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Christina Cullhed

Grappling with Patriarchies

*Narrative Strategies of Resistance in Miriam Tlali’s Writings*
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Abstract

This study is the first one devoted solely to the writings of the South African black novelist Miriam Tlali. It argues that her works constitute literary resistance not only to apartheid, noted by previous scholars, but also to South African patriarchies. Examining Tlali’s novels Muriel at Metropolitan (1975) and Amandla! (1980), and several short stories from Mihloti (1984) and Footprints in the Quag (1989), the study pits these texts against the black literary tradition dominated by men and also reads them within the social context of South African patriarchies, with its social restrictions on women and its taboos concerning sexualities. To distance herself from the patriarchal values inherent in the male literary tradition and to negotiate social and sexual restrictions on women, I argue, Tlali deploys narrative strategies like generic difference, generic dialogism, a double-voiced discourse, “whispering,” and “distancing.”

Drawing on the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, this study first explores “novelistic” traits in Muriel which function both to resist male literary conventions, like the epic mode of narrative, and to criticise their patriarchal ideology. Second, relying on Bakhtin, it analyses the generic dialogism and double-voicedness in Amandla!. Finally, making use of Kristeva’s semiotics and her theory of sacrifice, the study traces the development of a sacrificial discourse of gendered violence from Amandla! to some of Tlali’s short stories. Supported by Martha J. Reinecke’s explication of Kristeva, I show that Tlali’s texts insist that gendered violence upholds the sacrificial economies of both patriarchal apartheid and African patriarchy. The strategies of “whispering” and “distancing.” I claim, surface in Tlali’s addressing of the sensitive issues of black women’s victimisation and gendered violence. “Whispering” entails muting the criticism of the perpetrators of gendered violence, whereas “distancing” results in dis/placing gendered violence on the margins of the community. This study also examines the literary/social context of Tlali’s oeuvre: it explores specific traits of the South African black literary tradition, how the issue of rape has been addressed there, and the depiction of African patriarchy in autobiographies by South African black women.

Keywords: South African literature, narrative strategies, patriarchy, the black literary tradition, novelization, dialogism, fragmentation, gendered violence, sacrifice, rape, discursive taboo, whispering, distancing, Miriam Tlali

Christina Cullhed, Department of English, Box 527, Uppsala University, SE-75120 Uppsala, Sweden

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To Eva and Kerstin
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Introduction

“A woman writer, especially at that time when I started writing, was a real threat, you see. Not only to the Boers, but also to the male.”—Miriam Tlali.¹

Black women who struggled for freedom in South Africa during the 20th century faced a dilemma: how to combine the fight against apartheid with resistance to oppressing, patriarchal traditions.² When the two coincided it was relatively simple. For example, the authoritarian stance of black men towards women and children, whom they regarded as their property, was reinforced by the apartheid laws that treated black women as “minors” forced to rely on a man to provide a home for them. Black women’s resistance to apartheid could thus camouflage opposition also to patriarchal structures. At other times, however, women’s rejection of patriarchy resulted in one more burden on the shoulders of the black man, already marginalised and victimised by apartheid.

As a black woman writer from the 1970s onwards, Miriam Tlali, of course, shared this dilemma. In the 1960s she became a member of the ANC, and towards the end of the 1970s she was an adherent of the radical Black Consciousness Movement. Muriel at Metropolitan (1975), her first novel, was intended, she claims, to “get anybody, any African who read the book, to be conscious of the system [of apartheid].”³ Also, her engagement from 1978 to 1984 with the resistance magazine Staffrider, with its professed ideal

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¹ On 22 November 2001 I interviewed Miriam Tlali in Johannesburg at the University of the Witwatersrand (Interview I), and on the 5 December 2001 at her home in Soweto (Interview II). In this study I quote from these two interviews several times. The transcribed versions are now kept at NELM, the National English Literary Museum, in Grahamstown, South Africa. This quote is from Christina Cullhed, interview II, 10.

² Urbanisation and life in the townships has meant that African tradition, if it ever existed in a monolithic form, has been subject to both hybridization between different African cultures and rapid change due to contact with Western ways of life. For an extensive discussion about the reductive fallacy as regards tradition, see Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, eds., Chandra Mohanty, Russo and Torres (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991).

of raising the level of awareness among the people of Soweto, made her a frontal cultural figure in the political struggle. However, alongside their concern with politics, Tlali’s texts are fighting a battle on a different front as well. Her short story “Mm’a-Lithoto,” for example, as Pumla Gqola observes, is “directly criticising sexist practises within African culture.” As this study will show, not only her short stories, but Tlali’s entire oeuvre resists patriarchal values.

Miriam Tlali’s literary production is in several ways unique. With the publication of *Muriel at Metropolitan* in 1975, Tlali was, as Lauretta Ngcobo notes, “the first woman novelist inside South Africa to take her place among the national gallery of our black literary figures.”

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4 A. W. Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavic, preface, *Ten Years of Staffrider Magazine 1978-1988*, edited by A. W. Oliphant and Ivan Vladislavic (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1988), states that “the historical circumstances that prevailed at the time of *Staffrider*’s appearance ensured that the ideological perspective of Black Consciousness permeated the editorial policy and therefore the contents of the magazine. This mechanistic view regarded *Staffrider* as a magazine ‘by blacks for blacks’. However, while the initial self-editing policy certainly derived from the self-reliance advocated by Black Consciousness, the diversity of contributors during the same period cuts across the entire spectrum of the South African population and unsettles simplistic notions” (ix).


6 Lauretta Ngcobo, introduction, *Soweto Stories*, by Miriam Tlali (London: Pandora, 1989) xv. In 1994 a group called “Women in Writing” at the Department of Culture, Science and Technology in South Africa honoured Tlali with an award as the first black woman writer in South Africa. The inscription, which Tlali showed me at our first interview, Interview I, reads: “In honour of Miriam Tlali, first contemporary black woman writer in South Africa to publish a novel from a black woman’s perspective, and showed us that it could be done” (18). Other black women writers wrote their novels in exile, except Bessie Head who wrote one novel in the country before Tlali’s *Muriel*, but it was only published posthumously, in 1994. Gillian Stead Eilersen, *Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1995), states that Bessie Head’s *The Cardinals: With Meditations and Short Stories*, ed., M. J. Daymond (Oxford: Heinemann,1995) is based on a typescript entitled “Where the Wind Don’t Blow” written in 1961-62, while she was still in South Africa (55). Head’s other novels, *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969), *Maru* (1971) *A Question of Power* (1974), and *A Bewitched Crossroad* (1984) were, however, written in Botswana and published in London, with an eye to a Western audience. Noni Jabavu, another early black woman writer, moved into exile at the age of thirteen, and wrote about South African conditions based on memory and on experiences made during occasional visits to the country. Like Head’s, Jabavu’s novels, *Drawn in Colour: African Contrasts* (1960) and *The Ochre People* (1963), were published in England. According to M. J. Daymond in the afterword to Lauretta Ngcobo’s *And They Didn’t Die*, Lauretta Ngcobo’s *Cross of Gold* (1981) was both written and published in England. Therefore, Tlali’s feat on the South African English literary scene stands unchallenged.

Ntseliseng Masechele Khaketla (sometimes referred to as Caroline Khaketla), author of *Mosali eo u'neileng ena* (1954), must be commended for being the first black woman playwright in the country. However, writing in Sesotho, she does not reach a large audience. A few Anglophone poems, written by black women, such as A. C. Dube’s “Africa: My Native Land” (1913), published in the Zulu weekly *Ilanga Lase*, appeared sporadically during the whole of the 20th century. Also, there are several short testimonies, letters, and court statements by black women, some of which have been published in Mission presses over the same period. See *Women Writing Africa: The Southern Region*, eds., M J. Daymond, et al. (Johannesburg: Wits UP, 2003).
tan and Amandla! are among the first novels in the black literary tradition with a contemporary setting. And, what is more, Tlali is the first black South African writer to consistently raise questions about gendered violence. However, some critics in South Africa and abroad, perhaps because of Tlali’s status as a woman writer, have not duly recognized these literary achievements. Like most South African black writing of the period of resistance her texts have mainly been regarded as being in opposition to the apartheid regime.

“The history of black South African literature,” Njabulo Ndebele writes, “has largely been the history of the representation of spectacle,” implying the ‘spectacle’ of apartheid politics. Similarly, the South African critic Kelwyn Sole claims that the exclusive focus of “the Soweto writers,” a group to which Tlali belongs, was on the racial conflict, which explains why their literature “was not politically particularly questioning of social inequalities and divisions” based on gender, class and other factors.

Lastly, in his influential essay “Rediscovery of the Ordinary,” Ndebele finds no texts by black writers that deal with “the ordinary,” i.e. everyday life, which Tlali’s texts in fact do. Margaret Daymond notes Ndebele’s failure to recognise writers such as Bessie Head and Tlali in his search for a new kind of black writing. Ndebele, she writes, “did not (could not?) see that a gendered social life is what has made ‘the ordinary’ the chosen terrain of writers like Head and Tlali.” Sole’s refusal to give Tlali’s fiction credit for its criti-

7 Modikwe Dikobe’s The Marabi Dance (London: Heinemann, 1973), although not historical as such, is set thirty years back in time. However, it has been impossible to establish whether this time-lag may perhaps be explained by difficulties in finding a publisher. If this is the case, Modikwe’s novel, of course, competes with Tlali’s Muriel at Metropolitan as the first ‘modern’ black novel in South Africa.

8 Critics such as Kelwyn Sole, Dorothy Driver, Michael Chapman and Cecily Lockett, as we shall see, do not regard Tlali’s novels as being critical of patriarchy.

9 Njabulo Ndebele, South African Literature and Culture (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994) 41.

10 “The Soweto writers” designates the four black writers who each wrote a novel about the Soweto uprisings in 1976: Mongane Wally Serote’s To Every Birth Its Blood (1978), Miriam Tlali’s Amandla! (1980), Sipho Sepamla’s A Ride on the Whirlwind (1981), and Mbulelo Nzamane’s The Children of Soweto (1982).


12 Margaret Daymond, “Inventing Gendered Traditions: The Short Stories of Bessie Head and Miriam Tlali,” South African Feminisms, ed., M. J. Daymond (London: Garland, 1996) 228. Anthony O’Brien in Against Normalization: Writing Radical Democracy in South Africa (Durham: Duke UP, 2001) points out the “intertextual link” between Ndebele’s notion of the ‘ordinary’ and the texts of Bessie Head (52). O’Brien identifies several elements that Ndebele calls for and writes that these “not only stand for a new direction in black fiction: they inscribe Bessie Head’s whole ethic and aesthetic as exemplary, even though Ndebele never alludes to her” (53). O’Brien goes on to say that Ndebele at least “might have been expected to acknowledge” the connection, and that it is “curious that he overlooked Head’s work” (53, 54). A grounding of “the political and its representations” in the private sphere (53) seems, he argues, to grow from “the rhizome of feminism” (55), which, I find, both Head’s and Tlali’s fiction exemplifies.
cism of patriarchy and Ndebele’s failure to see the concern of Tlali’s fiction with “the ordinary” point up the fact that Tlali’s writing has not yet been sufficiently highlighted.

This dissertation constitutes the first book-length study of Miriam Tlali’s writings. By exploring certain narrative strategies deployed in her texts, I will demonstrate how Tlali’s writings, besides their rejection of apartheid, also constitute a powerful criticism of patriarchy.

Critical Context

Tlali’s critique of patriarchy is seldom overt, which may explain why critics have not always recognized it. Classifying Tlali among South African writers who have contributed “stories of the collective and isolated self,” Michael Chapman claims that her writing shows an “unwillingness to develop a critique on patriarchy in African social structures.” And, reading Tlali’s work as suffused by an attitude to women as solely playing a “‘supportive’ role to men in the struggle,” Dorothy Driver does not see Tlali’s fiction as ‘feminist’ and instead points to Ellen Kuzwayo’s Call Me Woman (1985) as an example of a South African ‘feminist’ text.

Primarily focussing on the critique of apartheid in Tlali’s texts, some critics have, however, also noted her resistance to patriarchy. Cecily Lockett states that Tlali’s collection of short stories, Mihloti (1984), is the first of her works to “add a feminist voice to black writing in English,” in the country. Lockett also states, and here she includes the novels, that it is “possible to trace a developing consciousness of women’s issues, even a feminist awareness, across Tlali’s three works.” She concludes, however, that although this feminism “takes a qualified form” it is still “subordinated to [Tlali’s] political aspirations.” Similarly, Gabriella Madrassi, in her analysis The Black Woman: A Woman Apart (1998), an historical overview of the figure of the black woman in South African literature, insists that Tlali regards the struggle against apartheid as the main struggle of the two.
Others recognize her specific resistance to patriarchy as more abreast with her critique of apartheid. Discussing Tlali’s work, specifically *Footprints in the Quag* (1989) alongside Bessie Head’s, Daymond finds that Head and Tlali together invent a gendered tradition in South African writing, which offers “a renewed regard for the maternal as a capacity (not just a subject-matter) in Southern African writing” and “release[s] the maternal from its symbolic role . . . into wider social action and aesthetic value.” Andrea Muhlebach also includes Tlali’s early work in a similar characterization: analysing *Muriel*, she states that Tlali from the start “steadfastly contests hegemonic discourse,” including patriarchal discourse, and that her voice, resisting ethnicity and violence as solutions in the process of nation-building, therefore belongs to “the future.”

Two dissertations, by Kelwyn Sole and by Josephine Evans, analyse Tlali’s work together with that of other writers. Sole examines *Amandla!* among the four Soweto novels that depict the historical watershed constituted by the youth uprisings in Soweto in 1976. Like Driver, Sole regards the women’s role in the struggle, as it surfaces in this novel, as mainly supportive of the black man. Unlike Sole’s study, Evans’ analysis, an exploratory journey encompassing all women’s writing in South Africa during the years of resistance, (1960-1995), places Tlali among the writers that she categorizes as “Exploring Gender,” in contrast to those whom she claims to be “Subsuming Gender.” However, Evans focuses exclusively on Tlali’s short stories, and thereby excludes Tlali’s novels from her ‘feminist’ project as she claims that they do not “offer a particularly pro-feminist analysis of the past and present” and instead are “full of yearning for a return to the certainties of the past.” In other words, Evans does not duly recognize Tlali’s resistance to patriarchy in her earlier works.

Perhaps, as suggested above, it is the covertness and subtlety of Tlali’s oppositional strategies, as well as her sometimes ambivalent stance to traditional patriarchal practices that explain why some critics consistently deny, or question, Tlali’s anti-patriarchal vision. Another explanatory aspect, I suggest, may be that her texts have not been read with due regard to the cultural context of their writing. Therefore, this thesis aims to provide a de-

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20 Daymond 236, 237.
23 Evans 164, 165.
24 Lockett writes: “Instead of diminishing the value of Tlali’s work by imposing rigid formalist critical criteria, it would be more useful to attempt to decode it in ways that might be ap-
tailed examination of the subversive stance towards patriarchy evinced in Tlali’s writings within the interpretative horizon of black African writing. Contesting Chapman’s view, mentioned above, that Tlali’s work does not critique black African patriarchal structures, which, he says, “render[s] her as a limited subject for women’s studies,” this study shows that Tlali draws on narrative strategies such as novelization, a dialogic fragmentation, and a development of a specific discourse on gendered violence, to negotiate the, to women, largely oppressive African patriarchal context. Also, defining feminism as opposition to social structures whereby men dominate women, this study refutes Evans’ stance, mentioned above, that Tlali’s novels do not evince a “pro-feminist analysis,” and Driver’s claim that Tlali is not a feminist writer. Instead, it suggests that both Muriel and Amandla!, as well as several of her short stories, in various ways subvert patriarchal expectations, albeit covertly. I align myself with Gqola who aptly pinpoints the dilemma of the black woman in the struggle: Tlali’s texts suggest a writer, as Gqola notes, who is “torn between race and gender and is grappling with a way of doing justice to both in a society that forces one to choose.”

Aim and Method

As its title suggests, this study examines the narrative strategies of resistance to patriarchy in Miriam Tlali’s writings. These strategies, I argue, function to solve the above-mentioned dilemma of opposing traditional patriarchal practices without overly burdening the already victimised black man, but also to negotiate the taboos surrounding sexual violence and to critique the hegemony of patriarchy. One of the underlying hypotheses is that Tlali’s texts not only resist Western patriarchy but, in particular, black African patriarchy. During apartheid, especially in its first decades, as we shall see, the black African public domain was dominated by men, and a black woman writer, like Tlali, who invaded this domain, must therefore have expected some degree of rejection. Such an expectation, I contend, motivated devices that would help to manoeuvre the text past the anticipated rejection. Therefore, the gesture of solidarity with black men and patriarchal hegemony, or gender hierarchy in society, necessitated strategic techniques such as a subversive subtext, or a double-voiced discourse. In the three main chapters of this dissertation, I explore the narrative tools that Tlali deploys to manage such a delicate ‘double’ negotiation. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, I aim to show how Tlali’s use of novelization and dialogism (terms appropriate for a black reader)” (278). Although I do not agree that any special “way” is more appropriate for a person depending on racial background, I find that it may be elucidating to read Tlali’s work within the cultural framework within which it is written.

26 Gqola 95.
borrowed from Bakhtin), as well as narrative strategies inherent in a discourse of sacrifice (an analysis based on Kristeva’s theory of sacrifice), function as tools that are adjusted to the political context of the time of writing. Tlali’s narrative strategies result in a widening of the black literary tradition and in a subversion of its patriarchal foundations.

The method applied here is a close reading of Tlali’s texts—sometimes several versions of her texts—in the light of specific literary theories. In addition, since Tlali writes back to the patriarchal values represented in black Anglophone literature in South Africa at the time, a literature dominated by men, and partly, as we shall see, posits her own writing in relation to that of her male predecessors, Tlali’s work is examined within this context. My method derives first from my hypothesis that the basic values of black African patriarchies are represented in black male writing, and, second, from the fact that Tlali’s resistance surfaces when regarded against this background. Therefore, both the context of black African literature and its patriarchal values will be discussed below. Lastly, Tlali’s texts are viewed within the political context of her writing, because, at times, this context had an impact on her choice of resistance strategies. Indeed, her subversive stance can be found, not only at the thematic level, but it can also be traced in the narrative form: the fragmentation of Amandla!, as several critics find, is in line with the Black Consciousness ideology of opposition to the hegemonic cultural conventions of the time. In addition, I claim, her use of a fragmentary form meanwhile functions to create a subtext that resists patriarchy.

Of course, my division of South African writing into ‘black’ and ‘other’ South African writing may be regarded as controversial. While Leon de Kock acknowledges “the binaries” that “always have been to hand” as regards South African literatures, such as “the civilized and the savage, settler and indigene, White and Black, oppressed and privileged, rich and poor” (and I would add Afrikaans and English), he also claims that South African writers who have “hit the seam,” that is, who deal with the often fraught contact zones between the diverse cultures in the country, are the only ones who rise to become “global South African writers,” among whom he men-

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27 For a highly informative and comprehensive account of black women’s writing in South Africa, which also includes a presentation of each writer, see Daymond et. al. From the middle of the 19th century, black women have written letters, articles, short stories, poems, court statements, and ‘mission-writing’ in vernaculars, sometimes in English, sometimes published and sometimes not. With the advent of this anthology, which publishes either for the first time or re-publishes such diverse women’s texts, either in the original English, or in translation from the indigenous languages, a lacuna has been filled which will benefit the study of women’s literary work in South Africa.

28 For example, Aubrey Mokadi and Kelwyn Sole. See my introduction to Chapter Two, note 314.

tions J. M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer and Es’kia Mphahlele. “Perhaps to be a ‘South African’ writer in the full sense,” de Kock writes, “requires imaginative inhabitation of the seam as a deep symbolic structure.”

To discuss black writing within an exclusively black African domain, as I do in this study, is not to “hit the seam.” But, as most critics know, the division between cultural spheres in South Africa, noticeable also in the field of literature, is still largely in place. In 1998 Lewis Nkosi pointed out that “in South Africa there exists an unhealed—I will not say incurable—split between black and white writing.” While Nkosi ascribes the split to the disparate conditions of writing between black and white writers, he also criticises the black writers for being “largely impervious for the most part to cultural movements which have exercised great influence in the development of white writing.”

Unlike Nkosi I believe that there are more reasons behind the ‘split’ than ‘disparate conditions’; it is not only access to resources but also the historical and ideological challenges facing black writers that differed starkly from those facing white writers. Also, black and white writers draw on different cultural heritages and, I would add, though many black writers did accept Western cultural ideas, there were others who chose to be ‘impervious’ to white cultural influence as a result of their political stance towards the hegemonic position of Western cultures. Although I do not wish to prolong the division of South African writing according to race (or, for that matter, according to gender), I suggest that discussing the South African literatures written during the apartheid years within one single framework, where the above-mentioned aspects are not taken into account, would imply marginalising black writing from this period. The significant literary contributions of black writers would then not get the attention they warrant. To deny difference is to believe in monolithic knowledge and one universal epistemology, which I do not.

Similarly, only by acknowledging black African traditions, and their patriarchal mode, is it possible to discern the subtle resistance that Tlali, for example, incorporates in her writing. I would therefore like to adopt de Kock’s suggestion that “what is to be desired is that the value of difference be fully recognized in its guise as différance, as a representational differential offering liberation from imprisoning fixations of identity,” in order “to cultivate the very mobility of selfhood and represen-

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30 de Kock 284.
31 Lewis Nkosi, “Postmodernism and Black Writing in South Africa,” Attridge and Jolly 75. In his essay mentioned above, Leon de Kock also refers to this quote.
32 As discussed below, according to Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of dialogism, no static identities exist, and the subject is constantly being created in dialogue with the other. Also, since it is a prerequisite of existence where each subject inhabits a specific position, difference must constantly be acknowledged. Yet, through language, in dialogue, the subject’s relational experience can be meaningfully communicated.
33 de Kock 287.
As we will see below, Tlali in *Muriel* assigns to her protagonist the task of mediating a heteroglossic, multicultural milieu.

Miriam Tlali, like so many of her compatriots, has dual cultural identities. She has a Western education and has adopted some of its ideals, but like her first protagonist, Muriel, Tlali is also shaped by black African culture: she lived and still lives her daily life within a black African cultural sphere. Language mediates culture and, since her parents stemmed from Lesotho, Tlali speaks Sesotho and therefore has a Sotho cultural heritage. But growing up in Sophiatown, which was a veritable melting pot of African languages and culture at the time, she also learnt both Zulu and Xhosa, an achievement of which she is extremely proud. Tlali’s knowledge of several African languages and their cultures, apart from influencing her writing, also explains her hybrid cultural belonging. Since such a multi-lingual black African cultural atmosphere fostered Tlali as well as all the Sophiatown writers, in my pursuit of literary signs of black African patriarchy, I have chosen to focus on texts by these writers and other black African writers with a similar background; therefore, I have excluded texts by ‘white,’ ‘coloured,’ and writers of Indian heritage. (A discussion on the Sophiatown writers is pursued in Chapter One).

To surmise that black African patriarchy is reflected in black male writing before the advent of the Black Consciousness Movement is reasonable. In

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34 de Kock 288.
35 Tlali’s mother and father moved to Johannesburg from Lesotho (then Basutholand) in the 1940s, but in the 1970s, after her father’s death, her mother returned to Lesotho, and married a resident of the country.
36 Cullhed, interview I, 10, and Cullhed, interview II, 4, 7. Tlali also speaks fluent English and Afrikaans.
37 The ‘Sophiatown set,” or ‘Sophiatown writers,’ is a concept introduced by Paul Gready in “The Sophiatown Writers of the Fifties: The Unreal Reality of Their World” in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16.1 (1990): 139-64, where he claims that “Mphahlele, Maimane, Mathshikiza, Modisane, Themba, Nakasa, Motsisi and Nkosi all lived in Sophiatown at various stages during the Fifties, ‘talking the world to tatters,’ and living almost as a community. It is these authors who will be referred to as the Sophiatown writers or ‘set,’ because although their experiences before and after this period varied considerably and not all of their writing is about or originating from Sophiatown or the Fifties, it was an era and place that was influential for all of them as people and writers” (143). Like these writers, Tlali grew up in, and was thoroughly influenced by the cultural climate of Sophiatown, where she spent all her formative school years. In 1956, on the destruction of Sophiatown by the Government to make way for a white suburb, Tlali, as a newly married woman, was forced to move to the South Western Townships, known as Soweto. In the 60s Tlali began her first novel.
38 Although this movement was patriarchal in tone, it began to pay lip-service to new ideals that envisioned a certain amount of gender equality, and some of its female adherents actively embraced these ideals. Mamphela Ramphele, the partner of Steve Biko (a central figure in the Movement) in her autobiography *A Life* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1996) writes: “I became quite an aggressive debater and was known for not suffering fools gladly. Moreover, I intimidated men who did not expect aggression from women. Soon a group of similarly inclined women, Vuyelwa Mashalaba, Nomsisi Kraai, Deborah Matshoba and Thenjiwe Mthintso, became a force to be reckoned with at annual SASO [South African Socialist Organisation] meetings. Ours was not a feminist cause at that time—feminism was a later development in
the early 1970s, traditional black African patriarchy had not been questioned in writing, neither by black women, nor by black men.\textsuperscript{39} The public black African sphere was dominated by men; women were not invited into ‘official’ male sections, and their resistance was carried out in exclusively female organisations, such as the ANC Women’s League, the FSAW,\textsuperscript{40} or the Black Sash.\textsuperscript{41} When they were finally invited to join the men, black women experienced oppression and marginalization by male comrades. In an autobiographical text from 1988 Lauretta Ngcobo writes:

\begin{quote}
As a grown woman involved in the politics of protest and the struggle against apartheid, I slowly came to realise that mine was a cheering role, in support of the men. I had no voice; I could only concur and never contradict nor offer alternatives. In short, men had (and still have) the exclusive right to initiate ideas and were (are) provided with the forms of expression for those ideas. They are raised on a diet of confidence-builders and morale-boosters. All decision-making positions are still in the hands of men, in spite of the lessons of a rigorous political struggle.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

Thus, black African patriarchal structures prevailed in the political resistance movement that most writers supported. As men are the beneficiaries of a patriarchal system, historically, men have not initiated change in this system, and therefore this state of affairs is likely to be reflected in much of the writing in the 1980s—almost exclusively produced, as we know, by men.

Apart from Gladys Thomas’ poems in \textit{Cry Rage} (1973) no Anglophone works by black women writers were published in the country before Tlali’s \textit{Muriel at Metropolitan}. As relevant aspects of the male black literary tradition will be discussed in direct connection with the analysed texts, the discussion here is necessarily brief. The most influential contemporary black writers prior to the bannings in 1965 were the Sophiatown writers.\textsuperscript{43} As men-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{39} In contrast, as we shall see, during the period after 1995, several black male writers are in the forefront of resisting patriarchal structures. See the section in Chapter Three of this study called “Sexual Violence and the Black Literary Tradition.”
\item \textsuperscript{40} FSAW, the Federation of South African Women’s League.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Hilda Bernstein, \textit{For Their Triumphs and for Their Tears: Conditions and Resistance of Women in Apartheid South Africa} (London: International Defence & Aid Fund, 1975), describes the Black Sash as “an organisation of predominantly middle-class women who have become known everywhere through their silent protests against many apartheid laws, wearing a black sash. In recent years, the organisation has devoted most of its attention to the evils arising from migrant labour and mass removals, and conducts advice offices in Cape Town and Johannesburg to which Africans come with problems arising from the laws. They publish a magazine, \textit{The Black Sash}, and are deeply concerned with the destruction of family life” (7).
\item \textsuperscript{43} In 1965 as a result of the Second Amendment to the Suppression of Communism Act the Government banned all active black writers, who were forced to flee, or faced being put under house-arrest.
\end{itemize}
tioned, according to Ndebele, their writings did not describe the “ordinary”; moreover, they were often “demonstrative,” even lacking in relevance and seriousness.\textsuperscript{44} Describing his own writing from this period, Bloke Modisane calls it “escapist trash.”\textsuperscript{45} Mostly, the short stories in \textit{Drum} magazine,\textsuperscript{46} from 1950-60, were riddled with stereotypical gender descriptions, where women were regarded either as mothers, as symbols of the nation, or as easygoing “good-time girls.”\textsuperscript{47} Prior to this, in the first half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, epics largely dominated black male writing: historical novels, such as Sol T. Plaatje’s \textit{Mhudi: An Epic of South African Native Life a Hundred Years Ago} (1930), Thomas Mofolo’s \textit{Chaka} (trans. 1925), and epic plays like those of H. I. E. Dhlomo, or, heroic epic poetry such as the work of Mazizi Kunene and, partly, Oswald Mtshali. These texts evince black African patriarchy in its traditional form, with men in authority, often as warriors or kings, and women as background figures of dependency, and/or mothers of the nation.\textsuperscript{48}

In sum, this study reads Miriam Tlali’s work against the foil of black men’s writing. While highlighting the importance of Tlali’s contribution to South African literature, it aims to show its consistent, albeit at times subdued, resistance to patriarchy, especially to black African patriarchy. Drawing on Bakhtin’s and Kristeva’s theories it examines Tlali’s innovative deployment of narrative strategies such as \textit{novelization, dialogism, a double-voiced discourse, whispering, and distancing} to negotiate experienced and expected hegemonic/patriarchal obstacles. Lastly, its exploration of gendered violence in connection with Kristeva’s sacrificial theory highlights the mechanisms of \textit{sacrifice} that underlie this specific kind of violence.

\textsuperscript{44} Ndebele 49, 55.  
\textsuperscript{46}In 1950 an American journalist started the monthly magazine \textit{Drum} in Cape Town, (it later moved to Johannesburg), which was to have a significant impact on black literary production. It catered both to the black middle-class reader and to a wider black readership, and fostered a whole generation of black journalists such as Bloke Modisane, Nat Nakasa, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Casey Motsisi, and Can Themba. Their writing and the policy of \textit{Drum} show a political and social concern with the plight of the blacks under the segregation laws implemented by the Nationalist Government from 1948. The writing produced was in the genres of the short story, the autobiographical short story, and reportage. See Michael Chapman’s \textit{The Drum Decade} (1989; Pietermaritzburg: U of Natal P, 2001) and my discussion on the \textit{Drum} writers in Chapter One.  
\textsuperscript{48} Plaatje’s \textit{Mhudi} has two main female characters, Mhudi and Ummandi, who, as Gabriella Madrassi in \textit{The Black Woman: A Woman Apart} (Berne: Peter Lang, 1998) writes, “offer a representation of the black woman running counter to all the stereotypes produced so far by white authors” (88). Yet, despite the narrator’s noticeable ambition to foreground Mhudi, and while at times directly inserting her own narrative voice, in the course of the narrative the women repeatedly slip into the background. Instead, Ra-Thaga’s and the other male protagonists’ dealings in the war are gradually foregrounded. Towards the end of the story, Mhudi’s role as a symbol of the land, or as the symbol of a future South Africa, dominates. Madrassi writes: “Mhudi and Ummandi . . . are both endowed with maternal attributes; they are representations of \textit{Mother Africa}” (88). The “maternal essence” of Plaatje’s “Hottentot Eve,” according to Madrassi, “fosters ancestral glory, youthful courage and endurance” (88-89).
Historical Background

The specific narrative strategies applied in Tlali’s texts are shaped to negotiate the political situation at the time as regards both patriarchy and apartheid; therefore, they differ significantly depending on the expected impediments to be negotiated, or the degree of contextual lenience/domination experienced at the time. The Black Consciousness ideology, for example, gaining momentum towards the end of the 70s, mobilised black resistance to the cultural hegemony of the apartheid regime. This, in turn, affected Tlali’s choice of literary form, a form that she then also deploys to oppose patriarchal values prevailing within the Black Consciousness ideology. In order to clarify these arguments, and as a general background to Tlali’s highly political writing, a brief historical background to political developments in South Africa in the 20th century and to the black women’s contribution to the struggle is presented here.

In South Africa the black people’s struggle against the Government’s laws of segregation between the races arose in direct response to the implementation of these laws. For example, the 1910 pass laws led to the foundation of the ANC in 1912,49 and the African women’s campaign against these laws in 1913/14 resulted in the formation of the Bantu Women’s League within the ANC.50 Sol T. Plaatje, the leader of the Native National Congress, campaigned against the Land Act of 1913 that restricted African ownership of the land, and wrote *Native Life in South Africa* (1916) in protest.51 Also, in reaction to the Hertzog Bills of the 1930s, which took away the voting rights of ‘qualified’ Africans in the Cape and “consolidated the Native Reserve Territories,”52 the All Africa Convention (AAC) and the National Council of African Women (NCAW) of 1935 were formed. Similarly, resistance to the ‘colour-bar’ that barred black people from skilled professions grew in response to the implementation of discriminating laws on the labour market.

