate and essential aspect of African identity.

The second half of this chapter is called ‘Scapegoating’ and it explains how narratives of difference continue to dominate discourses on black subjectivity and black South African identity in the city. Xenophobia is form of scapegoating and in particular, it is a corrosive discourse between rural-urban migrants and African immigrants, as well as rural-village inhabitants and rural-urban dwellers. The same novels will be discussed in this section of the chapter. Each novel suggests that the

city is a site of conflict for its inhabitants: rural-urban migrant communities in the city blame African immigrants for crime, prostitution and the spread of diseases and discord. Furthermore, in inner-city neighbourhoods like Hillbrow, a bleak post-apartheid landscape is stressed. Furthermore, the urban city is often metaphorically figured as a monster devouring its prey. The visual imagery in these fictions reveals a complex social imagination in South Africa that struggles to blend rural space with the urban city and vice versa because of the apparent incompatibility of 'tradition' and 'modernity', where 'tradition' is associated with ubuntu and 'modernity' with the city and with moral decay. These novels reflect that the city is the space where traditional values and communal history associated with an essentialised ubuntu is eroded. Yet, the novelists highlight scapegoating as a way to secure an ethical engagement with the reader. Finally, these fictions represent an appeal for social cohesion.

### **National belonging and tradition**

South Africa is inhabited by a wide range of different groups of people who, up until 1994, had been separated by apartheid law and who, prior to that, were oppressed by colonial occupation. As such, a diverse group of people will mean that the transition to democracy will be a morally hazardous one because the construction of a new society requires that we conscript members to its borders.<sup>177</sup> National belonging is marked out in the modern nation-state. These borders determine the value of a person assigning through systems of control such as passports and birth certificates a certain level of identity and belonging. These borders are the borders of the nation-state and

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<sup>177</sup> Francois du Bois and Antje du Bois-Pedan, 'Post-Conflict justice and the reconciliatory paradigm: the South African experience', in *Justice and Reconciliation in Post-apartheid South Africa*, ed. by Francois du Bois and Antje du Bois-Pedan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 289-311 (p. 290).

the nation-state is a Eurocentric construct with its own set of rights, morals, agency and power that is available for the people within its borders. These depend upon the nation-state as a naturally given entity with naturally defined territorial boundaries. Within this discourse, citizens and non-citizens are perceived to be ‘naturally’ occurring categories of belonging. However, since 1994 the country is experiencing a public re-assertion of ethnic identities in what South African historian Clifton Crais argues is a ‘new era of tribal and state formation’ that gives citizens the right to dignity and agency outside of Europeanised boundaries of the nation-state. Individuals are collecting according to the ‘new’ rules.

The *Khosa* Case in South Africa determined whether or not foreigners were entitled to the same socio-economic welfare rights as South African citizens.<sup>178</sup> The final decision made in the case overrode the decisions of the state in terms of state policy and state arguments about foreign nationals. The purpose of the decision was to portray the South African community in a compassionate light, in a manner that resonated with ubuntu values. We can examine the connections between the latter and public reaction to xenophobic ‘outbursts’. In one respect, the public were shocked but Pumla Dineo Gqola suggests that ‘the idiom of uncomprehending shock successfully allows us to disavow agency and complicity in the problems we face’. South Africans face the problem of xenophobia. In this discourse, foreigners are marked because of ‘darkness’; this as Gqola argues ‘hankers after the language of race science, apartheid and white supremacy’.<sup>179</sup> Xenophobia is a reading of identity as embodied, she argues, to such an extent that it is not simply xenophobia but negrophobic in character. Nowhere do South Africans expel rich, white or European

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<sup>178</sup> Drucilla Cornella and Kenneth Michael Panfilio, *Symbolic Forms for a New Humanity* (Fordham University Press: New York, 2010), p. 171.

<sup>179</sup> Pumla Dineo Gqola, ‘Brutal Inheritances: Echoes, Negrophobia and Masculinist Violence’, in *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, ed. by Shireen Hassim and others (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2008), pp. 209-222 (p. 211-9).

foreigners who are seen in an entirely different light as educated with personalities, gender and histories. White foreigners are seen as useful because they invest, they visit the country on tourist trips and 'represent countries we need to impress with our status as 'world class' or 'emerging nation'.<sup>180</sup> Therefore, xenophobia is sexualized, class marked and racialised in South Africa. Foreign black immigrants now represent the shortcomings of blackness.

Understanding national belonging in post-apartheid South Africa requires reading strategies that combine texts instead of separating them as a process of translation. A process of reading and writing performs a shaping role in terms of South African national identity and narrative is a powerful tool to reshape the nation and to reconfigure the terms of national belonging. For example, in the case of *Zuma vs. the State 2006*, Zuma drew on indigenous tradition to shape his political narrative and his public persona. When former president Thabo Mbeki addressed the nation after much publicised xenophobic violence in 2008, he suggested that 'authentic South Africans, the heirs to the struggle for African unity and redemption that he traces back to the mid-nineteenth century, could not possibly harbour such xenophobic sentiments and motives'.<sup>181</sup> However, the problem with Mbeki's speech is that he identified insiders and outsiders. Therefore, in the creation of the nation-state, the virtuous national citizen is figured alongside the outsider. Mbeki's perception of citizenship drew from an innate and essential aspect of African identity. This indigenous identity drew from innate and essentialised versions of African identity that are exclusive and oppressive, especially for women. Michael Chapman argues that *Zuma vs. the State 2006* demonstrates 'shaping power of narrative' but the ambiguity of Zuma's claim emphasises how national belonging and citizenship are

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<sup>180</sup> Gqola, p. 211-9.

<sup>181</sup> Hassim, 'Introduction', p. 7.

fragile forms of identity and are unstable because of the diversity of narrative content and form.<sup>182</sup>

Understanding our present is about the ways in which we are able to conceive of the past and the forms in which we gather this information and the value we place on these forms of narrative. In the *Zuma vs. the State*, Zuma placed emphasis on what he perceives as an inherent African identity. This is an important discussion because of the legacy of South Africa's past since the history of division between groups of different people in South Africa. For example, as Hein Marais suggests, a 'Two Nation' society 'marked by the systematic and violent segregation between privilege and deprivation' and the ways in which this continues to shape the way in which South Africans of different ethnicities value their personhood as an individual and in terms of a group.<sup>183</sup>

The *Zuma* Case contributes towards this palimpsest of South African consciousness. If as Mzamane illustrates, the function of writing and scholarship are 'processes of reclamation and ways of reintegration to my culture and history – and of sharing these processes of dealienation and decolonisation with [...] readers' then young black post-apartheid writers are navigating new territory beyond processes of dealienation and decolonisation. These fictions reveal that the urban city contradicts the optimistic discourse of the post-apartheid New South Africa and as such, young black writers do more than dealienate and decolonise culture and history; these authors express a new generation of South Africans living and working in the city who did not live through apartheid and who have little connection to an indigenous past outside of their grandparents.

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<sup>182</sup> Michael Chapman, 'The Problem of Identity: South Africa, Storytelling, and Literary History', *New Literary History*, 29, 1, (1998), 85-99 (p. 91). <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057469>> [accessed 01 March 2012]

<sup>183</sup> Hein Marais, *South Africa Limits to Change the Political Economy of Transition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cape Town and London: University of Cape Town Press, Zed Books, 2001), p. 245.

These authors are mostly made up of a generation of ‘born free’ young black writers. These include Niq Mhlongo, Kgebetli Moele, Phaswane Mpe, K. Sello Duiker and Kopano Motlwa who seem uncertain about their place in South Africa and who they are. ‘Born Frees’ is a name given to people born after 1990 and a report by the Institute of Race Relations (2015) suggests that these people become increasingly disillusioned with democratic life and become more involved in violent protesting. The report suggests that ‘born frees’ feel increasingly alienated politically, economically and socially and statistics prove that ‘unemployment rates are higher among younger people, women and Africans’. ‘Born Frees’ receive a poor quality of education and are those who are the most likely to get involved in protesting having dropped out of university.<sup>184</sup> These are younger men and women, most of who are born into privileged middle class black elite families. These young black authors as well as Beukes demonstrate the ambiguity of ubuntu and of indigenous tradition to national identity and belonging in terms of how this conflicts the modern state. These struggles are recognised as ‘second generation struggles’ and involve questions of ethnic conflict, the ironies of the Rainbow Nation, HIV and Aids, immigrant and rural-urban migrant jealousy and the space of ‘tradition’ in the modern South Africa state. The New South Africa was a commitment to social cohesion and the 1994 transition government inherited the racial, spatial and social divisions of the consolidation of the South African state from 1910 onwards. The next section briefly discusses the social and historical context of rural-urban migrant in South Africa.

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<sup>184</sup> ‘Born Frees frustrated by political, economic, alienation: Report’ (29 April 2015) <<http://amaXhosa.sabc.co.za/news/a/0a102080483105c4b226ff4d1170398b/Born-Frees-frustrated-by-political,-economic-alienation:-Report-20152904>> [accessed 13 May 2015] (para. 1 of 6).

## Rural-urban migration

The number of immigrants living in cities like Johannesburg has almost doubled between 1996 and 2001. This led to dramatic changes in most inner city neighbourhoods, such as Hillbrow, as far more men entered the country than women. In 2003, the South African government passed the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act 41 as a part of the continued processes of breaking down the racial, spatial and social legacy of apartheid.<sup>185</sup> Towards the end of the 1980s the number of black South African rural-urban migrants living and working in the city increased rapidly; however, urban migrants within the socio-economic and political landscape were seen as sojourners in a white city. The structure and regulation of black presence in the city contributed towards this insider/outsider categorisation. Consequently, urbanisation for black South Africans was controlled and regulated by structures. For example, during apartheid black migrants had to have curfews and dompas passes, and cities were subdivided into black townships, urban white suburbs, the central business district and industrial areas. Michael Titlestad argues that apartheid cities were shielded from the realities of the rest of the world up until the 1980s. The deregulation of the city began to occur post-1980s and South African cities were forced to engage with global and African modernity. Johannesburg became the largest and most significant metropolis in the country. In the early and mid-1990s, the city experienced an influx of black migrant workers who were predominantly made up of poorer working class black South Africans. This part of the population sought after cheap accommodation in the city and as a result, squatter settlements and shacks were a feature of the inner city. In

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some cases, vacant buildings were occupied and the inner cities were ‘invaded’.

Places such as Hillbrow, Berea and Newton become derelict partly due to strained relations between tenants and landlords.

The government placed emphasis on the political legitimacy of traditional authority post-1994 as a way in which to configure ‘new’ terms of belonging in the Rainbow Nation. This required that all people to commit to live in harmony with each other regardless of nationality, citizenship or place of birth. The re-instatement of traditional authority in the guidelines for governance laid out in the Constitution contributed to ‘new’ concepts of what defines a citizen and a non-citizen.<sup>186</sup> These laws located ‘rights in custom and [recreated] the politics of indigeneity that had first begun with colonial conquest’ and that continue to be a part of a wider process of renewing the value of the indigenous tradition in all areas of South African collective life including arts, culture, issues of justice and economic developments. As a whole these laws contributed to a dynamic and changing ‘new’ public discourse on the value of a human person.

We must recognise that discourses of traditional authority will alter the shape of the nation because an individual’s perception of citizenship determines how he or she will shape his or her own national belonging. The politics of traditional rule also concerns the struggle over historical claims to sovereignty and land. Land claims can turn violent and emerge as a ‘vernacular praxis’ within a discourse of ‘customary authority [that] does not live easily with the hegemony of the liberal modernist state [because] it sanctions alternative orders of law and justice, of the use of force, of

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<sup>186</sup> *Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act*, 23 (20 October 2009), 1-48 (p. 10).

<[http://amaXhosa.parliament.gov.za/live/commonrepository/Processed/20100921/221616\\_1.pdf](http://amaXhosa.parliament.gov.za/live/commonrepository/Processed/20100921/221616_1.pdf)> [accessed 10 March 2015]



responsibilities and entitlements, even of tribute and taxation'.<sup>187</sup> These tensions shape national belonging as a whole. As a result, spaces of ungovernance emerge in rural and urban areas due to the disparities between the liberal state and the practices of traditional governance. This is complicated further by people flooding into the city looking for refuge and job security.

Conflict over land and resources is the legacy of South Africa as a whole, a country built through migration but the turn to democracy has not meant that all share equal rights in terms of claiming national belonging and citizenship. Regional integration further increases the number of non-nationals in South Africa and migration studies experts recognize that 'while committed to tolerance and universal human rights, few South African citizens and politicians see foreigners as entitled to these rights; [the] denial of foreigners' rights affects South Africa's international reputation, economic prospects, and ability to deliver on its promises of freedom'.<sup>188</sup> And ultimately, the re-valuation of traditional authority post-apartheid means that ethnicity can determine who gets to act, why, when and how. Consequently, this affects the form and content of social cohesion between members of the country as the diversity of the city increases, and has led to xenophobia, racism and similar forms of violence and corruption.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, 'Reflections on liberalism, policulturalism, and ID-ology: citizenship and difference in South Africa', *Social Identities* 9, 4 (2003) 445-74 (p. 454)  
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1350463032000174632>> [accessed 30 March 2015]

<sup>188</sup> Loren B. Landau, 'Violence, Condemnation, and the Meaning of Living in South Africa', in *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, ed. by Shireen Hassim and others (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), pp. 105-118 (p. 106).

<sup>189</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, 'The Struggle between the Constitution and 'Things African'', *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 7, 3 (2005) 299-303 (p. 300)  
<<http://amaXhosa.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13698010500267918>>  
(DOI: 10.1080/13698010500267918) [accessed 23 October 2011]

### **‘New’ forms of masculinity in the city**

At the end of apartheid, the cultural influx of people redefined the city almost overnight. The dynamic in Johannesburg has changed dramatically and there are more non-South Africans making a living in South Africa than there were in the past. These people are practicing different ways of being and belonging that are in many respects foreign to South Africa and to South Africans. Nowadays challenges for governance over the increasing crime and xenophobia ‘lie in the social and cultural domain’ because many people turn to ‘rural-informed practices of survival’ to cope with the pressures of life.<sup>190</sup> These practices are based upon African indigenous religion from different parts of Africa and can be perceived as ‘backward’.

Hillbrow is in the innermost neighbourhood of Johannesburg. It is one of the most culturally diverse sections of the city but it is also one of the more dangerous parts of the country. Whole buildings have been hi-jacked in Hillbrow and some are ‘occupied’ by squatters. Hillbrow was once a whites-only area in inner city of Johannesburg; however, in the 1980s, black South Africans and people of colour started to move into the area. Today, Hillbrow is now 90% foreign nationals with people from the neighbouring Southern African countries such as Zambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Botswana, Zimbabwe and so on. Local myth suggests that Hillbrow is so full of immigrants that if another African country experiences difficulties, Hillbrow suffers too. In the 1990s, Hillbrow become so violent that local people may have assumed that the police had given the area over to criminals. Although parts of Hillbrow are being reformed, there remains areas where it is neither safe to walk in the day or the night.

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<sup>190</sup> Simone, AbdouMalik, ‘People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg’, *Public Culture*, 16, 3 (2004), 407-429 (p. 85) <http://research.gold.ac.uk/1946/> (DOI: 10.1215/08992363-16-3-407) [accessed 30 June 2012]

This flow of people creates a myriad of cultural communities that continue to grow in strategic parts, all over the city and the increase in numbers puts pressure on the economy and so job competition increases. Critics argue that people who live in the inner-parts of Johannesburg -- in places like Hillbrow -- are in a state of constant 'preparedness' against harm and chaos due to increasing competition over jobs, housing and shelter and education. The elevation of the image of the African immigrant in post-apartheid fiction represent a 'new' form of urban masculinity as a reaction to the pressure that rural-urban migrants feel to 'make it' in the city; therefore, this discourse is in effect a visible signifier of competing urban spaces.

In Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* and in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, the African immigrant is the 'new' symbol of urban masculinity. In these fictions, African immigrants are groups of unnamed, young and individual black men but they have a prowess to 'make it' in Hillbrow and when compared to the struggles of South African rural-urban migrant life, the immigrants are to blame for the bleak post-apartheid state. As such, they are revered and hated in terms of the way they dress and their sexual prowess with women. These are the trappings of success in South Africa's neo-liberal saturated global and modernised market, as Terry-Ann Selikow and Graham Gibbon explain, where clothing, branded cars and hairstyles, become important resources to define identity.<sup>191</sup>

In the novels, the status of a 'real man' or the performance of 'manhood' is represented as material wealth and sexual prowess. Judith Butler argues that subjectivity is performed and therefore created discursively. She suggests that we must not assume ontological integrity of the subject but that gender changes in different historical and social contexts and that gender intersects with race, class and

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<sup>191</sup> Terry-Ann Selikow and Graham Gibbon, 'Relationships of exchange amongst South African youth in the age of conspicuous consumption', *New South Africa Review 1 2010: Development or Decline?* ed. by John Daniel and others (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2010), pp. 447-462 (p. 450).

ethical, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constructed identities. As such, it is impossible to separate the performance of identities from the political and cultural intersections 'in which it is invariably produced and maintained'.<sup>192</sup>

Sexual prowess is one method that performs and secures the status of a 'real man' but failure to lay claim to this therefore seems to reduce a man's claim to his own sense of real manhood. Selikow and Gibbon conclude that a growth in the culture of consumerism in South Africa, encouraged by modernity and globalisation, and the pressures this puts on young people to obtain and display their material goods are some of the motivation towards the commoditisation of sex. Therefore, in the competing discourse of city life predominantly occupied in these texts by male rural-urban migrants and African immigrants, sexual prowess and material wealth is one way to demonstrate success. These marks of success engender feelings of discord between rural-urban migrants and African immigrants, at the expense of social cohesion.<sup>193</sup>

Although the urban African immigrant in these fictions is often portrayed as morally questionable, he has a likeable persona and is feared and revered at the same time. He is not policed effectively or convicted by the state. He is portrayed as attractive, dark, wealthy and mysterious. He has a female following, sports the latest fashion and the most expensive car. Like the urban migrant in these stories, the African immigrant is a hustler, doing business at all hours of the day and night. In both novels, Hillbrow is the centre of activity for the African immigrant and he is associated with real life places like Death Valley, Highpoint centre and Hotel Lagos in Hillbrow. The dominant image of the urban man is no longer white or South African. He is the illegitimate son of the city protecting the vulnerable but

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<sup>192</sup> Butler, p. 4-5.

<sup>193</sup> Selikow and Gibbon, p. 450.

simultaneously establishing corrupt forms of economic, social and political activity that violate the vulnerable, in the city space. This image of the African immigrant does not only feature in *Room 207* but is reiterated in Lauren Beuke's *Zoo City*. In this novel, rural-urban migrants are the section of the black underclass that suffer in Hillbrow in comparison to the African immigrant population who are seen to thrive amidst difficult circumstances in a fictional world where moral lines are blurred. These people emerge as heroic survivors competing against outside social forces of which they have no part in making. In comparison, there is a sense of responsibility that the South African has towards the state of his own nation.

The black male rural-urban migrant population are lower down the hierarchy of city life. These men are poor and struggling in a bleak political and social landscape. A place where black South Africans have been historically unwelcome, 'of locating oneself in a space that presents as rapidly accelerated modernity while erratically invoking and respecting the rights of tradition'.<sup>194</sup> A desired collective, is an 'other world' – says Murray in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* – where the city street is at the same time, 'the hostile new South African correlative of the unforgiving village'. In *Room 207*, the boys' have to prove that they are financially secure to establish their masculinity among competing masculinities but they feel constantly discouraged by increasing competition. As Dingz exclaims: 'The world's ways and the world's history will make your heart heavy, make you think things that can make you hate your own blackness' (Moele, p. 145). Here blackness is seen as a condition in the novel. The homeless character, Justice, reinforces this idea and Stomachache in Moele's *Dog Eat Dog* does the same. Both men fail to complete their studies and end up on the streets. The author suggests that the reader must question why these boys

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<sup>194</sup> Sally Ann Murray, 'On the Street with Vladislavic, Mhlongo, Moele and Others' in *SA Literature and Beyond 2000*, ed. by Michael Chapman and Margaret Lenta (University of Kwa-Zulu Natal: Pietermaritzburg, 2011), p. 69-96, pp. 82.

failed and examine their responsibility, peer pressure and institutional barriers. Yet, the characters constantly engage in who is to blame for their abject position.

For example, Molamo tries to break into an arts career as a poet, writer and director but he fails. He can't crossover into the arts because it is a space dominated by wealth and white people. He reverts to illegal art hustling. His actions mimic those of the African immigrant but unlike the masculine identity of their immigrant counter-parts, the migrant boys are emasculated because they cannot find stable jobs with stable incomes. Dineo Gqola argues that historically, as well as in the contemporary moment 'index access to finance as linked to sexual attractiveness and virility'; 'therefore, the loss of both a means of income and the opposite sex is a threat to such patriarchal and hetero-normative masculinities'. If foreign black Africans have all of the money then black South Africans cannot compete and 'this becomes the historic rumour which is much touted'.<sup>195</sup> This adds to their general sense of insecurity and anxiety further fuelling xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants. Magona represents a similar scenario in *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* when she represents how Tolo who had 'come to Cape Town seeking everything but his own humanity' that he had 'sucked from his mother's breast' and 'nourished by his people':

Had not yet learned it was in dispute. That lesson he would get in Cape Town where he would find, for the first time in his life, that there were people not quite convinced of the black person's humanity (*Living*, p. 117).

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<sup>195</sup> Gqola, p. 218-9.

In this discourse, black migrants lose their sense of personhood in the city because their right to life and their right to dignity as black men is under threat; furthermore, it serves to reinstate the binary between rural and urban life to suggest two things: that black South Africans are dehumanised in the city and secondly, that ubuntu is located in rural indigenous parts of South Africa.

In this discourse, difference is determined in oppositional terms. It shapes our understanding of human difference, as Patricia Hill Collins explains.<sup>196</sup> The terms rural and urban then only make sense in opposition to each other. The same can be said for rural-urban migrant and African immigrant. The one is inherently opposed to the other. Objectification is central to these binary relationships: the separation from the self and the object, the 'knowing' self from the 'known object'. As such, these relationships are unstable as they are interdependent. These social and cultural binaries are therefore reproduced in these novels through the reiteration of binary images. These novels therefore constitute sites for the production and reproduction of these binaries and images.

### **Cultures of impunity**

#### **Entitlement and the 'Born Free' generation**

There are cultural narratives of illegitimate entitlement creating forms of social cohesion in post-apartheid South Africa. These emerge as a response to and within the bleak reality of millions of people who live in shacks, without regular employment, subject to HIV and AIDS and other diseases and without prospects for

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<sup>196</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), p. 70.

new opportunities. David Bruce argues that violence in South African society is a result of a culture of violence and criminality engendered and concentrated in urban areas. Here, young men are engaged in criminal lifestyles and earn credibility by ‘demonstrating the readiness to resort to extreme violence with a weapon, and this culture is therefore strongly linked to South Africa’s problem of armed violence’, he says.<sup>197</sup> However, Bruce’s approach is unsatisfactory because it generalises without adequately identifying the discourses that are embedded in violence and criminality in urban South Africa. For example, there is a language of entitlement that underlies the Black Economic Empowerment schemes and Affirmative Action campaigns in post-apartheid South Africa; both of which are strategies to deracialise economic power and redress economic inequality. However, as Gelb and Pillay suggest ‘it is difficult to overlook the irony that the black-led state, through its own deliberate policy choices, continued to demean and debase the lives of the very black citizens it claims to represent’.<sup>198</sup>

Factors that effect illegitimate assimilation in South Africa include access to economic opportunity and the lack of stable and unsustainable opportunities for income generation. The increase in the cost of living is harder for poorer families than for the wealthier classes; secondly, there is a poorer quality of life for those living in the inner parts of the city. Forms of social exclusion push groups of people to the periphery of urban living because of social codes individuals or communities are ‘othered’. These factors contribute towards a general feeling of uncertainty and anxiety. Leaders who fail to address the needs of the individual while raising public expectation and those who fail to meet this expectation create space for cultures of

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<sup>197</sup> Bruce, p. 404.

<sup>198</sup> Stephen Gelb and Devan Pillay, ‘Behind Xenophobia in South Africa—Poverty or Inequality’, in *Go Home or Die Here: Violence, Xenophobia and the Reinvention of Difference in South Africa*, ed. by Shireen Hassim and others (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2008), pp. 11-14 (p. 13).



illegitimate entitlement. These are cultures of impunity: as Landau suggests, when the security of the national body is under threat it can create incompatible views of South African life including a renewed commitment to nationalism by the mobile elite, intense feelings of nationalism; in these situations, foreigners will be eager to claim rights to the state but are not excited to be considered 'South African'.<sup>199</sup> Post-apartheid author Lauren Beuke's novel *Zoo City* illustrates illegitimate cultures of entitlement and the moral ambiguity inherent in these. In *Zoo City*, Zinzi fights for what is morally acceptable and for humane living conditions in a rough Hillbrow landscape.

Lauren Beukes' novel *Zoo City* challenges ubuntu as a positive form of social cohesion because her writing suggests that configuring national belonging and the value of personhood is complex, if not ambiguous, for those on the urban fringe of society: namely, African immigrants and refugees. Therefore, *Zoo City* is an interpretation of the challenges to the 'we' of the nation state. In Beuke's novel, *Zoo City* is urban Hillbrow: a filthy and a run-down inner borough of Beuke's fictional Johannesburg. *Zoos* are citizens of *Zoo City* who have been relegated to the inner neighbourhood of Johannesburg because of a severe misdemeanour from their past. *Zoo City* is therefore the site of immorality. As punishment for their 'sin', each *Zoo* must carry with them an animal that represents the cross they have to bare. Zinzi, the protagonist, doesn't trust people easily and Beuke's generates empathy for her protagonist regardless of Zinzi's past. Beuke's uses flashbacks throughout the novel as a frame narrative to create sympathy for her character. In fact, Beukes uses Zinzi's past to justify her shady behaviour in the present as Zinzi gets caught up in questionable activities such as 419 scams, theft and immigration issues.

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<sup>199</sup> Landau, 'Violence, Condemnation', p. 106.

However, like a number of post-apartheid novels *Zoo City* is divided between images of an innate and essential African identity and people's refraction from it. Firstly, the nature of each Zoo character is mystical and 'other worldly'. Beuke's novel has been categorised as science fiction but the themes she draws on are distinctly ethereal from a traditional African perspective. As such, Zinzi's access to the 'otherworld' is ubuntu-like because she has an ability to see into the future, like an ancestor might. However, her moral dissension detracts from ubuntu as an ethical obligation towards the other. On the contrary, she is implicated in a '419 letter' scam when Zinzi and her African 'brother' con a white American couple out of a large amount of money. She justifies her behaviour because she feels that she has been consigned to the urban fringe and as such, under these conditions she is forced to alleviate her own poverty through a 'culture of entitlement'. For example, on a day-to-day basis Zinzi's essential needs are not met. She receives no government support for health care or basic social services with regards to access to clean water, adequate shelter or housing and sanitation facilities. Zinzi justifies her behaviour because she feels that she has a right to steal from the rich. Her 'I deserve it attitude' emerges within a broader culture of corruption, greed and material idolization. Outside forces therefore cause her to disengage from her desire to do well and to be good. Yet, the fact that it cannot but be inferred that she has been dealt an unfair blow coupled with the way in which she loves her African immigrant boyfriend, how she takes pains to clean her apartment and her sensitivity amidst her questionable morality makes her an interesting and complex character.

Beuke's characters reveal that some of the most vulnerable inhabitants of South Africa are not adequately taken care of in the post-apartheid state. In most cases, these inhabitants, such as African immigrants, do add to the economy of the city as a

positive social and economic resource bringing diversity, buying power, skills and new ideas and global connections. However, Zoo City deals with housing and security issues in Johannesburg for members of the community who are more susceptible to either get involved in crime or as victims of crime. Landau states that the primary needs of forced migrants (urban-rural migrants and African immigrants) is shelter, access to education and healthcare, safety and security, proper treatment in detention, access to economic opportunities, fast administrative action, and administrative justice in processing of applications and so on.<sup>200</sup> Zinzi's environment confronts all of these aspects but her desire to stabilise this environment for the local inhabitants reveals her genuine care and concern for the people around her. She expresses her need to protect others and to fight for justice, however ironic hers may be. Therefore, in spite of her past, a commitment to a form of social justice, peace and sustainability for the community that reaches beyond herself reveals a spirit of ubuntu deep within her; however, it is certain that her character and others maintain that an individual's own capacity to act morally for the good of the community is affected by outside social forces that are beyond the control of the individual;

Loren Landau has done extensive research on migration studies and xenophobia in South Africa. Where Glaser argues that forms of xenophobia can be attributed to 'popular passions' rooted in 'the politics of failed development and delivery', Loren Landau argues that the governments reaction to foreigners is 'two-faced'; it is no longer simply xenophobic in character but 'negrophobic' (Dineo Gqola, 2008) alerting South Africans to retain a 'critical awareness of the historical -- and, in

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<sup>200</sup> Loren B. Landau, 'Introduction', in *Forced Migrants in the New Johannesburg: Towards a Local Government Response*, ed. by Loren B. Landau, Forced Migrant Studies Programme (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand), pp. 13-23 (p. 19).

>[http://amaXhosa.academia.edu/5848010/Forced Migrants in the New Johannesburg](http://amaXhosa.academia.edu/5848010/Forced_Migrants_in_the_New_Johannesburg)> [accessed 13 March 2013]

particular, the colonial -- roots of current conflicts'.<sup>201</sup> Loren Landau describes the image of 'vertical ghettos' in inner city, which are rundown, policed and sealed off from 'regular' society:

There are rooms in buildings where the electricity has been cut, rendering the sewer pumps inoperative, and where floods of raw sewerage are a regular occurrence. In an 'occupied/hijacked' building called San Jose there is a shebeen on one of the upper floors. In The Ridge, a run-down hotel, four Congolese men, one of whom manifests the symptoms of full-blown Aids, share a room and pay R150 per month per person.<sup>202</sup>

Within these spaces, law enforcement is sporadic; there are small amounts of state housing delivery and 'an extraordinary range of living conditions exist'.<sup>203</sup> These 'vertical ghettos' allow the poor access to the city through a foothold that would otherwise be denied. *Zoo City*, Kgebetli Moele's fictional Hillbrow in *Room 207* and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* parallels Landau's image of 'vertical ghettos'. Loren's description of the living conditions of immigrants in the city is represented by the metaphor of the monster. In Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, the protagonist Refentse travels from a rural village called Tiragalong to Johannesburg in just under a couple of days but his provincial journey is one that will reset the course of his life in terms of his sense of ubuntu personhood; yet, in his encounter with the city, urban Johannesburg is portrayed as a menacing monster: 'the lure of the monster was, however, hard to resist' (Mpe, p. 3). His provincial journey from country to city is constructed on the memories and impressions – the stories – of

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<sup>201</sup> Gqola, p. 211-5.

<sup>202</sup> Landau, 'Violence, Condemnation', p. 116.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

his rural community. In other words, it is his rural community who have pre-constructed the image of the city as a monster. As such, his route into Hillbrow was ‘the culmination of many converging routes. You do not remember where the route first began. But you do know all too well that the stories of migrants had a lot to do with its formation’ (Mpe, p. 2).

The novel implies that there are many people, like Refentse, who come to Hillbrow because they thought that ‘the City of Gold was full of career opportunities for them’ but find that ‘the menacing monster’ of Hillbrow has the capacity to swallow up the children of the village (Mpe, p. 3). This is a figurative lesson through which we later find that the main character has lost his sense of morality through his encounter with city life. With regards to ubuntu, it is important to note that a sense of morality is associated, in these fictions, with the rural village implying not only that ubuntu is a moral ethic but that an innate and essential version of ubuntu is located in the rural village. As such, the metaphor of the monster incites binary thinking and Mpe and Moele’s novel encourage this.

In this narrative, the city is a monster that sets traps for innocent inhabitants (Mpe, p. 182). The city is therefore personified and this shift of responsibility gives its inhabitants the ‘right’ to act as and how they like. In their discourse, Johannesburg is compared to Sodom and Gomorrah from the Bible. The comparison illustrates patterns of behaviour that are traditionally associated with ‘immorality’ such as homosexuality, scandal, rebellion, uninhabited freedom and the lusts of the flesh. These patterns of behaviour are then associated with immigrants who are described as ‘Makwerekwere’; immigrants are accused of carrying AIDS from Africa into South Africa. Not only does the city appear to empty out the concept of community in these novels through failed social delivery but the emptying out of community opens up the

space for cultures of impunity whereby agents can act unreservedly.

Yet, the irony as *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* expresses is that the city builds up false expectations for young black South Africans and African immigrants:

There are very few Hillbroweans, if you think about it, who were not originally wanderers from Tiragalong and other rural villages . . . Many of the Makwerekwere [that is to say, strangers, foreigners, outsiders] you accuse of this and that are no different to us -- sojourners, here in search of green pastures (Mpe, p. 11).

As Clarkson argues, *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* is not a community in relations as the 'our' suggests because 'few of the inhabitants of Hillbrow are native to the place, so that the 'our' of the novel's title starkly, if ironically, registers notions of dispossession.'<sup>204</sup> In saying so, cultures of impunity emerge in this gap. For instance, there is a deep suspicion of African immigrants in these fictions who are viewed as illegitimate inhabitants of the city. These narratives are reflections of real underlying socio-political attitudes that develop into a discourse about 'outsiders' and circulate in and through specific groups of people.