In 1948, the Nationalist Party came to power and invented the politics of, and the term, ‘apartheid,’ which divided the country into ‘homelands,’ meant to house the specific ethnic groups in a system of ‘separate development.’ Now followed a period of forced removals; blacks who owned farms in one area were evicted and had to settle in arid areas to which they often had no prior connection. At this time, too, the Bantu Education Act stipulated an inferior, and much cheaper system of compulsory education for all ‘non-whites,’ and, in the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 and the Unlawful Organisations Act from the same time, the Government banned any organisation or meeting regarded as subversive of its rule. In 1964, after the

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50 Later known as the ANC Women’s League, the ANCW.L.
52 Walker 34-35.
‘Treason trial’ and the conviction of Nelson Mandela, then the leader of the ANC, resistance to apartheid became more militant. An Amendment to the Suppression of Communism Act in 1965 stipulated that all active black writers be banned, and Tlali, who made her debut at a later stage, was constantly harassed by the regime. As a result of the censorship laws, both her novels were subsequently banned.53

The segregating laws of apartheid, like the colonial ideology, were highly patriarchal, and black women constituted the lowest rung in the hierarchy. White men and women assumed patriarchal authority over both black men and women, and patriarchal hierarchies were reflected in laws and regulations. The holding of rental contracts, or the scant ownership of property allowed to blacks, was by law limited exclusively to men, which significantly weakened the social position of black women, and implemented radical change in African life styles. Anne McClintock writes:

The institution of marriage became a direct weapon of state control. Any [black] woman’s right to remain in an urban area became dependent on a male relative . . . In 1964, in an act of inexpressible cruelty, amendments were made to the Urban Areas and Bantu Labour Act, which made it virtually impossible for a (black) woman to qualify for the right to remain in an urban area. Wives and daughters of male residents were now no longer permitted to stay unless they too were legally working.54

Black women’s “traditional role in economic production was . . . undermined” in the ‘homelands,’ Jacklyn Cock writes, and they therefore “became increasingly confined to dependent domestic roles,”55 constituted either by hopeless isolation and destitution on rural farms, or by slave-like labour in white homes in the urban areas.

However, black women contributed significantly to the resistance struggle, which they, as mentioned, pursued in organisations parallel to the men’s.56 From 1948 women bravely initiated resistance, exemplified by their

53 Muriel at Metropolitan circulated for four years and sold very well. After its publication by Longman, however, the novel came to the attention of the censorship committee, and in 1979 it was banned (Madrassi 132). Amandla! was banned within two weeks of its publication.
54 Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest (New York: Routledge, 1995) 324-25.
56 Interracially, women also preferred to get together under a separate banner. Lazar writes: “Women demonstrated alongside their men to protest these laws, and in 1954, encouraged by several activists of different liberation movements, decided to pool their resources in the struggle for liberation. On the weekend of April 17, 1954, women from all over the country joined together to form the embryonic Federation of South African Women (FSAW). Their aims were based on a Women’s Charter with a policy that stated: “This organisation is formed for the purpose of uniting all women in common action for the removal of all political, legal, economic and social disabilities” (37). It was the FSAW that organised the legendary gathering on the steps of the Union Buildings in 1956, where twenty thousand women gathered to protest against the pass laws (39).
multiple campaigns against the pass laws, and, as the following quote shows, by other campaigns of protest:

[After 1948] African women began making their voices heard by organizing grass-roots campaigns about issues that affected them. For example, in Alexandra township and Evaton in the Vaal Triangle they joined a bus boycott to protest against the increase in the price of bus tickets. From dusk to dawn, township dwellers walked long distances to and from work. Nurses would leave home shortly after midnight to be able to arrive at their hospitals on time. Even mothers, with babies tied to their backs in traditional African style, walked ten or fifteen miles, exhausted and hungry, but refusing the easier option of catching a bus. The boycott was successful, and bus tickets reverted to their old price. In the Cape, a women’s Food Committee was formed to demonstrate against the rising price of food. 57

Concurrently, black women were oppressed by South African patriarchies and officially it took a long time for women to be recognized within the male black organisations. Only in 1955 was Lilian Ngoyi elected a member of the executive board of the ANC. 58 In the 1950s, as Cherryl Walker states, black men were still in authority:

Conservative men, reared in a strongly patriarchal tradition, the early ANC leaders . . . had embraced the system of values of the dominant group within society, the white middle class. In the process they adopted without questioning its views on the subordinate place of women, views which did not conflict with their own patriarchal tradition. Right up to the 1950s and beyond, the ANC continued to see women primarily as mothers and wives. This view conditioned the outlook of its female members as well. 59

Here, similarities between African and Western patriarchies are spelled out: women’s subordination to men was a value shared by both. Black women’s oppression by South African patriarchies will be discussed more fully in this introduction and also in Chapter Three, “Developing a Sacrificial Discourse on Gendered Violence.”

After the demonstration against the pass laws at Sharpeville in 1960, where 150 unarmed demonstrators were killed by the police, resistance to the regime took a more militant turn. The ANC was banned but went underground and mobilised outside the country, and, towards the end of the 1970s, the Black Consciousness Movement under the leadership of Steve Biko advocated non-co-operation with the Government. The rapid spread of the Black Consciousness ideology among young people coalesced with the Gov-

ernmental stipulation of Afrikaans as the major language of tuition in black schools in 1976, which sparked off the ‘children’s’ revolution in Soweto. Repercussions of this uprising spread throughout the black townships. In the 80s the Government was fighting a veritable civil war against acts of terrorism in the country; moreover, they were fighting the ANC at the borders to Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Botswana, as well as actively engaging in wars against the MPLA in Angola, SWAPO in Namibia, and supporting Renamo (or the MNR) against the FRELIMO in Mozambique. The election of Prime Minister F. W. de Klerk in 1989 marked a turning point: De Klerk initiated talks with Nelson Mandela and eventually released him from prison, and in 1994 the first democratic election was held in the country, whereby the ANC came to power.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a contested term within feminist theory and needs to be addressed. In an attempt to define patriarchy Sylvia Walby describes it as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women,” (her terms ‘structures and practices’ refer to institutions, socialisation and discourse). While this definition of patriarchy may parallel many people’s experiences in daily life, it may also be viewed as a determinist matrix that constructs ‘man’ as the agent and norm, and ‘woman’ as the passive, objectified ‘other.’ Also, ‘patriarchy’ may be regarded as a term that obfuscates women’s complicity in the patriarchal contract. For these reasons, Judith Butler views patriarchy as a reductive term, one that “no longer enjoys the kind of credibility it once did.” Further, like many other scholars, she reacts to its claim of universality: “The very notion of ‘patriarchy’ has threatened to become a universalizing concept that overrides or reduces distinct articulations of gender asymmetry in different cultural contexts.” In other words the term patriarchy may erase differences, and it is therefore more legitimate to speak of patriarchies, in the plural.

60 See Mark Behr, The Smell of Apples (London: Abacus, 1996), which addresses this war in Angola.
61 These are the acronyms that the guerrilla movements are popularly known by. SWAPO, for example, stands for the South West African People’s Organisation. For a thorough history of the fighting between South African forces and the guerrillas in Mozambique and Zimbabwe see Alex Vines, Renamo: Terrorism in Mozambique (London: James Currey, 1991).
64 Butler 45-46.
Walby writes in the tradition of Simone de Beauvoir, who refutes a biological determination of patriarchy. Nevertheless, both find that its historical origin is based on the different biological sexes. While de Beauvoir claims that “in human society nothing is natural and . . . woman, like much else, is a product elaborated by civilization,” paradoxically, she also states that “the triumph of the patriarchate was neither a matter of chance nor the result of violent revolution. From humanity’s beginnings, their biological advantage has enabled the males to affirm their status as sole and sovereign subjects; they have never abdicated this position.” In consequence, de Beauvoir contends, “woman’s place in society is always that which men assign to her; at no time has she ever imposed her own law.” While I accept Walby’s basic definition of patriarchy for the West, and agree with Walby’s and de Beauvoir’s views that the history of patriarchy is based on fundamental biological differences, I disagree with their determinist/reductive formulations that “men oppress” women, or “men assign” a place to women. If only men are seen as agents, women are victimised and objectified. But daily experience contradicts this view: many women do not accept being oppressed, or do not maintain roles ‘assigned’ to them, and most men do not actively/consciously oppress women. Of course, at the time, de Beauvoir’s analysis raised people’s awareness of the patriarchal mode of the system that we, in the West, are implicated in, but, as her theory disregards women’s complicity, Butler’s theory is, in parts, more adequate for my study.

As we are social beings, Judith Butler points out, all gender behaviour is shaped by societal structures, which she calls a “highly rigid regulatory frame,” a frame more or less replicated and represented by all members of society, past and present. This social framework, which shapes the individual, is already in place when the individual enters society. But through action the individual may in time successfully resist and attempt to re-negotiate the framework. In contrast to the deterministic view harboured by Walby and de Beauvoir, Butler’s perspective unveils the complicity of women in the patriarchal contract. In Gender Trouble, Butler describes a societal frame in similar terms to Walby’s societal ‘structures,’ but focuses on the construction, or ‘genealogy,’ of the category of ‘woman’ (or gender) within these structures, to understand how gender is “produced and restrained” by these “structures of power.” The shaping potential of these “highly rigid regulatory frames” is illustrated by her suggestion that they may even explain the biological differences between the sexes. Although I do not concur with this latter idea,

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66 de Beauvoir 82.
67 de Beauvoir 82.
68 Butler 43.
69 Butler 5.
I agree that we are firmly shaped by societal structures, but would add that we do have a given biological body on which the structures work.

Refuting a foundational and fixed notion of identity, Butler further evokes what Walby defines as ‘patriarchy’ by suggesting that “[t]he tacit constraints that produce culturally intelligible ‘sex’ ought to be understood as generative political structures rather than naturalized foundations” and calls forth ‘identity categories’ as “effects of institutions, practices, discourses, with multiple and diffuse points of origin.”70 Avoiding the term ‘patriarchy’ Butler instead designates ‘phallogocentrism’ and ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ as society’s “defining institutions.”71 Thus, Butler opens up a wider implication, namely, that men are not the sole reproducers, or enforcers, of these institutions: all society partakes in reproducing structures/frames that define its subjects in gendered terms. In consequence, if we are all involved in reproducing this framework, because we are not ‘fixed subjects’ but subjects-in-process, we are all also more or less free to resist it:

The “I” who would oppose its construction is always in some sense drawing from that construction to articulate its opposition; further, the “I” draws what is called its “agency” in part through being implicated in the very relations of power that it seeks to oppose. To be implicated in the relations of power, indeed, enabled by the relations of power that the “I” opposes is not, as a consequence, to be reducible to their existing forms.72

In other words, Butler’s discussion explains the individual’s freedom of agency and the limitations imposed by the system, as well as their dynamic interrelations in the form of women’s complicity with the system, for example.

Julia Kristeva, the theoretician this study is most indebted to, refers to patriarchy only in passing. Kristeva is first and foremost a psychoanalyst,73 interested in the subject’s individuation process, and the impact of this process on society. In order to exist in society, she claims, each human being must manage the symbolic breach (more often designated the thetic breach), the step out of the exclusively semiotic (being at one with nature),74 into the

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70 Butler xxix.
71 Butler xxix.
73 Kristeva has written extensively from a psychoanalytical perspective: Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1982), In the Beginning was Love: Psychoanalysis and Faith (1987), Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia (1989), Strangers to Ourselves (1991), and New Maladies of the Soul (1993). Her contribution to the field of psychoanalytical theory was influenced by Jacques Lacan’s theories of language and subjectivity.
74 The semiotic is the pre-verbal phase of existence when the nascent subject is still one with being, before it distances itself from existence to grasp the cultural use of symbols, thereby irrevocably entering the symbolic sphere of existence (two spheres that hence make up our being).
symbolic, where the subject becomes aware of his/her inevitable death—a process which leaves us with a constitution governed by lack.\textsuperscript{75} Relevant to this study, especially to Chapter Three, is also her theory of \textit{sacrifice}. Kristeva finds that most human societies have developed economies of \textit{sacrifice}, often through religion, that help its members to manage the above-mentioned ‘constitutional lack.’\textsuperscript{76} The sacrifice of humans, or animals, in these societies, she argues, functions as a re-enactment of the thetic breach and appeases the individual’s sense of lack, momentarily restoring societal order, or a sense of regained subjective unification.\textsuperscript{77} Sacrifice has an ambiguous function, simultaneously violent and regulatory. For sacrifice designates, precisely, the watershed on the basis of which the social and the symbolic are instituted: the thetic that confines violence to a single place, making it a signifier. Far from unleashing violence, sacrifice shows how representing that violence is enough to stop it and to concatenate an order. Conversely, it indicates that all order is based on representation: what is violent is the irruption of the symbol, killing substance to make it signify.\textsuperscript{78}

More relevant to our discussion of patriarchy here, however, is Kristeva’s idea that, since the semiotic is associated with the mother (as she is close to the infant before and after birth, and during the period of lactation), and the symbolic is associated with the father (who is freer to function in the public sphere), the mother, or woman, in this ritualistic re-enactment of the thetic breach, becomes the optimal object of sacrifice, which, by extension, produces patriarchal structures. Commenting on Kristeva’s theory, Martha J. Reineke suggests that this false generalisation is the nodal point at which patriarchy is established:

When human societies inscribe sexual difference as a resolution of the crisis of an original separation and loss that accompanies the human apprenticeship to language and culture [the symbolic] and under threat of loss and renewed crisis, draw on that difference once again, preferentially invoking women’s bodies in violent resolution of that crisis, \textit{they create patriarchy}. [Emphasis added].\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{75} Julia Kristeva in “Women’s Time,” \textit{The Kristeva Reader}, ed., Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), points out that “the human subject is not \textit{deprived} by lack . . . but is \textit{constituted} by lack” (198).


\textsuperscript{77} Christianity, Kristeva claims, is such a sacrificial economy where Christ’s body is symbolically sacrificed again and again in the ceremony of the Eucharist. Her theories, and Reineke’s explication of them, will be discussed in depth in the final chapter of this study.

\textsuperscript{78} Kristeva, \textit{Revolution in Poetic Language} 75.

How Kristeva’s and Reineke’s understanding of patriarchy as formed by a sacrificial economy may help to explain gendered violence in society will be examined more fully in the final chapter of this study. Now, the focus is more on the unfortunate association of women with the semiotic and of men with the symbolic.

When Butler critiques Kristeva’s theory of the semiotic and the symbolic, she too equates the semiotic with the mother and the symbolic with the father.\footnote{Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble} 101-19.} It is true that Kristeva says that the mother’s body is periodically more readily in contact with the semiotic through her birth experience, but, as both spheres exist in each human being, and both men and women must make the break into the symbolic sphere (without ever losing all contact with the semiotic), it does not follow that the mother’s essence is ‘semiotic.’ And, while Kristeva, following Lacan, intermittently calls the symbolic sphere ‘the law of the father’ because the father, in the West, has dominated the shaping of the symbolic order (and is perhaps often less in contact with the semiotic undercurrents of existence), it does not follow that the father is essentially a ‘symbolic’ being. In her critique of Kristeva, Butler further suggests that “[b]y relegating the source of subversion to a site outside of culture itself, Kristeva appears to foreclose the possibility of subversion as an effective or realizable cultural practice.”\footnote{Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble} 112.} To the contrary, I suggest that the semiotic, the level of being that pre- and coexists with the symbolic and subtly influences it, is the site that ultimately makes subversion of the “rigid foundations” possible. Since female complicity in patriarchy, as Butler suggests, does not necessarily bring about change, in line with Kristeva I contend that the momentary retreat into the semiotic sphere, caused, for example, by rejection, may do so. It is necessary, however, to note that the impact of the semiotic can be either creative or destructive: a resentful retreat that evokes abject feelings can lead to violent action, as is discussed in the final chapter. Nevertheless, patriarchy, through Kristeva’s contribution, is hence stripped of its label of determinacy.

In short, Walby defines patriarchy in terms of male-dominated structures, structures that Butler prefers to regard in terms of a rigid societal framework. Concurring with both, I claim that, if these structures are male-dominated, or patriarchal in mode, which they are in the West (and in many countries influenced by the West) it is possible to talk about a patriarchal framework, or patriarchy. The term patriarchy then only applies to a society that is organised in a patriarchal mode. However, in order to avoid the reductive fallacy, it is necessary to keep two points in mind: a societal mode\footnote{By societal mode, I mean the way in which power, via social structures, is allocated according to gender.} is neither deterministic \textit{per se}, nor is it universal. First, since each individual born into a
patriarchal system becomes implicated in its formation, and, since it is not based on biological necessity, but on the process of individuation, it is possible to influence/subvert its practices. Second, there may be very different kinds of patriarchies varying in modes and degrees of oppression of women, and, therefore, one term may not designate all patriarchal societies. Third, there exist other, equally rigid, societal frames that are not patriarchal in mode. As Signe Arnfred rightly points out, in matrilineal societies such as the Kaonde of Zambia\(^3\) (where kinship terms are neutral, and seniority is more important than sex/gender), and the Makhuwa of northern Mozambique\(^4\) (who do not discriminate in language by having special terms for mother and father), a completely different frame is in place and socially replicated.\(^5\) These latter examples suggest that prior to colonialism several indigenous African cultures were framed by other modes than patriarchy. In South Africa, though, patriarchal systems, as we shall see below, have strong indigenous roots.

**Patriarchies in South Africa**

The view that black women were oppressed by traditional black African patriarchy is not shared by all. “It can in fact be argued,” Walker writes, “that in defying the law as vociferously as they had, African women were looking back to a cultural tradition that had allowed women a great deal more independence and authority than western society considered either ‘natural’ or ‘respectable’ at the time.”\(^6\) This suggests that colonialism and apartheid detrimentally influenced the position of black African women. It further implies that the patriarchal structures of the West were very different from indigenous ones. In Africa, “the Western patriarchalizing gaze . . . [was] a major complication,” Arnfred contends, because it introduced gender distinctions when, perhaps, there were none.\(^7\) She also notes that the concept of ‘woman-as-other,’ for example, is contradicted by African feminist thinkers such as Ifi Amadiume and Oyéronke Oyèwumi, as “their own societies do not give rise to such ideas.”\(^8\) The sociologist Oyèwumi even claims that patriarchy is a foreign structure in Africa: “Colonization, besides being a


\(^6\) Walker 32.

\(^7\) Arnfred 15.

\(^8\) Arnfred 10. Amadiume and Oyèwumi discuss conditions in Western Africa, mainly Nigeria.
racist process, was also a process by which male hegemony was instituted and legitimized in African societies,” and, she writes, “[i]ts ultimate manifestation was the patriarchal state.” 89 Her uncompromising view and Walker’s suggestion above make it necessary to examine patriarchy and some cultural, sociological differences between Western and African patriarchy in depth. Although I do not concur with Oyéwumi that patriarchy was unknown in Africa before colonial times, I partly agree with her view that “[i]ndigenous [social] forms did not disappear, though they were battered, subordinated, eroded, and even modified by the colonial experience.” 90

During imperialism in South Africa, it may be argued that Western patriarchy added a patriarchal layer onto an indigenous patriarchal frame, exacerbating the oppression of black women. In his novel Chaka (1925) Thomas Mofolo describes the black nations at war 91 in the 19th century as extremely patriarchal, where the men ruled by the might of the spear: “Chaka, I tell you,” the witchdoctor Isanusi counsels the mighty king, “there is nothing that is too difficult for a man. If you are a man, and you know how to work with your spear, everything will happen the way you want it. It is through the spear that the brave acquire cattle, it is through it that fame is achieved, and it is through it that kings rule, for he who does not know how to use it, is ruled.” 92 But in the mid-nineteenth century patterns began to change. Pointing out the parallels between T. Shepstone’s administrative politics in Natal in the late 19th century and Rider Haggard’s King Solomon’s Mines (1885), Anne McClintock shows how “a nascent [Western] capitalism penetrated the region . . . disrupted already contested power relations within the homesteads,” and gave effect to “the reinvention of white imperial patriarchy through a legitimizing racial and gender politics.” 93 These politics, McClintock contends further, asserted “a white patriarch in control of a subservient black king,” and “reorganiz[ed] production and reproduction within the black family by usurping the chief’s control of the lives and labour of women,” negating “African women’s sexual and labour power.” 94 As will be discussed below, indigenous women and men contributed to the economy in different spheres, and, since black women’s work was the foundation of the agricultural economy, the imperialist patriarchs regarded them as a force that needed to be controlled, and ‘domesticated.’ This implies that before imperialism black women, though oppressed by indigenous patriarchy, had more

89 Oyéronke Oyéwumi, The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1997) 156.
90 Oyéwumi 156.
91 Mofolo describes the wars between the Zulus and the Matabele during the rule of the legendary King Chaka (1796-1828).
94 McClintock 257.
power than the imperialists bargained for. “Yet we know very little,” McClintock claims, “about how pre-colonial societies were able to subordinate women’s work and as little about the changes wrought on these societies by colonial conquest and the penetration of merchant and mining capital.”

In the early 20th century the British colonists’ lingering Victorian ideals combined with the Boer “Herrenvolk” patriarchy of the Afrikaner people to form the ideological ground of the often extremely patriarchal laws of apartheid. At the same time these discriminatory laws, as we have seen, relied on existing African patriarchal structures. The Boers brought, Tlali says, “[a]nother kind of patriarchy.” South African men during apartheid, she claims, “were made to know that a woman is nothing. It’s not African culture, it’s the system of apartheid. . . . African culture provided for the woman. And she had dignity in the home.” However, at the same time Tlali acknowledges that a lingering “silence” surrounding sexual matters, for example, functions to perpetuate female oppression: “You dare not speak about such things; you keep quiet, that is, according to the African culture,” and, Tlali concludes, “[t]he men took advantage of that.” Tlali’s resistance to patriarchy is therefore at times addressed to the Western patriarchy that informed apartheid and at times to traditional black African patriarchy. Indigenous societal structures in South Africa, as my examination of black women’s writing below shows, were/are unequivocally patriarchal in mode, and the two systems, Western patriarchy and African patriarchy, in combination, had a detrimental effect on the lives of black women.

South African Patriarchies in Black Women’s Writing

There are two reasons that make it necessary to examine the patriarchies in South Africa in depth. First, the boundaries between Western and black African patriarchy are, at times, blurred, which makes it difficult to distinguish between the two, as this study tries to do. Second, the oppressiveness of black African patriarchies is sometimes contested, whereby Western patriarchy in the form of apartheid is blamed for all oppression of black women. The method used here to examine the patriarchies in South Africa, and black African patriarchy in particular, is to investigate in what terms black women describe the African social gender systems they are implicated in. Two influential autobiographies by black women writers reflect African patriarchies in the second half of the 20th century: Ellen Kuzwayo’s *Call Me Woman*

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95 McClintock 233.
96 Cullhed, interview I, 14.
97 Cullhed, interview I, 13.
98 Cullhed, interview I, 11.
(1985) and Mamphela Ramphele’s *A Life* (1995). Characterizing these two works, Desirée Lewis writes, is “a legacy which continues to shape popular perceptions of women-in-the-nation, of women-as-citizens. In their representations of motherhood, the family and marriage, the texts reveal pivotal ways in which women’s citizenship is mediated.” In addition, I draw on Lauretta Ngcobo’s novel *And They Didn’t Die* (1990), illustrating traditional patriarchal mores in rural Natal in the 1960s, and finally Sindiwe Magona’s *Mother to Mother* (1998), which portrays the adolescence and early married life of a young woman. The patriarchal traditions addressed by Kuzwayo, Ramphele, Ngcobo, and Magona, it must be kept in mind, had first been impacted by colonialism and in the 20th century by apartheid. Therefore, according to McClintock, as mentioned above, it is hard and for our purposes not necessary to assess how pristine these traditions were. Interestingly though, the idealistic view of original African patriarchal patterns that Tlali partly cherishes is shared by at least one other black woman writer, namely Ellen Kuzwayo.

In the South African context, according to traditional Zulu philosophy, Axel-Ivar Berglund explains, the godhead, *iNkosi yezulu*, the “Lord-of-the-Sky,” is masculine and at his side there is the Heavenly Queen, *iNkosikazi*, the mother of the Heavenly Princess. A male god rules the universe with a woman at his side, cooking for him. But the godhead also has a twin, the Earth mother, from whom he is inseparable. Most African myths and legends,” Anthonia C. Kalu writes, “place woman at the center, or, at least as essential to the existence of things.” According to the “harmonizing principle inherent in existence,” Kalu further claims, in a non-hierarchical “duality discourse” women are seen not as a “complement to the male, but as a com-

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100 Since this is a literary study I have chosen to rely on material from this field instead of strictly anthropological material as ‘evidence’ of patriarchal structures in place in South Africa. One may, of course, question the use of literature as social documents. I think, however, that the works I have chosen are informed by a will to explain to the reader the circumstances that prevailed in South Africa at this time. The works of all four writers may in this sense be categorised as social documents: Ellen Kuzwayo is a social worker who explicitly sets out to write a social document, taking her own life experiences as a starting point, and Mamphela Ramphele is a medical doctor and social anthropologist with the same motivation. However, two of these works are fiction: Sindiwe Magona’s novel takes the form of a letter written to the mother of Amy Biehl in order that she may better understand the social environment that fostered the boy who killed her daughter, while Lauretta Ngobo’s novel sets out to document the historic women’s resistance to apartheid in Natal in the 1960s; there is no reason to believe that the traditional African mores described in her novel depart from experiences that the author is intimately knowledgeable about.
102 Berglund 63-64.
103 Berglund 34
plementary opposite of the male” [emphasis added], with men in the public sphere of society, organised according to ‘the male principle,’ and women in its domestic sphere organised according to ‘the female principle.’ Thus, in many other African cultures, like the black African cultures in South Africa, although gender-roles were/are rigorously prescribed according to sex, leaving little scope for individual self-expression, in their respective gender roles all people, at least ideally, were ascribed equal respect. Hierarchy, as we shall see, was/is instead often accorded by seniority. Not only elderly men, but also elderly women could/can expect to be revered. As Ellen Kuzwayo writes, “Any adult could instruct any child, and, as youngsters, we carried out instructions or errands without question. Respect for age was the order of the day.” Socially, there is usually a great deal of tension between people who have just met before their age hierarchies have been sorted out.

In her autobiography, Kuzwayo initially does not distance herself from the traditional patriarchal society she describes. As she tells her life story, from a rural childhood to her years of teaching (in an urban context), social work, and political activism during apartheid, Kuzwayo seems to accept a division of gender-roles where men represent the public sphere and women are first and foremost mothers who must feed their children, and who have to organise ‘their’ struggle against apartheid in support of the men, by themselves. Although Kuzwayo shows no awareness of it, her “laudatory naming of strong mothers,” Lewis claims, “is reminiscent of a routine nationalist strategy through which women are ennobled yet simultaneously depoliticised and dehumanised.” Kuzwayo describes how women take the initiative to resist apartheid, recruiting from within their own sphere, but always in deference to the men. Describing the leaders at the historic All Africa Convention in 1937, for example, she comments on how men in executive positions “were chosen on merit by their community, . . . to direct the affairs of the black people.” On the same occasion, she says, Miss Minah Tembeka Soga organised the draft of the women’s resolution: “With the full approval of the Convention, the women organised themselves to stand side by side with their menfolk in the struggle for the advancement and liberation of the African nation in South Africa.”

Complying with patriarchal expectations, Kuzwayo both accepts the gendered life-spheres and insists on reciprocal respect between these spheres. For example, she denies that ‘lobola,’ the bride price, symbolized the barter-
ing of young girls as brides, and claims instead that it was a token of “re-
spect and recognition for the young wife.”110 Also, she gives a respectful
description of African men and talks in loving terms of her grandfather, her
maternal uncle,111 and her “dear, loving” stepfather.112 To her father, “the
civic leader in Pimville . . . [the] chairman of the party,” she accords admira-
tion for civic bravery, and writes: “I have often told myself that I inherited
my tendency to community involvement from my father.”113 On the other
hand, she does not shirk mentioning the abuse she suffered from the hands of
her first husband, calling it “torture” that put her “life at stake:”114 “Day by
day I realised I was being humiliated and degraded, an experience I have in
recent years come to realise is suffered by many wives the world over,
within different races, cultures and religions. At that time I believed I was
being singled out as an individual.”115 However, Kuzwayo does not general-
ise her marriage experience to include other men, but contends that “African
men in rural communities had great respect and regard for their wives, a
situation which has deteriorated in urban areas where sophistication and
materialism have become the pivot around which family life rotates. The
values, mores and standards of old, built on the extended family unit, have
been discarded as antiquated by young and sometimes old couples.”116 In
other words, Kuzwayo insists that an earlier, more benevolent African patri-
archy existed, which, in the urban areas, under Western influence, has ‘dete-
riorated.’

Not until the final chapter of her autobiography, almost as an after-
thought, does Kuzwayo briefly analyse ways in which new gender roles (to
which she does not unequivocally subscribe) are having an impact on soci-
ety. Hereby, she inadvertently and indirectly depicts the traditional form of
patriarchy, which in fact was not quite as benevolent as the one she herself
has suggested:

The changing role of the urban black woman as she makes an increasing con-
tribution towards the family income, even brings in more money than the
husband, has added to the problems of family relationships. This factor hits at
the root of the traditional acceptance of the man as the head of the family,
and is made more complex by the cultural dimension in the black community
where the man has always been accorded a special authority as father and
master, with his word the last in family decisions. Women are now taking a
very firm stand against such behaviour in their husbands, who often still ex-
pect their wives to accept in silence some of their most unacceptable prac-

110 Kuzwayo 255.
111 Kuzwayo 66.
112 Kuzwayo 108.
113 Kuzwayo 113, 114.
114 Kuzwayo 123-27; here she describes the domestic abuse. The specific quotes are from 124,
125.
115 Kuzwayo 124.
116 Kuzwayo 255.
Describing a change in gender relations, Kuzwayo seems to consider that the traditional practices have been reinforced, or alternately have been detrimentally influenced by the apartheid regime. For example, in the chapter “‘Minors’ are Heroines” she mentions the shock she experienced when she found out that the apartheid regime regarded her as a “minor” who needed a man’s permission to apply for a passport. As her husband had recently died she had to ask her son, “someone who usually needed permission from me,” to sign the application—a turn of the tables that she regarded as an insult. Kuzwayo here distinguishes the traditional practice that ascribed authority to women from one that degraded women imposed by apartheid. In connection to this Kuzwayo, giving one more example of the impact of apartheid on patriarchal mores, expresses her pleasure that women at the time of writing have “at last won the right to [again] own their homes . . . a major victory for black women.” Thus, traditional ‘order’ has been re-installed, because, traditionally, even if they did not own it, women ruled the domestic sphere, which Kuzwayo acknowledges: “women took the leading role in hoeing the land and harvesting. Other household duties such as threshing corn, drawing water from the well and collecting wood were also seen as women’s responsibilities.” However, apartheid’s migratory system of labour, and the domestication of millions of black women in white households, she finds, degraded women’s roles and detrimentally cemented the division of labour.

To summarise, according to Kuzwayo’s autobiography, black African patriarchy thrived in South Africa at least until the 1980s. Men held the power of “the last word,” and, as her personal experience bears witness to, some may have resorted to physical force to the point of homicide to implement such authority. Her own experience, however, is not generalised to encompass men at large. Instead, Kuzwayo draws a positive picture of traditional patriarchy and of certain benevolent patriarchs who cared for their families and showed women due respect, claiming that traditional African patriarchal mores have drastically deteriorated under the influence of apartheid.

Discussing her roots, Ramphele describes patriarchal customs in her childhood in less roundabout terms: “Like most of his contemporaries, my grandfather was an authoritarian patriarch.” One symbol of this gendered hierarchy in her childhood home was that, in deference to the men, women and children would sit on the floor while the men and visitors used the few

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117 Kuzwayo 261.
118 Kuzwayo 240.
119 Kuzwayo 261.
120 Kuzwayo 128.
chairs. \textsuperscript{122} “Older men,” she states, “[see] it as their destiny to lead” and to hold the “right to be listened to with little or no questioning.” \textsuperscript{123} Even during discussions about future democracy in South Africa with Nelson Mandela in 1989 Ramphele complains with resignation that “[m]ale dominance is an ethos deeply embedded within African traditional authority structures.” \textsuperscript{124} Moreover, Ramphele attests to “rigid boundaries between male and female roles” in her home, but also to a set hierarchy: for example, at meals, men were fed first, leaving the elderly women and children for last, which was “very frustrating, because sometimes food would run out.” \textsuperscript{125} It is unlikely that these practices were the result of Western influence.

But even in this restricted context, women’s opposition was possible, and, by describing such intractability, Ramphele exposes patriarchy as a target of resistance:

My mother fought many battles within this patriarchal family system. She walked a tightrope as she carved out space for herself to live with dignity within the extended family. She established a delicate balance between challenging those aspects of the many rigid rules about gender roles, lines of authority and the conduct of relations that violated her dignity, and avoiding actions that would undermine the system and thus create anxiety and instability. She faithfully fulfilled her responsibilities as a ngwetsi and a lethari (newly married and young woman in the village)—no mean feat—but she would not be bullied by anyone. Young married women were often reminded that mosadi ke tshwene o lewa mabogo, a woman’s only real value lies in the fruits of her labour, including her reproductive labour. \textsuperscript{126}

Besides oppression by official ‘apartheid’ patriarchy, black African women, Ramphele claims, have traditionally been faced with rigid rules that have curtailed their behaviour, circumscribed their life spheres, and made demands on their productive capacities: “heaven forbid that a woman should shun [her child-bearing] duty,” she writes, “or be unable to discharge it. It was not surprising that most brides spent the entire [wedding] session sobbing uncontrollably.” \textsuperscript{127} Of course, these circumscriptions, for the most part, kept a woman strictly within the domestic sphere and if she ventured outside, as Ramphele did through her political activism, she confronted rejection by her male peers: “As a woman, an African woman at that, one had to be outrageous to be heard, let alone be taken seriously.” \textsuperscript{128}

Ramphele draws a more negative picture of black African patriarchy in South Africa than Kuzwayo. Male dominance is seen as an ethos embedded

\textsuperscript{122} Ramphele 17.
\textsuperscript{123} Ramphele 168.
\textsuperscript{124} Ramphele 203.
\textsuperscript{125} Ramphele 16.
\textsuperscript{126} Ramphele 13-14.
\textsuperscript{127} Ramphele 28.
\textsuperscript{128} Ramphele 71.
within the clan structures, and the domains of women’s lives, devoted to motherhood, are rigidly confined. In contrast to Kuzwayo there is no acknowledgement in her text that the situation was better before apartheid.

The constricting structures that Ramphele suggests shaped black African women’s lives, and that still existed in the rural areas in the 1960s, are illustrated in Ngcobo’s novel *And They Didn’t Die*. Since its depiction of the situation that young women encountered when they embarked on married life adds to our understanding of the patriarchal structures at the time, and shows how the oppression of women was linked to wifehood and motherhood, I have chosen to quote at length from it. Although it was written in 1990 the writer is drawing on her own experiences and knowledge of the social system in place in the 1960s. Strengthening Ramphele’s claim, Ngcobo avers that motherhood was the only life-path open to women, and a woman’s fate/ambition was to get married. In her father’s house (her original clan), young girls enjoyed immense freedom compared to their lives as young married women. Here, Jezile, the newly-wed protagonist, is pregnant and has come home to her parents’ village both to share her joy at her pregnancy, and to enjoy relief from her constrained life as a young wife:

> There was nothing like being home again where she was her old childhood self. She walked bare headed [sic] and laughed as loudly as she liked. She had come home to show off her success as a woman. She had been born to be a mother; every little girl was born to be a mother. Throughout her childhood she had been made aware that although she was well loved by her family, her place was with another family—unknown yet, but that was where she belonged, at her in-laws. She trained hard for the role, learning to do all the chores and to take responsibility for a lot of things. Marriage, complex as it was, was meant to make this possible. The fulfilment of her life depended on a successful marriage and the success of that marriage depended on hard work—work to produce food for those children. Marriage depended on hard work. Marriage was not just a relationship between two people, but a relationship between two families. And it was not the marriage itself, for its own sake—it was the children of the marriage who were of paramount importance. It was not the companionship, the love, the friendship and not the mutual emotional satisfaction of the couple. Yes, of course these mattered where they could survive, but marriage stood or fell on the question of children. And where the expression of emotional love and friendship had been hampered by the long-term absence of men on contractual labour mutual love and friendship died easily, but the marriage survived because the children were there.

> What was difficult to understand was that despite the formidable position of power that being a mother implied, in reality young mothers were truly powerless. Being a mother did not put a woman centrally at the home of her in-laws. She could decide nothing about her life; where to live, where to go, with whom and when. Her position of power as a mother could only be exercised from the outside. Essentially, she was in a permanent state of dependency and estrangement—always under suspicion should anything go wrong. The fear of betraying her in-laws was always there. Not only was she placed
in this isolated position, but there was a conscious effort to distance her from her husband as well. He was encouraged to keep the company of other men and she the company of other women. From the day she arrived at her husband’s home, no one called her by her name. She would be called MaMapanga, MaMajola, MaDuma [names of members of the new clan] or MaSibuya—her father’s name. Losing her name isolated a young married woman emotionally, further confirming her alienation. Her position would only change when she had her first child; she would then be known by her child’s name—NakaJeziile (Mother of Jeziile), NakaDumazile, NakaZenziile—thus living her life through the identity of her father or her child. Her adult identity derived directly from her capacity to be a mother. To reinforce her isolation there was a string of taboos that she had to observe. She had, always, to have her head covered in front of her senior in-laws. She could call none of them by their names, except the very young. Sometimes she could not even call her husband by his first name but would have to identify him as a younger brother’s brother or younger sister’s brother. After the birth of their first child she could then designate him the title, father of so-and-so. And there were foods she could not eat because she was not a full member of the family.¹²⁹

In this social system, a woman had no identity of her own: she was either her father’s daughter, her husband’s wife, or her child’s mother. In addition, towards the end of the quote Ngcobo by implication touches on the custom of hlonipha, a custom spread throughout Southern Africa, whereby the young newly-wed woman was also deprived of her language and ability to communicate freely. ¹³⁰ Hlonipha means ‘to respect’ and entailed that a woman, out of fear of awakening or directing the ancestral ‘shades’ towards her husband and his relatives in the new clan, may not pronounce a single syllable that belonged to any of his or the other relatives’ names, or to their articles of clothing or personal property. In other words, she must substitute every word that held a syllable that belonged to these senior members’ names or personal belongings with another word. This resulted in an intricate navigation between forbidden words and, of course, dire inhibition on the fluency of her speech. Usually, a sister-in-law was allotted the task of teaching the young bride this new way of speaking, and giving her substitutive words to use. However, as Ngcobo hints at above, not only was the young daughter-in-law expected to respect the senior members linguistically, she was also expected, as R. Finlayson writes, “to avoid them physically.”¹³¹ For women who refused to hlonipha there were “threats of severe punish-

¹²⁹ Ngcobo 55-56.
¹³⁰ R. Finlayson, “Women’s Language of Respect: isihlonipho sabafazi,” Language in South Africa, ed., Rajend Mesthrie (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), states that hlonipha is/was practised among “certain southern Bantu-speaking people, more specifically Nguni and Southern Sotho-speaking women” (279). The Nguni languages are a group of languages comprising Zulu, Xhosa, Swati, Ndebele, Sesotho, or Southern Sotho, which therefore implicates the majority of the black people in South Africa.
¹³¹ Finlayson 283.
ment, such as baldness, barrenness and other possible consequences,” for example, being ostracised from the community. 132 In principle this custom of respect for one’s seniors also applied/s to men but, Finlayson asserts, “only in exceptional cases do men hlonipha.” 133 It is a custom on the decline, and, while it still exists in rural areas, is no longer practised in urban areas. 134 Interestingly, perhaps because it gives men advantages over women, there seems to be a male interest in upholding the custom, since, as Finlayson claims, “it has been found that in some nuclear families, it is often the husband who will teach his wife how to hlonipha.” 135 This supports the idea that hlonipha has functioned, and perhaps still functions, to oppress women and re-enforce patriarchy. It may, at least, still have a lingering influence on the gender hierarchy.

In Mother to Mother Sindiwe Magona does not mention the word hlonipha, but does show some effects of the gender-hierarchy. Portraying the position of a young girl, Mandisa, and her life as a newly wed wife in the home of her parents-in-law, she outlines patriarchal traditions that support Ngcobo’s and Ramphele’s views that black African patriarchy oppressed, or oppresses, black women. For years after puberty Mandisa is subjected to meticulous and degrading inspections of virginity, performed monthly by her own mother to assure the men of the clan that the girl has not been “jumped into”, 136 “[i]f you don’t want me to see you, I’m calling your fathers to come and do it themselves,” 137 her mother threatens her. Despite these inspections, Mandisa becomes pregnant out of wedlock, and the ensuing “marriage negotiations,” 138 we are told, take place between the patriarchs who are the spokespersons of the two negotiating clans. From Mandisa’s clan arrive “three men, my uncles, . . . the two Father’s brothers: Middle Father and Little Father, . . . Malume, Uncle-Who-is-Mother’s-Brother,” who are met by “[t]hree young men . . . and an older gentleman.” 139 Later, on Mandisa’s arrival in her husband’s home, she is taken care of by her new ‘sisters’ whose duty it is to initiate her. She must pretend innocence in all matters pertaining to married life and shed tears lest she be branded an umavel’

132 Finlayson 282. Moreover, she writes, “The newly married woman is not allowed to treat this custom lightly, and is subjected to severe public shame should she ignore the rules laid down for her. The forces exerted by public opinion are a very important deterrent in upholding these rules, as one may be ostracised from one’s community” (284).
133 Finlayson 280.
134 To qualify this claim Finlayson writes: “In many of the rural areas researched it appears that there are three distinct categories of hlonipha users—the older group, who still hlonipha and strictly uphold all the customs; the middle group, who have a partial retention of the hlonipha vocabulary; and the younger set, who hardly hlonipha at all, and when they do, include many words of English and Afrikaans origin” (291).
135 Finlayson 291.
136 Sindiwe Magona, Mother to Mother (Cape Town: David Philip, 1998) 112.
137 Magona 98.
138 Magona 136.
139 Magona 124-25.
esazi, one who is “a born-knowing.” Immediately stripped of her own clothes and forced to wear clothes chosen for her by her new clan, she is also given a new name. Mandisa is named Nohehake meaning “an exclamation of utter surprise at some incredible, unimaginable monstrosity, some hitherto unheard of dreadfulness”—a name obviously intended to mock her. Even her child, born out of wedlock, is given a new name. In other words, from the start all of Mandisa’s markers of identity are taken away from her. Furthermore, as an umakoti, a young wife being initiated into the clan, Mandisa, like Jezile in Ngcobo’s novel, is forced to do all the household chores: “[a]ll that work they made me do . . . just killed me.” She gets up at four in the morning to prepare breakfast for everyone and is the last to bed, is never allowed to rest during the day but must steal cat-naps when she is nursing her child. She receives no money and can hardly feed her child. When Mandisa reminds her father-in-law that, in the marriage negotiations with her clan, he had promised that she be allowed to continue her education, she is wary of how to approach “this man, who wielded so much power over my little life.” Talking to him she must lower her eyes in respect and must defer to his decision, although he almost predictably decides to go back on his promise. Mandisa’s mother’s comment to her own situation: “I do as I’m told . . . [t]hat is what my father taught me,” sums up this patriarchal context.

As these four women writers attest, African patriarchy in South Africa entailed set gender roles; men and women had different life spheres altogether, which affirms Kalu’s “duality discourse.” Contrary to Kalu’s claim of ‘complementary’ and mutually respected roles for men and women, however, these roles, at least during most of the 20th century, were hierarchised to the effect that men wielded power over women’s and children’s lives, whereas women, as mothers, only had restricted power within the domestic sphere. The children (and the women) were ultimately regarded as the property of the husband’s clan. As Ramphela writes, “the children belonged to their fathers,” including also the father’s brothers, whom Magona calls the “Middle Father” and the “Little Father.” Thus, the women were kept more or less as hostages in their husband’s clan. On the issue of hierarchy, however, Kuzwayo vacillates, at times suggesting that the hierarchy was an effect of apartheid. In line with Ngcobo, Ramphela and Magona, I find instead that, although African patriarchy at several points was reinforced by apartheid law, which also regarded women and children as the property of the

140 Magona 133.
141 Magona 135.
142 Magona 138.
143 Magona 142.
144 Magona 130.
145 Ramphele 197.
146 Magona 124.
father and his clan, this oppressive hierarchy, by and large, existed prior to the apartheid laws.

However, since colonial times the African patriarchal system has been inter-linked with Western patriarchy, and its affiliation with Western capitalism, “rooted in the division between private or domestic labour and social or collective labour,” is an unmistakable reinforcement. Cock writes:

Capitalism in South Africa inherited a sex-based division of labour and sex relations of property and authority, together comprising a system of sexual domination. These were incorporated and reshaped within the capitalist system of production in South Africa and became active components of it. Regardless of its pre-capitalist origins, therefore, the system of sexual domination in [the country] must be seen as generated and determined in its specific forms and functions by the system of production and class structure of which it now forms a part.147

It is this new version of black African patriarchy we must be looking at in the 20th century, since pre-colonial traditions are not preserved in any pristine form. The examination of women’s writing above suggests that there were/are distinct traditional black African patriarchal structures, such as the clan-system and the hierarchical, rigid gender roles, which differ from contemporaneous Western structures. These two patriarchies in place in South Africa may be regarded as parallel structures, or, in Butler’s words, parallel ‘rigid formations.’ Although the Western social structure has been politically hegemonic, the African social structure co-existed and inter-acted with it historically. However, due to the spread of the Black Consciousness ideology in the 1980s, and the influence of Western feminism and demands for change voiced by black women activists, such as Miriam Tlali, this form of traditional African patriarchy has begun to change. Literary evidence of this change is found, for instance, in several short stories by black male writers published in 1995 that both thematise and evince resistance to patriarchal structures.148

147 Cock 241.
148 Basali: Stories By and About Women in Lesotho, ed., K. Limakatso Kendall (Pietermaritzburg: U of Natal P, 1995). This collection contains mostly stories written by women. However, the stories that engage with the topic of male abuse of women are written by the few male authors in the collection. In Mzamane Nhlapo’s “Give Me a Chance” sexual abuse is mentioned, as well as patriarchy, and in Inhahaneng Tsekana’s “How She Lost Her Eye” female circumcision, and the custom of ritual killing of young girls for valuable body parts, is addressed. Also Mapheleba Lekhetho’s “The Decision to Remain” concerns domestic abuse and the role of patriarchy.
Critical Narrative and Structure

Before giving an overview of my thesis I will briefly describe the theorists I aim to use and clarify my own theoretical position. Mikhail Bakhtin, an anti-Hegelian influenced by neo-Kantianism, based his ideas of existence and language on ‘the principle of dialogue.’ Emphasising the particularity and situatedness of both the self and language, he regarded the self as a non-transcendent entity, shaped by lived experience in constant dialogue with the Other. Although language and self exist in order to mean, Bakhtin views meaning as multifarious; there can be no unitary meaning; instead, because of a necessary multiplicity in human perception due to our different subject positions, difference must be accepted as a condition of existence. Moreover, he regards the language process as constantly in dialogue with the socio/political context, and vice versa, that is, society is in turn shaped by language.149

I share Bakhtin’s view that language and the self are rooted and shaped by social interaction, by people in constant dialogue with one another shaping and being shaped by their context. Also, I agree with the idea that each language performance is unique, because, although language always exists before us, the context, and we ourselves, imbue it with meaning.150 In other words, Bakhtin regards meaning as partially relational, that is, meaning partly depends on by whom and where an utterance is made. But, precisely because language pre-exists the self, and is shaped dialogically, it is not relational enough to become meaningless. This explains why we can take part in a dialogue with others, in present time, as well as over time. As social beings we subordinate our own will in order to be able to create meaning through language.

I also align myself with Kristeva’s theory of the semiotic and the symbolic, mentioned above, whereby she explains the individuation process. Building on ideas of Jacques Lacan, René Girard, and Mary Douglas, Kristeva outlines her semiotics as the basis of a theory of sacrifice. Since she hereby posits the development of human subjectivity as a foundation for the understanding of violence between humans, her discussion and terminology are fruitful for my study, which explores the unfolding discourse on gendered violence in Tlali’s works, where abuse is portrayed as sacrifice. Also, I have drawn heavily on Martha J. Reineke’s explication of Kristeva’s theory of sacrifice in Sacrificed Lives (1997),151 since she develops vital aspects of

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150 Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, translated and edited by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999) 183-84. This is the ‘principle of dialogue’ mentioned by Holquist, referred to above.
Kristeva’s theory by pointing out how it is applicable not only to the individual level, but also to the social level.

Chapter One, “Novelization in Muriel at Metropolitan,” relies on Kristeva’s explanation, in Revolution in Poetic Language (1984), of how resistance can foster change in art in general and in literary conventions in particular. According to her, rejection evokes negativity, which forces a new thesis, a process that she regards as a motor of renewal.\textsuperscript{152} This chapter also explores the genealogy of Muriel: an examination of the original typescript of the novel reveals how rejection is applicable to, and has influenced, Tlali’s writing in the direction of opposition to the literary conventions of the time. Borrowing a concept from Bakhtin, I have called this strategy novelization, which refers to the generic evolvement from the epic mode to the novelistic mode. Even though Bakhtin studied Western literature, I find his theory of the development of the novel in Europe, in his essays “Epic and Novel” and “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse,”\textsuperscript{153} applicable also to the process of appropriation of the novel in the African context. In South Africa, this ‘appropriation,’ or change from epic to novel, has followed a similar direction as in the West.\textsuperscript{154} Therefore, Bakhtin’s analysis of the novelization process is deployed to show how Muriel incorporates elements that resemble this process, confirming Tlali’s contribution to the shaping of the black Anglophone South African novel. Besides foregrounding Muriel’s novelistic elements, I also demonstrate how these elements resist patriarchal attitudes in black male writing. For example, one element of the novel that Bakhtin isolates is that the novel is grounded in personal experience,\textsuperscript{155} and, since Tlali’s novel is based on the personal experience of being a self-assertive woman, the self-assertive narrator resists the patriarchal value that women should not speak up in public.

The second chapter, “Dialogism in Amandla!,” explores Tlali’s novel use of fragmentation. Several critics have regarded this fragmentation as resistance to the conventional unified hegemonic Western novel. While I partly share this view, I also claim that Tlali uses this technique to resist patriarchy. By juxtaposing an idiosyncratic, double-voiced discourse pertaining mainly to the female community, which I have called a domestic discourse, and

\begin{itemize}
  \item Kristeva 172.
  \item Novelistic narrative elements, as opposed to epic elements, have existed in Africa in oral form (especially among women story-tellers), and, therefore, while the novel can never be regarded as having been ‘invented’ anywhere but in the West, it is still fair to put the degree of appropriation of the novel into question. Writing her first novel Tlali, of course, appropriates the Western novel, but she also incorporates novelistic elements, certain narratological elements of the orature, which contribute to its novelization. Moreover, since the novel in the epic mode was appropriated by black writers before Tlali introduced the contemporary novel, this order parallels the chronology of Bakhtin’s itinerary for the novel. Tlali’s novel, thus, in its novelistic essence, as we shall see, subverts the epic mode.
  \item Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” The Dialogic Imagination 13, 16.
\end{itemize}
genres that were used by male writers, Tlali generates a dialogue between them that creates a subtext of resistance to patriarchy. Bakhtin acknowledges the possibility of having discourses “interrelat[e] dialogically.”156 Also, ‘double-voicedness,’ developed by Bakhtin in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics,157 implies that one voice in the text may be ‘doubled,’ that is, given two directions to form a subtext. The subtexts thus created in Amandla! critique certain modern patriarchal practices, such as young men’s abandonment of their families, while at the same time cherishing others, such as the traditional clan structure where women’s and children’s needs were catered for. This chapter analyses the dialogues between the different genres, in sections such as “The Domestic Discourse and the Action Thriller” and “The Heroic Tale and Political Rhetoric,” to illustrate that the subtext that emerges from this dialogue subverts patriarchy.

The third and final chapter, “Developing a Sacrificial Discourse on Gendered Violence,” discusses Tlali’s most thematic resistance to patriarchy and how it is made possible by the narrative strategies that I have termed whispering and distancing. In a specific, subdued discourse she addresses issues of gendered violence and suggests conciliatory aspects of this violence that I call sacrificial, using Kristeva’s terminology. Her address of gendered violence is initiated in Amandla! and persists throughout the rest of her oeuvre to date: it surfaces in a few of her short stories, both in the collection Mihloti (1984) and in Footprints in the Quag (1989), and also in her only, unpublished play in English, “Crimen Injuria,” performed in Holland in 1986.158 Gendered violence keeps women in subordinate positions vis-à-vis men and is therefore one main feature of patriarchy, perhaps even as suggested, its nodal point. Within the context of Kristeva’s theory of sacrifice I explore the narrative strategies deployed and examine Tlali’s discourse to show how it unveils the sacrificial aspect of gendered violence. My analysis shows that the narrator ascribes to black men’s shattered subjecthood their violent attempts to regain a sense of subjectivity, which they do by repetitively and compulsively sacrificing the well-being of black women. Thus, in this final chapter, Tlali’s discourse on gendered violence is shown to resist not only oppression by black African patriarchy, but black African patriarchy as it has been magnified by the oppressive apartheid regime.

Since I regard fiction as an author’s conscious attempt to convey meaning, making use of literary devices that may change and develop over time, my overall plan is to discuss Tlali’s writings in chronological order. The

157 Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 185.
158 “Crimen Injuria” has been translated into Dutch by Anna Laming and performed in Leyden, Holland, by the Baobab Theatergroep in 1986 and 1987. A forty-five minute video-tape of the performance can be acquired through www.onroep.nl. On my first visit with Miriam Tlali in 2001 she gave me a copy of the play. However, she does not permit me to use it in my thesis.
third chapter, however, departs somewhat from this intention: first, it takes one step back to re-examine *Amandla!*, now from the aspect of gendered violence, before going on to discuss several short stories, among which at least “Detour into Detention” may have been written prior to the publication of *Amandla!*. 
CHAPTER ONE

Novelization in *Muriel at Metropolitan*

“[I]n South Africa, the aspirant African female writer has still to struggle to remove the cobwebs of tradition, custom, and the colonial mentality . . . She has to figure out for herself how to circumvent all male chauvinists who are likely to lash out at her as if she were a challenging force encroaching and violating the sanctity of their exclusive domain.”—Miriam Tlali.

**Introduction**

Several characteristics distinguish *Muriel at Metropolitan* (1975) from other Anglophone black writing published in South Africa in the 1970s. It was created by a woman at a time when black prose had largely been produced by men, and for the first time in South African black fiction the eponymous narrator is a woman. Unlike the women depicted in the rhetoric of nationalism found in much earlier writing, Muriel is not intended as a symbol of the land, and she makes use of a popular idiom. Furthermore, *Muriel* is set in contemporaneous time, which in itself is remarkable as black prose from this period, as discussed above, mainly comprised autobiographies or novels written in the historical or epic mode. And, at a time when the major indigenous black literary medium of protest was poetry or drama, Tlali wrote a novel. But not only does *Muriel* resist the generic traits of the black, dominantly male tradition, it also thematically opposes patriarchal attitudes. In the 70s, when black women, as we have seen, were expected to stay within the domestic sphere,

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161 Sol T. Plaatje’s novel *Mhudi* (1930; Jeppestown: Ad Donker, 1989) is narrated by an omniscient narrator; only briefly does the eponymous protagonist narrate her own experiences to the protagonist Ra-Thaga (37-47).
162 Head’s and Jabavu’s novels were both produced and published outside of the country. Still, Tlali’s and their texts seem to share a generic difference to the black male writing produced in South Africa at this time.
Muriel is a modern, outspoken, politically aware protagonist/narrator who boldly positions herself in the public sphere.

My aim is to explore the intricately linked generic, narrative, and thematic strategies of resistance to patriarchy manifest in *Muriel*. Relying on Bakhtin’s concept of *novelization*, that is, the process whereby the narrative conventions and the thematic aspects specific to the novel evolve, and employing his definition of *novelistic* elements, I show that *Muriel*’s incorporation of such elements constitutes a deliberate mark of *difference* to the conventions favoured by male writers and that these traits can be read as resistance to patriarchal values connected to these conventions, and, hence, to patriarchy. 163 But, not only does *Muriel* resist patriarchal values, it also contributes to the process of novelization in South Africa, and thus ultimately helps pave the way for the breakthrough of the black South African novel in the 1980s. Neither *Muriel*’s resistance to patriarchy, nor its generic contribution, has been duly recognized by previous critics.

Early reviewers like Lionel Abrahams, William Pretorius, and Jane Mkhonza164 do not mention *Muriel*’s resistance to patriarchal values. Instead, they read the novel as focussing exclusively on race relations. However, Pretorius also aptly notes a theme that indicates “the breakdown of order implicit in the tribal system, and . . . the formation of a new and homogenous society.”165 This concern with the tribal system, as will be explored below, is part of the novel’s resistance to patriarchal values. Further, Abrahams perceptively discerns the relative novelty of the depictions of everyday life and “ordinary” life experiences in *Muriel*, traits that differ from the dominant tradition.166 Several critics, though, have in fact recognized *Muriel*’s resistance to patriarchy. For instance, Lauretta Ngcobo hints at its oppositional stance: with *Muriel*, she claims, Tlali “struck out bold and fearless” not only against apartheid, but also “against the dominance of male writing which had attended black literature from the very beginning.”167 Further, recognizing *Muriel*’s concern with gender and the tension this generates in the text, Andrea Muhlebach writes: “gender—and race—are negotiated as two heterogeneous concepts that are at times very problematically linked.”168 Also pointing to tensions in the text that show “a writer grappling with her positioning as a black woman,”169 Pumla Gqola suggests that *Muriel* is a “simultaneous

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168 Muhlebach 81.
169 Gqola 95.
commentary on race and gender,” and notes that the text “constantly questions societal norms that prescribe behavioural patterns for black women.” However, no critic has to date fully examined the generic or narrative strategies deployed in Muriel to oppose patriarchy.

As Muriel writes back to the black African literary tradition dominated by men, it is necessary to explore this tradition in depth, which I do in the next section. Initially, however, when considering Tlali’s generic contribution, it is important to note that the novel as a fictive genre was not a favoured form in black South African writing in the 1970s, or earlier. “[N]o continuous tradition of black novel writing existed inside the country,” writes Kelwyn Sole in 1993 about the 1980s, and “many of the novels produced previously had been written in the vernacular and designed for consumption in Bantu Education schools.” Further, he claims, that while the black writer Mbulelo Mzamane’s view in 1977 that the black writer “simply cannot publish an original, authentic novel” in South Africa” is “ overstated,” it nevertheless indicates “a type of thinking prevalent among politically radical black writers in the early days of Black Consciousness.” Though Sole’s terminology may be intended to tone down Mzamane’s negative attitude to black capabilities, I still find that both Sole and Mzamane here overlook Tlali’s novel Muriel at Metropolitan.

From the 1950s, instead of the novel, the prose form that rapidly became popular in Anglophone black writing in South Africa was autobiography. First on the scene, and written in South Africa, is Ezekiel Mphahlele’s Down Second Avenue (1959), where Mphahlele retains his own name and tells his life story beginning with his first childhood memories and concluding just before he left South Africa for Nigeria in 1957. Next is Bloke Modisane’s Blame Me On History (1963) which will be discussed below. Others were both written and published in exile, such as Todd Matshikiza’s Chocolates for My Wife (1961), Naboth Mogkatle’s The Autobiography of an Unknown South African (1971), and Joyce Sikhakhane’s history-cum-autobiography A Window on Soweto (1977). These autobiographies, it may be argued, constitute a new phase in the African literary tradition of transcending the collective self (intrinsic to African philosophy and manifest in the oral tradition) to valuing the individual self. However, by creating fiction, inspired by her own experience, as we shall see, Tlali takes this trend one step further.

To clarify how difference can be seen as resistance, this chapter initially relies on Kristeva’s use of the term rejection, and her appropriation of the Hegelian concept negativity, which she combines into a theory that proposes an explanation of change in language and literary conventions. Rejection, and the reaction to rejection, which is negativity, she argues, constitute one

170 Gqola 94.
171 Gqola 87.
172 Sole 270, 271.
“motility,” that is, one motor of change in the symbolic order of language. A voice rejected, in Miriam Tlali’s case either censored by the apartheid regime or marginalised/suppressed by patriarchy, may evoke feelings of negativity that spark off new literary traits. Disclaiming the negative connotations of the term negativity and stressing its dialecticism, Kristeva contends that because rejection “generate[s] the semiotic function,” this results in negativity, which is set up “in conjunction with the symbolic function.” Subsequently, negativity fuelled by the semiotic sphere, rather than inducing “a logic of repetition,” forces “the symbolic function’s renewal.” For Tlali, the silence prescribed for women by patriarchy and by apartheid may therefore result in difference, that is, an avoidance of generic and/or narrative devices deployed by earlier writers. In other words, expecting rejection by the symbolic order dominated by men, a writer may choose to negate existing literary conventions by avoiding them, by inverting them, or, introducing new ones in their place. I argue that the form of Muriel is largely constructed as difference aimed at opposing the conventions of male black literature, inducing change in the genre conventions of black South African writing.

It is fair to surmise that Miriam Tlali expected rejection from the hegemonic symbolic sphere of the apartheid regime, and, as mentioned in the introduction, from the patriarchal symbolic sphere of her own community. As already discussed, black women at this time were not expected to opt for a place in the domain of literature, and Muriel at Metropolitan is the first novel by a black woman to be published in the country. However, in African culture in South Africa women were not excluded from narration: in the oral tradition both men and women participated. But, since men and women traditionally belonged to different sections of society, the oral tradition is/was likewise compartmentalized into a male and a female sphere. “[Oral] storytelling,” Hofmeyr notes, “is permanently embedded in sexual division.”

173 Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language 119.
174 Kristeva 118.
175 Kristeva 172.
176 Women were silenced by patriarchy and men, and as we shall see, by the apartheid laws of censorship. Paradoxically, in the space created by the banning of black male writers, Tlali resisted patriarchal restrictions as well as the threat of censorship by the regime and began to write her first novel. This discussion will be continued below.
177 Isabel Hofmeyr, “We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told”: Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand UP, 1993) 30. In Chapter 1, "‘Stories Go Hand in Glove with Building a Man and a Woman:’ Household, Gender and Oral Storytelling,” Hofmeyr claims that heroic narrative belongs to the male oral storytelling tradition, while dinonwane, or female storytelling, is not “as obviously gender-specific as the male stories of warfare and hunting, the skill of telling this type of story is seen as essential to the female craft of socialising very young children, both male and female. . . . Male storytelling, on the other hand, was seen as more important, partly because of its content which dealt with the ‘real’ world, partly because of its more sober performance, but also because it was enacted in a prestigious, public, male space and concerned itself with the socialisation of men” (30).
This compartmentalization seems to be the case in other parts of Africa too. In her study of the verbal art of women in Niger, Mali, and Senegal, Aissata Sidikou points out the irony that, while women are always “heard and continue to be heard in their societies by playing the triple role of entertainers, educators, and critics,” they are restricted to the female zone and marginalized in the public zone. She writes:

Many historically famous women who were queens, warriors, and politicians fell into oblivion because their positions and achievements were simply minimized or forgotten by patriarchal history and record-keeping, whether through male griots or the colonial political system. Often, in cases where such a woman was briefly mentioned, the argument was that she as an individual was just special or eccentric because she had ventured into an area where men are normally expected to be.

Subsequently, venturing into the male dominated public sphere of literature, at a time when all thitherto active black writers had been banned by the Government, Tlali certainly anticipated such dual rejection. This expectation, I suggest, may have inspired her not to adopt the conventional genres deployed by male writers. Drawing on new material, and material hitherto neglected by literary scholars, this chapter, presents the genealogy of *Muriel* and examines its mutation as a result of the publishing process. Further, an exploration of the typescript of the novel, as we will see, lends additional substance to my argument that *Muriel* resists patriarchy.

Rejection, or the mere expectation of it, I claim, forced Tlali to resort to strategies of negotiation to find a means of belonging in the symbolic order, that is, coming to grips with the dominant discourses. Such a need to negotiate rejection surfaces in *Muriel* as an awareness in the text of a woman’s circumscribed space. The narrator’s vacillation between her authority as a narrator and her subservience to male authority results in tension. One example is the tension created in *Muriel* by the traditional African patriarchal norm stipulating that a woman may never openly question a man’s morals or his judgement, in other words, that a man’s word overrules a woman’s. The narrator here shows an awareness of a black woman’s need to resort to intricate, covert strategies of resistance to negotiate the dictates of the black African patriarchal structures that have shaped her. The protagonist Muriel works at a firm in Johannesburg, Metropolitan, that sells electrical appliances, where Douglas, the mechanic, devises a scheme to swindle their boss. He suggests her co-operation. Muriel, responsible for all the records kept at the office, reflects on his scheme, but finds that it violates her ethical values: “He was determined to make his case. I was equally determined to make him..."
see the other side” (83). To comply with patriarchal notions, however, she feigns agreement with his plan and plays along with him: “I could bring a customer this very week” (85). But as she may not openly question a man’s behaviour she reflects, “I would have to think of a way out of this . . . to procrastinate” (85). Thus, in order to delay Douglas’ plan, and knowing that a white co-worker at Metropolitan, Mrs Stein, never takes a holiday, Muriel suggests that “the best time [to set the plan in motion] would be when Mrs Stein is on holiday.” Douglas, however, interprets this to mean that Mrs Stein is finally planning to go on holiday:

‘You know, I thought you couldn’t use your brain, like most women, but now I can see that you can think. I never thought of that. I have worked here for eight years and in all that time I have never known that woman [Mrs Stein] ever going on Holiday’ . . . Douglas was happy, because we had agreed on a deal, a lucrative one. He went over to Gants, bought two cold drinks and offered me one. Although I had agreed, I knew in my heart that I would never be able to go on with it. (Emphasis added) (85)

Patriarchal expectations then deny Muriel the possibility of refusing Douglas’ demands, and instead, on the plot level, she devises deceptive strategies to outwit his suggestions. Finally Muriel resigns: “I did not know what to say. I tried to look for any flaws in the scheme, but it all seemed to be a perfect crime which could not fail” (85). Despondent, she realises that circumstances, or patriarchal structures, are forcing her to go along with Douglas’ scheme against her own convictions, which creates tension. This tension reveals the restricted space within patriarchy from which a black woman may assert herself.