Irony is a tool that these young black writers use to make visible the contrast between reality and appearance in post-apartheid South Africa. What the boys in *Room 207* dream Hillbrow to be was not what it turned out to be; in other words, the reality of the city is different to their expectation. For example, in *Room 207*, the boys are split and have conflicting perspectives on 'dream city'; for Noko, the future

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<sup>204</sup> Carrol Clarkson, 'Locating identity in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*', *Third World Quarterly*, 26, 3, (2005), 451-459, (p. 451).

‘turns pitch-black so that [he] can’t see anything, even [his] big nose’.<sup>205</sup> From this perspective, Moele’s use of irony in *Room 207* allows the reader to judge the post-apartheid present. In the absence of fundamental forms of protection including resources, people are abandoned to form their own collectives. Hassim, Kupe and Worby have described this as ‘to live in a condition of abjection -- to be consigned to bare life beyond the limits of the political community.’<sup>206</sup> In response to these conditions, these young black authors bring characters to life, which constitute their own social world. Many of the post-apartheid stories show that young urbanites rename streets, buildings and shopping centres –remapping cities to suit themselves – and in doing so, negotiate their licence to re-spatialise post-apartheid South Africa.

With regards to post-apartheid city writing, Michael Titlestad says that the dominant aesthetic in post-apartheid city writing is spatialisation or remapping of the city. These include cognitive maps whereby inhabitants -- legal and illegal -- map their everyday practice and the range of innumerable possible spatial worlds. These maps serve as frames through which problems can be understood and perceived. Spatial maps of the city are ways in which writers show how they understand the connection (their own) to physical place -- how the author perceives and portrays society -- whether they are in conflict with society or whether society is in conflict with the individual.

In spite of tough urban living conditions, these novels suggest that both rural-urban migrants and African immigrants feel entitled to the city. However, the expression of entitlement is fought over the distinction between citizen and non-citizen and occurs in the fight to survive and to ‘make it’. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Refentse takes no notice of the ‘new’ post-apartheid street names: ‘Cross

<sup>205</sup> Kgebetli Moele, *Room 207* (Johannesburg: Kwela Books, 2011), p. 235. All further parenthetical citations will refer to this edition.

<sup>206</sup> Hassim, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

the street and turn right. I like this street but I don't know its name and I don't care what it is called' (Mpe, p. 158). Instead, he reverts back to the older Afrikaans names from apartheid. This is an act of defiance against the ANC government because he purposefully disregards the new street names that may recognise anti-apartheid heroes. However, as is the case for Modishi in *Room 207* and the images of Zulu Boy, the boys are not always certain as to how to handle their newfound freedom. When Modishi's parents are unexpectedly killed in a motorcar accident, he inherits a large fortune. His inheritance -- like that of the millennial born boys -- is a burden because he has no wisdom as to how to spend the money and so wastes it on sex, drink and drugs. His lack of knowledge and wisdom leads to his downfall. So Modishi, like Zulu Boy is 'just another sad black story', a University dropout with no money and no future. At the heart of these 'sad black stories' are feelings of anxiety and uncertainty for the future.

You know that thinking? It's another sad black story on its own. [...] You see, we are very funny people. A black man can kill you for living your life, for trying to improve and better your life, and still come to your funeral acting very hurt. Believe it happens. Believe me, I know (Moele, p. 41).

The boys are living in a situation that has caused them to lose hope. Noko pokes fun at the 'freedom' of post-apartheid South Africa and the promises that the African National Congress never delivered.

Yet, Moele's boys refract from these pressures and draw from complex moral reference points to create deceptive identities that give them a sense of agency in the city. This is achieved through their fake clothes and cars and false identities. For



example, the boys aspire to the likes of Che Guevara and of Herman Mashaba; both of who are ambiguous characters. Either way, the images of these two men and of Boom Shaka on their walls coupled with their ‘designer jeans’ allow social relations to thicken and heterogeneous citizens in the city are brought together relationally.<sup>207</sup> AbdouMaliq argues that residents of the inner city make conscious decisions to create a self-image—mostly fake—to secure confidence and not to appear weak. He argues that the most significant form of urban connectivity comes through the urban residents themselves as residents use each other to create the most significant form of urban connectivity.

Secondly, that the notion of a coherent identity is problematic ‘in the fractured world of a (post)colonial slum, where a person may, at different moments, have to rely on affiliations of kinship, ethnicity, religion, custom, political party, or professional grouping’.<sup>208</sup> This is an overarching discourse and governance will not be able to create equal urban connectivity. In fact, in *Room 207* the state is regarded ambivalently. In his argument, AbdouMaliq extends the notion of infrastructure to the activities of people in the city as he argues that ‘particular spaces are linked to specific identities, functions, lifestyles, and properties so that the spaces of the city become legible for specific people at given places and times’. This is evident in Refentse journey through the streets of Hillbrow in Mpe’s novel where he identifies local brothels, hotels, Death Valley, Ibo Nigerians and Hotel Lagos. The same passage is similarly described in *Room 207* where in both examples, the boys’ re-spatialise the city.

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<sup>207</sup> Matthew Gandy, ‘Cyborg Urbanization: Complexity and the Monstrosity of the Contemporary City’, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29, (2005), 26–49 (p. 31) as cited in AbdouMaliq Simone, ‘Some Reflections on Making Popular Culture in Urban Africa’, *African Studies Review*, 51, (2008), 75–89, (p. 76) <DOI: 10.1353/arw.0.008>

<sup>208</sup> Simone, p. 407.

## Scapegoating and the 'Born Free' generation

Discourses of difference have been the dominant narrative to explain identity and national belonging in South Africa. Scholars Zegeye and Harris argue that a lack of respect towards difference is the central cause of strife between peoples and therefore a cause for political instability. They claim that identity is the foremost concept for understanding the differences between personal and social, cultural and political, relations between social groups, the influence of the media on social relations, and the individual and the group. In South Africa, this discussion is of elevated significance to the terms of national identity and belonging because of South Africa's history of diverse ethnicities as well as apartheid's disavowal of anything black or African in terms of the past and in relation to indigenous traditions. Post-1994, South Africanism became an overarching national identity with the intention of wiping away previously marginalised groups of white, black, coloured, African, Indian, Malay and European that were then 'emptied out, refilled, reconfigured and stabilised'.<sup>209</sup> However, events post-1994 indicate that peace and prosperity in post-democratic South Africa is not where it was hoped to be. Xenophobia is merely the manifestation of deeper tensions between black South Africans and immigrants in the country. In fact, these tensions are exemplified between rural inhabitants and urban dwellers.

The novels examined in this section of the chapter reflect that there is a culture of blame between rural-urban migrants and African immigrants in South Africa as well as between rural inhabitants and urban dwellers. This could be caused by dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the New South Africa, in terms of the promises of the transition and the reality of a bleak landscape for most of the country.

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<sup>209</sup> Abebe Zegeye and Richard L. Harris, 'Introduction', in *Media, Identity and the Public Sphere in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, ed. by Abebe Zegeye and Richard L. Harris (Brill: Leiden and Boston, 2003), pp. 1-25 (p. 2).

I have already discussed how Mpe, Moele and Beuke's novel suggest that rural-urban migrant communities in the city blame African immigrants for acts of immorality deemed as violent crime, sexual prostitution and the spread of HIV and Aids in the inner city. Research from the Forced Migration Studies Programme identify that there are three common factors leading to group based violence. The first is a lack of trust in effective conflict resolution mechanisms in locations, a culture of impunity and a political vacuum or competition for community leadership so that unofficial, illegitimate and often violent forms of leadership emerge.<sup>210</sup> Furthermore, in response to the xenophobic attacks in 2008 and 2015, scholar and critic Pumla Dineo Gqola suggests that the idiom of 'uncomprehending shock successfully allows us to disavow agency and complicity in the problems we face' and in the discourse of xenophobia, the 'throw-away people' which we deem as 'foreign' are those whose bodies are marked through pigmentation allowing us to categorise people into those who belong to South Africa and those who do not. It is this language, she argues, 'that hankers after the language of race science, apartheid and white supremacy'. However, I want to suggest that this language also makes ubuntu dangerous territory for social cohesion, in the light of competing agendas in the city.<sup>211</sup> According to Gqola, this is a form of negrophobia and not xenophobia.

A debased discourse of 'blackness' is reinforced in Phaswane Mpe's *Thirteen Cents*. Mpe's narrative of negrophobia is contrary to the impulse of the Rainbow Nation because 'blackness' should not be socially and culturally despised in the New South Africa. I would like to draw attention to Mpe's narrative of vulnerable children, which, I believe, expresses a form of negrophobia. The novel reflects on socio-economic imbalances in South Africa that cause close communities to lose their

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<sup>210</sup> Eliseev, p. 31.

<sup>211</sup> Gqola, p. 211.

ubuntu leaving children the most at risk to abusive outside forces. The loss of ubuntu is birthed in narratives of blame. Narratives of blame are reflected in the happenings of inner-city neighbourhoods but are engendered by social and political forces; the population that has been the most effected are women and children. *Thirteen Cents* highlights families with young children living near gangsters, prostitutes and pimps on cheap housing estates or in slums and makeshift shacks within the city or on the peri-urban fringe. Here some of the poorest parts of the population live in close proximity to the richest. Without formal housing or shelter, no education and no job, the poorer classes struggle to survive in the city. Children are the most vulnerable portions of the population because there are no formal structures of protection to safeguard their rights and this leaves children open to abuse.

K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* is the story of an orphaned black street child who lives on the peri-urban fringe of Sea Point and later Cape Town, post 1990. Azure has no form of safety or protection to rely on apart from his own street smarts, and as he says about life on the streets: 'It's like anything -- you get used to it'.<sup>212</sup> The most striking feature about the small boy is his blue eyes, which cause much of the trouble for him as the novel progresses. He confesses that while growing up, his peers hated him for his blue eyes and dark skin. The implication is that he is a black boy with 'white' features which is an element of his identity that causes much trouble with the leader of the 28s gang later on in the story. Towards the end of the novel, Azure has been raped, beaten, starved, locked away, chased and had his possessions stolen from him. No one treats him with respect and therefore he isn't able to understand his own self-worth. As a result, he prostitutes himself; yet, he refuses to take hard drugs because 'it just does terrible things to your body' (Duiker, p. 3). In

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<sup>212</sup> K. Sello Duiker, *Thirteen Cents* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2005), p. 2. All further parenthetical citations will refer to this edition.

this contradiction, he exhibits an ethic that alludes to ‘a time past’, one, in which, the reader can assume that his parents instilled moral values into him whereby he can recognise right from wrong.

The most violent scene in the novel occurs on the Cape Flats between Azure and the 28s gang. The 28s are a notorious but predominantly coloured gang from Cape Town. Azure’s experience on the Flats is one out of many situations where he is forced to endure a series of relationships and situations that cause him to lose his sense of self-worth: his ubuntu personhood. Men who feel let down by apartheid and who take their anger out on more vulnerable members of the population abuse him. When Azure is accused of disrespecting a senior 28s gang leader in Sea Point, he is brutally raped and beaten by the 28s. After his first beating in a township in Sea Point, he is admitted to hospital. In hospital, the doctor accuses him of ‘sniffing glue and smoking buttons’ (Duiker, p. 42). The police don’t help him either:

And where are the police? Why are they never around when you need them?  
 [...] Why are they only interested in the big guy with the BMW who gets his  
 car stolen in daylight? [...] Why don’t they ever come out at night when you  
 need them the most? (Duiker, p. 52)

The female nurse is the only one who doesn’t support the trope that Azure has been ‘caught stealing’ (Duiker, p. 42) but even so, she doesn’t speak up and Azure is taken away by the 28s. Later he is taken to an outhouse, shoved into a small dark room for three days where he is made to eat, sleep and defecate. Following that, Azure is taken to the Cape Flats where is locked up on the rooftop for a further three days and gang raped. His experience is foreshadowed by a sign written on the wall of the flats, as he

walks up the stairwell: '*Mandela se poes*', the Afrikaans word for 'female genitals'. '*Mandela se poes*' reflects the social attitude at the time: many people felt let down by the ANC government because the promises of a new democratic nation were not being met.

In his portrayal of Azure's abuse, Duiker uses a series of metaphors to express negrophobia. The gang refer to Azure as 'gemors', which is Afrikaans for 'rubbish', and 'kaffir', as they force him to give them oral sex. 'Kaffir' is a racist word for black person and has associations with apartheid ideology and scientific racism. However, his lack of self-worth is not limited to his experiences with people. His own spatial journey of the city reflects the way in which he values himself as he walks from the heart of Cape Town, through the white suburbs and up into Table Mountain. Azure describes the white suburbs as 'a quiet neighbourhood where the only sound you'll hear is the sound of dogs barking behind closed gates' and where 'white schoolboys practise in nets' (*Cents*, 103). Further up the mountain, he encounters tourists who Duiker insinuates have not seen anything like Azure before as 'they stare and look and point to this and that. Everything is new to them' (*Cents*, 105). In his narrative, white people play in their suburban pools and enjoy a life of playtime and leisure; whereas, his every moment is deeply saddening.

The test is whether ubuntu instils a shared responsibility in the next generation in light of the challenges of the post-apartheid era. This challenge is best represented in light of the next generation who have been referred to as the 'born-frees'. Both *Thirteen Cents* and *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* suggest that the next generation—or born-frees -- reject ubuntu as an innate and essential African identity because of their experience of a bleak landscape; in other words, due to threatening outside social forces many young men and women are finding alternate ways to be and to belong.

Michael Titlestad has identified the city in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* as discrepant cities because it collapses binaries and in this narrative, the city is a part of the same moral [dis]order as rural Tiragalong.<sup>213</sup> At the start of the novel, Refentse is dead. He committed suicide and narrates his story about his life on earth from heaven. As he reflects on the violence in Hillbrow, he describes Hillbrow as a chaotic nightmare:

Two women were raped and then killed in Quartz Street...Three Nigerians who evaded arrest at Jan Smuts Airport were finally arrested in Pretoria Street for drug dealing...Street kids, drunk with glue, brandy and wild visions of themselves [...] ...At least eight people died and thirteen were seriously injured when the New Year's eve celebrations took the form of torrents of bottles gushing out of the brooding clouds that were flat balconies...Men going anywhere near the corner of Quartz and Smit Streets were advised to beware of the menace of increasingly aggressive prostitutes...a few men had allegedly been raped there recently... Welcome to our Hillbrow... (Mpe, p. 5).

All these things that you have heard see heard about felt smelt believed disbelieved shirked embraced brewing in your consciousness would find chilling haunting echoes in the simple words... Welcome to our Hillbrow (Mpe, p. 27).

In his depiction of Hillbrow, Mpe paints a bleak image of the city. This image rejects that of a cohesive collective as he replaces this with images of a violent city. At the heart of this narrative is a xenophobic discourse aimed at African immigrants.

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<sup>213</sup> Michael Titlestad, 'Writing the city after apartheid', in *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, ed. by David Attwell and Derek Attridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 676-96 (p. 682).

According to Refentse, Hillbrow has too many immigrants. His fictional Hillbrow is not far removed from its reality -- a heaven that 'carries within it its own Hell' -- where people's necks are 'draped with huge tyres wet with petrol, melting in the heat of the roaring flames' and Refentse's friends lost their sanity 'in the midst of the mental and emotional pressures' (Mpe, p. 47-8). This is the post-apartheid reality where the treatment of foreigners 'ran contrary to the human rights clauses detailed in the new constitution of the country' (Mpe, p. 23).

As these novels suggest, xenophobic narratives corrode the relationship between urban South Africans and African immigrants and challenge the concept that 'born-free' black South Africans are obligated to act according to an inherent ubuntu ethic. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, Mpe uses Refentse to showcase the dialogue of blame between urban black South Africans and rural communities in South Africa that exposes binaries of 'us' and 'them' that do not resound with ubuntu. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, the rural community use the term '*makwerekwere*' to refer to African immigrants because of the 'sound their unintelligible foreign languages' were supposed to make. According to the migrants and the rural community, immigrants are 'vulgar'. *Makwerekwere* are 'unintelligible' and sexually promiscuous African immigrants who apply 'dog style' sex and are imbricated in 'scandalous stories that did the rounds on the informal migrant grapevine' and the spread of HIV is attributed West Africans who are alleged to eat the meat of monkeys (*Hillbrow*, p. 4, 20). This dialogue later breaks down the relationships between members of the same community and leads to two suicides, two sexual affairs and scandal.