Another example of tensions in the text is when Muriel introduces into the otherwise realistic text a jarring note of non-realism. In a quarrel with one of her white co-workers, Mrs Kuhn, who calls her “baboon,” “chimpanzee,” and “monkey,” Muriel, risking dismissal from her post for talking back to the white woman, nevertheless abandons all restraint:

I might as well let them know what I thought of them. I was going to force it down their throats and let it sink. I was going to let them have it!

Mrs Kuhn turned to Mrs Stein and said, ‘She thinks she is like us, you know.’

I answered, ‘That’s an insult, Mrs Kuhn. I don’t think I’m like you. I don’t want to be like you. I am very proud of what I am. You’re too small, too full of hatred. You are always occupied with issues that do not really matter!’ (70)

A reader who is familiar with the everyday restrictions imposed on black women by apartheid and patriarchy at the time would find such outspoken-
ness unrealistic, more in line with wishful thinking. Nevertheless, this scene functions to expose the white women’s complicity in the patriarchal ideology of apartheid and its silencing of black women’s voices. Should apartheid and its patriarchal structures allow black women to voice their opinions publicly, as Muriel does here, the text suggests, they would forcefully do so. The narrator’s frankness thus functions to unmask an oppressive context (this time the apartheid context), thereby acknowledging women’s restricted space within the dominating orders of patriarchy and apartheid.

In sum, tensions in *Muriel* reveal the narrator’s awareness of the impediments imposed on black women in South African society at the time. This chapter aims to show how *Muriel*’s resistance to these obstacles promotes the black novel in South Africa by introducing certain novelistic traits, and how these traits at the same time function to resist South African patriarchies. I will first provide a brief overview of the black male literary tradition, from which Tlali marks her own writing as different, taking black women’s writing on the continent, and its resistance to male conventions, as my starting point. The following sections focus on *Muriel at Metropolitan*. “Genealogy and Mutation” compares the published editions of *Muriel* to the original typescript. The section “Novelization” discusses Bakhtin’s analysis of the process of novelization and examines the genre’s narrative and thematic traits. Against this background *Muriel*’s generic resistance of difference is analysed: its incorporation of novelistic narrative traits is explored and is shown to simultaneously subvert patriarchal values. Two sections examine the differences to the male literary tradition that are not linked specifically to genre, for example, the text’s avoidance of escapism and the ‘spectacular,’ while the two final sections explore how *Muriel* evades the Mother Africa trope and rejects prescribed gender roles.

**The Black Male Literary Tradition**

In order to posit *Muriel at Metropolitan* as resistance based on difference, and, as it is here assumed that male writing mirrors traditional patriarchal values, it is necessary not only to examine the male black literary tradition’s use of form, but also its patriarchal traits. And, to establish a framework for the analysis, I draw on earlier critics’ observations of the patriarchal traits of black male writing on the continent and their examinations of black women

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180 Another example of this can be found in *Muriel*’s last chapter but one called “One Human Heart for Another.” Here, especially from 177ff, Muriel speaks out in answer to the white ladies’ prejudices that in South Africa “all racial groups were happy and living with each other in harmony” (177). Muriel informs them of the restrictions of movement for blacks under apartheid, about the farce of self-government in the Bantustans and comments to herself: “I was saying things they had never heard before” (179).
writers’ relationship to it. I will begin by focussing on Africa at large before singling out South Africa.

That men’s and women’s writing differs in some respects and that women’s writing resists male writing is true about literature from many parts of Africa. Studying writing mainly from West and East Africa, Florence Stratton finds that the male writers “counter colonial misrepresentations with valorizations of indigenous [patriarchal] traditions,” while the women writers “are as critical of those traditions as they are of colonialism.”181 One effect, Stratton notes, is that rather than write back to the colonial West, as the men do, “the primary engagement” of black women’s texts is “with the African male literary tradition,” because women writers have “responded to the reactionary gender ideology embedded there.”182 This view is shared by Gloria Chukukere: “the male writers’ perspective,” she claims, “has to a large extent, influenced the female writer’s reaction [to the male tradition].” 183 In other words, male writers more often write back to the West, while women writers write back to male, African texts. So, when Tlali deploys a technique of difference to male writing, it is not unique within black African women’s literature.

To consider Muriel as textual resistance to the black male literary tradition, I find it useful first to examine Stratton’s and Chukukere’s analyses of literature by male writers in Africa more closely. The following gendered narrative traits, Stratton claims, may be found in the male tradition: 1) the embodiment of Africa in the figure of a woman, 2) the portrayal of women as passive and voiceless, and 3) the romanticization and idealization of motherhood.184 The symbolic use of Mother Africa, Stratton clarifies, is “one of the most enabling tropes of ‘post-colonial’ male domination as well as of colonialism,”185 and the portrayal of women as symbols, she contends, serves “to rationalize and therefore to perpetuate inequality between the sexes.” Further, the idealization of motherhood, she argues, is “a means of masking women’s subordination in society.”186

In her study of the depiction of women in African fiction at large, Chukukere has identified similar phenomena: a symbolic portrayal of women as Mother Africa, stereotypical depictions of women as either mothers or whores, women as submissive and passive objects instead of active subjects, and the idealization of motherhood. For example, commenting on Leopold Senghor’s writing, Chukukere finds that he raises the ideal of motherhood

182 Stratton 11.
184 Stratton 172.
185 Stratton 172.
186 Stratton 172.
“to metaphysical proportions,” and that his “image of a mother is transcendental, representing a life force that reflects the mythic cycle of birth and regeneration. The mother thus becomes a symbol of Africa.”187 In male African fiction, then, women are portrayed in stereotypical patriarchal terms, often symbolizing the land, and motherhood is idealized.

While I endorse Stratton’s and Chukukere’s claims about black African women’s writing and the male literary tradition in Africa, I do not subscribe to Stratton’s sweeping view, also criticised by Susan Andrade and Kenneth Harrow,188 that African male writers necessarily subscribe to patriarchy, or that male writers cannot question patriarchy, or gender-roles. Male writers, Stratton argues, actively choose these traits in a conspiratorial manner as “strategies of containment” in their attempts to “legitimate patriarchal ideology.”189 On the contrary, I would argue, Chinua Achebe, for example, does not unquestioningly write to “contain” patriarchal values, since his novel Things Fall Apart (1958) suggests “the female principle” as more successful than “the male principle” when confronting the culture of the Other.190 While Stratton may be partly correct, I would rather argue that male writers at times deploy the above-mentioned traits as story-telling conventions, or out of habit. These narrative devices may have a long history within oral storytelling, and, of course, although they might not actively be applied for this specific purpose, they may inadvertently function to contain or to legitimise a gender-determined organisation of the community, thereby fostering values that oppress women.

In South Africa black male orature and literature feature similar narrative traits as those compiled by Stratton and Chukukere. Male oral story-telling was epic in mode: long heroic narratives with an edge of nationalism passed on national laws and myths in the form of aphorisms, moral stories and proverbs. Describing this oral mode, which also infuses historical epic writing, Isabel Hofmeyr states: “Southern African historical narrative may well not be entirely epic, but it does certainly manifest epic tendencies, particularly in the ‘culture heroes’ or founding fathers that inhabit oral traditions.”191 Up to the 1950s, black African fiction is also largely in the epic mode, draws on history, and depicts the historical heroes of the African ethnic nations.

187 Chukukere 8.
189 Stratton 172.
190 For a discussion of the female principle in Achebe’s novel see Kate Turkington, Chinua Achebe: Things Fall Apart (London: Edward Arnold, 1977). Turkington writes: “Achebe appears to offer as his ideal a dualism, rather than a dichotomy, with masculine and feminine principles tempering and complementing each other” (15).
191 Hofmeyr 107.
Thomas Mofolo’s *Chaka*, which Tlali mentions having read, depicts the rise and fall of the legendary Zulu King, and although it is a remarkable psychological portrait that takes a stand against the cruelty practised during his reign, it nevertheless mainly revolves around his military endeavours. One novel that exemplifies this mode, but which, perhaps, strives to be an exception, is Sol T. Plaatje’s *Mhudi*. Despite its subtitle (see page 21), Plaatje’s project seems to be to distance himself from tribalism and the epic heroes. Instead, his narrative tends to replace the older heroes with new heroes much in the same epic mode familiar to the oral mode mentioned above. What is more, although two of his protagonists are women, their roles are gradually overshadowed by the male protagonists’ involvement in the war between the Barolong and the Matabele tribes, and the women finally come to take on symbolic roles of the land.

As in African literature outside South Africa, male writing inside the country often depicts women as passive and voiceless characters, in contrast to the active, male historical heroes, and woman and motherhood are frequently deployed as metaphors of the land, or the people. Analysing the symbolic depiction of woman as a Mother Africa figure in the historical novels by Mofolo and Plaatje, Gabriella Madrassi aptly notes:

> The land underlies their texts as the nurturing soil and the source of courageous strength and pride. She, the land, is the *matrix* generating the hero, the *womb* of peace, the *mammae* of memory—these are the signifiers of the mother-land concept that, in Plaatje’s and Mofolo’s works, construe the black version of the earth mother.

The two main female characters in *Mhudi*, as Madrassi rightly observes, embody the land in a metaphoric use of motherhood:

> [They] are both endowed with maternal attributes; they are representations of *Mother Africa*, the black version of the earth mother. This Mother Africa, in the decoding of the first black narrative, involves a correlation between the black woman herself and the African man’s physical and emotional relationship with his originating land . . . the woman was an extended metaphor of the land.

The novels of Mofolo and Plaatje initiated a literary tradition of historical writing that was to be embraced by the prolific writer H. I. E. Dhlomo in his play *The Girl Who Killed to Save* (1936), and his many chronicle plays from the 1930s: *Dingane, Shaka, Cetshwayo*, and *Moshoeshoe*, where he “sang the heroic exploits” of the Zulu and Basutho kings in plays that bear their

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192 Cullhed, interview II, 4.
193 Madrassi 87.
194 Madrassi 88-89.
195 Madrassi 89.
names. These plays, Bhekizizwe Peterson claims, “show a transition towards a militant nationalism.” The tradition was furthered as Madrassi points out, by, for example, Peter Abrahams in his epic novel *Wild Conquest* (1951).

After the 1950s, the politics of apartheid overshadowed all spheres of society, including cultural production. This preoccupation with the injuries inflicted by the system, resulted, as mentioned, in a literature Ndebele calls “the representation of spectacle.” He uses the term also to describe the most dominant writing between 1950 and 1965: the short story in the yellow press, mainly in *Drum* magazine. This kind of fiction, which Chapman calls “the most popular and prolific form of imaginative writing in South Africa [at this time],” has, according to Ndebele, “a similar penchant for the spectacular, although the symbols are slightly different.” Drum writing was escapist and sensationalist: it borrowed sexist stereotypes from American movies and shied away from serious political discussion. By “symbols [that] are . . . different” Ndebele is referring to the symbols of ‘escapism’ from the harsh reality that apartheid created. While the stories “show an almost total lack of interest in the directly political issues of the time,” escapism is manifest since these stories feature, Ndebele writes, a “pacey style, suspenseful plots . . . characters speaking like Americans, dressed like them, and driving American cars.” In his autobiography *Blame Me On History* (1963) Bloke Modisane attests to writing in an escapist vein:

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196 The only works printed during his lifetime were the play *The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongquause the Liberator* (Lovedale: Lovedale Press, 1936), and the long poem called *Valley of a Thousand Hills* (Durban: Knox, 1941). His plays were written and performed in the 1930s but were printed posthumously in H. I. E Dhlomo, *Collected Works* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985). All the plays can be found there except *Shaka*, which has been lost.


198 Peter Abrahams is a ‘coloured’ writer from South Africa who moved to Britain at the age of twenty and later settled down in Jamaica where he wrote and published several novels. As I am here exploring the black African novel, I do not take Abrahams’ writing into account.

199 Ndebele 41.

200 In 1950 an American journalist started the monthly magazine *Drum* in Cape Town (it later moved to Johannesburg), which was to have a significant impact on black literary production. It catered both to the black middle-class reader and to a wider black readership, and fostered a whole generation of black journalists such as Bloke Modisane, Nat Nakasa, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Casey Motsisi, and Can Themba. The writing produced was in the genres of the short story, the autobiographical short story, and reportage.

201 Michael Chapman, *Southern African Literatures* (London: Longman, 1996) 237. Chapman describes the *Drum* stories as “fast-talking” and “city slick,” (237) with a “racy, agitated, impressionistic prose,” (239) and concerned with the “entertainment of soccer, sex and sin.” (238) They did not “confront politics directly,” (241) yet have contributed with “the resilient voice of the individual never quite free of the community; the unselconscious, defiant use of English as creative communication; the flaunting of ‘art’ distinctions between fact and fiction; and a sense of the big event as subject matter” (241).

202 Ndebele 43.

203 Ndebele 43.
I wrote innocuous short stories, escapist trash, about boxers with domestic problems, respectable pickpockets, hole-in-the-wall housebreakers, private detectives and other cardboard images of romanticism, and yet even against this background my escapist hero was seldom, if ever, on the side of formal law and order. Like me, my characters were invested with a contempt for the law, their efforts were directed towards a flaunting of the law; my heroes were social maladjusts in a society where heroism is measured by acts of defiance against law and order.204

In line with Ndebele’s reflection Modisane claims that the stories he produced “presented an image of the African as an uncomplicated sentimentalist with an addiction for pin-ups, nice-times, violence in love and temper; which made one wonder whether the Africans lived in a candy floss of vulgarity.”205 Besides Modisane, Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, Casey Motsitsi, to mention a few, also wrote in the vein of “romantic escapist trash,” melodrama, and stereotype about non law-abiding ‘cardboard’ heroes, where the shebeen206 features as an icon for the independent, fun-loving, devil-may-care attitude of the frustrated black township population depicted. This is writing where stereotypes such as the ‘nice-time’ girl always ready for drinks and sex, the perpetually ‘boozing’ journalist, and the nasty black policeman recur again and again.

The only exceptions to the escapist and ‘spectacular’ mode at this time are Mphahlele’s short stories, for example, the “Lesane” stories, which I will discuss below. However, even here stereotypical depictions are common. In “The Suitcase”207 Mphahlele depicts women as either the wife, “so understanding” and “patient,”208 or as the ‘nice-time girl’ who twists “her body seductively this way and that, like a young supple plant that the wind plays about with.”209 His story “Down the Quiet Street,” 210 a salient example of early fiction about ordinary life, depicts women as gossipy, perpetually pregnant, or with breasts “that itched from the milk,”211 and surrounded by lots of children.

Returning to Ndebele’s claim that a convention of ‘spectacle’ dominated the Drum writing at this time, we find that he describes it in the following terms:

204 Modisane 139.
205 Modisane 139.
206 A shebeen is an illicit bar where home-made, or smuggled, alcoholic beverages were served under constant threat of being raided by the police. In South Africa, selling alcoholic beverages to blacks was only allowed in City-controlled beer halls.
208 Mphahlele, “The Suitcase” 73.
209 Mphahlele, “The Suitcase” 74.
211 Mphahlele, “Down the Quiet Street” 99.
The spectacular documents; it indicts implicitly; it is demonstrative, preferring exteriority to interiority: ... it provokes identification through recognition and feeling rather than through observation and analytical thought; it calls for emotion rather than conviction; it establishes a vast sense of presence without offering intimate knowledge; it confirms without necessarily offering a challenge.\textsuperscript{212}

In this kind of writing, violence is given a realistic and raw face. Bodily injuries are often described in sensational detail, depicting from the onlookers’ point of view instead of the victims’. One example is Can Themba’s gruesome depiction of violence in the short story “Mob Passion,” where the female protagonist Mapula, facing a mob which has come to kill her boyfriend Linga, suddenly finds an axe at her feet, and with a “love frustrated beyond bearing” she retaliates:

Quickly she picked up the axe whilst the mob was withdrawing from its prey, several of them spattered with blood. With the axe in her hand Mapula pressed through them until she reached the inner, sparser group. She saw Alpheus spitting upon Linga’s battered body. He turned with a guttural cackle—He-he-he! He-he-he!—into the descending axe. It sank into his neck and down he went. She stepped on his chest and pulled out the axe. The blood gushed out all over her face and clothes. With that evil-looking countenance she gradually turned to the stunned crowd, half lifting the axe and walking slowly but menacingly towards the largest group. They retreated—a hundred and twenty men and women retreated before this devil-possessed woman with the ghastly appearance. But then she saw the mangled body of the man she loved and her nerve snapped. The axe slipped from her hand and she dropped on Linga’s body, crying piteously: ‘Jo-o! Jo-o! Jo-o! Jo-na-jo! Jo-na-jo!’ \textsuperscript{213}

Of course, this is a spectacular event with some fantastic elements (the suddenly materialised axe). The reader is invited to share in the spectacle without being challenged by any complex analysis of the feelings or motives of the people involved. Thus, the reader, in Ndebele’s words, is offered “exteriority” in place of “interiority,” and “documentation” and “confirmation” of the violence in the townships without the balance of keen observation and analytical thought. In short, black Anglophone writing before \textit{Muriel} has patriarchal connotations and evinces generic traits from the epic, the historical novel, and autobiography, and narrative traits such as the symbolic use of woman as Mother of the nation, gender stereotype, the idealization of motherhood, escapism and the ‘spectacular.’ As this chapter will show, these constitute a sharp generic and narrative contrast to \textit{Muriel}’s more novelistic traits.

\textsuperscript{212} Ndebele 49.
\textsuperscript{213} Can Themba, “Mob Passion,” ed., Chapman 38.
Genealogy and Mutation

The very publication of *Muriel at Metropolitan* seems to contradict the now famous words of Gayatri Spivak: "There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak." Of course, it is not possible to equate Tlali with a 'subaltern' in Spivak’s sense, but considering the subordinate position of black women in general under the rule of apartheid in South Africa, she certainly did share some aspects of the term. And, as explored briefly, *Muriel*'s inherent awareness of the difficulties for a woman to acquire a space from which to speak, and, as we shall see, the difficulties that Tlali encountered before and after the novel’s publication, partly validate Spivak’s claim. This section aims to describe the publication history of *Muriel*, explore the parts excised by the editor prior to its publication, and suggest their significance for the understanding of Tlali’s stance of resistance to patriarchy.

With the Amendment of the Suppression of Communism Act in 1965, which strengthened the laws of censorship, all active black writers and journalists were banned. Thus, the Government effectively curtailed an emergent black literature in South Africa. A period of literary silence that McClintock calls “the ‘long silence’ of the 1960s” followed, and it lasted until 1968 when some black Anglophone poems were printed in white literary journals. In 1966 Tlali, who belonged to the ANC already when it was banned in 1963, and therefore had considerable knowledge of the silencing of black writers, began to write her first novel, which was to be published as *Muriel at Metropolitan*. Perhaps she felt compelled by the vacuum, or was inspired by it, which her own comment attests to: “Organisations had been banned, it was after 1967, books were not circulating, the books that should have been there to keep the spirit of the revolution alive, all these were almost completely obliterated. That is what made me even more restless—it made me even more determined to write.” Perhaps she realised that there might exist an as yet untried possibility that the censors would let the voice of a black woman pass unnoticed. Hence, the silencing of the black male writers, in combination with this hope, had unexpectedly opened up a space for a black woman’s literary voice in South Africa.

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216 McClintock 339.
218 Cullhed, interview II, 2.
This crack in the wall of hegemonic discourse allowed Muriel, the assis-
tive and self-confident narrator/protagonist in Tlali’s novel, to take literary
form. Muriel is a clerk at Metropolitan Radio where she, amidst workers of
all races, helps her Jewish boss Mr Bloch to keep track of his black credit
customers. From her first day of work to her last, she manoeuvres a complex
position as an interpreter between the cultures and the various language
groups at Metropolitan. The name of the shop, Metropolitan Radio, is a
name that the narrator links to Sophiatown, which she describes as “the cen-
tre of the metropolis” (123). This name evokes Sophiatown’s cultural diver-
sity and thereby suggests the racial hybridity of her workplace, making it a
microcosm of the multilingual and multicultural city of Johannesburg. In the
act of interpretation Muriel also generously imparts her political knowledge
to her co-workers (and, thereby, to her readers). However, as a result of her
growing awareness of the financial exploitation of the black customers, and
her developing sense of solidarity with her own oppressed people, her situa-
tion finally becomes untenable. Feeling increasingly uncomfortable about
straddling two worlds, she finally resigns.

Throughout the novel Muriel is proud to demonstrate that she is politi-
cally well-informed and not afraid to forcefully voice her opinions on such
issues. For instance, speaking her mind about the system of migratory labour
she states: “It is a system based on cheap labour, which undermines all laws
of morality and decency, making nonsense of the concept of the family unit.
On it the mining industry in the Republic of South Africa has flourished. To
my mind, it is comparable only with the slave trade” (60-61). Just as boldly,
she openly declares her own political opinions when talking with her white
coworkers, Mrs Kuhn and Mrs Stein. Central to our discussion here is a
black woman’s courage within this oppressive context to openly declare her
political stance to the face of her enemies:

I replied, ‘What you say about people being free to move and free to say what
they like is perhaps true of the whites but not of the blacks. When I want to
visit a relation of mine in another location, I must first obtain permission
from the superintendent of that location. Otherwise if the police find me there
and discover that I do not live there, I can be arrested. As an African, I can be
asked to produce my pass at any time and anywhere and I can be searched;
also my house can be searched at any time of the day or night. We are not
free to move. Thousands are arrested every month for offences involving
movement. How many times have we sent someone out to the police stations
to pay a fine and plead for the release of our own black workers here? And
about speech—the blacks are not free to say what they feel. How can they?
They may not hold political meetings. All political organisations have been
banned. The blacks are voiceless.’

Mrs Stein scoffed, ‘What do you mean, voiceless?’

‘They have no vote. They may not choose anyone to represent them in a
parliament, which makes laws for them.’(178)
Muriel enlightens the misinformed ladies about the workings of apartheid, and does not shy away from any uncomfortable truths. Similar to the previous example of her almost unrealistic assertiveness, which creates tension, the text here implies that if women were given the chance to speak in public they would and could do so. This, then, is an assertiveness that resists black African patriarchal expectations on black women.

To avoid reading Muriel’s declaration as purely political dogma, we need to set her boldness and politically charged comments in the context of the black woman’s position under African patriarchy. As discussed in the introduction to this study, “[w]omen [in Africa] are,” as Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie writes in 1987, “‘naturally’ excluded from public affairs; they are viewed as unable to hold positions of responsibility, rule men or even be visible when serious matters of state and society are being discussed . . . politics is considered the absolute realm of men.”

In the ANC well into the 1960s, as Walker writes, patriarchal tradition was powerful:

Advances had been made since the days when politics was unquestionably assumed to be a male domain, but by the end of the 1950s, the national liberation movement had yet to grant women a full and unequivocal recognition of their rights as equals of men.

This lag between theory and practice was most marked at the level of the ANC rank and file. Many male members of the ANC were deeply conservative and traditionalist in their attitudes towards women.

Muriel heralds later black women protagonists who protest against the exclusion of black women from politics. One example is Ngcobo’s protagonist in And They Didn’t Die who ponders the gender patterns in her African community:

[I]t was a men’s meeting that no women attended. It was like that at Sigageni. When men were there, they attended their own meetings to which they did not invite the women. They did not have to say it; it was simply understood that a men’s meeting was a men’s meeting. . . . [f]or the moment it was men who decided.

As in Tlali’s fiction, Ngcobo here exposes the invisibility of black women in their, at first, futile struggle against apartheid, as well as the still on-going struggle against patriarchy.

It took Tlali a long time to find a publisher for her typescript. Six years after its completion in 1966, Ravan Press, established in 1972 as a joint venture between the Institute of Race Relations, the South African Council of

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220 Walker 260.
221 Lauretta Ngcobo, And They Didn’t Die (New York: The Feminist P, 1999) 75-76.
Churches, and the director of Spro-Cas\textsuperscript{222} to publish radical South African fiction, finally accepted it. This publisher, one may assume, was influenced by liberal ideas concerning the value of an Anglophone black woman’s voice. “From the outset,” G. E. de Villiers writes, “[Ravan] registered its opposition to racial discrimination and the political ideology underpinning it. A voice was given to the oppressed and their cause championed,”\textsuperscript{223} a declaration that favoured the acceptance of a text such as \textit{Muriel} with its radical resistance to apartheid.

The severe editing of Tlali’s work, however, mutilated her text, and led to a conflict between the parties that delayed its publication. “Tladi’s [sic] manuscript,” Randall claims, “consisted of a large ring binder crammed with disjointed writings including verses and prayers. It was clear, however, that embedded in this mass of material was an interesting and original narrative. Sheila Roberts was commissioned to edit the work and did so brilliantly, shaping it into a lean and publishable text while retaining the writer’s own voice.” For this harsh editing, Tlali, according to Randall, “attacked the [Ravan] press on racial grounds and accused it of manipulating her work.”\textsuperscript{224} Commenting on this editing Tlali says: “I wouldn’t call it edited, except that they took out certain portions. They chopped it up . . . they actually removed chapters, paragraphs and so on, that was painful, because it didn’t have then all the things that I wanted to sort out . . . I knew that the African readers here in South Africa would not be able to get those [political] comments anywhere.”\textsuperscript{225}

The omissions and changes in the first edition, according to Jean Marquard, were made at “the advice of the publishers to ensure that the novel would not meet the fate of so much black literature in this country,”\textsuperscript{226} which suggests that the muting was motivated by a fear of censorship. At this point in time, however, and with such a radical publisher as the newly founded Ravan Press, I find this hard to believe. I suggest instead that, as Randall points out, the editing was done to meet the stylistic conventions of fiction, and I would add Western fiction. Tlali’s mixture of political rhetoric, fictional narrative and sentimental verses in the typescript simply did not suit the publisher. This mixture, however, may be an expression of novelistic heteroglossia or of a different kind of orally linked literariness; it may, for

\textsuperscript{222} Peter Randall, “The Beginnings of Ravan Press: A Memoir,” \textit{Ravan: Twenty-Five Years (1972-1997)—A Commemorative Volume of New Writing}, ed., G. E. de Villiers (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1997) 1-12. The founding directors of Ravan were Beyers Naudé, director of the Christian Institute, Danie van Zyl from the Council of Churches, and Peter Randall, director of Spro-Cas (the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society). It was intended to be a self-sufficient venture, but after 1977 it was funded by donations mainly from German church sources (5-6).

\textsuperscript{223} G. E. de Villiers, \textit{Ravan: Twenty-Five Years} i.

\textsuperscript{224} Randall 9.

\textsuperscript{225} Cullhed, interview II, 1-2.

example, be intended to advertise the author’s dexterity as a ‘person of words.’ Stephanie Newell states that black writers of popular fiction in Ghana “claim legitimacy as writers and also presuppose readers’ immersion in a distinctive set of interpretive conventions” by “quot[ing] . . . different literary ‘master’ languages.” With this aim, writers look for texts that are “recognisable and culturally familiar to readers.” In her search of texts in English widely recognisable to a black reader the aphorisms of Patience Strong, as discussed below, may have been Tlali’s only possible choice.

The neat, original typescript kept at the National English Literary Museum (NELM) in Grahamstown, South Africa, does not fit the description Randall gives above; it is hardly a script “crammed with disjointed writings.” A collation of the original typescript and the Ravan edition from 1975 shows that Ravan initially omitted, or shortened and merged as many as seven of the original chapters. The excluded chapters feature long sections of ‘political’ rhetoric, similar to the following excerpt:

The Republic of South Africa is a country divided mainly into two worlds. The one, a white world—rich, comfortable, for all practical purposes organised—a world in fear, armed to the teeth. The other, a black world; poor, pathetically neglected and disorganised—voiceless, oppressed, restless, confused and unarmed—a world in transition, irrevocably weaned from all tribal ties.

Admittedly, the political sections—cumbersome, lengthy explanations of the system—at times make heavy reading. Nevertheless, their exclusion has not been done with due consideration for the contexts of writing or reception. Excluded were also, understandably, stereotypes of “the Boers”: “they have an insatiable lust for persecuting non-whites, [their] perfect efficiency in this respect was motivated by the unmistakable burning desire you find in most of them, that is, to sit on the necks of the non-whites.” Other more debatable examples are when Muriel parodies traditional tribalism, in the chapter called “Waiting,” discussed below. Perhaps the editor regarded Tlali’s resistance to tribalism, that is, to the old patriarchal tradition, as offensive to its presumed black readers. Furthermore, to exclude the politically informed chapter “One Human Heart for Another,” where human understanding between the races, along with the absurd consequences of apartheid, are debated by women of all races, is a mutilation of Tlali’s specific, dialogic voice. Fortunately, in 1987, except for the title and the verses, most of this

228 From the typescript, excluded from the Ravan edition, restored in the Longman edition of Muriel at Metropolitan, 11.
229 I was not allowed to take a photocopy and unfortunately forgot to note the page numbers when copying by hand parts of the typescript kept at NELM.
material was retrieved in the Longman publication of the same typescript. For more than ten years, in other words, the Ravan version was the only accessible one.

Excluded from both the Ravan and the Longman editions are two epigraphic verses from Patience Strong’s popular and sentimental poetry/aphorisms in *Passing Clouds* (1959). Perhaps, as the life spheres of black and white women at this time did not have many interfaces, the editors, blinded by the sentimentality of these verses, were not alerted to their function in the text, their ambiguity, and the irony they evoke. The following verse heads the first chapter of the typescript:

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A Message for You
Put all you know in the job you’re paid for –
And then with a conscience that’s clear –
Turn your attention to things deep and wonderful.
Open the eye and ear.
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On the one hand, in the oral tradition, and, as mentioned, in popular fiction, to quote from various sources is taken as a sign of the speaker’s storytelling skills, which may be one reason why Tlali included them in the first place. Also, the verses may have been incorporated to whet the interest of the reluctant reader. Asked about how she motivated the verses Tlali says: “there are people who don’t read much, who don’t have the time. And maybe, if you open a book you would see something that would interest you, then it catches your attention. Then you know that that particular chapter is about something that you are really interested in.”

On the other hand, in the context of Muriel’s narrative, the irony of this verse is obvious: although Muriel has put all her skills into her job, she is not fairly compensated for her work, since, as a black worker in apartheid South Africa she receives a far lower salary than her white counterparts. What is more, forced to exploit her own people, she can never have a “conscience that’s clear,” and were she to turn her attention finally to things “deep and

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230 A more recent edition of this novel has been published as *Between Two Worlds* by Broadview Press, Canada, 2004.
231 Patience Strong was an English writer of popular sentimental verse with 126 publications to her pseudonym. Her real name is Winifred May, and her verses were often printed on calendars and greeting cards.
232 As mentioned above, Patience Strong’s writing belonged to the culture shared by white women.
234 Currently, approximately 30% of the population over 20 years of age lack formal education (which means that the figure is higher for the black population where the drop-out rate from school is 50%). And among those who can read the proficiency is perhaps not developed to the full. But then, literacy has increased rapidly of late, which means that there were many more illiterate adults in South Africa in the 1970s.
235 Cullhed, interview II, 2.
wonderful” her eye would only meet degradation, and her ears only the political naivety of her white co-workers. This verse attunes the reader to the protagonist’s dilemma of straddling two worlds, betraying the one in the name of the other. Moreover, the irony signals the unmistakably humorous note in the narrative, a humour partly based on the verses’ ambiguity. In other words, the verses seem to serve several purposes: the sentimental, hopeful note evinced on the surface of these verses may be meant to catch the reader’s interest and to demonstrate the writer’s narrative skills, while their interaction with the textual themes brings out the irony.

The other verse by Patience Strong, “written on that Pitco Tips Tea Card,” Muriel says, “which Johan unconcernedly deposited on the desk before me,” heads the last chapter “I Quit”:

Even though the day holds out no hope of happiness
Don’t despise it or despair for you can never guess –
What it may unfold before the sunset dies away.
Greet with glad thanksgiving the beginning of each Day.236

When each day entailed waking up to the same hopelessly oppressive political situation, any black in South Africa during the 1960s and the 1970s would have realised the irony intended by this verse. In addition, on this day in the narrative Muriel has decided to resign from her post at Metropolitan Radio, which, of course, emphasises the irony: it seems unlikely that a woman, having to give up the relative independence that her work position and her income have given her, with no welfare network to rely on, would “greet with glad thanksgiving the beginning” of such a day. Regarded within the context of the novel the relational irony237 of these ‘sentimental,’ British verses is unmistakeable—an irony, which their exclusion effectively silenced.

Two more stanzas in the original typescript were excluded by Ravan Press. The first one heads the chapter “A Slap in the Face:” “The drum is made / From the skin of a hare; / Beat it too hard, / Then it is sure to tear.” This verse echoes a well-known African proverb, later referred to by Adam, an assistant at Metropolitan Radio. It evokes the picture of an imposing opponent (apartheid, the employer, or patriarchy) whose might is forged from cowardice, something that makes it/him both vulnerable and possible to resist. This verse, as it questions the basis of several societal power structures,

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236 In the typescript at NELM. The verse has the following heading: “Happy Morning.” Quote from Patience Strong’s book ‘The Bright Horizon.’ This verse is included in the Ravan version on page 91, but here it does not head the chapter, nor does it include the title “Happy Morning.”

237 Linda Hutcheon, in Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony (London: Routledge, 1994), claims that one semantic characteristic of irony is that it is relational, that it “operates . . . between people,” and “as a consequence of a relationship, a dynamic, performative bringing together of different meaning-makers” (58).
suggests a carnivalesque stance. The second stanza, which opens the chapter called “The Mechanic Walks Out” (in which Lennie, the white mechanic walks out on the boss), is composed by Tlali herself:

The thing lies deep, too deep inside;
For there is fear—no place to hide.
It’s in the centre, there in the core;
It lies all buried in the status quo.

The ambiguous entity “[t]he thing” implies something lost due to the status quo, either of apartheid, or of patriarchy. In Lennie’s case, he is walking out because he cannot develop his full potential at Metropolitan; he has more elaborate plans to pursue, a potential that apartheid obstructs. Lennie’s “walk out,” however, parallels Muriel’s walk out from the roles prescribed for her by traditional patriarchy, that is, motherhood and a life in the domestic sphere (examined fully in the final section of this chapter). For her ‘the status quo’ that impedes, or ‘buries,’ her potential ‘too deep inside’ may also indicate patriarchy; and, like the apartheid system, patriarchy also evokes fear, is ever present, and leaves her without any ‘place to hide.’ Both these verses can be read within the two different contexts of apartheid and patriarchy.

Ravan also excluded repetitive markers that at best function to mock the hypocrisy of apartheid. Several expressions, such as “the so-called” and the adjective “good” in front of “white ladies,” that add reservation, even irony to the narrator’s words, were crossed out, silencing the presumptive irony. Very few instances of irony remain as in “the good lady had snatched the receiver,” (in the chapter “A Slap in the Face”) where the mood evoked by the word “snatched,” as opposed to the connotations of “good,” is ironic.

The most drastic change that Ravan made concerns the title of Tlali’s typescript, “I Am Nothing!” Discarding this title, Ravan’s first printing in 1975 instead published it as Between Two Worlds, a title that signals apartheid and captures Muriel’s position of in-betweenness at Metropolitan. Later, that same year, a second printing gave it the more neutral title Muriel at Metropolitan that Longman kept, while the latest publication by Broadview Press in 2004 has again adopted the title Between Two Worlds. However, neither of these titles retrieves the meaning implied by the paradoxical title typed in this manner: “I AM … NOTHING!” Although this title suggests subservience, humility, and, perhaps, the lowly position of the narrator at Metropolitan Radio, its typography asserts pride: appearing at the centre of the front page, boldly spelled out in capital letters with an ellipsis that suggests a hesitation giving way to an exclamation mark, it shows that al-

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238 Carnival is a concept introduced by Bakhtin to designate a boisterous critique of those in power in society by those who lack power.

239 In the typescript.
though the narrator may be regarded as ‘nothing’ in the eyes of the hege-
monic patriarch, the author/narrator is nevertheless determined to speak out. Of course, several other readings are possible, but before discussing them, it is necessary to briefly consider the ‘humility topos.’

It is possible that Tlali’s suggested title functions as a humility topos, a formulaic device deployed to excuse a writer’s forwardness. 240 Such a device was used frequently in the Middle Ages in the West, Gerda Lerner notes, not only as an apology for the writers’ assertiveness, but also to underrate their achievements: “[e]ven those who apologized and seemingly accepted the humility topos transmitted a different attitude in the rest of their writing, as though they felt freed, once the formalities of admitting their inferiority had been satisfied, to prove their strength and talent and individuality.” 241 Interestingly, the release of tension effected in women writers by the humility topos, this “pathetic remnant[1] of what must have been agonizing struggles each woman had to conduct within her own soul and mind,” made possible her dynamic enterprise. 242 As a parallel, I suggest that a black woman writer of the 20th century such as Tlali, who suffered similar oppression exerted on her by patriarchy, in the face of rejection by the symbolic order, may also have chosen a title such as “I Am Nothing!” as an act of humility, a formula that freed her to pursue her endeavour to write. This token of humility can be intended to release tension caused by patriarchal expectations, creating a space for Tlali within patriarchy to prove her narrator’s inherent strength. This may be one way of reading it, but, the paradoxical nature of Tlali’s title allows another reading.

The paradox surfaces and becomes even more significant when the exact wording of the title, without the exclamation mark or capital letters, but with the ellipsis, is encountered in the body of the text (in the Ravan edition):

‘Muriel, tell me, what are you?’
‘What do you mean, what am I?’
‘Are you a teacher, or something?’
‘No, I’m not a teacher.’
‘What are you then?’
‘I am just myself—just a person. I am … nothing. Why do you ask?’ 243

Unobtrusively embedded between a direct answer to Lennie’s question, and Muriel’s conversational follow-up question, the sentence could simply mean: “I have no regular occupational title.” However, by suggesting it as the title of her work, the author highlights the sentence, and therefore, we may ascribe other meanings to it, such as ‘I lack status’ or ‘as a black person I am

241 Lerner 52.
242 Lerner 51.
243 This quote is from the Ravan edition: Miriam Tlali, Muriel at Metropolitan (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1975) 88.
not rewarded for my skilled work.’ Additional readings that evoke resistance to patriarchy are: ‘I am nothing because as a black woman I have no right to voice my opinion in public except among my peers’ or ‘I have no right to higher education, no right to own property, no right to be assertive vis-à-vis men,’ to only mention two. Moreover, Tlali’s paradoxical title may be read as the narrator’s assertive resistance to the rigid framework of patriarchal gender expectations in African society. Such an analysis is pursued below in the sections called “Avoiding Woman as Symbol,” and “Resisting the ‘Something’ of Motherhood.”

As mentioned above, Tlali adamantly defended her typescript version. The publishers’ heavy editing, not least their suppression of its original title, which delayed the publication, was a sore point with her, and she only relinquished the original title and accepted the revisions in compliance with her mother’s wish to see the book in print before her death.244 Both the altered title and the novel’s heavy editing made the work, in Tlali’s words, “too skimpy, it doesn’t have all the corners, all the preaching,” and made her so ashamed of her text that pending its publication she went into hiding in Lesotho.245

**Novelization**

With her two novels *Muriel at Metropolitan* (1975) and *Amandla!* (1981) Tlali promoted the black South African novel written in English. My aim, as mentioned, is to show how *Muriel* constitutes generic resistance to the dominant conventions of the black male literary tradition, where mainly epic, historical novels, autobiographies, and short stories had been produced, by forwarding the process that Bakhtin terms *novelization*. The novelistic traits deployed in *Muriel*, I claim, function as a critique of black African patriarchy as it surfaces first and foremost in male black writing.

The examination of *Muriel’s* generic resistance is grounded on Mikhail Bakhtin’s analysis of the evolution of the Western novel as an independent genre. The generic change from the epic to the novel in the West, I would suggest, is largely paralleled in the process of assimilation/appropriation of the novel as a genre in Africa, though in a much compressed time-span, and of course with variations. The dominating genre in the oral mode, as we have seen, was the epic narrative; the epic mode is then introduced in prose form, which gradually evolves into the fictive novel in the modern tradition. Bakhtin’s term novelization describes the process by which new novelistic traits work their way into literary form, gradually transforming the preceding

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244 Cullhed, interview I, 16.
245 Cullhed, interview I, 16.
dominant genre, the “hardened and no longer flexible” \textsuperscript{246} epic, into what we know as the modern novel—this radical “genre-in-the-making . . . in the vanguard of all modern literary development.” \textsuperscript{247} Viewed in the light of Bakhtin’s ideas, \textit{Muriel} contributes to the process of novelizing the black literary tradition.

Over time, the novel in the West developed certain thematic and narrative conventions, and by incorporating similar traits in a narrative any writer contributes to novelization. Bakhtin claims three specific characteristics that set the novel off from the epic mode (in poetry and prose): first, it is “based on personal experience and thought,” \textsuperscript{248} second, stylistically it “[realizes] a multi-languaged consciousness,” \textsuperscript{249} and third it has “maximal contact with the present” \textsuperscript{250} and thereby changes the “temporal co-ordinates” in literature. By contrast, he writes, the epic is set in the “absolute past,” \textsuperscript{251} builds on national tradition and always keeps an “epic distance” isolated from personal experience. \textsuperscript{252} The epic, moreover, idealizes the past in highfalutin, official language, in contrast to the novel which “is associated with the eternally living element of unofficial language and unofficial thought.” \textsuperscript{253} In his essay “Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel” Bakhtin specifies further traits that characterize the process of novelization: a prolific use of dialogue, dialogism, and a gradual movement away from a folkloristic deployment of fate, symbols, allegory, romance, and idyll. \textsuperscript{254}

\textit{Muriel} incorporates many, if not all, of the above-mentioned novelizing elements, and Tlali’s main strategy of resistance to patriarchy in \textit{Muriel} is therefore generic. In addition, there are narrative and thematic elements that, while they contribute to novelization, also resist patriarchy. The next section discusses the step from autobiography to fiction and the introduction into the literary tradition of a woman narrator. The following section examines how the narrator, by incorporating various idioms and her awareness of the diversified language milieu that South Africa constitutes, resists the more univocal and monoglossic discourse of the black male tradition, creating space for the voice of the Other. The third section analyzes in what way \textit{Muriel} posits modernity and a discourse of anti-tribalism in place of epic, nationalistic writing, and thereby refutes the patriarchal foundation of such writing. The fourth section discusses the novel’s opposition to the male conventions of stereotype, escapism and the ‘spectacular.’ Finally, the last two sections

\textsuperscript{246} Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” \textit{The Dialogic Imagination} 3.
\textsuperscript{247} Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” \textit{The Dialogic Imagination} 11.
\textsuperscript{249} Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” \textit{The Dialogic Imagination} 15. In the ‘epic world’ “there is no place . . . for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy” (16).
\textsuperscript{250} Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” \textit{The Dialogic Imagination} 16, 17.
\textsuperscript{251} Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” \textit{The Dialogic Imagination} 18, 19, 20.
\textsuperscript{252} Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” \textit{The Dialogic Imagination} 153, 225, 246, and 255-56.
explore how Muriel’s realism and themes manage to avoid the conventional Mother Africa symbol and the role of motherhood.

**Narrating “Personal Experience and Thought”**

“To portray an event on the same time-and-value plane as oneself and one’s contemporaries,” Bakhtin writes, “(and an event that is therefore based on personal experience and thought) is to undertake a radical revolution, and to step out of the world of epic into the world of the novel.” 253 The novel in this respect differs strikingly from the oral tradition where the personal is transformed into type or symbol, or is lost in a diffuse, mythical past. Narrating personal experience in the present, on the other hand, implies a degree of individualism: the author cum narrator/protagonist breaks away from the collective and elevates his/her own experience above the experience of the collective. Personal experience thus offers the reader an object of identification on a person to person basis. This is a step in the process of novelization that Muriel takes.

Prior to Muriel, there is one example of longer black fiction published in South Africa based on personal experience: 254 Ezekiel Mphahlele’s *Lesane* stories (1957), four consecutive short stories in which he depicts his experience of living in a ghetto and the mundane lives of black working-class men and women in contemporary Johannesburg. 255 The stories narrate the experiences of the members of one family as well as of the larger community of the township Newclare. As Rob Gaylard claims, Mphahlele here deals with ‘the ordinary’ in much the manner that Ndebele called for in 1991. 256 Also, as Gaylard notes, the stories have “no stereotyping in the description of violence;” in other words, they do not engage with ‘the spectacular’ and even “challenge prevailing stereotypes of Drum writing” by incorporating a true to life “idiom of one of the residents of Nadia Street itself.” 257 However, Mphahlele’s stories were printed as four consecutive short stories in *Drum* magazine. Had he developed his project these stories might have become four chapters in a contemporary novel. While it is likely that Tlali was inspired by Mphahlele’s short stories, Tlali’s *Muriel* was nevertheless the first black novel to incorporate the novelistic element of ‘portraying an event on

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254 Modikwe Dikobe’s *The Marabi Dance* (1973) is probably also based on personal experience but was not published within the country; also, it dealt with a period thirty years prior to its publication, and therefore does not qualify as a novel that Bakhtin would describe as portraying events “on the same time-and-value plane” as the writer and his/her contemporaries.
257 Gaylard 82.

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the same time-and-value plane as oneself and one’s contemporaries,’ and it thereby differs from the work of other black writers of the time.

Furthermore, unlike Mphahlele’s stories *Muriel* depicts the personal experience of a woman, thereby elevating such experience to a legitimate subject matter for fiction. The black male writers at this time hardly ever made women the centre of their narratives, and consequently their narrators are always either male or not gendered. Thus, a woman’s views on life narrated in the first person constitute resistance to the dominant literary tradition and to patriarchal expectations.

Compared to Mphahlele’s and Modisane’s autobiographies *Muriel* takes the novelization process one step further. Although the author, as she states in my interview, draws on her own experiences as a clerk in Johannesburg, (in the typescript Tlali even retains her own name Miriam), this text is not an autobiography. There is a clear, albeit episodic plot that begins in medias res. The narrator’s depiction of people and situations, her reminiscences, but mainly the social interactions of the community of workers at Metropolitan, form the nexus of the narrative. In the course of the narrative the eponymous narrator develops an awareness of her dire predicament, and she concludes with an open ending when the need for change turns into a crisis that leads to her resignation. Tlali is not telling her own complex life story, as Mphahlele does, nor is she describing an embittered personal history and life situation, as Modisane does. Instead, she transforms a short, specific period of her life into a humorous, entertaining narrative of the community at Metropolitan, from the narrator/protagonist’s first day of arrival till the day she resigns. Thus, the text constitutes a novelization of the writer’s personal experience, that is, a fictionalisation in line with one of the criteria that Bakhtin outlines.

For example, when Muriel visits Sophiatown, biographical details more or less correspond to the author’s own life. Tlali grew up and was married in Sophiatown, but, prior to its demolition, she moved away to live with her husband’s family in Soweto. In other words, she was not there when the removals were set in motion. In one of the rare ventures off the premises of Metropolitan Muriel and one of the drivers make a visit to Triomf, the suburb built on the ruins of Sophiatown, to repossess goods. During this trip Muriel mentions how she grew up in Sophiatown and how she loved the heterogeneous milieu. When she sees writing on the wall of what once was her wedding church: “God Our Father, Christ Our Redeemer, Man Our

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258 There are, of course, a few exceptions, e.g. Can Themba’s short story “Martha” (1956) and Sol T. Plaatje’s *Mhudi* (1930). However, the narrator in both cases is omnipresent and *Mhudi*, as mentioned above, is gradually moved to the background of the narrative as a symbol of a new South Africa.

259 Cullhed, interview I, 1-3.

260 In Sophiatown, once a throbbing black township, a melting-pot of many ‘nationalities’ or language-groups, blacks could own property, but by the time of the narrative it had been demolished by the Nationalist government.
Brother” (126), she remembers with pain the Sunday before the removals, when the women’s section of the ANC had congregated, and people of all races were singing: “We weep for our country . . . which was taken by the whites . . . Let them leave our land alone!” (127). Yet, whether these parallels between Tlali’s life and Muriel’s reminiscences are true or not is irrelevant:—as they are transformed into fiction, they merely add to the authenticity of the historical context—the removals and the historic demonstration by the ANC’s women’s league are here only seen in relation to the protagonist. In sum, it has been shown that by transforming a segment of personal experience into the novel form, and by introducing a female narrator, Tlali marks her own writing as different, reshapes black literary conventions of the time, and resists patriarchal ideals.

Realizing a “Multi-Languaged Consciousness”

Novelization entails a new literary awareness of the polyglot essence of language. As Bakhtin notes, a language is not a unified enterprise but consists of a diversity of idioms and genres, which the novel strives to accommodate:

The novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour . . . this internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre.261

In her first novel Tlali is thematically, as well as stylistically, preoccupied with language diversity both within one and the same language and above all as regards the many different languages in use in South Africa. This section aims to examine how Tlali’s Muriel incorporates what Bakhtin calls “a multi-languaged consciousness,” one of the traits of novelization, marking Muriel as different from the more univocal and monoglossic black male literary tradition at the time. Before Muriel there are, to my knowledge, no prose examples in the black tradition of a similar effort.262 Such language

262 In his light articles, Casey Motsisi uses what Bakhtin terms skaz to represent the English language spoken in the townships at the time. He thereby shows a certain degree of language awareness. For example, in “On the Beat,” The Drum Decade, he uses slang words like “blotto” (175) “boodle” and “cherrie” and a special syntax as in “[t]here’s a girl who’s sitting a few feet behind me who is proving to be the why for Kid’s jaded nerves” (176). This, however, is not what Bakhtin means with the concept ‘multi-language consciousness.’
awareness, it is suggested, functions to open up a space for difference, including a space for a woman’s voice.

As Muhlebach aptly points out, *Muriel* portrays a “multifaceted reality of languages”\(^{263}\) that are spoken among the black Africans, e.g. Sesotho, Zulu, Xhosa, Shangaan, Tsotsi,\(^{264}\) among the whites, Afrikaans, English, Yiddish, and between the two groups mutually, Afrikaans, English, Tsotsi, and Fanagalo.\(^{265}\) Metropolitan Radio is a veritable tower of Babel where it is hard to make oneself understood. The following episode conjures up an atmosphere of language confusion from the start. Here Adam, the main assistant at Metropolitan, acts as an interpreter between three African customers and the white boss, Mr. Bloch:

> The boss shouted: ‘Adam! Just get rid of these boys, man; they’ve been here too long, man. What are they all standing here and *katazing* (bothering) me for—what do they want?’
> The elderly African in the soiled dust-coat answered:
> ‘They want repair, baas. They don wan to pay six rands for repair, baas.’
> He addressed one of them in Fanagalo. The man produced a piece of paper and handed it to the boss.
> ‘Where’s the radio? What has been done to it?’
> ‘There, baas, on the table. Dire kod and new eriel.’
> ‘Dial cord and a new aerial? Tell them they’ve got to pay six rands, Adam. Did you put in a new battery?’
> ‘Yes, baas.’
> ‘Well, I haven’t even charged them for that, tell them.’
> Adam explained to them in Fanagalo. They were still unyielding and the boss must have decided to tackle them himself. He said, ‘*Mangaki mali wena funa kita?*’ (How much do you want to pay?)
> The men hesitated, looking at each other. The boss bargained, ‘All right. *Mabili mapondo kuphela*?’ (Two pounds only, then.)
> The three men looked astonished; they looked at each other, their eyes widening, and shook their heads s. The boss tried again. ‘*Mina haikona badalisa wena lo malahla.*’ (I’m not charging you for the ‘coal’, meaning battery.)
> ‘*Serataputa, senora, Miranda siranda*—*Wena lo-Portuguese eh? Wena lo Mashangaan*?’
> Everybody laughed. One of the so-called mine-boys, grinning, took out four rands from his trouser pocket and paid. (9-10)

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263 Muhlebach 79.
264 Tsotsi is a pidgin language initially created by gangsters in the townships. It is derived from most languages spoken among blacks in Johannesburg, and used by many blacks to forge language barriers.
265 Fanagalo is another pidgin language (see Tsotsi above) created as a means of communication between labourers and the foremen in the mines. Black mine-workers migrated to the mines from all over Southern Africa and therefore spoke many languages. Fanagalo has subsequently spread and was/is common as a means of communication between a white employer and his/her black employees.
The word “katazing,” is Afrikaans-English slang. In addition, Mr Bloch first speaks English, before switching over to Fanagalo, and Adam is rendered as speaking ‘rotten’ English, while the mine ‘boys’ speak Portuguese, “Ser-ataputa senhora,” and Shangaan, “Wena lo Portugues eh?” (Do you speak Portuguese?). As Mr Bloch assumes that all blacks speak Fanagalo, the joke finally falls on him, since he cannot make himself understood to these customers at all. When the three men react to his speech by asking whether Mr Bloch speaks Portuguese or Shangaan, the informed reader may deduce that they are fairly newly arrived migratory workers from Mozambique, which makes it even less likely that they speak Fanagalo, a fact that the black employees and other customers are already aware of: hence, the laughter all around. The narrator Muriel thus incorporates heteroglossia to make a good story out of these language difficulties.

The writer/narrator shows an awareness of the many languages that the characters speak, an awareness of how they mix languages, create new words, understand and misunderstand one another, due both to problems of language, and/or their knowledge or lack of knowledge of the culture of the Other, which of course is mediated through language. In fact, Muriel is hired specifically to manage the language ‘problem’ at Metropolitan, “to fill in particulars [sic] forms for hire purchase agreements where the customers were blacks, Coloured and Indian. This was to remain my exclusive duty” (15). She is employed to decipher the black clients’ addresses, to try to understand their often complicated marital relationships (due to the laws of apartheid), and to explain the intricacies of the credit system to the black customers in languages that they will understand. Having been brought up in Sophiatown, one of the most heterogeneous language communities in South Africa, she is found to be the ideal “interpreter” between the many languages at her workplace. She knows that she owes her job partly to this skill, and is often asked to explain the customs of ‘her’ people to the white employees. For instance, when the African custom of naming children is discussed Muriel is called on to explain a rather strange name to the white ladies:

But they have such funny first names,’ said Mrs Stein.
Mrs Kuhn smiled.
‘Yes, names like Lorry and Spitfire … or Capetown. Lovey, Beauty, Naughty-boy … those you can always spell easily.’ (129)

‘And what about the other one I saw the other day. I don’t know what language it is—Ayisiyu, or something. Muriel, what’s that now?’ asked Mrs Stein.

‘Oh yes. That must be “I see you,” hey, Muriel?’ said Mrs Kuhn.
They all laughed.

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266 This term designates a much deformed English idiom, often deployed to describe a form of English used in the former British colonies that is hard to understand.
‘No, Mrs Kuhn,’ I said. ‘You see, I asked that customer what her name meant and she said that it was actually the initials “I.C.U.” Her father used to be an official of an organisation called Industrial Commercial Workers’ Union at the time she was born. She says the clerks at the pass office did not understand what she said when they made her pass, so they just wrote Ayisiyu.’

Unlike the white women, Muriel refrains from laughing at the customer with the strange name since her language competence helps her understand it, suggesting the importance, especially in South Africa, of this kind of knowledge.

Muriel is notably aware of the power inherent in mastering several languages. In one instance her boss accuses her of “educating” a customer, that is, explaining the credit system to the customer in a language that this customer will understand with the result that the customer claims his money back. For this the boss calls Muriel “a big mouth” and even threatens to dismiss her (64-65). Thus, her language skills give her a reputation of being a trouble maker, as the following dialogue also shows:

Adam was also talking and the noise was intolerable. Mr Bloch tried to take control.

‘Adam, shut up, man. You talk too much!’

‘Yes, that’s her fault. She makes him cheeky like that. Ever since she came here you can’t speak to any of them. She’s always talking to all the agents, the customers, all the men.’

‘But that is why I’m here, to speak to customers, agents and everybody who needs my help. What do you think I am, a doll or something?’ (69)

Muriel’s refusal to be silenced, to be ‘a doll,’ is a protest against both apartheid and patriarchy. Mainly, though, it highlights the importance of being able to master several different languages for successful communication between various sections of South African society, by extension also between the male and the female spheres of society.

Language awareness is further shown when, on a few occasions, the characters in Muriel choose a specific language in order to keep other people in the dark as to what is being said. For example, when Muriel narrates and mocks the fact that certain groups cannot understand other groups, sensitive statements, even jokes, are made in the vernacular over the heads of the white people who have no knowledge of the vernaculars.267 In this episode, the white ladies loudly discuss Adam’s manner of cleaning the floor. They loudly remark on how he drops cigarette ash on it while dusting, which prompts Mrs Kuhn’s suggestion that it has to do with his feet:

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267 There is still a lack of reciprocity on this score in South Africa: blacks often speak several Bantu languages and either English or Afrikaans, often both, whereas very few whites speak a Bantu language and often have a poor knowledge of the other European language.
‘It’s his bunions, Mrs Stein,’ Mrs Kuhn replied. ‘Hey, Adam, what happened to those bunions, those corns, Adam, are they finished now?’

Adam ignored them completely. They might just as well have been speaking to a wall. He moved away from them and came slouching towards me. He looked annoyed. Mrs Kuhn asked him again, ‘Adam, why don’t you answer?’ She and Mrs Stein laughed.

‘Why don’t you say something, Adam?’ I asked him, and he replied in vernacular, ‘Do you answer a lunatic’s questions? It’s only because the baas is not here. As soon as the baas goes, they start their nonsense.’ (92)

Adam, we realize, addresses Muriel well within earshot of the white women, but since he has switched to the vernacular he is not afraid to voice his opinion. He then goes on to talk about things that “the white man knows nothing about,” even calling the white people “evil spirits” (93). As she cannot understand him, Mrs Kuhn loudly protests: “I just can’t concentrate with Adam’s voice over there. Muriel, Adam’s talking too much. Just chase him away!” (93). To Mrs Kuhn, Adam’s vernacular carries no meaning at all, it is just so much disturbing noise, a message the text convincingly conveys.

Here, again, the narrator is reminding the reader of the importance of fostering an understanding between different societal spheres.

Seldom departing from English, the narrative nevertheless manages to communicate the diversity of languages and some of the idioms spoken at Metropolitan. The reader realises, for instance, that while Muriel uses a vernacular when talking to Adam, she addresses the coloured mechanic Douglas and Mrs Green in Afrikaans. Also, we understand, that to the white ladies, Mrs Kuhn and Mrs Stein, she speaks English, to some of the black drivers Fanagalo or Tsotsi (pidgin languages), and to black customers various Bantu vernaculars. Usually the narrator mentions outright which language is being spoken: “Mrs Stein came in carrying parcels and followed by Lennie. They were speaking in Afrikaans and smiling” (73), or, “[t]hen the boss and his sister continued speaking in Yiddish. After a while, the boss switched again to English to ask, ‘And Mrs Stein, where’s she?’” (73). Another technique of direct heteroglossia is when sentences in a language other than English are not translated: “Mrs Stein only nodded her head and went on adding loudly, ‘… vyf, elf, agtien – Een honderd, agt-en-twintig Rand, tien sent’” (92). In the Longman edition the Afrikaans is sometimes translated, but other times not: ‘Muriel, luister altyd as hulle skinner van my. My man is al moeg van hierdie plek’ (52).268 which is rather a long sentence not to translate, suggesting either that the reader can be expected to understand it, or that the text refuses to indulge the reader. In the typescript these insertions are not even italicised. The Fanagalo spoken by Mr. Bloch, on the other hand, is always meticulously translated, signalling perhaps that any reader would find this

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268 In English: “‘five, eleven, eighteen—one hundred, twenty-eight Rand and ten cent,’ and ‘Muriel, you must always try to hear if they gossip about me. My, I am so sick of this place’ [My translation].”
difficult to understand. However, even the famous freedom song, sung by the ANC women in a vernacular, is translated: “Mabayekumhlaba Wethu!! ... (Let them leave our land ...) Thina Siswe ... Thina Sizwessinsundu” (We the black nation ...)”(126). Consequently, to convey the variety of languages the narrator most often merely states which language is being spoken; only rarely does Tlali incorporate a vernacular idiom.

Additional evidence of heteroglossia are the two distinct English idioms in the text: standard English and ‘rotten’ English. When Adam is rendered as using his own vernacular he speaks standard English: “Do you remember how even the boss used to call a white doctor to examine me in the shop here and how many times that doctor came to give me injections?” (93). When, on the other hand, he is shown to speak English he uses a ‘rotten’ idiom which at times is incomprehensible: “Dat rorry for Dan, baas. He stuck in Industria and I get rift in, baas. Dan ter’ me he do reven garrans for forte-two maeres, dat rorry, baas” (155).269 The Longman version partly offers a translation rendered by Mr Bloch’s rephrasing of it in the form of a question: “Daniel told you the lorry had eleven gallons of petrol in only forty-two miles?” (155). Thus the narrator manages to convey the full spectrum of the language diversity at Metropolitan Radio. While such heteroglossia constitutes a considerable step on the path of novelization, because of its difference from the conventions of a more univocal and monoglossic black male writing, I claim, it also questions the patriarchal monopoly of the symbolic sphere. By realizing a multi-languaged consciousness Tlali not only moves the novelizing process forward but also sets her own writing apart from the black male tradition, which constitutes her first strategy of difference in resistance to patriarchy. Second, Tlali imparts an awareness of the variety of discourses in the country, 270 which promotes a generous and open-ended world-view that creates scope for difference, for the Other, and by implication, for a woman’s voice. “The mosaic of voices she evokes,” Muhlebach claims, “creates a context which is officially dichotomized but in reality fragmented, and which thereby steadfastly contests hegemonic discourse.”271

Even if Muhlebach here is referring to the hegemonic discourse of apartheid, the statement may also apply to the hegemony of patriarchal discourse, since she further contends that “[t]he usage of multiple languages by the author is

269 “Boss, Dan’s lorry got stuck in Industria and I got a lift in. Dan told me that lorry does forty-two miles in eleven gallons [My interpretation].” The Ravan version does not include this quote. In the original ms. kept at NELM the quote reads: “Dat ‘rorry’ for Dan baas. He stuck in Industria and I geté ‘rift’ from ‘ada’ baas. Dan ‘ter’ me he do ‘reve’ ‘garraus’ for forté-two ‘maeras’, dat ‘rorry’ baas” (156).

270 Today there are eleven official languages in South Africa: Zulu, Pedi, SeTswana, Xhosa, Shangaan, SeSotho, Ndebele, Griqua, San, English, and Afrikaans.

a strategy of portraying diversification in a much wider sense.”272 Such an endeavor breaks off from the male black literary tradition and resists patriarchal attitudes.

New “Temporal Co-ordinates”: Modernity as Resistance to the Epic

With *Muriel at Metropolitan*, the black South African novel, to reiterate Bakhtin’s words, “steps out of the world of the epic,” which is “a radical step” for an author to take.273 In contrast to the genre of the novel, the epic embraces and expounds the traditions of nations and, according to Anne McClintock, nationalism in South Africa was/is “constituted as a gendered discourse.”274 In other words, to resist the epic mode is to resist its gendered nationalistic discourse, and by extension, patriarchy. Discussing the relationship between nationalism and patriarchy, Boehmer writes: “both [identify] a unitary, monologic vision, a tendency to authorise homogenising perceptions and social structures and to suppress plurality. Nationalism, like patriarchy, favours singleness—one identity, one growth pattern, one birth and blood for all . . . [and] will promote specifically unitary or ‘one-eyed’ forms of consciousness.”275 In Tlali’s *Muriel* the antonym of such ‘unitary’ and nationalist forms is modernity in the sense of a celebration of scientific, rational thought grounded in education, individualism, and new Western technology. If modernity also comprises, as Neil Lazarus claims, “reflexivity and historical consciousness”276 then the epic, as its counterpart, may be characterized by non-reflexivity and a lack of perspective. It is true that the epic celebrates heroes and battles and is suffused by a sense of a great historical past, but it lacks distance to itself. While modernity, of course, can never escape tradition altogether, its reflexivity creates a distance that makes it possible to discuss and even critique tradition. By introducing what Bakhtin calls “new literary co-ordinates,” *Muriel* embraces reflexivity and an historical awareness, that is, modernity makes it possible for the narrator to critique the nationalist traditionalism of the epic mode. Instead of evoking an epic, mythical past *Muriel* manifests what Bakhtin calls “direct contact with developing

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272 Muhlebach 79.

273 Of course, there are writers who write epic prose, for example Ngugi wa Thiong’o and Ousmane Sembène, but it is no longer the dominant genre that it was when the novel, as Bakhtin claims, began to evolve in the West in resistance to the epic mode, then predominantly a poetic mode.

274 McClintock 355.


reality." This section first discusses the new literary co-ordinates before showing how Muriel thematically resists nationalism and its patriarchal discourse.

Since the narrator Muriel is highly self-conscious about the modernity that surrounds her—the modernity of the city, of her education, and of office work-life—this in itself constitutes a firm thematic stand against the diffuse “epic past” of traditions and nationalism. In contrast to the black historical novels mentioned above, Muriel depicts contemporary urban working life. The name Metropolitan Radio, the firm that “deals in radios, furniture, and electrical household appliances” (123), both stresses the urban locality and signals modernity. The importance of the radio as an icon of modernity in the 1960s is evident from a derogatory remark about blacks by a white worker: “They’ll give anything for a radio. They would rather go hungry and naked. As long as they have an F. M., they are satisfied” (31-2). What is more, several times specific brand-names of radios are mentioned such as “[a] Blaupunkt, three band Baracuda,” (31) or “a four-band Omega” (97), adding emphasis to the trendy, modern setting.

Moreover, repeated references to other modern appliances such as telephones, addressographs, adding-machines, lorries, and scooters stress the arrival of new technology. For example, “[a]s a rule they had to report every morning with whatever money they had collected and were given petrol slips with which they could have their scooter tanks filled at the garage” (16), which is a sentence that hardly takes the plot forward but fills the purpose of signalling the modernity of the setting. Also, the shop’s interior is described in detail: “piles and piles of papers, books, catalogues, stacks of folders and files containing invoices, statements, delivery-notes, hire purchase agreements” (24). Such a significant stacking of references to the paraphernalia of a modern, literate society, at a time when only a small percentage of the black population were literate, creates a distance to the non-literate past. Such an obvious relish for detail pertaining to modern appliances emphasises what Bakhtin calls “maximal contact with the present,” which singles out the present as the new literary co-ordinate in the text, the other being the past, which is also evoked in the text, but from which Tlali’s text distances itself.