The concept of ubuntu may instil a shared responsibility to help others but the 'born-frees' replicates a generation of people looking for quick and upwardly mobile route to material success and fame at the expense of others. The same violent



landscape is represented in Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207*. This is a story about five young black South African friends Matome, D'Nice, Molamo, Modishi, S'busiso and the narrator, Noko who share a one room flat in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. These boys are rural-urban migrants from different rural villages. In *Room 207*, a homogenous notion of black identity is complicated by heterogeneity: Noko is Sotho, S'busiso or "Zulu-boy" is Zulu, Matome is Pedi, Modishi is Tswana. The boys emphasise how each of their identities have been historically and socially constructed. For example, Noko argues that Zulu boy inherited his superiority from 'somewhere in our past' and in this discourse 'all Zulu men are violent, always talking hard and commanding'.<sup>214</sup> It is Zulu boy who embodies the contradiction: he is xenophobic suggesting that Nigerians make a living from corruption and are in South Africa with 'their corrupt ways' (Moele, p. 161).

They arrive in Johannesburg – dream city – 'in different ways and, indifferently, became united' (Moele, p. 15). The walls of their flat are plastered with images of black South Africans who have 'made it' in Hillbrow (Moele, p. 16). Their one room flat or 'safe haven', as they refer to it, is depressing. It is literally a bedroom 'cum dining room cum sitting room, you can sit on this single bed or that double bed, or you can just find a spot and make yourself comfortable anywhere you prefer, even on the floor' (Moele, p. 15). The boys laugh at their circumstances and Mpe does the same in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* using euphemisms to highlight a bleak post-apartheid reality. For example, 'successfully redistributed' is a euphemism for theft (Mpe, p. 22).

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<sup>214</sup> Marzia Milazzo, 'Racial Power and Colorblindness: The 'Sad Black Stories' of Kgebetli Moele's *Room 207* and Twenty-First Century Black South African Fiction', *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, 1, 1 (2013), 33-59 (p. 45).  
[https://www.academia.edu/3526750/Racial\\_Power\\_and\\_Colorblindness\\_The\\_Sad\\_Black\\_Stories\\_of\\_Kgebetli\\_Moeles\\_Room\\_207\\_and\\_Twenty-First\\_Century\\_Black\\_South\\_African\\_Fiction](https://www.academia.edu/3526750/Racial_Power_and_Colorblindness_The_Sad_Black_Stories_of_Kgebetli_Moeles_Room_207_and_Twenty-First_Century_Black_South_African_Fiction)  
 [accessed 20 June 2012]

Although the boys laugh at the bleakness of the post-apartheid reality, they have little hope of making it out of Hillbrow as the depth of their circumstances and pressing outside social forces increase. AbdouMaliq Simone has described the lives of many of the urban youth as ‘analogous to those of people who inhabit refugee camps’.<sup>215</sup> Unconsciously, the boys blame their rural African heritage for not ‘making it’ in ‘Dream City’. This is evident when they reject the people from their village and their past lives. In Moele’s *Room 207* Noko bumps into his homeboy in the city, ubuntu should dictate that he helps his brother but he chooses not to. However, when Noko rejects his rural homeboy, his actions actually infer that he rejects his inner ubuntu. Noko does not help his homeboy. Instead, the novel argues that Noko learned how ‘to be’ and to belong ‘on the street, the hard way’ (Moele, p. 174). He doesn’t fear the streets as he walks around confidently to see ‘...well we’ll see where we end up’ (Moele, p. 75).

The question is whether or not the story implies that ubuntu is dead in the city or in fact, if ubuntu is dead in post-apartheid South Africa. In *Room 207*, Noko appears to be disillusioned with the promises of post-apartheid South Africa as he laughs at the concept of the ‘Rainbow Nation’. Yet he and his friends remain committed to ‘make it’ in the city: an idea that constantly reiterated in the fact that they are waiting to celebrate their own ‘leaving’ Hillbrow party, which turns out to never materialise. It is Noko who exclaims how ‘poverty and suffering unite people’ and ‘good living’ divides them and as such, he is jealous of Matome as he leaves Hillbrow (Moele, p. 195). He is the only one who breaks out of Hillbrow; Irene Visser argues that it is because he rejects black essentialism, hates Hillbrow, emphasises material inequality between blacks and whites but still squanders his

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<sup>215</sup> Simone, p. 418.

money. Visser says that ‘Matome conceptualises Hillbrow as a state of mind, an epistemological space’.<sup>216</sup> It is necessary, he says, that the inhabitants of Hillbrow ‘de-slave-ise’ and ‘de-Hillbrow-ise’ their minds (Moele, 196).

Similarly, in Mda’s *Ways of Dying*, Noria says that she will pay Toloki back ‘when I have found myself’ (*Ways*, p. 71). The implication in the story is that her journey from the village to the city has caused her to lose her sense of ubuntu personhood. This argument is matched by later sentiments in the novel. For example, Jwara warns Nefolovhodwe about going to the city:

Many people went to the city and did not come back. They forgot all about their friends and relatives in the village. Nefolovhodwe promised that he would always have the village in his heart (*Ways*, p. 123).

Thematically, death plays an important role in the narrative and it also drives the plot. For example, it is because of death that Toloki pursues what he perceives to be a more profitable profession and so made up his mind ‘that he too was going to benefit from death’ (*Ways*, p. 122). The irony is that in South Africa death is a profitable industry and funerals have become a ‘primary focal point’ of community activity, as Claire Laurier Decoteau argues. In fact, she has described this in terms of the ‘production’ of funerals where cars, busses and bakkies form convoys to the burial of loved ones and members of the community. Although Laurier Decoteau discusses death primarily in relation to the AIDS pandemic, ‘the production of funerals has become a kind of industry of death’ (*Ways*, p. 123). Death therefore is a depressing trope for collective community in post-apartheid South Africa.

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<sup>216</sup> Irene Vesper, ‘How to Live in Post-Apartheid South Africa’, *The Transnational Journal of International Writing*, 37 (2002), 39-43 (p. 42). <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02690050208589807>> [accessed 30 June 2012]

Death is an issue that Mda plays with in *Ways of Dying*. Toloki the professional mourner mourns the death of his homegirl's son but when the funeral procession is interrupted by a wedding procession that will not give way to the funeral procession Toloki causes the wedding procession to give way. The confrontation between the funeral party and the wedding party is a confrontation between two very different worlds: the poor back underclasses and the burgeoning black middle class elite who are symbolically 'embellished with colourful ribbons and balloons' (*Ways*, p. 10). The encounter is a metaphor for the growing inequalities between black South Africans in terms of what the ANC government had promised South Africans and the realities of what was not delivered. The 'ragged souls on foot' of the funeral procession versus 'a procession of beautiful people, and many posh cars and buses' can symbolise the highly disproportionate difference between the very wealthy and the poor in post-apartheid South Africa. The rich are portrayed to not to care about the poor as the 'ill-humoured driver of the convertible' shirks his responsibility for the country's state of affairs: 'It is not my fault that these people are poor'. A culture of blame therefore replaces any form of ubuntu.

Furthermore, Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* reflects the disintegration of ubuntu social mores and values and 'renders ubuntu/botho insufficient to rescue Azure/Blue from a life of penury', argues Sam Raditlhalo.<sup>217</sup> In the novel, Azure's parents are dead and he is left alone to look after himself. He has a tough attitude to the streets; he says, 'It's like anything – you get used to it' (Duiker, p.2). Without any form of support or reference to ubuntu relationships, he is forced to create his own sense of ubuntu. The topological reconstruction of Azure's past in K. Sello Duiker's use of

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<sup>217</sup> Sam Raditlhalo, 'A Victory of Sorts: All Thirteen Cents and Bitter, Too', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 37, 3 (2010), 266-279 (p. 276).

<<https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/crcil/article/viewFile/24476/18142>>  
[accessed 12 December 2013]

the oral story-telling form in *Thirteen Cents* is mirrored in his ascent up the mountain and signifies an attempt to lay a claim to an ubuntu past. Through reference to Khoi-San and *amaXhosa* histories, Duiker draws his story from a collective communal archive and uses it to frame the development of the subject: Azure. His dreams frame his journey through the city, and his development as a subject. Therefore, the discourse he chooses to use to rewrite his past demonstrates that his process of becoming concerns an ontological understanding of personhood.

Therefore, there is a temporality of ubuntu that is reflected through images and characters in the ancestral world in *Thirteen Cents*. According to concepts of ubuntu discussed in this thesis, an individual's journey towards personhood is built on a solid connection with the ancestral realm and an understanding of the onto-triadic notion of being. The community in this sense includes the living, the dead and the yet-to-be born. This community plays an important role as 'catalyst and as prescriber of norms' for people, argues Menkiti. The concept of personhood is married to the notion of 'moral arrival' and moral arrival is a theme that is explored through the omnipresent communal narrative in these texts as the voice engages with the reader.<sup>218</sup>

Additionally, Duiker's narrative flow in *Thirteen Cents* mimics the temporal structure of ubuntu because it moves from the present to the past in such a way that the two become enjoined together. This is a rhythm that mimics the unfolding and enfolding rhythm of ubuntu and understands that 'being' is made up of a worldly and otherworldly past, the present and the future (Duiker, p. 15).

The omnipresent voice plays an equally significant role in Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*. The second chapter is titled 'Notes from Heaven' and it introduces the third frame of spatial separation in the ontological structure of ubuntu. The afterlife

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<sup>218</sup> Ifeanyi. A. Menkiti 'On the Normative Concept of a Person', in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. by Kwasi Wiredu (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 324-31 (p. 326).

and belief in the ancestral realm forms this third narrative frame. Mpe parallels the third frame or ancestral realm with the ‘crime and grime’ and ‘moral decay’ happening in Hillbrow and Tiragalong. Overshadowed by the collective community voice, Refentse admits to his moral shortcomings. From Heaven, he reflects on a sordid affair with his best friend’s lover who he later finds having sex with his girlfriend. Shortly after, Refentse commits suicide by jumping from the twentieth floor of his building. He blames his mistakes on his ‘humanness’ and justifies his shortcomings attributing these to ‘bone and of flesh’ sharing his ‘humanness’ with Lerato and Sammy, who he justifies, based upon their mutual transgression ‘could only be viewed as human only so long as it remained uncovered by prying eyes and unpublicised by enthusiastic tongues’ (50). Refentse believes his actions can be forgiven because he is only human and so he blames most of his misgivings on his ‘humanness’ and his understanding of personhood is secured by his heavenly or ancestral position. In spite of his immoral behaviour on earth, he receives a space in heaven as an ancestor. Refentse explains how his journey towards ubuntu happened only after he felt remorse for cheating on his partner. In this turn of events, his remorse allows him to respect the dignity of his peers and in doing so he becomes a person. He is an ancestor, as a reward.

These novels reflect an oral story-telling tradition that incites ways of being and of belonging that are different to typically Western paradigms. And as such, the narrative voice in these novels offers a form of social cohesion for those who ascribe to the tradition. For example, in *Thirteen Cents* Azure blends Khoi and San traditional folklore together to create a past that he would like to have descended from.<sup>219</sup> As Andre Brink argues, memory can reshape the past and the present.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Chapman, p. 96.

The oral story-telling form represents an innate and essential aspect of African identity because it is associated with rural space, it refers to a pre-colonial past and lends from African folklore. The oral story telling tradition is also associated with themes of good and evil and myth and fact. According to McClintock, oral tradition promises a more democratic history in terms of the following:

New areas of social life such as family histories and domestic power relations, the myriad forms of popular culture, or the dynamics of informal social groupings such as squatter communities and sheens – hitherto secret, taboo, or neglected – were opened to public history.<sup>221</sup>

However, ‘the collection and preservation of human memory is less a technique for increased historical accuracy, than it is a new, contested technology for historical power’.<sup>222</sup>

The characters in *Thirteen Cents* resemble mythical figures from African folklore: the street vendors are compared to evil rats and pigeons with ‘kids under their evil spell’ who have a capacity to change shape; Azure morphs into a half spirit/half flesh mythical being in the final chapters alongside Sara Baartman, Mantis, T-Rex and similar shape-shifters. Through the theme of good versus evil and the representation of mythical figures, Azure uses aspects of an innate and essential African identity to escape this living urban ‘nightmare’. Azure relies on an idea of an imagined community that the reader is left to imagine he learned from the stories that his parents had told him growing up. As he relies on these mythical characters,

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<sup>220</sup> Andre Brink, ‘Truth, Memory and Narrative’, in *Negotiating the Past: The making of memory in South Africa*, ed. by Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 29-42 (p. 41).

<sup>221</sup> McClintock, p. 310.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 310.

ancient folklore and history Azure creates his own sense of community. He feels secure in these stories and is ultimately always the hero. He defeats Mantis and T-Rex on the top of Table Mountain securing a history that blends a group of nations -- Khoi-San people, the Afrikaners and the *amaXhosa* -- into his own version of the past. He recreates a sense of self that is denied to him in a cruel post-apartheid landscape. Critics have argued that these mythical features of Duiker's writing should be considered as magical realist. Chris Warne argues that it is critical commonplace 'to claim that magical realism emerges from contexts characterised by the existence of pre and post-industrial life'.<sup>223</sup> There is an emphasis on the role of folklore in everyday life to the extent that its presence suggests that African modes of perception differ from Western modes of perception. For example, the use of proverbs and aphorisms represent the presence of African tradition in the modern liberal state.

Secondly, there is a relationship between orality and morality. For example, good moral values are central to ubuntu personhood and there are moral and social expectations that are specific to the group in question. Sociologist Ari Sitas highlights the role of orality and its poetic forms -- the *isibongo* -- and the parable as a moral story-telling practice with its ritual connections, limitations and instructions with regard to members of a given community. The boys in *Room 207* for instance experience what Sita's refers to a 'disvaluation' that is

An experience of loss and defamiliarization, as normative patterns and reciprocal relationships are challenged in urban centres, being in essence a

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<sup>223</sup> Christopher Warne, 'Chronicles of Belief and Unbelief: Zakes Mda and the Question of Magical Realism in South African Literature', in *Ways of Writing: Critical Essays on Zakes Mda*, ed. by David Bell and Johan Jacobs (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009), pp. 73-90 (p. 75).



disvaluation from the way of life that has been generated through the history of a people, its folklore and meanings.<sup>224</sup>

An *imbongi* is praise poem and is a part of an African oral tradition. The imbongi poet can be classified ‘as a person involved in the oral production of poetry using traditional styles and techniques in any given context where they are recognised as a mediator, praiser, critic and educator and accepted by the audience as such’.<sup>225</sup> The relationship between the poet and the audience and the role they play within society are of utmost importance, argues Kaschula, because the poet is a social and political commentator. The imbongi has been changed by urbanization, the impact of education, formation and disbanding of homelands, the changing nature of chieftainship, emergence of black nationalism during apartheid, the subsequent release of black political prisoners and the unbanning of organisations in the early 1990s, the transition to democracy, shifts in political power in 2000, and the rapid emergence of technologies; all of which had an effect on the tradition. The Nurse in *Ways of Dying* takes on the role of the imbongi poet because of the political stance that she repeatedly takes.

### **A plea for social cohesion**

Generally speaking, a ‘fault finding’ attitude is not congruent with the discourse of ubuntu and as such, discourses of blame and cultures of impunity are not either. I have argued that the novels discussed in this chapter express these elements of post-

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<sup>224</sup> Aris Sitas, *Voices that Reason: Theoretical Parables* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 237.

<sup>225</sup> Russell H. Kaschula, ‘A contextual analysis of Xhosa imbongi and their izibongo’, in *The Cambridge History of South African Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 42-59 (p. 43).

apartheid society; however, I have also discussed ways in which parts of these novels subvert an oppressive post-apartheid regime. Carrol Clarkson has argued that through Refentse's heavenly narrative, Mpe shapes the readers' perception of life on earth drawing the reader into an ethical engagement with the South African collective conscience. This engagement is crucial, as Clarkson suggests, 'if the narrative is to counter the myths and stereotypes which (in the popular imagination) surround the topics of AIDS, witchcraft, and 'Makwerekwere'.<sup>226</sup> According to Rob Gaylard, storytelling is structurally and thematically central to the novel. Gaylard identifies two central tropes to Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* which are important in 'the way in which we see and understand our lives: life as a story and life as a journey'. Gaylard argues that 'these stories directly influence the life choices made by the individual characters, and their lives in turn become 'stories' which are recycled by 'Tiragalong's authoritative grapevine'. Additionally, a third-person narrative view gives the reader an opportunity to view a South African story from different perspectives and might influence how the reader understands their humanity and the humanity of others.