Bakhtin, “Epic and Novel,” The Dialogic Imagination 39. Bakhtin acknowledges such a role for the novel: “The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is, after all, the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it” (7). Furthermore, he writes: “The novel . . . is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questioning, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review. Such, indeed, is the only possibility open to a genre that structures itself in a zone of direct contact with developing reality” (39).

Two co-ordinates are needed in order to position oneself on a plane. Tlali introduces the present as one of her literary co-ordinates, while the past, from which she distances herself, is the other. In the epic, the co-ordinates in use all belong to the past.
The narrator of the text resorts to several techniques in order to introduce this new set of co-ordinates. For example, to create distance to the epic’s high-flown language and elevated topics of heroes and descriptions of kings and court life, Tlali’s narrator does not shirk low, ‘unofficial’ details of, for example, the toilet facilities that made daily living a struggle under apartheid. Muriel’s realistic description of “the heavy stench which emanated from the stagnant urine on the floor of the toilet . . . Being in there was like being in hell. . . . drunken men of all races kept pushing the door open and peering in at you” (34), is a glimpse of a mundane, albeit modern world far from the nationalist endeavour. Moreover, the text at times juxtaposes modernity and tradition in order to highlight the difference between the two. In the following passage, the white mechanic Lennie, along with Muriel, personifies a modern paradigm of thought, which contrasts with traditional medicinal beliefs embraced by both Adam and a black woman customer. The white mechanic asks:

‘What’s wrong, Adam?’

‘Baas Lennie, dis custom is kros. She say portabol still no gudu and she pay ten rands las week when you finish repair.’

The customer did look cross. I could see her speaking and gesticulating, looking from Adam to Lennie, explaining what was wrong with her radio. She addressed Adam harshly but spoke politely to the white mechanic. Poor Adam, as usual, was paying the price of being black.

Lennie called me over to help. They were standing round a portable radio, a four-band Omega which stood neatly on the desk on several layers of cloth in which it had been wrapped, like a beloved infant who was again brought to the doctor for medical examination, and whose mother was standing by, worried by its painful relapse.

Lennie looked bored and impatient. He was turning the knobs and pressing the buttons on the radio. I listened to what the customer had to say. She could speak English quite fluently and I wondered why the mechanic had asked for my assistance.

‘Master, listen. This radio doesn’t speak Zulu after five o’clock.’

Lennie replied impatiently, ‘But there’s Zulu.’ He said, turning to me, ‘Muriel, please explain to her. Maybe it was the battery, it was weak. There. I’ve put in a new battery and it sounds different already.’

I repeated what the mechanic said, and interpreted her reply. ‘She’s not concerned about the tone. She says after five o’clock every evening, the radio just stops playing.’

‘What’s wrong, is it bewitched?’ Adam asked the customer in vernacular. The customer looked at him and said, ‘Yes. You bewitched it here. You want me to come and pay more money. You only half fix it up.’

‘Where are you living, far?’ Lennie asked, thinking that perhaps if she lived too far from the nearest F.M. tower the distance might affect its reception. Instead of addressing the mechanic, she turned to Adam and myself, and spoke sharply, pointing and almost shouting, ‘Mona, Berario mona. Qholong ea nta mona!’ (Here, in Berrario, just here. On the hip-joint of a louse!). (97-98)
By juxtaposing the customer’s and Adam’s animistically informed regard for
the radio and Lennie’s and Muriel’s more rational understanding of the trappings of modernity, this scene highlights the differences, and points out the frustration of the woman who is caught up in traditional thinking, thereby subtly questioning old paradigms of thought. The dialogue between the two paradigms helps to foreground Tlali’s text as one that steps out of the past, into the world of the reflexive novel, fully aware of the historical relativity of the past and the forces of modernity.

Besides introducing new literary co-ordinates, *Muriel* resists nationalism and its patriarchal discourse thematically. African nationalism and patriarchy, as shown, combine in the epic mode to glorify the national heroes in the shape of kings or chiefs. In *Muriel* one episode focuses on traditional customs surrounding specific African kings and discusses the role of the chiefs. The passage is quoted at length, because the celebration of heroic deeds and tribal pursuits is here first replaced by an ironic playful enactment of reverential acts in the middle of ongoing modern office life, only to be thoroughly questioned and criticised. A group of black employees are standing around the shop waiting for their weekly pay cheques when the main “repossess man,”279 Agrippa, saunters in:

They were standing about, some of them leaning against old furniture, and engaged in quiet talk. William No. 2 came in last. With the load of portable radios he was carrying in both hands, he seemed even shorter than he actually was.

As soon as he appeared, Agrippa shouted, ‘*S’bona wena, we Matanzima!* (We see thee, oh Matanzima!) Ever since this day dawned, I’m seeing a human being—a real one—for the first time, oh Matanzima!”

William No. 2 put the portables down, smiled and went nearer to Agrippa to shake his extended hand, saying loudly, ‘*Ewe, Sobhuza!*’

All the others, looking at them and amused at the performance, laughed heartily. It was Lambert who remarked in ridicule, ‘What’s all this Sobhuza and Matanzima business? You are greeting Agrippa as if you are entering a *kraal* and dressed in *amabheshu* making *bayete* (salute) of the days of Shaka.’

I added, ‘Yes, Agrippa should be sitting on a grass mat spread over a floor smeared with cow-dung, and you, William, should be carrying a skin shield and a spear instead of those portable radios.’ The others laughed.

Adam, pointing at Lambert and myself, said, ‘By the way, we have here Johannesburg born and bred ones, children of the houses with the numbers.’

‘Yes, Adam,’ said Agrippa. ‘Lambert does not have a chief, he knows nothing about the real things a young man should know, and neither do most of you here.’

‘Just what are those things anyway? Tell us,’ Simon asked.

Adam explained. ‘The correct way of greeting your elders and respectable people is one of them. Chiefs must be respected …’

279 An employee at Metropolitan who helps the firm retrieve goods bought on credit that the customer has not been able to pay for.
Lambert cut him short. ‘What is a chief anyway? In what way does his presence affect my life?’

Silas added, ‘Yes, tell him, Lambert, our chiefs are our location superintendents, all of us here.’

Lambert went on, ‘All of you are governed by the laws of the superintendents not the dummies you call chiefs. They too, Sobhuza and Matanzima and the rest, when they come here, they must be under the superintendents or the city councils—the white men.’

Agrippa refused to accept that. He boasted, ‘Not my chief, not Sobhuza, King of the Swazis!’ (42-43)

Lambert and Silas, shown to embrace the modern point of view that traditional African chiefs no longer have any power and need not be taken into account, here ridicule the traditionalists Agrippa and Adam (the latter of whom we also recognize as a traditionalist from the previous quote), who instead speak reverently about their chiefs and kings. Initially, this is mainly an exchange of opinions between men with Muriel merely in the background, jokingly emphasising the contrast between the traditional and the modern. She points out the primitivism of the scene with these uncompromising words: “a grass mat spread over a floor smeared with cow-dung,” and contrasts the modernity of the “portable radios” to the ancient artefacts “a skin shield and a spear,” giving the reader a hint of her own point of view before she has the final say:

‘Yes, we Africans are undergoing a change,’ I replied. ‘We are fast acquiring the white man’s way of life—we have to in order to fit into this modern world. As different tribes in the past we had a few cultural differences, but these minor distinctions are a thing of the past. They may be put down on record and preserved, stored away in the museums and archives so that coming generations may read about them and know them, but they now belong to an age we shall never go back to, an age we cannot go back to whether we like it or not.’ (44)

Here, the hierarchies of the epic past are first ridiculed, only to be discarded. In other words, parody resolutely closes the door on nation-building along tribal lines, framing it as a by-gone discourse fit only for the archives, completely alien to the discourse of modernity.280

Another example of the narrator’s ridicule of the traditionalists is her mention of the paradox manifest in Agrippa’s life: on the one hand he is proud of his “Swazi royal blood,” on the other hand, as the most competent of the ‘repossess’ men, he helps Mr. Bloch to retrieve goods that have not been paid for, which marks him as a traitor to his own people. For this reason, Muriel mocks his heroic boastfulness by juxtaposing his pride and his

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280 I am quoting from the Longman version. Unlike this edition, and the typescript, however, the Ravan edition only kept the first few lines of this monologue, putting them in the voice of Lambert.
detested work: “I have Swazi royal blood in my veins. My name is Agrippa. I am Mlambo’s son. And this is my work!” (55). Of course, this juxtaposition may be interpreted as emphasising the degradation of blacks by apartheid, since even those with royal blood need do menial tasks. However, considering the playful context and the critique of traditionalism prior to this passage, I suggest that this juxtaposition instead evokes a sense of past hierarchies that modernity has deprived of meaning; it illustrates the futility of clinging to traditional lineages today. In consequence, national attributes and their patriarchal overtones are ridiculed.

Making use of a mixture of characterization, transposition, metaphor, and synecdoche, the following episode exposes not only Muriel’s resistance to tribal traditions, but also her equating of tribal tradition with patriarchy. Again, Adam is shown to embody traditional ideals when he reveals his extensive knowledge of traditional customs, which he generously imparts to Muriel, hoping to inspire her to resort to traditional medicine:

Now, you listen to me, Muriel. You have acquired much of the knowledge of the white man’s life, but I can see that you are in fact ignorant. Some things in life the white man knows nothing about. You are weak, my child. You must ask your husband to speak to his parents to get you a good African witch-doctor to strengthen you against some of these evil spirits. If you are weak, these things can be dangerous.’

He paused for a while. He was stern and spoke with the typical authority of a man of his age.

‘Look how you behaved this morning when that customer came to you with that pass which had been “worked on.” You must be very careful. It can happen that a man whose aim may be to “get” you, can come here and cast a spell over you so powerful that you can actually leave your house and your husband and children and go running after him!’

I laughed, but Adam was in earnest. He went on seriously. ‘For instance, consider this illness of your child which kept you away from work for so long. That should not have happened. If you had taken the child to our doctors it would have been better . . . You must get someone to work on you.

(92-93)

The belief in traditional medicine functions as a synecdoche for African traditions in general, and for patriarchy in particular since Adam is described as one who has the “typical authority of a man of his age” (92), and who allows himself to be “stern” when speaking to Muriel. In turn he ‘naturally’ expects her to listen to him respectfully and heed his advice. The narrator, just as traditionally, seemingly humbles herself and complies with his ideas by showing her (traditional) respect. Successively, however, the narrator distances herself from Adam’s patriarchal attitude. First, she only mildly refuses his advice by laughing at him in a friendly, almost respectful way: “I laughed, but Adam was in earnest” (93). Second, Muriel transposes her voice to Mrs Kuhn’s voice, as her position as a white woman allows Mrs
Kuhn a greater scope of overtness. Irritated that Adam is “talking too much” (93) the narrator feels obliged to explain what Adam has just suggested, after which Mrs Kuhn loudly exclaims: “Oh, Adam talks a lot of nonsense!” (94). The frank voice of Mrs Kuhn overtly expresses what Muriel, a black woman in conversation with a black man, may only quietly insinuate. When the narrator again assumes authority, her opinion of Adam emerges, again covertly, imparting to the reader her critique of Adam by portraying him and his traditional wisdom in the following way:

I looked at Adam as he moved away, thankful that he was going towards the linoleum, and not coming to compel me to answer the questions he had asked me as I might have disappointed him. He had imparted part of his extensive knowledge to me, a lot of which still remains inside that head of his. He slowly slouched back to his post, the soles of his unlaced worn shoes hardly leaving the surface of the floor, but rubbing over it with every step. He gave me one more knowing look and shook his head slowly, perhaps regretting my apparent state of utter ignorance and stubbornness. He sat, sullen, facing the door, his eyes staring, his lips partially parted. He sat dead still, big and rugged like the sphinx, as if he was part of the furniture, stiff and static. (94)

Muriel’s disapproval of Adam’s traditional and paternal values is here evinced in her use of metaphor. The trope of the sphinx embodies traditional patriarchy: outmoded, static, “dead,” grand in its time but outrun by modernity. Thus, by making use of characterisation, transposition, and metaphor, the narrative resists tribal traditions, while the synecdoche enables it once more to critique patriarchy.

It has been shown that Tlali introduces new literary co-ordinates into black literature when she posits modernity as a mode from which to view traditional practices. In Bakhtin’s terminology this is one way of enhancing the novelization process. At the same time, since the nationalistic tradition was equivalent to patriarchal rule, such a novelizing trait also functions to critique patriarchy. The heroes of the nation, and the chiefs, were all powerful men who ruled over and oppressed women. To resist this form of nationalism, then, is to resist patriarchy. Lastly, using subtle narrative tools Tlali portrays patriarchy as an outmoded practice.

Resisting Patriarchal Stereotype, the ‘Spectacular,’ and Escapism

This section departs from Bakhtin’s novelistic traits and aims to examine how Muriel at Metropolitan resists the conventions of stereotype, the ‘spectacular’ and escapism forged in the South African black male literary tradition. All three contain elements that represent patriarchal attitudes in black male writing at this time, for example, the violence of the ‘spectacular’ mode and the escape from the ordinariness of domestic life to the glamour of the shebeen and the ensuing evasion of a serious political discussion in the es-
capist mode. Therefore, to resist these motifs is also to resist patriarchy. The aim of this section is to show how the depiction of women in *Muriel* opposes stereotypical male depictions of women, especially in earlier ‘epic’ writing, how a low-key mode of narration in *Muriel*, in combination with the non-dramatic setting of the novel, resists ‘the spectacular’ in later black male writing, and how the gradual development of the story, an involvement with ‘the ordinary,’ and the serious political discussion pursued in the narrative challenge its escapism. All three of these male conventions are found in the writing of the *Drum* decade, discussed above.

*Muriel* resists the stereotypes of earlier black male writing, most obviously, by introducing a new type of black woman protagonist. In contrast to male writers’ protagonists, for example Plaatje’s Mhudi, who is a symbol of the nation, or Mphahlele’s many traditional mothers, Muriel is above all a modern working woman, well educated, with a good command of English, economics and bookkeeping; moreover, she is politically aware, knowledgeable about trade unions and the laws of the country. She values her own rationality and the condition she shares with all humanity. Asked outright ‘what’ she is Muriel answers: “What do you mean what am I? I’m a human being, of course” (68). Muriel thus resists being defined in stereotypical terms of race or gender; rejecting any label others want to pin on her she first and foremost regards herself as a person worthy of respect.

Furthermore, Muriel also mostly depicts others in a non-stereotypical fashion. The characters who run the most risk of becoming figures of ridicule are the Jewish boss, Mr Bloch, his sister Mrs Kuhn, and the “die-hard Afrikaner” woman, Mrs Stein. While at times characterised as exploitative, racist ‘Herrenvolk,’ they are also assigned positive human characteristics such as patience, humour, maternal or paternal warmth, an ability to forgive, and a basic concern for the black workers’ well-being. For example, towards the end of the novel, the narrator reflects on Mr Bloch’s egalitarian attitude: for him “[t]he colour of our skins did not come into it—there was work to be

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281 Ndebele in 1990 sought a serious political discussion in black writing that, eliding Tlali’s writing altogether, he claims not to have come across. In this alleged void, Tlali has her narrator seize every opportunity to inform about political issues. Ndebele’s oversight is, of course, understandable given that these lengthy political sections were excluded by the first Ravan Press edition, the one in circulation for ten years. The excluded passages, as mentioned, were only reinserted in the Longman edition that, in turn, was banned for many years.

282 Michael Chapman’s popular anthology of texts from this period called *The Drum Decade: Short Stories from the 1950s* (Pietermaritzburg: U of Natal P, 2001) may give this literary period a name: “the Drum decade.” If one stretches the decade up until 1965, when the banning order was served, one can incorporate two autobiographies: Ezekiel Mphahlele’s *Down Second Avenue* (1959), and Bloke Modisane’s *Blame Me On History* (1963) within this period, or “decade.”

283 However, there are references to the whites that fall into the category of stereotype. For instance, when Muriel reflects that “[y]ou always know what to expect from the Boers” (71).

284 Although Mr Bloch and his sister Mrs Kuhn are Jewish, as whites in South Africa the politics of the regime assigned them the position of ‘Herrenvolk’ vis-à-vis the blacks.
done, and the boss had equal confidence in all of us. When there was an error in the office records, he did not care what colour the hand was that made the error, only whose handwriting it was. When a radio or motor was damaged in the workshop, it did not matter if the mechanic responsible was white or black” (163). For this reason, the final lines of the novel, in which Muriel looks into Mr Bloch’s eyes and says, “[t]hanks for everything”(190), are to my mind totally devoid of irony.

Unlike the spectacle of male writing discussed above, Muriel presents a low-key, non-dramatic narration of rather mundane events. Instead of depicting violence or appealing to strong feelings of resentment or vengeance, Muriel subtly foregrounds the small injustices of every-day life. Alongside outright political ‘preaching,’ Muriel, with didactic scrupulousness, depicts incidents likely to awaken the reader’s awareness of the political situation, or to gently provoke identification with the protagonist’s dilemma. Her observations promote rational thought and caution rather than emotional reaction and violence. The slow evolvement of a dramatic instance in the chapter called “A Slap in the Face” may serve as an example. Muriel’s situation at work gradually becomes more difficult to bear due to suspicions against her harboured by the white workers. The incidents that generate these accusations are characteristically non-dramatic: they are ‘the toilet incident,’ (22) ‘the incident of the addressed statements on the ledger cards,’ (63) ‘the incident of the legal document,’ and ‘the incident when the boss is accused of all too often asking for Muriel’s advice,’ to the dislike of the white ladies (64). As Muriel is “beginning to despair,” she narrates the “worst incident,” in which she, ironically, because of the anti-climax, is accused of “educating’ African customers” (64). The irony, of course, derives from the positive connotations of the word education. The argument that ensues, after Muriel is accused of theft, in comparison to the ongoing societal violence caused by the enforcement of apartheid, is drama in a low key:

[The boss] stood listening to our heated exchange, looking from one to the other. Then he said, ‘Keep quiet, Lieda, I’ll deal with her!’

‘Have you been telling Mr Bloch lies about me?’ I asked Mrs Kuhn. She would have struck me if the boss had not stopped her. As she came storming towards me, the boss pushed her back, saying, ‘Go back, Lieda. What’s wrong with you? If she wants she can go; I can’t pay her for telling customers nonsense!’ (66)

The boss explains the intricacies of leaving work without notice: Muriel will only get paid for the days she has actually worked that month, and Muriel in turn patiently explains the episode to him in the following cool, detailed way:
‘Mr Bloch, I never said that I wanted to go. It was Mrs Kuhn who advised you to fire me and I answered her back by saying that I would rather go than be called a thief. Besides, I was never told not to tell the customer the truth.’

I was surprised that the boss had the patience to listen to me. Who was I, after all, what did I think I was? I kept expecting him to remind me as I had been so many times in my life, ‘Don’t forget that you are only a native, see?’ But to my surprise, Mr Bloch never uttered those words. He just sat there and listened to me. (66)

Here there are no exaggerated emotions, all is subdued; instead of being overwhelmed by hatred, the protagonist, as always, resorts to afterthought and persuasion and no drama seems to be added for effect, or ‘spectacle.’ Violence hovers only as a diffuse background threat.

Similarly, the portrayal of Muriel’s gradual development towards an awareness of her predicament also resists the convention of the ‘spectacular.’ Unlike the flashy action, sudden reversals of fortune, and violence found in the Drum stories, Muriel is portrayed with psychological subtlety: step by step she realises how companies such as Metropolitan further the cruelty of apartheid, and how her position there is gradually making her complicit with this policy. Initially, she is pleased to have landed a new job and has “nothing to complain about except that it was too noisy”(12), and still, after some time at Metropolitan, she likes Mrs Kuhn for being “so friendly and kind”(14). But when she eventually begins to realise what her work entails, a more negative tone is heard:

I had seen apartheid applied in many spheres in the Republic but never before had I seen it applied to ledger or record cards! At Metropolitan Radio we kept the European cards in one section separated from the non-European cards. It was all very confusing for a person who did not know the different Coloured townships because that was the only clue to where the card should be filed or found (15-16).

Then gradually, she is introduced to the tragic consequences of the credit system. The head African salesman William No. 1 is the first to explain to her that he is not happy about “the high interest rates at this place”:

It’s killing our people. Every time I introduce a person here, I know he’ll pay and pay and pay. It makes me feel guilty, like I’ve brought him to be slaughtered.’

‘How are the other shops? Don’t they also charge interest?’

‘They do. But not as high as here. You’ll see.’ (17)

This information leaves Muriel “trembling” with “uneasiness and loneliness,” and a feeling of hopelessness, which slowly grows into a strong conviction. In this state, a black customer’s reaction serves as an eye-opener to her: “She looked at me as if I were a traitor, and went away without saying
goodbye [Emphasis added]” (100). Muriel’s newly found insight finally forces her to act, making her confide in Douglas that she feels as if she is sitting “between two fires”(81). Finally, in the last paragraph, she admits that she can “not continue to be part of the web that has been woven to entangle a people whom I love and am part of” (190). This portrayal of Muriel’s gradual transformation, ultimately resulting in feelings of solidarity with the Black Consciousness Movement, contrasts sharply with the mostly escapist ‘pacey’ prose of the Drum stories.285

In place of the escapism of the Drum writing, Muriel introduces ‘the ordinary’ as a subject matter for the novel. As mentioned above, Tlali’s narrative engages with the ordinary lives of very ordinary people. In addition, in place of male writers’ refusal to engage in political matters she posits a serious political discussion revolving around the powerlessness of the black people. At the time, the narrative explicitly points out that, due to laws implemented by the apartheid regime, blacks had no right to vote, could not own property, and were not allowed to go on strike. This type of discussion, Cecily Lockett writes, renders Tlali’s project “didactic in nature.”286 In black South African fiction, didacticism is a frequently used narrative device that lacks the negative connotations that are ascribed to this phenomenon by Westernised critics, such as Lockett. Tlali’s ‘didactic’ sections are often dialogic, that is, they take the form of a discussion, where the characters are allowed to voice their opinions, but where the reader is left to be the judge.287 For example, when the white mechanic Douglas complains about his low wages, Muriel takes the opportunity to comment on the different working conditions for blacks and whites and finds it apt to explain to Douglas how the white unions protect the interests of the white workers. On the other hand, she says, the “non-white workers were unorganised, and it was difficult to get them more organised” as it was “illegal for non-whites to strike” (80). She does not try, however, to persuade him to change his mind but lets him carry on grumbling. At other times she is more forceful, as for example in a heated discussion with the two white ladies in the chapter “One Human Heart for Another”:

‘But Muriel, what do you think would happen if the Europeans left and went back to Europe? The black people would massacre one another, wouldn’t they?’
Mrs Kuhn, who had been quiet for some time, came to life.
‘Yes. Look at what happened in the Congo!’
It was always raised as an example of the inability of the Africans to govern themselves. I sighed.

285 Of course, compared to the short story the novel form invites such deliberations. Nevertheless, I find the difference highly relevant for my overall argument of novelization.
287 Amandla! incorporates one such long (50 page) political discussion.
‘Why did the Belgians keep all doors closed to the Africans for all those years until the eleventh hour? Why did they not train the Africans in local administration first and give them responsible positions gradually, why did they wait until the people demanded rights? If they had been given adequate education and prepared, they would have been able to take over without disastrous results.’ (180)

Here Tlali is venting both sides of the argument, giving the reader a chance to form his/her own opinion. In my interview with her, when asked to justify her political didacticism, Tlali says that there were very few channels of information open to people living in Soweto at the time. Therefore, a lack of information/knowledge about political developments often caused confusion in the black community. In *Muriel* Tlali depicts a protagonist whose political awareness served as an eye-opener to her fellow Sowetans at the time, and to her readers in general. This concern with the ordinary lives of people and the serious political discussion pursued dialogically in *Muriel* forms a critical contrast to the escapist mode of black male writing. By implication it thereby resists this mode’s patriarchal attitudes of disrespect for the life spheres of women and instead acclaims their longing to be taken seriously politically.

In sum, this section has shown that *Muriel*, by avoiding stereotypes in the depiction of women, by portraying low-key ordinary events in a way that fosters gradual transformation and afterthought, and by introducing a serious, dialogic political discussion, opposes such literary traits found in black writing as gender stereotype, ‘the spectacular’ and escapism. Forging difference in this way, I find, is one way of resisting patriarchal attitudes harboured in black male writing.

**Avoiding Woman as Symbol**

A symbolic depiction of women, as discussed above, is a convention not only of male African literature in general but also of black male South African literature. As Anne McClintock and Elleke Boehmer note, the heroic tradition is preserved in an ongoing gendered discourse of nationalism in South Africa that constructs women as symbolic bearers of the nation, but denies them any direct relation to national agency. “Excluded from direct action as national citizens,” McClintock writes, “women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit.” McClintock here endorses Boehmer’s claim that black men are “metonymic,” that is, they are contiguous with the national whole, and that black women, in contrast, appear “in a metaphoric or symbolic role.” Like

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288 Cullhed, interview I, 4.
289 McClintock 354.
290 Boehmer 6.
other critics such as Gunner, although she is writing about Zimbabwe, I also recognize in this literature a combination of “colonial-settler patriarchy” and “indigenous patriarchy” that together constitute “male dominated nationalisms in which women feature as icons but rarely as active and self-defining agents.”

This section will show how **Muriel at Metropolitan** refutes the black male literary convention of depicting women as symbols of the land or the nation. Examining the complexity of the tension/paradox, discussed above, created by Tlali’s suggested title “I Am Nothing!” in relation to the novel itself, I suggest the following: defying the compelling symbolic position of nation, and the position of ‘something,’ which implicates motherhood and a life in the domestic sphere offered to a black woman within traditional patriarchy, Muriel provocatively claims to be ‘nothing.’ To tease out this alternative interpretation I will compare **Muriel** to a play performed in 1973: Credo Mutwa’s “uNosilimela” (1981). Since it was staged under the auspices of the Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg, which established Ravan Press, Tlali’s publisher, it is not only possible, but also likely that Tlali saw it performed at the time. Interestingly, Tlali’s suggested title echoes a seminal sentence in “uNosilimela”, where the eponymous protagonist, despair: “They are right. It’s true. I’m nothing any more, just rubbish.” I suggest that Tlali’s intended title is a reaction to this specific scene, and to the play in general; with her provocative title, Tlali challenges Mutwa’s and other male writers’ symbolic narration of women.

Clearly Tlali’s novel is not an allegory, nor is Muriel a symbol of Mother Africa. Instead, ordinary, highly realistic working life with all its petty conflicts forms the nexus of the novel. uNosilimela, on the other hand, is definitely a Mother Africa figure. A goddess herself she is also the daughter of a

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292 The typography of Tlali’s suggested title, “I AM … NOTHING!,” seems to cry out a woman’s position in South Africa at the time. As shown above, it may be interpreted as subverting the self-confidence of the narrator, thus creating paradox, and a subtext in the novel. On the other hand, as mentioned, the title may be taken as signalling pride and resistance.
293 As discussed in the introductory chapter, Kalu points out that in African philosophy the sexes ideally occupy different but equally respected spheres, the female is regarded as “something” while the male is “something else,” (in practice, however, there often exists a hierarchy between these spheres). The male and the female domains are strictly kept apart.
294 Credo Mutwa, “uNosilimela,” South African People’s Plays, ed., R. M. Kavanagh (London: Heinemann, 1981) 1-61. Since Mutwa advocated separate development for different races in South Africa and therefore supported apartheid, he is currently a discredited writer. During the Soweto uprisings that began in 1976 his house was burned down by radical activists. It is likely that Tlali was aware of his deviant views at the time of writing Muriel and therefore felt compelled to protest against these, and against his symbolic use of women in his play.
295 Mutwa 5.
296 Mutwa 47.
goddess, the Earth Mother, who symbolizes the African people, their land and their traditions, in the convention of the epic. Since she openly resists her mother, the Earth Mother, uNosilimela breaks the tradition to respect the elders and to revere motherhood, an act that symbolizes the urban blacks’ breach with African tradition, or the laws of the African land, where the spirits of the forefathers are thought to be active. For this act of resistance uNosilimela is punished by being exposed to harsh circumstances. Chastised by her family uNosilimela finally utters the crucial words: “I’m nothing any more.”

Mutwa’s symbolic meaning is manifest from the start as the storyteller opens the play with the words: “This is a story of self-understanding, self-discovery, love of your neighbour and love and respect for the laws and religion of your civilized forefathers.” Thus, to deny traditional African values, which are synonymous with patriarchal values in Mutwa’s play, is to become “just rubbish.” uNosilimela represents this breach with African tradition. Seeing her daughter’s ‘deprived’ status, the Earth Mother, adding insult to injury, chides and advises her as she lies among the refuse, “in the scraps and tins of a Hillbrow alleyway,” by saying: “How symbolic! Rubbish upon rubbish … death stalks you as a lion stalks an impala in the darkness. Leave Johannesburg at once. Go out to the pure open spaces where the truth about you and your people will be revealed to you.” Accepting this option to repent, and thereby to heal the breach of tradition, uNosilimela finally heeds the voice of her Earth Mother; as she again embraces traditional values she is awarded eternal life among the deities of heaven.

The text openly advocates the need for uNosilimela, and hence the nation, which she symbolises, in order to ensure a better future to return to pre-colonial rural (patriarchal) traditions, implicating the traditional gender divide. Thus, the sentence “I’m nothing” designates the deprived status of the black people severed in the city from African rural traditions and oppressed by apartheid, which includes the status of a woman deprived of her traditional role as a mother. Women, having traditionally occupied a compelling yet respected position of ‘something,’ revered as mother at the centre of creation, have forsaken tradition to such an extent under the influence of apartheid and urbanisation that they are at this point regarded as ‘nothing.’ The choir repeatedly reminds the audience in what direction salvation can be found: “Even when I’m asleep [I] remember my father. Teaching me the proverbs of our people . . . Oh how I remember father,” while the Earth Mother is shown to be an accomplice to patriarchy, since she regards a

297 The emphasis is in the original.
298 Mutwa 8.
299 Mutwa 48.
300 Mutwa 47-48.
woman (and, for that matter, a man) who defies African tradition/patriarchy as rubbish fit for the gutter.

Tlali’s suggested title “I Am Nothing!” defies Mutwa’s symbolic deployment of his female protagonist. Instead, it demands that women be regarded, not in any preordained role, but as subjects, in their own right. Parallel to the crucial point in the play, perhaps identifying her protagonist Muriel with uNosilimela, who has dared to break with patriarchal traditions, Tlali does not define Muriel in traditional gendered terms. Instead she is shown to be proud of being “nothing;” she would rather be nothing than be forced back into the role of motherhood, domesticity, and dependency offered to her within African tradition. The title forcefully spells out the narrator’s total disregard for the gendered position allocated to her within the patriarchal structure. This disregard creates a starting-point—a zero point of nothingness—from which Muriel may begin to define herself. Of course, this may not only imply gender, but may designate any label that society wants to use to define a person, such as, for instance, race. By contrasting Tlali’s novel to Mutwa’s play, we can detect Muriel’s ambiguous mixture of pride, assertiveness, and denigration.

The complexity of meaning teased out from the original title was/is, of course, denied Tlali’s readers: Muriel at Metropolitan is a neutral title. Perhaps her own suggestion was regarded as too politically charged or too pessimistic. I suggest that the original title refuses to internalise the definitions and positions allocated women by both patriarchy and apartheid; Muriel’s flaunting of her ‘nothingness’ allows her, in the text, to begin to seriously question not only racial stereotypes, but also prescribed gender-roles.

Given its self-conscious use of symbolism, Mutwa’s play is not entirely epic in mode. “uNosilimela” nevertheless constructs woman as Mother Africa and therefore functions to represent this convention in black literature. Tlali’s more realistic depiction of Muriel is shown, in contrast, to resist this convention. Her suggested title for the novel, “I Am Nothing!” signals her own literal depiction of woman and her breach of tradition: to be ‘nothing’ is not to be a symbol of anything, and, above all, not to be the ‘something’ that patriarchal tradition prescribes.

Resisting the ‘Something’ of Motherhood

The previous section argued that Muriel opposes definition of her self by patriarchal expectations. In line with this declaration of independence her status at Metropolitan is not assigned to her in traditional terms, that is, in relation to her marital status, or to her status of motherhood. Her confidence instead derives from her excellence as a bookkeeper, her knowledge of most of the languages used at Metropolitan, her conscientiousness, competence, punctuality, friendliness, and skills of diplomacy. In this section I explore how Tlali avoids the convention in black literature of idealizing marriage
and motherhood, thematizing resistance to it instead. Thereby I disagree with Michael Chapman who claims that “Tlali is seen to have reiterated the need for black women to nurture the young in domestic security while encouraging the men to fight for change.”

One of several traditional African words for ‘woman’ used between families arranging a marriage is ‘calabash,’ which, being round and smooth on the outside and full of seeds and nurturing food on the inside, implies all the tropes of home, nurture and motherhood. This prescriptive metaphor exposes the societal consequences should a woman prove to be barren: in African tradition a barren woman is/was not regarded as an asset to the community and is/was often shamed by expulsion from the clan. The protagonist in Ngcobo’s *And They Didn’t Die*, discussed above, is terrified when she does not conceive, because, “[a]bove all,” the narrator explains, “[c]hildren would fulfil her life and save her from social torment.” According to African traditional custom a woman ‘naturally’ wants to be a mother and give priority to the care of her children, and, as we have seen, she naturally belongs in the home of her husband where she has no right to her own name but must take the name of her father until she acquires the name of her child, preferably her son. In consequence of this strong tradition, wifehood and motherhood were often idealised in black literature. The following passage from Plaatje’s *Mhudi* (1930) illustrates this idealization:

> Childless marriages were as rare as freaks . . . every mother had to nourish her growing brood, besides fattening and beautifying her daughters for the competition of eligible swains. Fulfilling these multifarious duties of the household was not regarded as a drudgery by any means, on the contrary, the women looked upon marriage as an art; the daughter of a well-to-do peasant, surrounded by all the luxuries of her mother’s home, would be the object of commiseration if she were a long time finding a man. And the simple women of the tribes accepted wifehood and transacted their onerous duties with the same satisfaction and pride as an English artist would the job of conducting an orchestra.

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301 Chapman 377.
303 I am here discussing the black African traditions in South Africa. It is accepted usage, in this context, to speak of ‘Africans’, thereby denoting black Bantu people. Of course, there are whites now who also want to be called ‘Africans,’ which complicates the use of this term. Perhaps, too, it is necessary for me to point out again that while the Bantu people speak several different languages and thereby have different cultural traditions, they nevertheless have many patriarchal views and customs in common.
304 Ngcobo 55-56, quoted in the introduction. Ngcobo here describes the powerlessness of a married woman in the home of her husband.
305 Plaatje 23-24.
While I understand that Plaatje’s eclectic style\textsuperscript{306} may invite Anthony Chen- 
nells’ claim that Plaatje is here being ironic,\textsuperscript{307} I find the subject matter, 
where Plaatje depicts the peaceful Barolong as a background to the conflict 
between the Barolong and the “ferocious” Matabele who subdued them, all 
too serious to find his claim plausible. In this case the irony may have been 
an uncalled for effect, and the idealization may be read as an expression of 
Plaatje’s patriarchal views, perhaps nostalgia for the traditional roles of 
women in his own rapidly changing society.\textsuperscript{308}

In stark contrast to this tradition, Tlali depicts a black woman who openly 
admits to preferring her workplace, that is, public space, to her home. As 
Muhlebach aptly notes, “Muriel does not define herself in terms of a ‘private 
realm,’” and “[h]er husband and child are only fleetingly mentioned half- 
way through the novel.”\textsuperscript{309} For the narrator not to mention from the start her 
marital status while working in a public space like Metropolitan must be 
regarded as a deliberate gap in the narrative. And when the information is 
given it is not to glorify her role as mother but the opposite. Chapter Twelve 
begins: “After being absent from work for six days because my child was ill, 
I experienced a wonderful feeling of satisfaction as I approached the shop. It 
was like going back where I really belonged” (87). In other words, Muriel 
harbours radical views as regards work and home and how a woman may 
give priority to these if she is allowed the choice. First and foremost she is a 
working woman who will not let her private life interfere unnecessarily with 
her working life.

Further, the narrator assures us that when forced to stay at home she allo- 
cates a minimum of time to her home and child. Although she takes leave 
from work to care for her sick child, she soon arranges for someone else to 
take over. And, instead of performing housework, she engages in something 
radical for a black woman at the time:

I had come back to work so eagerly after spending six days at home. The first 
three had not been so bad, but as time went on I had become increasingly 
restless. I had found the days long and had read when I was not attending to 
the child. But gradually I kept thinking of my work. It was the first week of 
the month and I knew there would be many customers coming in and many 
others to pay and make enquiries. It became more and more difficult to con- 
centrate on what I was reading. The location was so desolate during the day, 
especially when my little Moleboheng was asleep. I had intended to stay with 
my baby for at least a week, but I felt that my absence from work would in-

\textsuperscript{306} A. E. Voss, introduction, \textit{Mhudi, by Sol T. Plaatje} (Jeppestown: Ad Donker, 1989) 13-22, 
refers to Plaatje’s style as incorporating a “wide range of tone and register” (19).

\textsuperscript{307} See, for example, Anthony Chennells, “Plotting South African History: Narrative in Sol 

\textsuperscript{308} As Linda Hutcheon, \textit{Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony} (London: Routledge, 
1994), makes us aware, irony is “relational” and can be interpreted very differently by differ- 
ent readers (58).

\textsuperscript{309} Muhlebach 81.
convenience the office staff which was already short. I could not bear the thought any longer. When the child showed speedy signs of recovery and the dark scabs on her back and chest were falling off, I decided to leave her in the care of a sympathetic friend, and I went back to Metropolitan Radio. (88)

At a time when 80 percent of the blacks and 90 percent of the black women in South Africa were illiterate, to portray Muriel as indulging in books must be regarded as a definite feminist statement. A black woman who prioritizes reading over the care of her home and family was/is radical, and her priorities, in resistance to patriarchal expectations, position her instead as an educated member of the work force.

Muriel establishes herself firmly in the public sphere, and breaks a very strong African tradition of regarding women exclusively in relation to their status as wives and mothers. Her statement, that her workplace is where she “really belonged” is a slap in the face of, for example, the Goddess in Mutwa’s play—it is a breach of the law of the forefathers (and foremothers). Nevertheless, Muriel self-assuredly turns her back on the private sphere as the only life-career open to women within the patriarchal framework.

Nor are other women characters, with one exception, portrayed in relation to motherhood. Above all, they are shown to be office-workers, bookkeepers, or customers in search of a modern lifestyle and regarded in terms of whether they treat the black workers with respect, or not. Mrs Kuhn is characterised as one who “owns the business,” and who “pushes herself forward,” and Mrs Stein is a person who “makes a point of remaining with the boss every evening long after everybody else has left.” Also, she “works for her good name!” (13). However, in the novel’s final chapter, motherhood acquires a somewhat different, contrasting function. Here, Muriel portrays the same white ladies in terms of motherhood with a completely different agenda: to soften the readers’ attitudes towards them, and thereby justify her own changing views of them. At this stage, she no longer looks upon them as “die-hard Afrikaners”:

[Mrs Stein] would sometimes even engage in casual conversation with me, especially when Mrs Kuhn was not present. She passed many household hints to me. Like most Afrikaner women, she was an excellent housewife and a good mother. She would tell me a lot about her own children, and would divulge some of her concern and fears for them. Occasionally, she brought photographs of her children to show us.

Quite often, on Monday mornings, Mrs Stein would bring in samples of dishes she had prepared for her family during the week-end, neatly wrapped in spotlessly white cloths, for all of us to taste. Her embroidery, knitting, crocheting and smocking were all perfect.

As for Mrs Kuhn, I had now almost forgiven her all her past atrocities against me. She was a great little lady, always hard-working, and she too was a devoted mother.

...
Fate had not been kind to her. She had lost her beautiful talented daughter, at the height of her career as a dancer, in a fatal car accident. Why should such tragedies occur? I used to ask myself whenever I looked at her and thought of her beloved Molly, who had (to quote from Trollope) ‘a dignity of demeanour devoid of all stiffness or pride.’ (173)

Portraying these white women, who have called Muriel a “baboon,” as “devoted mothers,” as living up to the black African ideal of motherhood, here serves to make them more “human.” The title of the chapter is, as mentioned, “One Human Heart for Another,” and refers to a discussion in the text about the first South African heart transplant by Dr. Chris Barnard who transplanted the heart of a ‘coloured’ man into the body of a ‘white’ man. The rhetorical question raised is: if we are all human then why do we construct artificial barriers between us? Of course, there is also a possibility that motherhood used in this context is given an ironic tinge. Having shown these white women as embodiments of ideal motherhood, Muriel later on mocks their ideals: Mrs Stein and Mrs Kuhn’s political naivety borders on stupidity with Mrs Stein stating:

‘The critics overseas are ill informed about the true situation. They only receive false information. South Africa is a most peaceful country. People are free to go where they like, and say what they feel, I mean . . .’

She went on to insist that all racial groups were happy and living with each other in harmony, how for nearly a decade now there had not been any uprisings or strikes unlike other countries such as America where there were killings and riots. I listened, trying very hard to be patient. I could not understand how anyone in full control of his or her faculties could claim that South Africa was a peaceful country, that all its peoples were happy.

But Mrs Kuhn was looking at Mrs Stein nodding her head in approval to all that she was saying. (177)

If these ideal mothers and housewives, the text implies, at the same time are misinformed, naive women—a naivety that perhaps stems from their being too focused on the private realm—the idealization of motherhood is not an ideal to cling to. The subversion Tlali makes constructs women’s traditionally prescribed gender role as one that an assertive, self-conscious, black woman like Muriel would do better to stay clear of. In other words, the text opposes the ideals of African patriarchy and the patriarchal domination of the symbolic order by opting for access to this order, which surfaces in the text’s advocacy of a woman’s right to information, to the improvement of her mind through reading and education, to choose a professional life and enjoy it, and to inhabit public space.
Conclusion

Since black writing was synonymous with male writing at the time, Tlali’s main strategy of resistance to male hegemony, it has here been shown, is to set her own writing apart from black male writing. For example, instead of adopting the ‘escapist’ mode of the Drum short stories, the magazine where most male black writers had been engaged and that did not deal with political issues, Tlali, hoping to reach out to her black compatriots in the townships, made her own writing political; she “preached with the very first chapter,”\textsuperscript{310} partly about the less dramatic economic oppression suffered daily by blacks under apartheid. At the same time, seemingly paradoxically, instead of the convention of ‘the spectacular’ Tlali’s rendering of the consequences of apartheid is subdued, deliberately low-key, and engaged with ordinary, mundane events. Despite this subdued tone, Tlali’s Muriel is the first assertive black woman protagonist in South African fiction who is not used as a symbol of the nation and who decisively goes against the grain of patriarchal expectations, traits that also mark this novel as different from male black writing at the time.

By comparing the edited versions of Muriel to Tlali’s original typescript of the novel I have shown that the editing consisted mainly of an exclusion of the political, didactic material (later retrieved in the Longman edition), which, it has been suggested, may not have agreed with the hegemonic, Western, literary conventions. Moreover, several epigraphic verses shown to evoke irony were excluded. Thus, Tlali’s voice was muted and its ironic resistance to both apartheid and patriarchy less pronounced than she intended. However, the editors’ main modification of the novel was their refusal of Tlali’s proposed title “I AM … NOTHING!” The title’s typography evokes a paradox created by the capital letters and the exclamation mark, signalling pride in contrast to the hiatus of the ellipsis and the downgrading connotations of the words. Several interpretations of this paradox have been supplied, for instance the humility topos. Mainly, though, it has been suggested that the paradox implies the narrator’s pride at not wanting to have any labels of either race or gender pinned on her by the hegemonic spheres of apartheid and patriarchy. Such a reading is supported by the intertextual analysis pursued in the section “Avoiding woman as symbol” where it is suggested that Tlali derives her proud exclamation of being ‘nothing’ partly in resistance to the traditional patriarchal expectations on women, highlighted in Mutwa’s play “uNosilimela”.

As she incorporates into her text what Bakhtin identifies as several significant elements of novelization, Tlali both helps to develop the black novel and, as mentioned, marks her own writing as different from black male writing. Kristeva’s discussion about negativity and rejection and how these fos-

\textsuperscript{310} Rosemary Jolly, “Interview” 144.
ter a ‘logic of renewal’ of literary conventions supports the claim that difference can be regarded as resistance to a hegemonic symbolic order. Three novelizing elements identified by Bakhtin can be recognized in *Muriel at Metropolitan*: the transformation of personal experience into fiction, ‘realizing a multi-languaged consciousness,’ and introducing ‘new temporal coordinates.’ The main thesis of this chapter is that such elements of novelization, in Tlali’s novel, at the same time function to subvert patriarchy.

Examining Bakhtin’s first novelistic trait I have shown that, choosing an assertive female protagonist as the narrator of her novel, Tlali transforms a segment of her own life experience into fiction, thereby adding to the novelizing process. Such a choice of protagonist/narrator in itself constitutes resistance to patriarchal expectations that a woman should not venture into public space, let alone discuss public matters such as politics. Second, the introduction of heteroglossia into her novel and the realization of “a multi-languaged consciousness” rejects male univocal literary conventions. Thereby, Tlali again contributes to novelization. In addition, the heterogeneity of her language defies patriarchy as it opens up symbolic space for the voice of the Other, which is patriarchy’s way of defining women.

Third, as the narrator repeatedly mentions the trappings of modern office life in the city, with the radio as a favoured icon, it has been shown, she privileges modernity and “maximal contact with the present” in order to demarcate distance to the epic past. Her narration of mundane and even low topics also helps create a distance to the elevated topics of the epic mode. But to refute the epic mode is also to refute the nationalistic and patriarchal tendencies of this mode, which the narrator does when she addresses questions of tribalism and makes use of characterization, transposition, and metaphor to highlight her oppositional stance to an outdated patriarchal nationalism that celebrates kings and war heroes. Lastly, by avoiding a symbolic depiction of women and refusing the role of motherhood as the only life career for a woman (shown to be two distinct characteristics of the male literary tradition) the novel adds new traits and topics to black writing and again challenges black African patriarchy.

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CHAPTER TWO

Dialogic Fragmentation in Amandla!

Introduction

In Muriel at Metropolitan (written between 1965-69), as we have seen, Tlali appropriates the Western realist, contemporaneously set novel to resist the epic, as well as other genres employed by black male writers, thereby rejecting patriarchy. Amandla! (1979), written more than ten years later, also evinces realism but, in its fragmentation, discards the linearity of the conventional 19th century, or popular Western novel.312 This change has several explanations. Of course, a gap of ten years between two novels, in any writer’s oeuvre, is bound to affect the writer’s narrative strategies. But for South African writers, the period from 1969-1979 was a time of extreme political upheaval, which necessarily made them reconsider their writing, and not least its narrative strategies. The rise of the Black Consciousness ideology, above all, fostered a new pride that boosted black writers’ self-confidence, and the black novel emerged on a broad front at this time.313 Its pioneers were the ‘Soweto novels,’ of which Tlali’s Amandla! was the second.314 One characteristic that Amandla! shares with at least one of the other Soweto novels, namely Mongane Serote’s To Every Birth Its Blood (1981),

312 As we shall see Tlali was inspired by the 19th century realists.
313 Mark Sanders sets out to regard racism as a “mental phenomenon” and claims that the Black Consciousness ideology “links consciousness of the self and confidence in the self.” Mark Sanders, Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid (Pietermaritzburg: U of Natal P, 2002) 166.
is a fragmentary form, or what Johan Geertsema calls a “structural disjunctedness.” Instead of having a linear plot, like *Muriel at Metropolitan*, chronologically structured around the narrator’s experiences, *Amandla!* has loosely forged, parallel plot lines and evinces a mixture of various discourses seemingly erratically juxtaposed.

Several critics have tried to account for this fragmentary form. Kelwyn Sole regards the form and style of these novels as devices that undermine Western hegemony; Black Consciousness writers, he claims, “brought Eurocentric literary criteria into the firing line.” Similarly, Aubrey Mokadi writes that all the Soweto novels “set out to demonstrate the people’s resistance of domination by the White culture and its aesthetics.” Moreover, critics have also suggested that the fragmentary form reflects the extended chaotic upheaval in Soweto. This reflection, of course, could be either unintentional or intentional. Carol Boyce Davies regards the form as an intentional reflection when she describes *Amandla!* as “a vast canvas of characters and activities which seems to mirror the turmoil of South African life” at the time. Reading *Amandla!* as a novel “of struggle against apartheid,” Geertsema, on the other hand, suggests that the fragmentation derives from the text’s uncertainty of “its real contribution to the struggle,” resulting in a “confusion.” Unlike Sole, yet like Boyce Davies and Mokadi, I see the fragmentation as intentional. “This disregard for ‘correct’ linear development [in *Amandla!*],” as Cecily Lockett writes, “does not signify a lack of authorial perspicacity, but rather indicates Tlali’s sense that the demands of chronology should be subservient to the demands of narrative . . . rather she aims to display her control over her material and over her world in the sense that she understands the cultural and political elements that constitute her society and is thus able to reflect them in her narrative.” Unlike these critics, however, I argue that the fragmentation is also instrumental: the result of

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315 Mbulelo Mzamane in “The Impact of Black Consciousness on Culture,” *Bounds of Possibility*, eds., N. Barney Pityana, et al. (Cape Town: David Philip, 1992), finds that the Soweto novels evince fragmentation to such an extent that they can generally be characterized as being “loose and variegated,” where events “jump into one another; the numerous characters fuse and separate; the time sequence varies with each episode and point of view” (192). I suggest that Mzamane’s words apply only partly to his own novel *The Children of Soweto*, but more fully to Mongane Serote’s *To Every Birth Its Blood*, as well as to *Amandla!*, whereas Sipho Sepamla’s *A Ride on the Whirlwind* (1984), being couched in the realist sub-genre of the action thriller, is much more linear.


317 Sole 64

318 Mokadi, *Narrative as Creative History*, 36.


320 Geertsema 116.

321 Geertsema 117.

322 Geertsema 118.

323 Lockett 282.
an eclectic mixture of genres/discourses it forms a subtext that critiques patriarchal values. I have called this technique dialogic fragmentation.

Applying the term *dialogism* broadly, Bakhtin acknowledges such a principle of generic dialogism: not only can a discourse be dialogic in itself, he claims, but generic discourses can be juxtaposed so that they “mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and . . . interrelat[e] dialogically.”325 In *Amandla!,* what I have called a *domestic discourse,* a discourse of gossip and rumour utilised mainly by the maternal community, 326 with characteristics such as heteroglossia and *double-voicedness,*327 is pitted against ‘male’ discourses such as the heroic tale, political rhetoric, the action thriller and the love-story. In their juxtaposition the discourses interrogate one another, constituting a dialogic interaction that generates a subtext to resist patriarchy.

As the critical context is discussed in depth below I will here only briefly mention that critics such as Josephine Evans, Gabriella Madrassi, and Pumla Gqola rightly acknowledge *Amandla!*’s engagement not only with apartheid but also with questions of gender; Gqola, as mentioned in Chapter One, describes Tlali’s writing as a “simultaneous commentary on race and gender.”328 Also, D. J. Desvaux de Marigny finds that the novel not only comments on patriarchy and the suppression of women, but shows an “impulse to challenge patriarchal authority,” which supports my argument. Moreover, the novel actively negotiates a different future for black women in South Africa: “It is evident from Tlali’s *Amandla,*” Marigny writes, “that her sense of the ideal is located in a future goal and that her emphasis falls upon present experience and knowledge, not memory; in other words, upon the active reformulation of traditional ideologies in the light of present practices.”329

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324 The dialogic principle entails that language and literature are ruled by mutual reciprocal relationships between the self and the other in a constant dialogue. According to Michael Holquist it describes the very foundation of Bakhtin’s literary and philosophical theory, a theory that regards language, literature, even human existence as governed by the principle of dialogue. The smallest potentially dialogic units of language and literature are the word and the utterance, and each utterance, Bakhtin says, is always dependent on history, its context, and its intended recipient. Thus all three—history, context, and recipient—have an effect on the utterance, and therefore no utterance is ever innocent, or original, yet always unique. All language is dialogic by nature, as it is always directed to a listener and expects an answer. However, some texts can be more dialogic than other more monologic texts. Traits that render a text dialogic are, for example, heteroglossia, carnivalism, double-voicedness, and a shown awareness of the dialogic nature of language.


326 Daymond, “Inventing Gendered Traditions” 223-39, describes a similar discourse in *Footprints in the Quag,* but Daymond uses the term “maternal idiom” to designate what I have preferred to call a “domestic discourse.” I will return to this discussion below.

327 This concept will be discussed below.

328 Gqola 94.

At the same time the novel largely shares the values of the Black Consciousness ideology. The rise and high tide of this ideology in the 1970s up until 1985 was a crucial cultural and political factor in South Africa as it presented a “counter-ideology to the hegemony of white literary criticism and political commentary,” as Sole notes, and produced “a discourse and set of concepts which strove to establish itself as hegemonic among black people.” This ideology spread rapidly through the writings of Steve Biko, who sums up Black Consciousness in *I Write What I Like* (1978):

Briefly defined therefore, Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their operation—the blackness of their skin—and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the ‘normal’ which is white. . . . It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their culture, their religion and their outlook to [sic] life.

The changes in the climate of resistance, now informed by the ideology of Black Consciousness, influenced the few black writers remaining in South Africa at the time: “[t]he Black Consciousness Movement urged a revival of African traditions half-destroyed or distorted by colonisation and apartheid.” These writers subsequently embraced a new awareness of what they regarded as negative implications for African culture of the hegemony of Western colonial and postcolonial discourse. Thus, the Soweto novels, as Mokadi indicates, although mainly realistic in setting, experiment with new forms and liberally incorporate narrative elements that echo African storytelling conventions. These novelists’ attempts “to revive the art of storytelling, by emulating their illiterate forebears and thus foster a vital bond between their works and their own communities,” he claims, even result in a “Black aesthetics.” Not going quite so far, Sole recognizes at least the search for a ‘black aesthetics’:

It is not surprising in such circumstances that pre-colonial oral literature served as an important model for these writers and performers. The urban-based literature produced in Soweto and elsewhere from the early 1970s strove to revive the values of African societies existing before the colonial onslaught; it laid stress on a rediscovery of African, non-exploitative relationships. Traditional culture was supposed to help in a forging of fresh values.

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330 Sole 417-18.
333 Mokadi 38.
334 Mokadi 36.
335 Sole 66.
This new awareness, as Chapman notes, informed the action in 1979 when “the demands of Africanism led to several black writers resigning from the Johannesburg branch of the international PEN organisation on the grounds that its avowed non-racialism was a euphemism for Eurocentric dominance in matters of selection and taste.”336 Towards the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s black cultural workers at large, inspired by the Black Consciousness Movement, resisted hegemonic Western culture.

However, given that the Black Consciousness discourse was clearly a gendered one, it contributed to the dilemma black women activists faced, as mentioned in the introductory chapter. In the quotation above from Biko’s writings, words like “black man” and “brothers” reveal this discourse as male oriented and, according to Dorothy Driver, “[t]he personal pronoun which has predominated in the public statements of Black Consciousness is masculine.”337 In a similar vein, Mark Sanders writes that “[t]he masculinist terms of Black Consciousness rhetoric and practice are well known,” and further, that it “did not produce a critique of existing gender relations.”338 Thus Black Consciousness embraced traditional African value-systems, and, in Biko’s words, an African “outlook to life.”339 Moreover, the hegemonic nature of the ideology, as noted in the “Introduction” to Women Writing Africa, also had patriarchal roots: “The African political elite of the 1970s and 1980s used tradition to create and command political loyalty in patriarchal terms.”340 In other words, within the struggle, Black Consciousness muted dissident ideas and, as Sole contends, the “desire for a black unity” led to “a romanticising of ideas of community and social harmony: downplaying class and gender tensions which might disturb this vision.”341

In order to negotiate this hegemonic, patriarchal context and this call for “unity,” Tlali’s resistance to patriarchy in Amandla!, I argue, is downplayed. The “ambiguity” that Geertsema recognises in Amandla! therefore arises, I suggest, from the need in this patriarchal context to disguise the text’s resistance to patriarchy. As we have seen, Muriel at Metropolitan resists traditional African patriarchal structures by more or less equating African tradition with patriarchy. Amandla!, on the other hand, complying in part with the hegemonic ideology, evinces a new level of complexity: patriarchal tradition

336 Chapman 369.
337 Driver 234. Although change was underway tradition was still a powerful force. Walker in Women and Resistance in South Africa says that “[a]dvances had been made since the days when politics was unquestionably assumed to be a male domain, but by the end of the 1950s, the national liberation movement had yet to grant women a full and unequivocal recognition of their rights as equals of men. This lag between theory and practice was most marked at the level of the ANC rank and file. Many male members of the ANC were deeply conservative and traditionalist in their attitudes towards women” (260).
338 Sanders 177.
339 Biko 53.
340 Daymond, et al., introduction, Women Writing Africa 41.
341 Sole 10.
is here no longer depicted as one entity, because, while cherishing certain values upheld by traditional African society, it simultaneously rejects oppressive, patriarchal ones, such as the exclusion of women from the public sphere of politics, male domestic violence towards women, and oppressive marital customs. This complex depiction of traditional values, as mentioned, is at times overtly conveyed to the reader, but mainly it emerges covertly in a *double-voiced discourse*[^342] and the dialogic application of a fragmented form mentioned above.

This chapter aims to examine how a multifaceted view of tradition emerges in *Amandla!* by means of the double-voiced domestic discourse that simultaneously cherishes and resists the patriarchal base and practices of African society. Also, it aims to show that the subtext, emerging from a fragmented use of discourses set in a dialogic relationship to one another, resists patriarchy. The first section of the analysis below focuses on the domestic discourse, explores its characteristics, and examines its depiction of both positive and negative traditional African values, and its resistance to patriarchy. The final section centres on the dialogue between the genres, the novel’s resistance to patriarchal values embedded in the fragmentarily interspersed male black literary discourses, and the subtext that emerges when these are set in a dialogic relationship to the domestic discourse.

Several critics see a multiple use of genres as an African narrative convention. Examining popular black African literature,[^343] Karin Barber finds that it “allow[s] or encourage[s] eclecticism,” and is “‘syncretic,’ composed out of elements from more than one source.”[^344] This specific convention, she claims, is rooted in an oral tradition and can be encountered in many African societies; Barber refers to it as a “deep and ancient disposition that shapes the social, political and economic domains as well as the cultural.”[^345] Similarly, in her discussion of women’s popular writing, Jane Bryce uses the word “composite” to describe the nature of African popular fiction.[^346] And popular literature published in Ghana and Nigeria, according to Stephanie Newell, also incorporates “a variety of ‘master’ languages from diverse nar-

[^342]: This concept will be discussed further below in the section “Terminology.”
[^343]: It may be argued that *Amandla!* is an elitist political novel compared to the more popular writing of, for example, the yellow press in South Africa. However, in my interview with Tlali, she says that she was aiming “to capture the reader” (II, 3) to reach a wider black audience, and hence, in contrast to *Muriel at Metropolitan*, in *Amandla!* she resorted to ‘popular’ genres, such as romance and the action thriller.
[^345]: Barber 6.
[^346]: Jane Bryce, “Women and Modern African Popular Fiction,” *Readings in African Popular Culture* 123. The sentence reads: “[A] more fruitful way of looking at these composite genres, may be to see them as Karin Barber does, as syncretic forms with ‘underlying cultural dispositions.’”
rative resources.” Such writing, Newell notes, “appropriate[s] quotations from other narrative forms, including folktales, sermons, proverbs, plays and religious publications,” and, she concludes, “West African texts are less rigid [than Western popular fiction] in their adherence to generic formulas,” and therefore “remain receptive to a wider variety of intertextual currents.”

This eclecticism embraces the inclusion of both ‘high’ and ‘low’ genres. In Nigerian writing, for example, the boundaries between high and low literatures, Newell claims, are often dissolved, and “readers seem unwilling to discriminate between high and low forms,” which allows for an inclusion of both within one narrative. She also notes that many elitist novelists, reworking popular plots and character types, do not shirk “themes and concerns in their narratives which spring from the same popular sources as those informing local [popular] novelists.” Similarly, recognizing a willingness in African literature to erase boundaries, Barber notes that “the shifting, mobile, elusive space of the ‘popular,’ which is in fact continuous with both the traditional and the ‘modern’ categories, . . . deconstructs all the oppositions which sustain the binary paradigm [between popular and elite writing],” and concludes that ‘popular’ African writing “encourage[s] eclecticism, hospitality to novelty and the incorporation of the foreign, openness to revision, and responsiveness to audiences.”

Within the South African context, Elleke Boehmer identifies an eclectic use of ‘high’ and ‘low’ discourses, or genres, in, for example, Plaatje’s Mhudi, describing it as a mixture of “epic battlefield scenes and romance, speeches of biblical gravity and slapstick tussles with lions.” This observation, I find, parallels Barber’s and Newell’s to the effect that an eclectic use of ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ genres seems to constitute an oral convention that is

348 Newell 4.
349 Newell 153.
350 Newell 157.
351 Newell 158.
352 Barber 8. Here, I find, Barber risks stretching the discussion to endorse the view that only Western literature discriminates between high and low forms. It is therefore interesting to note that a Western theorist such as Bakhtin, while upholding definite distinctions between elitist and popular literature, also allows for changes within their hierarchical order. Conflating the elitist, at the time of the novel’s advent, with the high genre of the epic, contending that popular laughter and contemporaneity were mobilized to undermine the then hegemonic genre of the epic, he claims that the novel, deriving from ‘popular’ discourses became a new ‘high’ genre. In other words, popular discourses and motifs familiar to the masses, through novelization, eventually rose to slowly become ‘elite.’ In contrast to their modern Western (an icon for elite culture) counterparts, Newell implies, African writers, readers, and critics alike do not regard ‘popular’ writing as a ‘low’ genre, but one that both readers and writers can readily accept.
353 Barber 6.
widely used in African popular literature. Similarly, Eileen Julien contends that one of the foremost traits of the oral tale, is “the inclusion of several genres (proverb, riddle, tale) within a text.”

In Tlali’s writing this eclecticism is deployed dialogically as a strategy of resistance to patriarchy.

The second trait in *Amandla!* that adds to its fragmentation is its profuse use of dialogue, a commonplace in South African black writing. Dialogue dominates the texts of such diverse writers as Mofolo, Plaatje, Mphahlele, Ndebele, and more recently Sindiwe Magona and Zakes Mda. In line with this convention, page after page of *Amandla!* comprises dialogue, for example, the long Chapter 24 (210-259), which is largely one extensive discussion between two characters, without any conspicuous narrative intervention. However, Tlali, as will be explored below, uses this form in a specific way to critique patriarchy.

But let us now leave the wider scope of African literature, to focus on *Amandla!*, and to briefly examine its genealogy, the critics’ views, its fragmentation, and the specific terminology I will be making use of here.

**Genealogy**

The publication of a chapter of *Amandla!* in *Staffrider* in June 1980, with the title “Amandla: An Excerpt From the Novel in Progress by Miriam Tlali/Rockville,” paved the way for Tlali’s second novel. Since *Amandla!*, meaning “The Power!” is the first half of the revolutionary ‘war-cry’ used by the young people during the uprising in Soweto, the publisher Ravan Press regarded it as too provocative a title. In my interview with Tlali she expands on the controversy and the subsequent banning of the novel:

> When I presented the manuscript to Ravan Press (they had been waiting for it because I had told them I was writing on the Soweto riots), they said that there is no way in which *Amandla!* could escape being banned. They didn’t want to produce a novel that would naturally be banned, they wanted to make money out of it. So what was the point in risking a thing that would be banned anyway. Even if I knew this I did not care. Then they called me and said: “Unless we change the title,” they spoke as with the first book,


356 In an African-American context this hybrid technique is not unknown: discussing black women’s writing in America during the 20th century, Mae G. Henderson, “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer’s Literary Tradition,” *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women*, ed., Cheryl A. Wall (London: Routledge, 1990) finds that black women here often “spea[k] in tongues,” meaning that they incorporate “polyphony, multivocality, and [a] plurality of voices” in their writing, and that “[t]hrough their intimacy with the discourse of the other(s), black women writers weave into their work competing and complementary discourses” (23).


358 “Amandla!, Ngawethu!” is Zulu meaning “The Power! Is Ours!” This rallying cry was used in South Africa during the struggle against apartheid.
“Unless we change the title and call it Ngawethu,” you see when the people say ‘Amandla!’ the reply from the crowd is ‘Ngawethu!’ — meaning ‘The power, is ours!’— “You play into the hands of the Boers. We should at least do that.” But I had already had the painful experience with Muriel and I said “No ways! Either you take it as Amandla! or you leave it.” So they agreed to take it, and it was circulated for about three weeks and within those three weeks they had sold all, or many copies. Many many hundreds, thousands. Yes, they had already sold thousands.359

As the publishers predicted the title triggered a banning order in December 1980, merely three weeks after the novel’s publication. Perhaps the dust-jacket, depicting a black clenched fist against a red background, referring to its revolutionary contents, contributed to the banning. After the banning order was lifted in 1985, however, the novel was reissued by Miriam Tlali herself. These copies, Tlali says, sold very well, but the novel could unfortunately not be reprinted as the printers had destroyed the plates, allegedly by accident.360 Amandla! has since then been out of print but is currently being re-published by Sedibeng Publishing House in Johannesburg.

The novel depicts the experiences of the black communities in Soweto during the 1976 uprisings. Tlali wrote at least parts of Amandla! in Soweto, where she personally experienced the chaos, and the chaotic aftermath of the upheaval. Frequent raids by the security police belonged to the routine, and to save her books from being confiscated she often buried them in her garden, sometimes forgetting where. This turmoil could, as some critics have argued, underlie its fragmentation. However, the fact that Amandla! was partly written during a two-month visit to London supports my claim that the fragmentation is above all an intentional device:

but part of it I wrote when I was abroad, in England when I was invited over to talk. For instance, I wouldn't have been able to read much of the background I needed [in South Africa], but in England, fortunately, these people were so good that they allowed me to stay after the tour in an apartment where nobody disturbed me. And, I had access to all these libraries.361

During this time Tlali could distance herself from the on-going events, and in England the political and cultural climate was, of course, more conducive to creative activity.