Finally, the authors make an appeal for social cohesion. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, for instance, Phaswane Mpe uses Refentse as a platform to tell the story of 'his' people: 'places are owned by the people who live their stories in that place' (*Welcome*, p. 177). However, in heaven, he experiences 'relief from the pressure to succeed', 'relief from the constant financial strains and burdens' and 'from the unending disappointments of life etched on your brain' (Duiker, p. 40-1). Heaven is a space of reflection, judgement, contemplation, reconciliation and forgiveness. It is a space of hope against a cruel bleak post-apartheid reality that the authors' have

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<sup>226</sup> Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane, *Words Gone Too Soon: A Tribute to Phaswane Mpe and K. Sello Duiker* (Pretoria: Umgangatho, 2005), p. 180.

somehow removed from their protagonist's sense of personhood. Rob Gaylard argues that Mpe's opposition towards prevailing myths and stereotypes surrounding HIV and Aids, witchcraft and 'makwerekwere' is a 'generous and compassionate view of human life'. He parallels the compassionate if somewhat confused narrator against the tension between migrant and immigrant populations as well as rural and urban communities. In doing so, Mpe is able to create an explicit 'plea for tolerance, rationality, understanding and forgiveness, contrasts starkly with the views attributed to the residents of Tiragalong or Hillbrow and provides a normative ethical frame for the narrative'. By doing so, Mpe highlights the imperfections of community and social collectives in South Africa and therefore directs and shapes the readers perception of social cohesion in South Africa, says Clarkson.<sup>227</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Whilst city writing focuses predominantly on the experiences of young black men, the experience of insecurity and anxiety engendered in the post-apartheid landscape affects men and women alike. This next chapter discusses the occult and ubuntu in terms of responses to fear and instability in the neo-liberal state. In this discourse, men and women draw on witchcraft, muti murders, religion, accumulating wealth and consumer culture among others to refract from pressure. These faculties do not bode easily with the modern liberal state and as such pose a challenge for ubuntu and social cohesion in the country.

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<sup>227</sup> Clarkson, 'Locating identity', p. 454.

## Chapter Four

### Ubuntu and the occult

In contemporary South Africa, high levels of violence and crime emphasise that the socio-political landscape in post-apartheid South Africa does not reflect the ‘miracle’ of the transition to democracy that it was envisioned to be. A legacy of conflict, insecurity and concerns about the government’s ability to deal effectively with vigilante forms of violence, arcane practices and the occult preoccupy the social and political landscape. Nowadays, increasing levels of crime and the nature of the crime challenge social justice; problems lie in the cultural and social domain as people lean increasingly on rural-informed practices. Ari Sitas uses the term ‘spiritual insecurity’ to refer to the post-apartheid landscape but Jean and John Comaroff propose that ‘occult economies’ is the phenomenon. This applies to what they identify as a ‘crisis of culture’ in South Africa.

It is the primary task of democratic South Africa is to transform a racist and oppressive regime into a body that can represent ‘democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights [...] but which resonate with a popular sense of trust in Law and Government as effective instruments of Justice’.<sup>228</sup> Police have been called upon to deal with, among other things, urban vigilante activities conducted in the name of Muslim morality, ‘alternative’ justice ostensibly exercised under the terms of African customary law, bloody culture wars in the countryside, and witchcraft-related killings, of which there have been many since the early 1990s. Moreover, the ‘new’ South African Police Service has an Occult-Related Crime Unit that, not long ago,

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<sup>228</sup> Adam Ashforth, ‘Aids, Witchcraft, and the Problem of Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa’ (n. pub, 2001), 1-30 (p. 9). < <https://amaXhosa.sss.ias.edu/files/papers/paperten.pdf> > [accessed 20 November 2012]

instituted a program to teach officers how to handle the forensics of crime scenes involving arcane practices.<sup>229</sup>

When interviewed regarding the witchcraft-related violence in Orange Farm on October 2011, Professor Anthony Minnaar head of the security management programme at The University of South Africa commented that a significant portion of children go missing in South Africa every year due to ‘muti’ murders as ‘the belief in the power of body parts was widespread’.<sup>230</sup> *The Independent* reported that ‘while all human body parts are powerful, the genitals of young boys and virgin girls are regarded as particularly potent’. The newspaper report briefly gave the details of one of these muti murders:

Sometimes a severed hand, for instance, is often buried at the entrance to the shop to encourage customers to come in. But often parts are mixed with other ingredients and smeared on the body as medicine against disease and illness or simply thrown into the pot for eating.<sup>231</sup>

Two young men in their late twenties convicted of murdering eight of their relatives, including two toddlers, in muti-related murders in a similar incident in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The men allegedly ‘armed with bush knives’ attacked their victims in their sleep. In this situation, the murderers had accused the deceased of witchcraft.<sup>232</sup>

In 1996, the Ralushai Commission of Inquiry on Witchcraft and Ritual Murder

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<sup>229</sup> Comaroff, p. 6.

<sup>230</sup> Mary Braid, ‘Africa: Witchcraft returns to haunt new South Africa’, *The Independent* (23 October 2011) (para. 10 of 17) <<http://amaXhosa.independent.co.uk/news/africa-witchcraft-returns-to-haunt-new-south-africa-1139937.html>> [accessed 14 July 2015]

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, (para. 10 of 17).

<sup>232</sup> ‘Brothers confess to butchering 8 relatives for ‘using witchcraft’ (28 October 2015) (para. 4 of 12) <<http://amaXhosa.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Brothers-confess-to-butchering-8-relatives-for-using-witchcraft-20151028>> [accessed 14 November 2015]

criticized the Suppression of Witchcraft Act (1957) as an ineffective solution to the problem of violence and coercive forms of practice in parts of South Africa. The Northern Province had become violent and associated with the occult. The Commission was one of the first gestures of the African National Congress (ANC) shortly after it came to power, in the 1990s. As vigilante killings and witchcraft related killings increased, the government was under pressure to do something about 'witchcraft' post-1994. Therefore, the modernist ANC government saw that it was necessary to create a commission of inquiry into ritual murder and witchcraft in the Northern Province, Peter Geschiere argues that the amendments made in the law pending the Commission 'can be read as confirming the reality of witchcraft as a crime'.<sup>233</sup> The act confirmed that persons could face prosecution if involved in acts that led to suspicion over witchcraft. The problem, as Geschiere explains, is how it is possible to reconcile this recommendation with the 'general trend of legislation under the post-apartheid regime'.<sup>234</sup>

Tales of mythical figures, 'witches' or sorcerers and other creatures are common in post-apartheid South Africa. For example, in places like Soweto, and other parts of the country, 'a huge repertoire of dreams, visions, voices, omens, and auguries represents the manifest intentions and purposes of invisible presences' and the ability or the tools available to interpret these are varied and ambiguous. Witchcraft, in particular, creates a paradigm within which

notions of personal responsibility for thought and action can also be radically different, at times, from those commonly conceived in modern discourses of politics, economics, and jurisprudence, to say nothing of everyday life. For

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<sup>233</sup> Peter Geschiere, 'Witchcraft and the Limits of the Law', in *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony* (Chicago; London: Chicago University Press, 2006), pp. 219-246 (p. 219).

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 219.

amongst the many capacities of the witch's craft is the ability to use others as agents without the victims being aware that they have been manipulated.<sup>235</sup>

In his research on witchcraft in Soweto, Adam Ashforth recounts the story of *Inkosi ya Manzi* and the residents of Snake Park, a township at the borders of Soweto. One of the local residents encountered what he believed to be a giant snake living under the local bridge. The old man and the locals referred to the snake as *Inkosi ya Manzi*. The old man believed that *Inkosi ya Manzi* was angry with the local residents and had threatened to eat some of Snake Park's children and dogs. Although initially sceptical, Ashforth explains that the community collectively believed that there was something wrong in the spiritual realm; however, no one could agree as to what was wrong or how to deal with it. In the end, no sacrifice was made to *Inkosi ya Manzi*, the children were not harmed and neither were the villagers and the elderly gentleman's prophecy concerning the Giant Snake did not come true. The snake did not eat anyone and it did not destroy the village either. Instead, a cacophony of spiritual narratives emerged within the collective and individual experience of misfortune and spiritual insecurity.

Ashforth's argument is that there are many authorities claiming to speak on behalf of the occult and these are in a constant state of flux. He argues that 'the various agencies of authority, such as those embodied in Western institutions, religious organizations, and indigenous healers are unable to impose a generalised hegemony of interpretation. At the same time, the prevalence of misfortune stimulates an enormous profusion of interpretive endeavours and that the varieties of meaning attributed to putative signs of unseen powers are in a constant state of flux.

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<sup>235</sup> Ashforth, 'Aids, Witchcraft', p. 7.

Given the frequently precarious conditions of life in the country, this added uncertainty about the fundamental forces shaping existence can quicken great fear and insecurity.<sup>236</sup> The sense of fear and anxiety against increasing insecurity in the social and political landscape generates responses that are of the occult.

Jean and John Comaroff argue that in post revolutionary societies like South Africa, there has been a ‘dramatic rise in occult economies: in the deployment, real or imagined, of magical means for material ends’.<sup>237</sup> These occult economies include but are not limited to the following: narratives of witchcraft, trafficking human body parts, zombies and the brutalization of children, neo-liberal Pentecostalism and other forms of religion. In addition, forms of mass action arise from anxiety over the production and reproduction of wealth in poorer parts of the country. Jean and John Comaroff use the term ‘occult economies’ to refer to people’s efforts ‘to interpret modern changes and to gain access to them’. They argue that the ‘distinguishing mark’ of “millennial capitalism” is this proliferation of occult economies: ‘pyramid schemes, transnational financial speculations, smuggling on a global scale, Satanist networks on the Internet, and so on—all pretty difficult challenges for the state, which is nonetheless expected to somehow remain in control’.<sup>238</sup> Similarly, Ashforth’s notion of ‘spiritual insecurity’ attests to the manifestation of the myriad of competing narratives and sources on the afterlife, the ancestors and death in contemporary urban Johannesburg, and greater parts of South Africa. ‘Spiritual insecurity’ is a response to deep-seated fear and anxiety in postcolonial South Africa.

This chapter examines representations of the occult and ubuntu as a response to experiences of misfortune in Kgebetli Moele’s *Book of the Dead* (2009), Zakes

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<sup>236</sup> Adam Ashforth, ‘Reflections on Spiritual Insecurity in a Modern African City (Soweto)’, *African Studies Review*, 41, 3 (1998), 39-67 (p. 65). <<http://amaXhosa.jstor.org/stable/525353>> <DOI: 10.2307/525353> [accessed 12 October 2011]

<sup>237</sup> Comaroff, ‘Occult’, p. 279.

<sup>238</sup> Geschiere, p. 219-22.



Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995) and Kopana Motlwa's *Coconut* (2007). Jean and John Comaroff's definition of the occult in their analysis of postcolonial South Africa and Adam Ashforth's notion of 'spiritual insecurity' will support my argument. In the first part of this chapter, the 'we' of the community is discussed through *Ways of Dying*. This 'we' is an ambiguous response to an unstable post-apartheid landscape. The pressures of postcolonial South Africa expose that the 'we' of the community is ambivalent and that this ambivalence is represented in different forms of the occult. The next section of this chapter addresses the occult in *The Book of the Dead* and *Coconut*.

### **Violence and the occult**

Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* addresses an unstable and violent post-apartheid era between 1990 and 1994. Mda addresses important moments in the transition to democracy where the community respond to misfortune and his novel discusses these. The 'we' of the community demonstrate a preoccupation with vigilante justice, high levels of conflict in the townships, political leaders' inability to deal with township violence, and arcane practices of coercion such as neck lacing. The transitory landscape is shown to engender fear and insecurity for South Africans and affect the construction of the unified ubuntu 'we' of the community. Likewise, the Comaroff's concept of occult economies relate to *Ways of Dying* because of the modes of consciousness active in the post-revolutionary nation. These are contrary to the optimistic vision of the post-apartheid state and illustrate the ambivalence of the concept as a tool for social cohesion before it was applied in political rhetoric for the Rainbow Nation.

In *Ways of Dying*, Mda's South Africa is portrait of a nation in violent transition. In the novel, Toloki lives among 'the dockworkers, the sailors and their prostitutes' and Noria lives in a shack settlement or squatter camp. Loren Landau has described these forms of self-housing as a response to the lack of social services in the country. According to Landau, 'shack settlements often become physically and socially impenetrable to outsiders and emerge as ghettos of sorts. Shack settlements offer poor quality housing, are particularly vulnerable to fire and have inadequate access to services'.<sup>239</sup> There are multifarious versions of the communal 'we' that are exposed through violent township or shack settlement life; the 'we' of the community represents *amaXhosa* South Africans and is bias towards *isiZulu* South Africans.

The 'we' is ethnically defined and this leads to ethnic violence and vigilante forms of violence. The collective identity of the black South African community in the story is narrated by the omniscient and omnipresent communal voice but the division in the community is shown by the separation between *isiZulu* South Africans from *amaXhosa* people. The narrative of the 'Tribal Chief' in *Ways of Dying* is a narrative of ethnic disunity between black South Africans. 'Tribal chief' inadvertently refers to Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the *isiZulu* tribal leader who founded the Inkatha Freedom Party in 1975. The omnipresent narrator suggests that Buthelezi who 'ruled a distant village with an iron fist' funded the 'vicious migrants' (Mda, 23). Buthelezi and his people embody a coercive form of 'we'. The local shack inhabitants respond with vigilante forms of violence. The shack dwellers unite in response to the 'vicious migrants' and form vigilante groups to protect the residents. Toloki describes these vigilante groups as being 'strongly united' because 'people fight back' against those who want to 'wreak havoc' amongst the people (Mda, 146). The narrator explains

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<sup>239</sup> Landau, 'Violence and Condemnation', p. 155.

how during apartheid's forced removals, vigilante groups were initiated to 'protect the people' with 'protection fees' but whom, in effect, manipulated residents out of their money by threatening that their shacks would 'mysteriously catch fire' if they failed to pay (Mda, 146). The point of this argument is to highlight how Mda's reference to 'the people' is, in fact, an exclusive form of politics; it sets up binary relationships and is a coercive form of social cohesion. Furthermore, the term 'people' is inconclusive in this narrative.

Mda's novel plays up to these stereotypes perpetuating the landscape that the Comaroff's describe as the 'liberty' of post-apartheid: 'the liberty to transgress and consume in an unfettered world of desire, cut loose from former political, spatial, moral, sexual, and material constraints'.<sup>240</sup> In this discourse, Africa and black South African people are dangerously represented as polarized and coercive. As the strange and monstrous, Africa constantly escapes the European concept of the self and African indigenous spiritual and religious practices and customs are boxed into categories under the strange. Firstly, Toloki explains how the community are preoccupied with all types of drinking, promiscuity and ferocity and he paints a picture of his people behaving senselessly on Boxing Day engage 'in an orgy of drinking, raping, and stabbing one another with knives and shooting one another with guns' which 'we call a joll' (*Ways*, p. 25). He creates a negative image of the black community that adheres to racial stereotyping representing ignorant Africans who 'piss and vomit' (*Ways*, 25). In Mbembe's *The Postcolony*, he argues that 'speaking rationally about Africa is not something that has ever come naturally'; it is common in Western discourse to discuss an African human experience through a negative interpretation in a context of Eurocentric philosophy where 'all struggles have

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<sup>240</sup> Comaroff, 'Occult', p. 293.

become struggles of representation'.<sup>241</sup> In the discourse of our times, Africa emerges as the strange and monstrous and as well as the familiar and intimate. As Pal Ahluwalia describes it:

Africa has come to be seen as a nullity, which makes it uniquely available as a site of whatever fantasy one cares to propose. Such a discourse even takes the darkness of African skin as the absence of light, a sign that there is something missing, an emptiness that is to be written on by others, that can be filled with wonder or with horror, with anything but the species of actual African lives.<sup>242</sup>

Qukezwa in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* mimics the trope of an idle native preferring scheming, fighting, lazing, wantonness, lavisciousness and indolence.<sup>243</sup> Images of the occult in Mda's fiction therefore amplify a Eurocentric and negative image of Africa.

The occult is a coercive means by which to expel individuals from the collective 'we' of the community. For example, an individual 'could only be viewed as human only so long as it remained uncovered by prying eyes and unpublicised by enthusiastic tongues' (Mpe, 50). Mda emphasises how the 'we' plays a significant role in determining who gets to belong in the community and who doesn't, and even death is used as a means to expel people. In Refentse's account of his mother's death, Tiragalong accuses Refentse's mother of bewitching her son, which later leads to her death. The community eventually murder his mother because they believe she is a witch: her neck is 'draped with huge tyres wet with petrol, melting in the heat of the

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<sup>241</sup> Mbembe, 'Postcolony', p. 1.

<sup>242</sup> Ahluwalia, p. 37.

<sup>243</sup> McClintock, p. 252.

roaring flames' (Mpe, 47-8). Similarly, Refentse is allegedly bewitched by 'a loose-thighed Hillbrowan called Lerato' later on in the novel (Mpe, 43-4).

Dehumanization is a sentiment that is repeated in Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* and in Moele's *The Book of the Dead*. In *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*, people within the community individually make up their own versions of the 'truth' about HIV and Aids. The omniscient narrator illustrates the uncertainty of these 'truths': 'one of the stories that you remember vividly was of a young man who died of a strange illness in 1990, when you were matriculating. The migrants said it could only have been AIDS. [...] He died, poor chap; of what precisely, no one knew' (Mpe, 4). The 'strange illness' is caught up in 'popular understanding' and therefore is assigned to 'foreign germs' from 'makwerekwere'/African immigrants who bask in Hillbrow and who are accused of, in some narratives, of eating the 'Green Monkey' (Mpe, 4). In *The Book of the Dead*, Pretty quickly learns that she cannot trust the men in her community after she is abused and raped by her Standard Four male class teacher. Moele portrays Pretty as a victim of her beauty that 'scared men out of their minds' (Moele, 32). And from a very young age, she prostitutes herself to the local boys. Instead of helping her, the community are the 'the chilli-hot whispers' and the 'pointing fingers' (Dead, 33). Sadly, 'by the time she made it to high school her back had been forced down naked by so many people she knew in the community' (Moele, 33). Consequently, the unified 'we' of the community is in dispute in these novels.

### **The occult as a subversive narrative: the politics of witchcraft**

Geschiere argues, witchcraft is a difficult subject because of the 'subversive character of witchcraft discourse'; furthermore, that the politics of the state is not equipped to

deal with or exercise control in the domain of the occult. Witchcraft is too ambiguous to conclusively control in legislature and secondly, local experts are needed to validate (as a key witness) whatever circumstances the accusation of the occult relates to or arises in. The Comaroff's argue that witches

Distil complex material and social processes into comprehensible human motives, then, they tend to figure in narratives that tie translocal processes to local events, that map translocal scenes onto local landscapes that translate translocal discourses into local vocabularies of cause and effect. .<sup>244</sup>

Claire Laurier Decoteau refers to witchcraft as an 'indigenous ontological perspective' or the reason or explanation for causal happenings. She says it is 'constitutively hybrid' and that 'there is nothing pure, delimited, or radically other about it'.<sup>245</sup>

Kgebetli Moele's *The Book of the Dead* demonstrates different forms of the occult that arise within paradigms of severe misfortune but the novel focuses on the relationship between HIV and witchcraft. Witchcraft then is a paradigm and a form of moral agency through which to deal with what is seen as unjustified misfortune. Occult economies have emerged as a part of the response to epidemics such as HIV and AIDS and like other crises in the country people's responses are mixed. Reactions have come in the forms of vigilante justice, witchcraft killing, ritualised medicines and traditional forms of healing processes. In *The Book of the Dead*, HIV is personified when Khutso's consciousness is overtaken by the person-AIDS. Both Moele and Mpe's novels suggest that no one really understands what HIV/Aids' is or

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<sup>244</sup> Comaroff, 'Occult', p. 286.

<sup>245</sup> Decoteau, p. 62.

where it comes from and therefore the characters make it up as they go. Person-AIDS is Khutso's new consciousness. Person-AIDS is a pseudo-character or spirit that inhabits and devours:

I am in your blood and your heart pumps the death that I am to every corner. I have taken a bite of you and I will slowly take another one. You are my Cape apple, and I am going to eat you down to the core before I chuck you away.  
[...]. (Moele, p. 91)

Moele assigns HIV its own persona and imagines Khutso's consciousness or humanity being taken over by the virus. Here, person-AIDS speaks, thinks and acts on Khutso's behalf. From this perspective, AIDs represents an evil spirit that has overtaken innocent Khutso. As his health deteriorates, Khutso slowly becomes a shadow of his former self. His friends address him as 'Spokie', which means ghost in Afrikaans and they struggle to trust him as his behaviour changes:

I don't trust you, not because you did anything, just because I don't trust men of your calibre. You don't smoke, you don't drink and you have no steady girlfriend. Then, to top it all, you are softly spoken. Sorry, Khutso, but I don't trust you. You are a phantom. (Moele, p. 103)

He begins to separate his spirit (*umoya*) and his shadow from his flesh (*umzimba*) and his blood (*igazi*). He goes without food or water for four days but 'felt good that he was alive' as he 'dragged his himself to the refrigerator and fed his body, and when he had regained some of his energy he made his way to the bathroom to wash himself

with his bruised and bloodied hands' (Moele, p. 81). There is a clear distinction between spirit and flesh because the disease has consumed him. He describes himself as having 'come back to life' because 'something had possessed him and it made everything that had happened irrelevant' (Moele, p. 80). Here Khutso is the new Khutso, emptied out of his old self, consumed by this new spirit; he sits and contemplates the mission that he and the disease were going to undertake together: 'We are going to fuck 'em dead, I told him, and he smiled' (Moele, p. 89). Here, the person-AIDS has taken over the body of Khutso and Khutso is described as simply a zombie. From an indigenous ontological perspective, the body is not solely the individual's in the paradigm of the occult in African tradition.

According to Claire Laurier Decoteau, in indigenous ontology, the body is linked to 'a host of ancestral spirits' who give the individual a unique identity and certain gifts. It is the ancestors that are said to guide the life choices of the individual and at certain important stages when a person is in a liminal state between life and death such as pregnancy, widowhood or disease.<sup>246</sup> Decoteau shows how the body is a site of four synchronized components: the spirit (*umoya*), the flesh (*umzimba*), the blood (*igazi*) and the 'aura' or 'shadow' directly translated as 'charisma'. In order to heal the body, these four parts of the body need to be balanced: the body, the spirit, the blood and shadow. Misfortune, death or disease would be seen to upset this balance and require a method to re-establish or set right what has gone awry.

Adam Ashforth discusses the extent to which the term *isidliso* – black poison – is used as the reason HIV in South Africa. He suggests that the extent to which the epidemic of HIV/AIDS is used represents the extent of the epidemic of witchcraft in the country. *Isidliso*, witchcraft or 'black poison' is believed to be an evil work of

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<sup>246</sup> Decoteau, p. 62.



what some people call witches. Witches send *isidliso* to people. *Isidliso* is a mixture of herbs and magical substances such as animal fats.<sup>247</sup> The term *isidliso* is said to form the shape of a small creature:

Sometimes it resembles the shape of a crab, other times a frog or small animal, a lizard, say. It can even take a man's form and devour a person from the inside out [...] and it is said to wreak all sorts of social misfortunes – divorce, unemployment, unpopularity, family dissension, amongst other things -- as well as physical illness and death.<sup>248</sup>

According to Ashforth, there is no singular system of belief – Satanic powers, sorcery, evil ancestors, witchcraft – in African tradition but all can be brought to bear on the reasons for evil and suffering in the world. In the South African context, witchcraft can typically mean 'the manipulation by malicious individuals of power inherent in persons, spiritual entities, and substances to cause harm to others'.<sup>249</sup> Witches afflict lovers, friends and family members who are close to the victim.

There are a range of complicated social and cultural 'truth's of the occult in *The Book of the Dead*. Ashforth identifies three dominant 'interpretive' frameworks to explain the unexplainable in South Africa. These include culture or tradition embodied in the traditional healer, science or biomedicine (often associated with white South Africa or white science) and Christian churches subdivided into three theological strands: European provenance, Protestant evangelical sects, and indigenous syncretic faiths known as African Independent Churches – Zionist or

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<sup>247</sup> Ashforth, 'Reflections', p. 9.

<sup>248</sup> Ashforth, 'Aids, Witchcraft', p. 9.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

Apostolic.<sup>250</sup> The meaning of the sign and the power attributed to the unseen or invisible agent 'is contingent upon the framework of interpretation' and 'proponents of different interpretative schemes are always close at hand'.<sup>251</sup> The power of the unseen lies in the interpretative framework of choice and this then determines the individual and collective response to the unexplainable and affects the relationship with the community. Tom Lodge argues that African communities restructure themselves around tradition, legacy, heritage, around the values and relationships that characterized pre-colonial institutions and values'; this is the adaptation and humanization of the 'impersonal forces of modern bureaucracies, international markets and electronic technology'.<sup>252</sup> The *sangoma* is a part of this African tradition.

Witchcraft is an interpretative framework through which to comprehend suffering and it allows a paradigm in which we can make sense of misfortune, especially that which is seen as unjustified misfortune. For example, HIV and AIDS is given mystical properties in the story of Nkululeko in *The Book of the Dead* and this reveals the complex social imaginary of witchcraft in rural space. When Nkululeko's mom finds out that her son has HIV, she incites him to sleep with a 'virgin' female goat. Late one night, 'during a full moon Nkululeko had to go and find a spotless white female goat that had never given birth, then he must drink the potion that Tshiane had given him and have sex with the goat and then leave it to its fate' (Mhlongo, p. 143). His mom believes in *isidliso* and as such, she refuses to admit that he has contracted it through illicit sexual relations so she takes him to a *sangoma* or traditional healer to find a cure because according to Nkululeko's mother,

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<sup>250</sup> Comaroff, 'Occult' p. 286.

<sup>251</sup> Ashforth, 'Reflections', p. 58-9

<sup>252</sup> Tom Lodge, *Politics in South Africa from Mbeki to Mandela* (David Philip Publishers: 2002), p. 230.

he has 'bad blood' that needs to be 'washed' (Moele, p. 140). Walker et al explain how the idea of 'dirty blood' is an important way in which to explain causation by many indigenous healers. 'Dirt' is sometimes equated with poison and the effects are then experienced or felt beyond the individual and to the wider community. The belief is that the HIV and AIDS virus is a poison inside of the person's blood.<sup>253</sup> Next she takes him to healers who 'healed in the name of Jesus, other who healed with the power of the ancestors' (Moele, p. 140). His mother is adamant that he has been poisoned but Nkululeko finds himself caught between 'old world' indigenous traditions that, in this circumstance, are portrayed in a negative light.

The occult can be a form of tradition to hide behind, especially for the individual within a collective. Here, an individual can potentially escape real social and political issues. For example, Grant Farred argues that Toloki is politically neutral in the novel. Toloki's own indifferent political position emphasises this dispute. Toloki is always outside of this 'we'; as Grant Farred suggests, he is never portrayed to take a political stance on any of the more serious issues in the text as he claims that 'this politicking was interfering with [his] inspired mourning' (*Ways*, p. 23). Toloki only chooses to help out because he has fallen in love with Noria. He is willing to do anything to please her, even if it means he may feel 'embarrassed at being the only man working with women' as 'he is doing all this for Noria, and not for anyone else, nor for anything else' (*Ways*, p. 170). In comparison, both Noria and the Nurse take a stand on political issues. The community elect Noria as a leader and the youth are more politically involved than Toloki. The political leaders and Noria's community are concerned that the muti murderer is also the person who killed Noria's son. If so, this will fuel further dissension between the white government and the

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<sup>253</sup> Liz Walker, Graeme Reid and Morna Cornell, 'Introduction', in *Waiting to Happen – HIV/AIDS in South Africa – the bigger picture*, ed. by Walker and others (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), pp. 12-21 (p. 99).

black population. In other words, if the story gets out that Noria's son is killed by her own 'people' in witchcraft related killing then this information will darken the image of black township life and sally the anti-apartheid resistance campaign and 'give ammunition to the enemies of the people': the government and its vigilante groups and its police (*Ways*, 48). However, her election is merely a consolation for the death of her son. The liberation movement force Noria to sacrifice her son. As such, her sacrifice for the greater 'we' is ambiguous because of the way in which she is valued within the collective 'we'. An allegiance to the anti-apartheid resistance movement and justice for her son's death leaves Noria torn.

The role of the Nurse at a funeral is to tell the 'truth' of the events that led up to the death of the deceased. At the novel's opening funeral scene, the Nurse accuses the community of killing their own children. He laments that the death of the child is the community's 'own creation' (*Ways*, 7). On the contrary, others feel that the Nurse is wrong to blame the community, as 'this will give ammunition to the enemy' (*Ways*, 7). The Nurse highlights the fact that the child could have run off to join the militant youth movement; however, in the end the body of the boy is discovered: 'he had been castrated, and the killer had also cut open his stomach, and had mutilated his flesh from the navel right down to the thigh' (*Ways*, 47).

Ultimately, the 'we' of the community is morally ambiguous. The occult makes this evident, particularly witchcraft. Isak Niehaus identifies the 'subversive character of witchcraft discourse' in South Africa. He explains how there are widely different views on the difference practices of the occult in South Africa and as such, it is hard to reconcile the world of occult healing and the politics of the state. For example in 2004, Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance created a new law that formalized a way in which state officials can work together with *inyanga or sangoma*

(healer); however, the practical implications of this are tricky.

Diviners usually experienced a series of events such as dreams, hallucinations, bouts or fits of paroxysms over a period of their lifetime, which -- the people believed -- was an indication that this person was a diviner. These were the ambivalent signs that represented the presence of a legitimate diviner and not a fake. An established diviner would be called in to determine if certain spirits were good and evil as well as to confirm the legitimacy of a 'new' diviner. However, it was not a spiritual experience alone, which qualified a person to be a diviner. Ultimately, the people determined the role and status of the diviner: the success of a diviner (prophet) was dependent on the dialogue between him/herself and the people. Therefore, not only did his or her peers have to accept the diviner but also he/she had to conform to the expectations of the community. In this dialogue, 'the process of divination was not a one way street through which the charismatic diviner led his passive flock, but a dialogue between diviner and clients where the course of action prescribed by the former was circumscribed by what the latter was prepared to accept.'<sup>254</sup>

Traditional practices of healing take different forms and sangoma's and inyangas take use and combine different elements in their work; the inyanga is the herbalist dealing in traditional medicines such as herbs and roots and the sangoma is said to be possessed by a spirit/s when dealing with her clients.<sup>255</sup> As Walker et al explain, the unexplainable can be fixed with traditional medicine is unlike western medicine; healing in the traditional sense assumes that there is a problem in the spiritual realm.<sup>256</sup> The guardians of this realm are the ancestors. According to Niehaus, the state is not equipped to deal with the occult or to exercise control in this

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<sup>254</sup> J. B. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of Their Independence* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1982), p. 68.

<sup>255</sup> Liz Walker, Graeme Reid and Morna Cornell, *Waiting to Happen – HIV/AIDS in South Africa – the Bigger Picture* (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), p. 92.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 95.

domain. For example, there are no conclusive laws to define the difference between a 'witch' and an *inyanga*; instead, he proposes the importance of interpreting occult beliefs in the framework of political-economic change.<sup>257</sup>

The subversive nature of witchcraft and the ambiguity of the occult in state discourse is embodied by two women in the novel. These women are Napu's grandmother and Noria's mother, 'That Mountain Woman'. Both women represent that which is unexplainable and therefore the occult. Laretta Ngcobo argues that the accusation of witchcraft is a common ploy 'designed to cause the mother's social demotion' and to cause her to leave her people, even after many years. The sources of conflict for these accusations include the arrival of the daughter in law competing for attention in love and over money, the development of personal interest that the family perceive as causing the neglect of the family, tug of authority between mother and son and now daughter in law.<sup>258</sup> After Noria falls pregnant with the son of a city labourer, she runs away to stay with Napu's grandmother, who is described as 'a vicious woman' (*Ways*, p. 76). Noria rightly suspects her of being a witch when Napu's grandmother is found to be dancing naked over her 'chanting in some strange language' (*Ways*, p. 77). After the incident, Noria has to carry her baby for fifteen months and so the family hire diviners and herbalists to solve the misfortune. When Noria finally returns home to That Mountain Woman, the narrator insinuates that her mother is a 'good' witch as her medicines 'only heal and bring good fortune, and wealth, and love, and fertility' (*Ways*, p. 79)

The primary dualism implicated in the relationship between the two is the binary between good and evil. The contrast between good and evil affirms the occult

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<sup>257</sup> Isak Niehaus, 'Witches and Zombies of the South African Lowveld: Discourse, Accusations and Subjective Reality', *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11, 2 (2005), pp. 191-210 (p. 198) <<http://amaXhosa.jstor.org/stable/3804206>> [accessed 12 July 2015]

<sup>258</sup> Laretta Ngcobo, 'African Motherhood—Myth and Reality' in *African Literature An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), pp. 533-41 (p. 540).

as supernatural and it plays into an ontological understanding of human beings as either inherently good or evil. This discourse removes personal responsibility and assigns it to the 'evil' other. Here, the collective 'we' cope with misfortune, insecurity and fear, by placing blame on the 'evil' other. In the discourse of a modern liberal democratic state, causation therefore is ontological and cannot be adequately addressed.

### **Post-apartheid 'promises' of prosperity: profiting from death**

Jean and John Comaroff argue that South Africa was one of the last colonies of the world to win 'the right to secular modern nationhood just as global processes were compromising the sovereignty and material integrity of the nation-state, *sui generis*'.<sup>259</sup> The fall of apartheid was partly due to a global moment: 'one in which the machinations of multinational capital and the fall of the Soviet Union had drastically restructured older polarities'.<sup>260</sup> This new era raised the living standards of the black middle class elite but it continues to be difficult to get a job and poverty is still rampant for the black underclass. Secondly, there are newer tensions in the post-apartheid state; these involve a lack of police protection for ordinary citizens, there is violence, the state is allegedly in retreat, crime is seen as 'routinized redistribution' and there is a 'new topography of public space marked by few zones of safety and many of danger'.<sup>261</sup>

The space between discourses of 'tradition' and the modern liberal state and millennial capitalism is ambiguous. For example, apparently archaic 'old world'

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<sup>259</sup> Comaroff, 'Occult', p. 288.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 288.

<sup>261</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, 'Millennial Capitalism, Occult Economies, and the Crisis of Reproduction in South Africa', in *Religion and Sexuality in Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. by Stephen Ellingson and M. Christian Green (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 223-50 (p. 241).

traditions do not fit in with a democracy modelled on a European philosophy. For example, this has an effect on the legitimacy of public power in South Africa because, as Ashforth suggests,

When the suspicions of witchcraft are at play in a community, problems of illness and death can transform matters of public health into questions of public power, questions relating to the identification and punishment of persons deemed responsible for bringing misfortune to the community, that is: witches.<sup>262</sup>

Likewise, Niehaus argues that the transitory nature of post-apartheid South Africa makes the role of the state in spiritual affairs paradoxical. The state has to deal effectively with these issues. The Comaroff's argue that at the end of apartheid everyone would be set free to 'speculate and accumulate, to consume, and to indulge repressed desires' but for many this moment has passed 'without any palpable payback'.<sup>263</sup> Yet, Mpe's *Ways of Dying* and Moele's *The Book of the Dead* address the concerns of those who did not receive the 'promises' of post-apartheid prosperity. The young black underclass embody the contradictions of post-apartheid South Africa in that the country is trying to create 'a modernist nation-state under postmodern conditions'. This is especially difficult for young black men who have to face 'the apparent impossibility of the contemporary situation – and to confront the difficulties of social reproduction in an age that once held out fervent hopes for rebirth'.<sup>264</sup> Through the figures of Toloki and Nefolovhodwe, death is used for profit in a bleak post-apartheid landscape. Having become disillusioned with having little payback in

<sup>262</sup> Ashforth, 'Aids, Witchcraft', p. 9.

<sup>263</sup> Comaroff, 'Occult', p. 284.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. 284.



the transition, Toloki creates a career as a Professional Mourner and Nefolovhodwe as the 'the best coffin maker' in the city. In this narrative, both men profit from death that is said to be 'plentiful in the city' (*Ways*, p. 125). Their industries are therefore linked to the occult but this does not, as the Comaroff's suggest, 'imply an iteration of, a retreat into, 'tradition'; on the contrary, it is often a mode of producing new forms of consciousness; of expressing discontent with modernity and dealing with its deformities'.<sup>265</sup> Both Toloki and Nefolovhodwe embody these distortions.

Toloki and Nefolovhodwe 'use monstrous means and freakish familiars to appropriate the life force of their lesser compatriots to strengthen themselves or to satisfy consuming passions'.<sup>266</sup> In the city, Nefolovhodwe is described as having 'ballooned to ten times the size he used to be back in the village' and is to be found 'sitting behind a huge desk, playing with fleas' (*Ways*, 128). His own success is ironically found through high sales of his Nefolovhodwe Collapsible Coffin and De Luxe Special, a collapsible set of coffins that can be carried like a suitcase by one person, even a child. The implications of his corrupt business, his gluttonous bodily form and the frivolity of his Flea Circus is an ironic parallel to the poverty that captures the rest of the country in Mda's novel. Mda's Nefolovhodwe is an account of the way in which the rich and powerful, as the Comaroff's suggest, 'use monstrous means and freakish familiars to appropriate the life force of their lesser compatriots to strengthen themselves or to satisfy consuming passions'.<sup>267</sup> Nefolovhodwe copes with the changes of the transitory nation in this way.

Toloki does the same but allegedly, his intentions are more altruistic. Toloki's obsession with the occult leads him to purchase an elaborate outfit and to begin his Professional Mourning career whereby he sits near to a funeral mound and make

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<sup>265</sup> Comaroff, 'Occult', p. 284.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 282.

‘excruciating’ groans that sent the relatives of the deceased ‘into a frenzy of wailing’ (Ways, 17). He claims that he feels a desperate need to provide a service ‘to mourn for the dead’ but he still charges for the service (Ways, p. 15). Like Nefolovhodwe, Toloki comes from a poor background. When he arrives in the city to find fortune, he similarly makes a success of his life but unlike Nefolovhodwe, Toloki loses his money. In this dire state, he turns to the occult as a way to deal with the changes and to map out a space for himself in the transitory landscape. Toloki copes with extreme poverty through an imaginative world where eating green onions and cake gives ‘an aura of austerity that he associates with monks of eastern religions that he has heard sailors talk about’ (Ways, p. 15). He uses magazine clippings and newspaper cuttings to transport himself to other worlds of alms and monks but when he wakes up, he finds himself sleeping ‘in the foetal position of his village’ (Ways, p. 15). Noria suggests, ‘our ways of living are our ways of dying’ (Ways, 98); in this discourse, Toloki has produced his a new form of consciousness as a way of expressing his discontent with nation in its transitory phase and he is successfully making money from literally nothing.

There is a similar anxiety about feeling left out of the ‘promise of prosperity’ in Kgebetli Moele’s *The Book of the Dead*.<sup>268</sup> This manifests in the close proximity between the celebration of life and of impending death in the character of Khutso and his relationships with his close family and friends. Pretty and Khutso’s marriage is overshadowed by the persistent presence of death and dead things. This is a haunting experience where towards the end of the novel, Pretty begins to feel ‘like a ghost in her own house’ (Moele, 67). This moment foreshadows that isolation that Pretty feels away from her rural village and in her marriage as their relationship begins to grow

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<sup>268</sup> Comaroff, ‘Occult’, p. 284-5.

cold and distant: 'He wanted to ask her why she was crying, but he couldn't find the words, so instead he kept quiet and when she brought him a bill to pay he paid it' (Dead, 71). Thapelo's birthday is another contentious moment in the novel. When Khutso invites one of his friends over to celebrate the birthday of his son, a party that his wife has arranged, his friend chides Tshepo for celebrating his birthday as he claims: 'I am an African, I have never celebrated my own birthday, and I don't see the purpose of celebrating birthdays, but happy birthday anyway' (Moele, 60). These shared moments between family and friends reiterate a bleak post-apartheid mood.

As such, the economy of the occult in postcolonial Africa is a fusion of 'modern and postmodern, of hope and hopelessness, of utility and futility, of promise and perversion'.<sup>269</sup> The novel's dark-take on HIV and Aid as Khutso slips into a new form of personhood that disavows ubuntu. When Pretty breaks Khutso's trust, he goes mad. Consequently, after Pretty's death, Khutso wants to kill every woman who he sleeps with and record her name in his 'Book of the Dead'. The title is a morbid reference to ancient Egyptian funerary texts and has eschatological allusions to Hell. Khutso feels out of control but the funerary text allows him to regain a sense of control over his feelings of extreme uncertainty and fear. He violates himself through when he freely exploits others.

People lose their ubuntu through the pursuit of wealth in the city. For example, the stark contrast between the poverty of Noria's shack settlement in *Ways of Dying* and that of the black middle class 'bejewelled' elite smiling 'benevolently' as the women serve cabbage and not meat to the 'Mercedes Benz' political leaders, serves to highlight this point. Mda's narrative insists that moral corruption occurs in the city when through their journey to the city, Noria and Toloki begin to 'lose their

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<sup>269</sup> Comaroff, p. 284-5.

way' and are 'bent on losing themselves' (*Ways*, 12). The city is held contrasted with the village, where 'we live our lives together as one' and 'we know everything about everybody', 'even things that happen when we are not there' (*Ways*, p. 12). In this discourse, the village is the space of the occult where, in close proximity to the Mountains, inhabitants are able to tap into traditional forms of healing and culture. For example, it is in the village where Jwara shapes his mystical figurines into things that 'he had seen in his dreams'; in the village, the community learn that the collective sleeping position is the foetal position; in the village Napu's grandmother and That Mountain women perform 'witchcraft' (*Ways*, p. 28). Nefolovhodwe made so much money in the city that he loses his sense of ubuntu in the city because of his greed; he now 'pretends that he does not know the people from the village anymore' (*Ways*, p. 13). The assumption is that to 'lose your way' is to abandon traditional forms of African culture.

Popular discourses of African folklore and witchcraft suggest that if a person surrenders their ubuntu, he or she could turn into a zombie or *utikoloshe*.<sup>270</sup> Widely held perceptions of the term zombie often portray these in a 'trance-like animation' but in popular discourses in South Africa, the zombie something entirely different. Drawing on the Comaroffs and Geschiere, Niehaus argues that 'popular discourses of the poor associate witchcraft with the emergence of new forms of inequality and portray zombies as providing indispensable support for new elites to accumulate wealth and power'. In this discourse, there is a connection between zombies and the bleak post-apartheid landscape whereby individuals are imagined to employ zombies as a 'magical means for material ends'; zombies can be found 'wandering exile' and 'bear testimony to the rupture of connections between people and place'.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Mzamane, p. 244.

<sup>271</sup> Niehaus, p. 193).

## **‘Born frees’ and the occult**

In their research in some of the poorer parts of the country, namely the Northern Province, the Comaroff’s argue that there is ‘widespread anxiety about the production and reproduction of wealth, an anxiety that frequently translates into bitter generational opposition’ and leads to ‘violent reactions against people accused of illicit accumulation’.<sup>272</sup> They argue that the dominant cleavage in this society is generational and not race or class. Kopana Motlwa’s *Coconut* is a narrative of the ‘born free’ generation who are the legacy of apartheid. *Coconut* is a narrative of incompatibility of the ‘born free’ generation expressed by two very different characters. This novel compares the accumulation of black middle class wealth and the effects of this life in Ofilwe’s life to the poverty of the urban townships represented in Fikile’s life. Yet, in both paradigms, each girl struggles to reconcile her place as a ‘born free’ the New South Africa. They reject forms of community and invent new modes of consciousness related to the occult.

*Coconut* is the story of Ofilwe and Fikile or Fiks. Ofilwe is from a middle class black elite family whose wealthy father married ‘a metallic blue-black nothing girl of a nothing woman’ (Motlwa, p. 52). Ofilwe grows up in a world where she wakes up to ‘cubed fruit, muesli and mixed nuts on a bed of low-fat granadilla yoghurt’ (Motlwa, p. 13). This world of pleasure amplifies the assumption that a section of the ‘born free’ generation are born into privilege. The title of the novel testifies to the fact that she never feels like she fits in or can belong: not with her friends and not with her family. In Ofilwe’s dreams, she imagines her children ‘painted in shades of pink’ but ultimately, as her brother explains when white people

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<sup>272</sup> Comaroff, ‘Millennial Capitalism’, p. 241.

reject her for her blackness, she will turn to her 'people' but her 'people', those who she has already rejected, 'will no longer recognise the thing [she] has become' (Motlwa, p. 19, 93).

From a young age, it seems that Ofilwe desires to feel like she belongs. She admires Kate Jones who has the 'the most beautiful hair [she] had ever seen' and whom little black girls did favours for 'in return for a feel of her hair' (Motlwa, 1). Ofilwe spends many painful hours in the salon to straighten her hair and has plastered magazine cuttings of white women all over her wall. However, according to Tshepo she fails to recognise her desire to be everything that she is not. Tshepo, her brother, painfully brings this point across to her. Ofilwe rejects the traditions of her family. She sees Ofilwe's mother, Gemina, as embodying African tradition and motifs of witchcraft. Gemina believes in *Badimo* and that it existed before the 'missionaries, tricked [them]' into believing something other than 'age-old Pedi rituals' (Motlwa, 9). Gemina embarrasses Ofilwe because she speaks 'in broken English' and runs a bath for her friends. Gemina does not acknowledge, as Ofilwe believes she should, that 'white people only bathe at night'. Ofilwe believes that her 'mama is dumb' (Motlwa, p. 53). Ironically, Gemina feels guilty for not teaching her daughter African 'tradition' and berates Ofilwe for not greeting her elders in the customary manner. Gemina feels that wealth and privilege cannot make up for the African tradition that Ofilwe has lost.

Ofilwe only understands the weight of her choices much later on in life as she finds herself 'stuck between two worlds, shunned by both' (Motlwa, p. 93). She feels confused and alone. The story of Ofilwe parallels that of Nosisa in Sindiwe Magona's *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* who commits suicide because of a deep sense of unbelonging. A comparative look at the character of Nosisa and

Ofilwe explains this argument more clearly. Nosisa is different to her schoolmates because she has had a more 'privileged' lifestyle having grown up in a white family. Other children compare themselves to her because she is 'clear-eyed, skin soft as velvety petals kissed by the morning's dew' (*Living*, p. 79). She could also speak English before she could speak *amaXhosa* and her schoolteachers adore her. Nosisa begs her mother to move back to the urban township but her mother refuses as she believes that Nosisa is getting a better opportunity at life in the Smith's home. Nosisa envies her friends for their carefree township life and sees the Smith's as a prison. She blames her mother for her misfortune and refuses to learn indigenous African culture. He criticizes her mother when she chases her food down with milk, which is as 'the order of partaking in her bread and milk' (*Living*, p. 90).

The Smith's daughter, Karen, triggers Nosisa's anxieties and the sense of displacement she feels in apartheid South Africa. Ofilwe experiences a similar sense of anxiety and displacement in post-apartheid South Africa. For Nosisa and Ofilwe: black is bleak.<sup>273</sup> These feelings of unbelonging – not entirely attributed to race – cause Nosisa to take her own life by setting herself alight outside the maids rooms—the 'small squalid narrow thing at the back of the house' (*Living*, p. 88). The family hear her screams behind a veil of clattering china, inside of the house, while her mother serves the Smith's their usual dinner. The novel suggests that Ofilwe and 'born frees' like her suffers a similar 'death' 'seizing the mind for its own usage' (Motlwa, p. 93). In this 'death' Ofilwe laments that 'born frees' are displaced in the New South Africa which is a space of 'white greed, blond vanity and blue-eyed malevolence' where 'isiZulu is forgotten [and] Tshivenda a distant memory' (Motlwa, p. 93).

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<sup>273</sup> Comaroff, 'Occult', p. 293.

Tshepo's behaviour is similar. He is the next generation and 'progeny of the electronic age' has 'held out the greatest expectations for revolution' but who has not seen these reflected in the lives of the majority. In fact, he feels guilty for his middle class life. This sense of overwhelming guilt leads him to reject a life of middle class privilege and his status of 'born free'. For example, from a young age, he refuses to call the levels of their three-storey house 'floors' as these 'sounded pompous'; instead, 'he would call the second floor the middle, the first ground, and the third the top' (Motlwa, 82). He hides away from his parents black middle class lifestyle and reverts to wearing his mother's kaftans and beating drum on 'the middle' of their townhouse in a manner reminiscent of African tribal ritual. Later on in the story, Tshepo purposefully takes a job at *Instant Fried Chicken* the cheap fluorescent take-out spot in Pine Slopes. Tshepo takes the jobs because he wants to feel connected to 'his people' but finds that he 'reek[s] of KTV, IEB, MTV and ICC, although [he] has tried to mask it behind All Stars sneakers and a free Youth League election t-shirt' (Motlwa, 26). At *Fried Chicken* Tshepo learns the ways of 'the real world' where he is 'shocked by the ways of the *Umlungu*' (Motlwa, p. 29). *Umlungu* means white person. Tshepo is ashamed of himself because he complained naively to the kitchen staff that the white customers are offensive. This only increases his feelings of displacement and unbelonging.

Ayanda is the same as Tshepo. He is a part of the black middle class 'born free' elite and works at the Silver Spoon to join 'his people'. Ayanda and Fikile work in the *Silver Spoon*, a popular middle class white café. When Ayanda has an altercation with a white customer over a cheese sandwich, it leads to a swearing match about black civil rights and the state of black literacy in the post-apartheid state. Yet, in the kitchen, as he protests about the 'great paradox in this country,



Ayanda is the 'great paradox' (Motlwa, p. 152). He is not a part of the 'ten percent of them still living on ninety per cent of the land, ninety per cent of us living on ten per cent of the land' and so the kitchen staff laugh at him because he

had gone to a white school, lived in white neighbourhoods all his life. He had the life that everybody dreamed of. The ass was just talking out of his arse.

And we all knew it. I did, the kitchen staff did, and he did. So after that, he got back to work. (Motlwa, p. 149)

The irony is that Ayanda lives in a loft that his parents bought him in Morningside so he has no real concept of the 'great paradox' that he rants about.

On the other side of the spectrum is Fikile who is the embodiment of what the Comaroff's refer to as the implication of the 'millennial moment [that] has passed without palpable payback' for the majority'. She is a part of the black underclass youth who 'have to face the apparent impossibility' of 'a modernist nation-state under postmodern conditions' and daily 'confront the difficulties of social reproduction'.<sup>274</sup> Fikile 'never had a father and [her] Mama was a drunkard and a coward who ran out on life, leaving [Fikile] alone, drenched in her wretched blood' (Motlwa, 147). Her wayward uncle who sexually abuses her from a young age raises Fikile. She grows up hating poverty and claiming that she 'never had a stomach for poverty' (Motlwa, 140). Fikile pursues a life that she can never lead: she imagines that she 'is foreign, from the UK or somewhere there' and that her 'accent is so perfect and [her] manner so refined' (Motlwa, 143). She also feels that she does not fit in but endeavours to achieve her Infinity Project where she is rich and famous. Fikile associates the

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<sup>274</sup> Comaroff, 'Occult', p. 284.

accumulation of wealth and consumerism with a sense of belonging. She believes that others intervene in her ability to accumulate and consume and these people become 'the object of jealousy and envy and evil dealings'.<sup>275</sup>

Ayanda is her first target. She envies him for his life of privilege and the favour that he finds with their white employer Miss Becky. Ayanda lives the lifestyle that Ofilwe can never have. Her second target is Ofilwe and her family. The Tlous are regulars at the *Silver Spoon* but Fikile refuses to serve them. She sees them as 'new money', people who she cannot stand because they 'sicken [her]' and 'remind [her] of everything [she does] not want to be' (Motlwa, 174). So she avoids the Tlous. Consequently, Fikile escapes into imagination. Like the boys in Room 207, she dreams of '*Project Infinity*' where she believes that one day she will 'mingle with the A-list, who will some day be friends and neighbours', people who 'were not the fortunate ones who were born into the lap of luxury' (Motlwa, 176). But it is obvious that this will never happen, at least not in the way in which she imagines it to be.

Fikile rejects her 'her people'. She sees black people as poor people and she refuses to acknowledge that she is a part of the poverty that surrounds her. This poverty is represented by 'the boys selling newspapers and cold drinks at the intersection' who 'whistle and holler' at her with their 'dusty newspapers all warm and grimy from dirty hands handling them all day' as she walks 'past the revolting smell of chicken feet' sold by the peculiar women with the odd orange umbrella (Motlwa, 140). Yet, the narrative suggests that there is no way out for Fikile unless she chooses to run off with one of the rich old white men who flirt with her at the *Silver Spoon*. No matter how hard she works, she will not escape her feeling of

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<sup>275</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, 'Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: notes from the South African postcolony', *American Ethnologist*, 26, 2 (1999), 279-303 (p. 284).

displacement and is therefore not so 'born free' among "new" black bureaucrats and businessmen, politicians, celebrities, and criminals, grow rich'.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, 'Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: notes from the South African postcolony', *American Ethnologist*, 26, 2 (1999), 279-303 (p. 292).

## Conclusion

Her neighbours beat Gugu Dlamini to death in December 1998 just days after she had disclosed her HIV positive status to the community. This happened shortly after Worlds AIDS Day, on 1 December of that same year.<sup>277</sup> HIV and AIDS discourse is shrouded in ambiguity in South Africa. This is partly due to the government's unsteady response to enacting effective HIV and AIDS policy. Former Health Minister Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, for example, controversially suggested that garlic, the African potato, lemons and beetroot could cure AIDS.<sup>278</sup> In comparison to Mbeki, President Jacob Zuma's AIDS message changed dramatically when he took a public AIDS test in 2009; however, three years prior to this, Zuma had allegedly taken a shower after having sex thinking it would reduce the risk of infection.<sup>279</sup>

The historical and political context of HIV and AIDS in post-apartheid South Africa is ambiguous. Southern Africa is the most AIDS affected area in Africa, and the HIV epidemic in South Africa is interlinked with epidemics occurring in neighbouring countries.<sup>280</sup> The UN Report showed that the 'severity of the epidemic is closely linked to the region's political economy, issues of poverty, women's relative lack of empowerment, high rates of male worker migration, and other social and cultural factors'.<sup>281</sup> The depth of the disease in South Africa links to the context of 'a newly democratic society emerging from a history of social disruption and racial and gender discrimination associated with equitable distribution of resources as a

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<sup>277</sup> Donald, G. McNeil, 'Neighbors Kill an H.I.V.-Positive AIDS Activist in Africa' (*New York Times*, 1998) <<http://www.nytimes.com/1998/12/28/world/neighbors-kill-an-hiv-positive-aids-activist-in-south-africa.html>> [accessed 12 June 2015]

<sup>278</sup> Lizzy Atree, *Blood on the Page* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), p. 7.

<sup>279</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4879822.stm> [accessed 12 November 2015] (para.1 of 19)

<sup>280</sup> HIV & AIDS and STI STRATEGIC PLAN FOR SOUTH AFRICA 2007-2011 (2007) 1-159 (p. 20)

<[http://data.unaids.org/pub/ExternalDocument/2007/20070604\\_sa\\_nsp\\_final\\_en.pdf](http://data.unaids.org/pub/ExternalDocument/2007/20070604_sa_nsp_final_en.pdf)>

[accessed 12 August 2015]

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

result of apartheid'.<sup>282</sup> Consequently, this has left the majority of the population massively disadvantaged and poverty has left many people susceptible to poverty related diseases including HIV and AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria 'which affect mainly the previously disadvantaged sections of the population'.<sup>283</sup> Poorer communities often in rural or informal settlements are the most at risk to HIV and AIDS due to poor access to social services such as prevention, treatment, and nutrition and care programmes. As the Comaroffs and Ashforth suggest, economies of the occult have emerged in responses to epidemics like HIV, and, like other crises in the country, the epidemic engenders mixed reactions in terms of prevention and cure. However, Decoteau argues, that 'AIDS has radically shaken the epistemological moorings of both biomedical and indigenous healing paradigms. The fact that the disease is incurable but treatable seriously challenges the ontological foundations of South African indigenous healing'.<sup>284</sup>

The history of HIV and AIDS virus in social and political discourse in South Africa is complex. It may be, as Decoteau suggests, that 'the battle over denialism has officially ended, many have suggested that AIDS no longer figures prominently in South Africa's national politics'; yet, post-apartheid literature provides a space of intervention into the contradictions inherent in the dialogue between HIV and AIDS virus and African tradition. A detailed explanation of this history and the government's HIV and AIDS policy is beyond the scope of this concluding chapter; however, I would like to make some brief and closing comments on HIV and ubuntu personhood in terms of how the latter is embedded in HIV and AIDS discourse.

Margaret Lenta has suggested that the role of literature in the construction of the New South Africa has allowed 'the expansion of the idea of 'South Africanness'

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<sup>282</sup> HIV & AIDS, p. 29.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>284</sup> Decoteau, p. 19.

and has disavowed the confinement of any kind of political orthodoxy, language or ethnic group, [...] gender group or class'. The diversity in the fictions discussed in this thesis '[are] not merely a recognition of the different traditions and interests of the various South African groups; equally importantly, it declares the authors' and publishers' confidence that members of the other groups need and want to read about them'.<sup>285</sup> The concern is to extend readership beyond white and middle class readers to a much larger section of the South African population. It is therefore vital that all sectors of the population are in dialogue with traditions embedded in the social and political discourse of HIV and AIDS, because 'AIDS continues to be the terrain upon which [these] postcolonial paradoxes are played out'.<sup>286</sup>

Sindiwe Magona states that when she got back from New York in the 1990s, she says that 'the astounding thing, [is] that there is such big denial, on a personal level, individuals are walking around as if there is nothing happening'.<sup>287</sup> She states that in the township euphemisms are predominantly used for HIV/AIDS, such as *lo gawulayo* – meaning 'that which chops' – or *ukugula* which translates as illness implying that there came a time when 'she is sick or he is sick' automatically came to mean HIV/AIDS.<sup>288</sup> People came to know and understand what that meant. This theme is one of the lesser explored in post-apartheid literature. For example, the most notable character in *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* but the one who gets the least attention is the 'scarecrow heroine'. In his metanarrative of the 'scarecrow heroine', Mpe makes four critical connections: 'Euphemism. Xenophobia. Prejudice. AIDS' and claims that 'no matter what other stories [he] might write, none of them would ever be

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<sup>285</sup> Margaret Lenta, 'Expanding 'South Africanness' in *SA Literature and Beyond 2000*, eds. Michael Chapman and Margaret Lenta (University of Kwa-Zulu Natal: Pietermaritzburg, 2011), p. 50-68, p. 65.

<sup>286</sup> Decoteau, p. 19.

<sup>287</sup> Lizzy Atree, 'Interview with Sindiwe Magona: 20<sup>th</sup> July 2006 – Cape Town, in *Blood on the Page*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), p. 35.

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

sufficient to answer such imponderables' (Mpe, p. 60). Not only does the 'scarecrow heroine' embody these complexities but she exemplifies gender differences embedded in discourses of tradition and in the transitory landscape as a woman with HIV/AIDS.

The 'scarecrow heroine' is a fiction writer who writes to escape 'the lashing tongues of Tiragalong' but becomes 'eaten up by grief and bitterness' when her narrative form and content is rejected by the publishers (Mpe, p. 58). The novel focuses on the way in which her community rejects her. This leads to her suicide. The community did not realize that they, 'together with the moralistic guardians of change', were destroying her (Mpe, p. 58). The omniscient narrator explains how the 'scarecrow heroine' became gradually disillusioned with post-apartheid life, a space where 'one year after the overthrow of the political and cultural censorship, [...] the damaging and dishonest indoctrination system which had been aimed at forcing South Africans to believe that life's realities lay exclusively in euphemisms' (Mpe, p. 57). Therefore, in spite of 'the so-called new dispensation, nothing had really changed' (Mpe, p. 57).

Moral judgments within communal narratives strongly influence understanding of HIV and AIDS. This has led to the stigmatization of those who have the virus. As Walker, Reid and Cornell explain when the first instance of HIV and AIDS was reported in South Africa in 1983, 'minorities on the margins of society were often blamed for the spread of the disease' and 'were believed to be victims of their own moral and antisocial behaviour'.<sup>289</sup> Following on from this, prevailing racial and political attitudes influence HIV and AIDS discourse in post-apartheid South Africa; furthermore, HIV and AIDS have been strongly associated with African immigrants. Some members of the community argue that the 'scarecrow heroine'

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<sup>289</sup> Liz Walker, Graeme Reid and Morna Cornell, *Waiting to Happen – HIV/AIDS in South Africa – the bigger picture*, ed. by Walker and others (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004), p. 32.

‘should not be condemned since she was just a worker in the kitchens, whose poverty caused her (as might have been the case with anyone else in her position) to take advantage of the care that potential lovers could bring’ (Mpe, p. 54). ‘Were there no stories of Tiragalong people who died of sexually transmitted diseases, with genitals swollen and decaying that one could hardly recognise then for what they were?’ (Mpe, p. 54).

Sex and power are, as Walker et al suggest, a central concern in HIV and AIDS discourse but historical and cultural perspectives on the epidemic are important in terms of how people make sense of the disease, cure, prevention and causation as well as what it means to live with HIV and AIDS. For example, HIV and AIDS has been strongly linked to the idea that old African diseases have been resurrected and ‘assumed a new virulence because of disrespect for culture’ and ‘the exchange of fluid in sex is linked to strong cultural beliefs associated with well-being’.<sup>290</sup> Adam Ashforth argues that

cultural and religious traditions can make it difficult or impossible to openly discuss sexual practices in order to facilitate condom use. The subordinate status of women makes it difficult for them to practice safe sex while being vulnerable to rape and physical abuse. Norms of masculine sexuality encourage multiple sex partners’.<sup>291</sup>

Poverty entrenches these habits and outlooks – such as the exchange of money for sex.

Further research on literature on HIV and AIDS, particularly from a gendered

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<sup>290</sup> Walker and others, p. 21.

<sup>291</sup> Ashforth, ‘Aids, Witchcraft’, p. 3.



perspective is crucial to contribute towards what Walker et al identify as ‘AIDS in context’: to situate the individual in relation to his or her social, cultural and historical environment’.<sup>292</sup> Ubuntu has a significant role to play in terms of how we understand HIV and AIDS and why some get infected and others not and as Walker et al argues, ‘South African society is characterized by cultural complexity and difference. This is reflected in the many ways that health and disease are understood’.<sup>293</sup> Biomedical causes for the disease lie at the heart of western scientific model and this is dominant in South Africa too; in this discourse, ‘the cause of the disease is a virus, and the focus of prevention and treatment the individual patient’.<sup>294</sup> However, research in parts of the country shows that it is relevant to ‘develop a culturally sensitive approach’ to HIV and AIDS.<sup>295</sup> From this perspective, a ‘return to tradition’ may be necessary.

Contrary to western education founded in values of the individual and independence, self-decision-making and individual agency, ubuntu and other forms of African tradition do not posit the same outlook or ontology towards health and healing. This is a major concern for dealing with HIV/AIDS prevention and healthcare. Indigenous African ontologies offer other healing systems outside of westernized ones and this has lead to people consulting medical doctors and traditional healers. Healers deal with the root cause of the disease and medical doctors with the symptoms.

The fictions discussed in this thesis indicate that the implications of tradition rooted in discourses of HIV and AIDs oppress women, and, as such, further research on this would make a compelling contribution towards a discussion of the

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<sup>292</sup> Walker and others, p. 21).

<sup>293</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

postcolonial paradoxes of post-apartheid South Africa. In her exploration of literary representations of HIV and AIDS, Lizzy Atree highlights how 'traditional' ways of dealing with HIV and AIDS are more accessible than western forms of healthcare. Gouws explains how political and public responses to HIV and AIDS speak to the uniqueness of the conditions of the developing South African state. The conditions of the postcolonial state challenge 'the gains that women have made' because it has been a complex process to build a nation out of 'the racialization of the apartheid past and the increasing engagement of the South African economy with a global economy'.<sup>296</sup>

One of the problems is to whether the liberal democratic South Africa state can deal with the complexities that the conditions living with HIV and AIDS in the post-apartheid state. For example, African tradition is historically patriarchal which has lead to misogynist narratives of women living with HIV/AIDS and misogynist images of women, in general. Walker et al raise some interesting questions concerning sex and trust, which play into ubuntu. *The Book of the Dead* discusses these issues of sex, power and trust. Trust in particular is a relationship is 'measured by the willingness of the partners to take risks and practice unsafe sex'.<sup>297</sup> The second assumption is that women need men as source of income for their 'needs'. This is an issue raised in *Ways of Dying* and *The Book of the Dead*. Noria and Pretty, respectively, come from poor rural backgrounds but the attention they receive at a young age turns to forms of prostitution later on in life. These novels suggest that 'girls like [them] were not for marriage but for show, so people believed. They believed that her kind were made for sharing amongst men, as no one man could ever handle such beauty alone without jealousy rendering him insane (Moele, p. 32). Both women learn to sell their bodies for money or material goods.

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<sup>296</sup> Amanda Gouws, 'Introduction', in *(Un)thinking Citizenship: Feminist Debates in Contemporary South Africa*, ed. by Amanda Gouws (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 1-20 (p. 1).

<sup>297</sup> Walker and others, p. 41.

The constitution of personhood in South Africa overlooks the position of women and gender differences embedded in African tradition. This is evident in misogynist texts written by black male authors in the post-apartheid landscape. Yet, these representations of the female body and the gendered understanding of HIV in collective social imagination in the social and political landscape have been overlooked in fiction written by young black male authors post-1995. Misogyny is clearest in texts about HIV and Aids that this thesis did not have the scope or space to explore further. Acclaimed young black male authors portray women in way that is degrading. This is a worrying representation of a very real social and political contextual situation where women may feel forced to have sex for money, luxuries or consumerism. My concern is that these novels fail to represent emotional dependency, patriarchal political and social landscape defined by the unequal balance of power between men and women.<sup>298</sup> Instead, these fictions focus on the female's need for accumulation and her male hero who saves her.

For men and HIV and AIDS, this raises interesting questions about the pressures of 'being an African man' and the demand that is made on men to act sexually aggressive, to accumulate wealth, to be married and independent. Through research into cultural beliefs and HIV/AIDS, these are manifestations of the belief that 'male sexuality is determined by biology – men have sexual urges that lead to inevitable behavior patterns'.<sup>299</sup> In this thesis, we have seen the detrimental affects that these pressures have placed on women and have outlined the oppression that black women, in particular, face from violent men, but a deeper discussion of the pressure of living up to masculine ideals of typically African men, imagined in political figureheads such as Jacob Zuma, Buthelezi and Julius Malema, is important.

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<sup>298</sup> Walker and others, p. 38.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

These stereotypes alienate homosexuals, mixed races and African men raised outside of 'tradition' or who may have missed their initiation rites into manhood. Perhaps there is a way in which we can approach HIV and AIDS from an ubuntu perspective whereby communities can be empowered, individuals can regain a sense of participatory rights and to help people and communities cope with living with HIV and AIDS.

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