Amandla! has a realistic, contemporaneous setting. During the riots in Soweto Tlali’s home functioned as a refuge and gathering place for the leaders of the young people’s spontaneous revolution, and these are the experiences that Tlali incorporates in her novel. While Tlali claims that the narra-

359 Cullhed, interview I, 8.
360 Cullhed, interview II, 9.
361 Cullhed, interview I, 7.
tive is “fictitious . . . the characters also,” she also admits that she crafted the characters on people in her immediate surroundings: “They were actual people,” she says, “[a]nd they were very open with me. They used to sit and talk. That’s why I could build the story.” This ‘realistic’ content, however, I find, does not detract from my claim that Amandla!, by way of fragmentation, subverts other characteristics of the Western realist novel such as its preference for unification and linearity. The fragmentation brings Amandla! closer to modernist literary developments in the West. But, considering the context of Tlali’s writing, where reading material was extremely scarce, it is not possible to argue that it places her in an avant-garde position. As inspirators Tlali herself refers to English classics: “When I came to Britain, to London, having read Thackeray, Dickens and Shakespeare and others, it was like coming home.” But she also mentions being enthused by modern African writers such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Don Mattera, and Ezekiel Mphahlele. In addition, as we shall see below, she is certainly influenced by the South African oral tradition.

As Amandla! is not easily available, I will briefly summarise the two intertwining main plots. Including elements of the heroic tale, one plot centres on the young Pholoso, nicknamed Moses, who is the leader of the organisational unit heading the 1976 children’s riots in Soweto. Pholoso, perpetually on the run from the police, erratically turns up at his grandmother Gramsy’s house for shelter and comfort, or is intermittently found among his comrades in their dugout sanctuary under the Catholic Church Regina Mundi, or at his girlfriend Felleng’s house. Subsequently, he is captured, imprisoned and tortured by the security police, but finally, he escapes and leaves the country for an existence in exile. The other main plot centres on Gramsy and her struggle to buy a tomb-stone for her dead husband, and from her sickbed to organise a long overdue stone-laying ceremony in commemoration of him. This plot, contained in the domestic discourse that dominates the narrative, has a wide scope: apart from largely narrating Pholoso’s story by way of gossip and rumour, it includes other narratives, such as the community’s reaction to the riots. Moreover, in Gramsy’s many dialogues with relatives and neighbours several other minor stories are embedded, for example, the one about Gramsy’s battered niece Agnes and her violent drunkard husband Bra-Joe; the story of Niki’s discarded girlfriend Seapei, who becomes a sell-out to the cause; and the story of Felleng, who is eventually left behind when Pholoso goes into exile. Finally, vital for the dialogue of discourses is a sub-

362 Cullhed, interview I, 7.
363 Cullhed, interview I, 17. Pholoso, for example, is modelled on Tsietsi Machinini, “the boy who started the riots” (18). Moremi-T, the ANC man, was Tlali’s influential high school teacher, and the Killer was a man from the Unity Movement whom Tlali knew: “He used to come to my house . . . he knew that he was the character in the book” (7).
364 Cullhed, interview I, 6.
365 Cullhed, interview I, 6 and I, 14.
plot that runs parallel to Gramsy’s and Pholoso’s tales: the story about the cuckolded Sergeant Mamabolo, his young wife Teresa, and her lover, constable Nikodemus, narrated in the discourse of the romantic love story. In the fragments of male discourses, which will be discussed below, Sergeant Mamabolo also features in comic scenes rendered in the discourse of the action-thriller.

**Critical Context**

Despite its limited availability, *Amandla!* nevertheless receives some critical attention. Unlike Mokadi and Geertsema, who read *Amandla!* solely as resistance to apartheid, Sole acknowledges its wider scope: “The use of dialogue and the interweaving of several stories of human interest allow [Tlali] to present a number of areas of black discontent.”

Events, he says, are mediated collectively and through rumour, “through the experiences and conversations of an extended family living in the Rockville area of Soweto,” and since Tlali, “[i]nto this web of family experience,” introduces a number of “other figures, historical events and issues of discontent and political debate in Soweto at the time,” it becomes a communal story more than a family saga. Sole also aptly discerns the inherent critique of the older generations’ “lack of commitment,” and Tlali’s mobilisation of “spiritual and cultural roots” as an “active and ever-present force in the contemporary struggle for freedom.” However, I do not agree with Sole’s conclusion that all the Soweto writers “reduce and restrain the possible ambiguities of meaning,” and that beyond the racial conflict their literature “was not particularly questioning of social inequalities and divisions [sic].” Instead, I argue that *Amandla!* in its double-voicedness and dialogism, covertly resists the “inequalities and divisions” immanent in the patriarchal structures.

As mentioned briefly above, my stance is partly shared by critics like Evans, Madrassi, and Gqola, who acknowledge that *Amandla!* addresses gender issues. However, although Evans agrees that Tlali explores gender, she finds that *Amandla!* largely resists male oppression, not by explicitly critiquing African patriarchy but rather patriarchal oppression enforced by the apartheid regime. Tlali, she concludes, does not “offer a particularly pro-feminist analysis of the past and present. Covering over the prior patriarchalism of black South African life, Tlali’s [novels] show race as the determining factor in the lives of her people.” In other words, Evans detects *Amandla!*’s resistance to patriarchy, but overlooks the complexity of this

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366 Sole 274.
367 Sole 275.
368 Sole 283.
369 Sole 418.
370 Evans, see note 22.
371 Evans 164.
resistance and its aesthetic realization. Given that in *Amandla!* certain patriarchal structures are revisited to be both cherished and resisted, I question her view that *Amandla!* is “full of yearning for a return to the certainties of the past.” Instead, I agree with Zoë Wicomb’s claim that in Tlali’s writing “concealment . . . becomes a trope for the woman writer who has to negotiate the conflicting loyalties of race and gender.”

Gabriella Madrassi finds the novel’s message about gender confusing. While she notes on the one hand that Tlali envelopes a militant protest against patriarchy in a blanket of ‘womanism’ that cherishes tradition, where women are allotted a solely supportive, traditional place in the struggle, she holds, on the other hand, that Felleng, for example, is depicted as embodying a “black woman’s self-assertion as a *de facto* condition of her life.” What Madrassi does not take into account in the first instance is that patriarchal society may have placed women in a supportive role, but that this placement, in *Amandla!* is contradicted by their active support of, and engagement in the children’s revolution. Moreover, Madrassi claims that Gramsy is depicted as the “embodiment of Mother Africa,” and that Tlali, in an essentialist way, is “naturally driven to revisit the Mother Africa myth.” I argue instead that *Amandla!*, like *Muriel at Metropolitan*, resists the symbolic use of woman. Far from being a symbol of the continent, Gramsy is depicted as a tired, yet stubborn old lady, who, for example, confined to her bed as a result of a stroke, tries to relieve her boredom in a down-to-earth ‘realistic’ manner: “Gramsy extended her still vital left hand and tossed the sweets into her toothless mouth, sucking and smacking her tongue noisily, obviously enjoying the rare treat” (36-7). Another instance that contradicts any symbolic value she may have is that she finally becomes terminally ill and dies (281). In such a revolutionary context, it is hard to envision a writer who would let the literary symbol of the nation die in the aftermath of a stroke, or of old-age.

**Dialogic Fragmentation**

This section gives a brief example of the fragmentation in *Amandla!* and explores the subversive dialogue it creates. To re-iterate, *Amandla!* inscribes an oral convention of eclecticism, which, in its resulting fragmentation rejects the conventional linear 19th-century novel form. This fragmentation, I have argued, found also in other black writing from this period, reflects the turmoil of the times, but also resists Western cultural hegemony symbolised

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372 Evans 165.
374 Madrassi 140, 142.
375 Madrassi 146.
376 Madrassi 142.
377 This fragmentation will be explored more extensively below.
by the imported classical British education of the time. However, in *Amandla!* the juxtaposition of discourses also creates a subtext that resists patriarchy.

Examining the fragmentation in *Amandla!*, for example in chapters eleven to fourteen of the novel, we detect different discourses. Chapter 11 opens up in the vein of the domestic discourse with a chatty, heartfelt conversation between Nana, one of the protagonists, and her friend nurse Betty, about daily concerns: buses do not run because “the children will burn them,” and their fears for their children who, to evade the police, have to “live like birds . . . . In old cars, dongas, garages and so on” (75). In this chapter the short domestic dialogue between two concerned mothers is immediately followed by, and contrasted to, a long wordy political speech by an established representative of the male public sphere, a lawyer who, citing a minister, another such representative, incorporates a much wider sphere of reference: he mentions the Bible, Abraham Lincoln, the Human Rights Charter, and draws on historical parallels to, for example, the Sharpeville massacre. He makes use of rhetorical devices such as addressing the whites as if they were listening and includes the whole of the continent: “It is an undeniable truth that we the blacks are of this continent of Africa. That we belong to every inch of it cannot be disputed . . . . Centuries before your ancestors set down their feet at the Cape, my ancestors were already moving in every inch of this continent from Cape to Cairo” (78). In contrast to this polished political rhetoric, the next chapter describes the young Pholoso’s revolutionary cell’s inexperienced discussions, couched in the discourse of boy-scout romance, about suitable personal codenames, whether to use milk or urine as invisible ink—“[urine] stains,” and “[b]esides, it smells!” (85)—before they settle on a code based on the Bible: “if I decide to use Mark, I shall head my letter MRK. X.6 (using the Roman numeral for the chapter). And for a book with two parts, like John or Timothy, we shall write JJ or TT for the second parts” (88). This rather naïve discussion metamorphoses into another serious political speech, this time made by Pholoso, in a monologic idiom that mimics the political rhetoric of the grown-ups, where we largely hear the voice of the author:

‘We have to counteract the propaganda of enslavement which is preached to our people, by raising their consciousness. Goebbels, in Nazi Germany, capitalised on emotionalism in which he hid the truth about the predicament of the German forces. The same strategy is used to make the people believe that if they stop working for a fortnight, they will perish—and that if the investors withdraw their capital there’ll be doom. Surely they, too, do not want to keep their money in an unstable country like this where the disgruntled hungry millions are kept as slaves.’ (93)

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379 The characteristics of this discourse will be explored in depth below.
This speech is followed by the unexpected introductory sentence of Chapter 13: “The two lovers, Niki and Teresa, were lying next to each other, naked” (94). In the stereotypical discourse of the romantic love story the chapter goes on to depict the intricacies of how the lovers cheat on Teresa’s husband, Sergeant Mamabolo. “‘Has he become suspicious about us? . . . Teresa quickly looked at [Niki], her tear-filled eyes blinking and making the tears run down her smooth cheeks. In that instant, her heart had missed a beat” (100). Subsequently, the text, in Chapter 14, returns to the domestic discourse, to a discussion that again shows the interlocutors’ concerns for the community: in a heart-to-heart talk with her aged brother, Gramsy, by way of gossip, relates the story of Pholoso’s imprisonment, imploring her brother to take action, and confides to him her suspicion that one of her daughters is a police spy.

Notably, the fragments of different discourses described above, the domestic discourse, political rhetoric, boy-scout romance, the love-story, and the heroic tale, are not indiscriminately juxtaposed; the subtext that emerges from the fragmentation signals that they are set in a dialogic relationship to one another, because, apart from jolting the reader, this switching of discourses produces irony: Nana’s and Betty’s mundane concerns for the children’s welfare, when juxtaposed to the men’s high-flown political rhetoric, highlights the wordiness of the latter, and reveals how it is distanced from daily concerns. Instead of monopolising the political domain, the subtext suggests, the men should involve themselves more directly with the ongoing, spontaneous struggle. Also, the domestic discourse that subtly interrogates the male, political discourse, at the same time critiques the structures that exclude black women in the townships from the public sphere of politics; there is irony inherent in the contrast between the women’s active involvement in the revolution and their official exclusion from the political arena. Moreover, the men’s political rhetoric in the novel, when juxtaposed to the more naive plotting of the boy leaders of the revolution, evokes the irony that, while the establishment prefers merely to talk, the youth/children are the agents of the uprising. Accentuating this irony is the discourse of the heroic tale used in conjunction with Pholoso, who, being just a boy is far too young to be spoken of in honorific terms. Lastly, Pholoso’s fervent speech, juxtaposed to the romantic pursuits of the policeman Nicodemus, accentuates a critique of the police, but also of the men in the townships who do not take the children’s revolution (supported by the maternal figures) seriously. Thus, by their fragmentary juxtaposition a dialogue of discourses emerges, and in the gaps a covert opposition to African patriarchal values is discernible.
Terminology

My discussion will now turn to the terms discourse/genre, dialogism and double-voicedness used in the analysis below. The novel is a genre that incorporates many discourses couched in different styles, and it may even incorporate other genres. In his essay “Discourse in the Novel” Bakhtin writes:

The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [raznorecie] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [raznorecie] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships.

Bakhtin deploys the term discourse not strictly in the sense of a dialogue between two people, but in a wide sense, to designate “language in its concrete living totality,” in contrast to language as a set of linguistic elements. He regards the term as a name for types of utterances, where genre may be one such type. As Tzvetan Todorov notes, “Bakhtin distinguishes up to five types of [discursive] differentiation: by genre, profession, social stratum, age and region.” This diversity of speech is staged in the novel’s incorporation of varying discourses, some so distinct that they develop into separate genres, and here I find that Bakhtin’s characterization of genre may even apply to the term discourse:

Literary language—both spoken and written—although it is unitary not only in its shared, abstract, linguistic markers but also in its forms for conceptualizing these abstract markers, is itself stratified and heteroglot in its aspect as an expressive system, that is, in the forms that carry its meanings.

This stratification is accomplished first of all by the specific organisms called genres. Certain features of language (lexicological, semantic, syntactic) will knit together with the intentional aim, and with the overall accentual system inherent in one or another genre: oratorical, publicistic, newspaper and journalistic genres, the genres of low literature (penny dreadfuls, for instance) or, finally, the various genres of high literature. Certain features of language take on the specific flavor of a given genre: they knit together with specific points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents characteristic of the given genre.

Another meta-linguistic aspect that Bakhtin regards as one of the vital possibilities of the genre of the novel is dialogism. In his view, dialogic ut-

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381 Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 181.
382 Tzvetan Todorov, Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984) 57.
terances, in contrast to linguistic entities, designate semantic positions and are “directed toward an answer,” bearing within them the potential response of the other, in a collective give-and-take. Any utterance, even that constituted by a single word, becomes dialogic when it is not perceived as “the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else’s semantic position,” or voice. It is possible to link this discussion to the one on novelization in the previous chapter. For the novel to move from a more monologic mode, that is, a self-centred, unified view of reality expressed in what Bakhtin calls “direct” language, to a heteroglot dialogic view of reality, where utterances voice an opinion and even, as we shall see, may contain several voices, adds to its degree of ‘novelization.’ “The development of the novel,” he says, “is a function of the deepening of dialogic essence.”

Moreover, Bakhtin states, if juxtaposed in the novel, discourses and genres can be intentionally set in a dialogical relationship to one another, with the effect that the different “points of view, forms of thinking, nuances and characteristic accents,” which he mentions in the quote above, can form a dialogue from which new meaning emanates:

In actual fact, however, there does exist a common plane that methodologically justifies our juxtaposing them: all languages of heteroglossia [or genres] whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically.389

[Emphasis added]

Elsewhere, claiming that dialogic relationships are possible between any utterances, he contends similarly that “dialogic relationships are also possible between language styles, social dialect . . . insofar as they are perceived as semantic positions, as language worldviews of a sort, that is, as something no longer strictly within the realm of linguistic investigation.” Therefore, even a political monologue can function dialogically if it is set in a dialogic relation to another discourse within the novel. Much in the manner described above, Tlali in *Amandla!* pits various discourses and genres against one an-

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385 Holquist 60.
other to generate a critique of patriarchal attitudes harboured in both the political and the domestic spheres of society.\footnote{This form of dialogism is a contrast to what Bakhtin calls, in Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, “dramatized dialogue,” which he finds to be the most profusely used form of dialogue in literature. Often encountered in drama, dramatic dialogue, like dramatized dialogue, in order to move the plot forward, is necessarily monologic (the opposite of dialogism): it does not “rip apart the represented world” or make it “multi-leveled,” instead it presumes a “monolithic unity of that world [of drama].” Dramatic action at large, according to Bakhtin, “resolves all dialogic oppositions, is purely monologic,” and exempts “true multiplicity,” (17). From this one may conclude that the loosely forged, multi-levelled and multiple, undramatic plots in Amandla! render it more dialogic in nature than a text that exhibits a “dramatic” unified plot. Furthermore, with the term polyphony Bakhtin implies that different, very characteristic voices (e.g. skaz), or discourses, are incorporated into a text. In a sense then, Amandla!, in its dialogic use of discourses, although it does not deploy skaz, does exhibit traits of polyphony, and, at least, is just as, albeit differently, polyphonic compared to Muriel at Metropolitan.}

Lastly, the term “double-voiced discourse” has been coined by Bakhtin to designate a discourse that “has a two-fold direction,” that is, two conflicting ideas are incorporated in one set of utterances; two voices are heard, one addressing “the referential object of speech,” and the other addressing “another’s discourse” or “someone else’s speech.” Double-voicedness, Bakhtin contends, is one specific form of dialogism, and here he incorporates several meta-linguistic phenomena such as “stylization, parody, skaz and dialogue (compositionally expressed dialogue, broken down into rejoinders).”\footnote{Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 185.}\footnote{Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 195.}\footnote{Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics 196.} Tlali in Amandla! deploys parody and irony, in which, to use Bakhtin’s words,

> the author makes use precisely of other people’s words for the expression of his own particular intentions. In [parody and irony] the other person’s discourse remains outside the limits of the author’s speech, but the author’s speech takes it into account and refers to it. Another’s discourse in this case is not reproduced with a new intention, but it acts upon, influences, and in one way or another determines that author’s discourse, while itself remaining outside it. Such is the nature of discourse in the hidden polemic.\footnote{Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 185.}

In the hidden polemic, he claims further, there appears “alongside its referential meaning . . . a second meaning – an intentional orientation toward someone else’s words.”\footnote{Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics 195.} Such are the two voices that may at times be discerned in the domestic discourse that create irony in Amandla!. In the next section, we will explore the nature of the domestic discourse, point out its dominating position, its complex relationship to tradition and patriarchy, and show how this discourse inherently manifests other aspects of dialogism, such as heteroglossia, carnivalism, and a hidden polemic.
A Double-Voiced Domestic Discourse

In the dialogue of discourses in *Amandla!* the domestic discourse functions as a meta-narrative: serving as an adhesive throughout the narrative, it conveys the main plot and incorporates several minor plots. The domestic discourse centres on the maternal figures of the community, belonging largely to the kitchens and bedrooms, but also to the private conversations on the streets and in the shops of the township, at times including men. Values of the private, domestic sphere, such as the nurturing of the young and the care of the elderly, of active involvement in the welfare of the community, and pacifistic non-collaboration in support of the young people’s revolution are fostered within this discourse.

In contrast to *Muriel at Metropolitan*, the domestic discourse in *Amandla!* does not emphasise modernity, or conflate tradition and patriarchy, but, in compliance with the hegemony of the Black Consciousness movement, it instead revisits African patriarchal traditions, cherishing certain aspects of them while critiquing others. Cherished are, for example, an ideal form of African social institutions such as a distribution of power between men and women,395 neighbourly helpfulness, structures of caring for young and old within the clan, the fact that all children are regarded as belonging to the whole community, that all the grown-ups, men as well as women, share the responsibility for the children (in turn children show the elders respect), and reverence for the ancestors. Concurrently, the domestic discourse critiques aspects of patriarchal, or male practices, both traditional and more modern ones, such as the strict gendered division of society into a male and a female sphere, hence, the exclusion of women from the public domain, male proprietorship over women, and male abuse of women. The tension lies in trying to reclaim tradition while critiquing it.

The strategy encountered in the domestic discourse to contain this ambiguous stance is the hidden polemic which arises from its double-voicedness. In *Amandla!*, the effect of this strategy, I argue, is a more subdued criticism of patriarchy. For example, although the grandmothers literally say they enjoy caring for their grandchildren their speech also implies a critique of the absent fathers. This simultaneous endorsement and/or resistance to certain African patriarchal values takes place both within the double-voiced domestic discourse, and as a result of this characteristic discourse’s confrontation with ‘male’ discourses (dealt with in the next section). The double-voicedness, of course, contributes to the dialogic mode of the domestic discourse, as do heteroglossia and carnivalism, both specific for this discourse, setting it apart from the other ones incorporated.

395 Let me remind the reader of the African indigenous philosophy, discussed in the introductory chapter, that stipulates a distribution of power between the sexes into a paternal public sphere and a maternal domestic sphere.
Recognizing a similar discourse in Tlali’s collection of short stories *Footprints in the Quag* (1989), which she calls a ‘maternal idiom,’ Margaret Daymond justifies her claim that Tlali, along with Bessie Head, at this time, “[i]nvent[s] gendered traditions” for South African black writing.396 The ‘maternal idiom,’ Daymond notes, is distinguished as an idiom based on the township’s women’s ways of speaking about their lives, “the popular turns of phrase” full of “humour coming from ordinary daily life,” with a “co-presence of languages” that works “to counteract any residue of controlling authority that might linger in the English language,”397 exerting in the text generally a wish “not to ‘control’—a wish which is fundamentally at variance with the (male) authority usually granted to writers.”398 Daymond recognizes several traits that contribute to this idiom’s dialogism:

Powerlessness (of a people and of women in particular) is pervasive but defeatism is counteracted by the stories’ dialogic mode. Releasing the dialogic potential of language so as to register the otherwise silenced co-presence of the meanings of other speakers and listeners has, as Bakhtin (1973,1981) has argued, always been a potent political tool. And Tlali’s stories are dialogic in two senses: they absorb social conflict into themselves by recording the many ways in which people actually talk about their lives; they are also often told in a structured exchange of voices that is disruptive of the status quo. [Emphasis added]399

This multiplicity of voices and “otherwise silenced co-presence of meanings,” I find, is reminiscent of what Bakhtin calls double-voicedness. In short, the ‘maternal idiom’ that Daymond identifies in *Footprints in the Quag* is based on women’s talk: it is dialogic in so far as it resists ‘male authority’ and is characterized by humour (carnivalization)400 and heteroglossia, and, although Daymond does not spell it out, by double-voicedness. This subversive ‘maternal idiom’ is already discernible, I would claim, in *Amandla*! Here too women’s talk dominates the domestic sphere in a discourse that is dialogic precisely because it embraces heteroglossia, at times evinces humour in a carnivalesque way, and, in a double-voiced manner cherishes some patriarchal traditions while resisting others. Although there are similarities between the two terms, for our purposes the term idiom does not suffice since it is a more restrictive term than the term discourse as used by Bakhtin. In linguistics, idiom mainly refers to the form of expression, that is, the words used, and does not take into account the semantic position of the speaker, the content and overall context of the language used. Discourse,

396 Daymond. “Inventing Gendered Traditions.” The quote is from the title.
397 Daymond 235.
398 Daymond 236.
399 Daymond 234.
400 Bakhtin’s concept of carnivalization entails a topsy-turvyism that allows the underdog of society, by means of humour, to turn the tables in the existing power hierarchies. High becomes low and vice versa. The tramp becomes king and the king is ridiculed as tramp.
as we have seen, connotes a wider field, including specific topics, and, in the
words of Bakhtin quoted above, “specific points of view, specific ap-
proaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents.” Furthermore, the term
‘maternal’ invites an essentialist reading of woman and the notion that this
discourse is for ever linked to women, and motherhood. Calling it instead a
domestic discourse I have chosen to focus on the discourse’s affinity to the
domestic sphere, noticeable both in its concerns and values, and in the fact
that it belongs to the bedrooms and the kitchens, at times to the streets, that
is, to unofficial private spaces. Of course, in this context, the domestic
sphere was the women’s domain, but the concept of a ‘maternal idiom’
would conserve women within this sphere, and silence the text’s attempt to
widen the domestic sphere to also include men. In this section I explore the
domestic discourse by first pointing out its heteroglossia and carnivalesque
traits, before going on to show its domestic contents and lastly its double-
voicedness which creates a subtext of resistance to patriarchy.

Two of the main characters, Gramsy and Nana, around whom the domes-
tic discourse revolves, belong to a network of women who are either related
to one another, or are neighbours. There are Gramsy, who is the oldest, her
sister Mmane Marta, her daughter Mmamoni, and her niece Nana, but also
Betty, who is Nana’s best friend and neighbour, and Nana’s sister Agnes.
The men whose stories are told within this discourse are Agnes’ husband
Bra-Joe (who drinks and beats his wife but is attempting to reform),
Gramsy’s brother Raimane, and the young hero Pholoso. Because of his
heroic role, Pholoso may in one sense be regarded as the main protagonist,
but in another sense, his story is largely conveyed through rumour within the
domestic discourse, and is therefore subordinated to the plot centred on
Gramsy, a story which thus, in a sense, becomes a meta-narrative.

A long dialogue between Gramsy and Mmane Marta, opening Chapter 6
(34-43), illustrates the heteroglossia and the special idiom of the domestic
discourse:

‘Ao! It’s really you here, Marta. My very own mother’s baby! You
thought of your dear old sister at last. Do sit here next to me. I want to have a
good look at you. How I’ve longed to see you! One would think Phiri [a geo-
graphical location] is not in Soweto but in another world. Put your bag on the

401 Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel,” The Dialogic Imagination 289
402 Apart from the meaning of making use of different languages, used in my Chapter 1, Bak-
htin assigns several other meanings to the concept heteroglossia. By heteroglossia he also
designates the phenomenon that a word may take on diverse meanings depending on whose
utterance it is and on the context of its utterance. A text is heteroglossic when words are de-
liberately used to mean different things (e.g. punning) or when words are incorporated that are
not easily interpreted (foreign words that are not glossed). A proverb also adds to heteroglos-
sia, because the interpretation of it is open-ended. In other words, a dialogic text is het-
eroglossic when it appropriates new words, words that may be new to the reader but are apt
for the intended recipient of the utterance, adopts foreign expressions and colloquial idiom,
flows with the diversity of life, and is replete with local colour.
chair and sit on the bed here. How cold and tired you must be, my-mother’s-child!”

‘Heh! I knew you would complain, Gramsy. Just be thankful that I do get
time to come by, even if it’s only a “peep”. What shall we say? We’re in the
hands of the children now. They are as good as our parents. We must try to
help them. Have you forgotten that I have grandchildren to look after? I did
send word that my youngest daughter had her third baby two months ago,
didn’t I? Poor Sisi. How you can forget!’ (34-35)

Words are inserted that add local atmosphere to the text. The interjections
“Ao!” and “Heh!” for example, introducing two of the utterances, reflect the
conventions of the African vernaculars foreign to English. Heteroglossic is
also the way in which the concept ‘sister’ is rephrased as her “mother’s
baby,” and “my-mother’s-child,” which creates intimacy and signals the
familiarity, or the domesticity of the discourse. The expression “my mother’s
child” is a direct translation from a vernacular expression that preserves the
importance, for their relationship, of their dead mother, and her power to act
as a link between them, which adds a new level of meaning to the word “sis-
ter.” In this way, new expressions are coined that incorporate a local, idio-
matic way of speaking. Similarly, the deviant sentence, “It’s really you here
Martha!”—in standard English one would prefer “Is this really you Mar-
tha?”—reflects the language context in which it is spoken; while adding to
the diversity of expression, it exemplifies how the utterance is dialogically
gearied towards the recipient who would recognize the vernacular word or-
der. Furthermore, when Betty later recalls the words of an official who has
intimidated her, her story includes no fewer than six sentences in Afrikaans
left untranslated. This refusal in the text to indulge the reader mimics the
manner in which the oppressive official has addressed her: “Dit is die wet,
nie ek nie. As die wet sê jou ‘mosadi’ mag nie hier wees nie, dan moet sy net
uit! . . . Sê haar, Ons moet haar nie meer in daardie huis kry nie! . . . As ons
haar weer daar kry, sal jy in die groot moeilikheid wees. Hoor jy? . . . Kom,
kom nou! Ek het nie tyd om te mors nie. Volgende!” (18-19) The Afri-
kaans sentences here highlight the interlocutors’ (and perhaps the black
readers’) shared experience of not being pampered with translations, but of
being forced to adjust to, and to learn, the two official languages of the
apartheid era. Adding a new level of meaning in this way, the sentences thus
contribute to the discourse’s heteroglossic mode.

403 In most homes in Soweto people would speak a mixture of African languages, English and
Afrikaans. This mixing of languages has become a hallmark of hybridity on, for example, the
stage and contemporary television shows in the country.
404 “It is the ‘wet’ [the district superintendent] that stipulates so, not I. If the ‘wet’ says that
your woman is not allowed to reside here, then she has to go! . . . Tell her: ‘We do not want to
find her in that house any more.’ Do you hear? . . . Come, now! I don’t have time for idle talk.
Next!’” [My translation]
Another heteroglossic feature of this discourse compared to the other included discourses is the use of proverbs. Usually they are literal translations from a vernacular as in “the womenfolk . . . grab the sharp end of the knife,” or they are rendered in the indigenous language together with a literal translation: “Ngwana mosetsana ke Mme-gaa-loye: Wa mosimane gaare yalo—A female child says: Mother is no witch, whilst a son does not say that” (268). In black African culture proverbs convey traditional ways, or even the ‘common law,’ or merely the wisdom of life handed down from mother to daughter: Agnes “remembered that her mother used to say that one should always try to distract one’s mind from the recollection of a bad dream, that that way one avoided suffering from its tormenting effect” (177). Characteristically, this discourse often attempts to represent language as it is spoken ‘at home.’ Short sentences lacking sub-clauses imitate the fragmentation of an informal conversation that allows for pauses and afterthought, as in Mmane Martha’s answer to her sister: “What shall we say? We’re in the hands of the children now. They are as good as our parents. We must try to help them” (35), evoking the quality of daily, informal speech.

Moreover, the domestic discourse evinces traits of carnivalism that add to its dialogism. In the following example the women have been drawn out into the streets, just outside of their homes, because of the havoc caused by the young people. The chapter begins with the outcry “The office is burning!” (15), and only later does the reader understand that the municipality offices are being referred to. In other words, the cry evokes a sense of shared references, even bonding among the people in the street who are assembled. Among them are a group of women: Nana, her daughter Matshidiso, Betty, and Mamphuti. Together they watch the official offices burn down and listen to the joking passers-by:

The glow of the flickering blaze was reflected in their smiling faces.

‘I bet you could make a huge “braai” of boerewors there on those red-hot zins,’ remarked someone laughing.

‘You’re making my mouth water, man!’ replied another. ‘And how I would enjoy it!’ (16)

Considering that ‘braai’ is the South African word for barbeque and ‘boerewors’ is a popular farmer’s sausage, the allusion perhaps is to the apartheid representatives (the Boers) that could be roasted on that hot roof. This type of humorous exchange within an oppressive context is what Bakhtin calls “the common people’s creative culture of laughter,”405 which forms the basis of the topsy-turvydom of carnivalization. Another example of the carnivalism is when Mamphuti, shortly after the above event, gets involved in an exchange between two children who are fooling around with a telephone:

‘What have you got there, man? Let’s see.’

‘It’s the phone thing, man. I’m just “phoning” my baas at work, man. Tring . . . tring . . .’ He went on winding the handle and laughing.

‘Baas, is your boy here. I’ll be late for the work, baas. My “mosadi” is seek, baas . . .’

‘Where did you get that from?’ asked an adult standing a few feet away from her whom Nana recognised as Mamphuti, the owner of the house opposite hers. She moved nearer to her.

‘We ripped it from the switchboard there.’ The boy pointed at the burning cubicle.

‘Shame. What will the poor, half-blind operator say when he finds his little kingdom has gone up in flames?’

‘Ag, it doesn’t matter, after all!’ interrupted an angry woman’s voice from somewhere in front of them.

‘Here, even if you beg them to ring for a doctor to help a dying relative, they refuse. They tell you: “The Superintendent says this phone is not for use by the residents.” Where should we go to?’ (16-17)

The play-acting of the children mocks the superiority of the dethroned superintendent who does not allow the residents to use his phone even in an emergency, and the turned tables, due to the fire, are taken in good humour by the women, who add comments of their own, as in the sly remark: “his little kingdom.” By way of values, the maternal figures are again shown to be involved in down-to-earth domestic issues, and they evince traditional collective concern for the children of the community at large, as Mamphuti’s address here to the children regarding their behaviour illustrates.

The domestic discourse is largely linked to place: it usually takes place in kitchens and bedrooms. The domestic trait is reinforced by its content, which is linked to the sympathetic and intimate gossip about one’s kith and kin and next-door neighbours, often grounded in rumour. (This discourse, of course, can easily be, and at times is, transferred to the streets). The following example of gossip illustrates how the sisters discuss Bra-Joe, and tell his story by way of rumour:

‘What about Agnes’ husband – does he still drink a lot?’

‘That is no longer drinking. That’s swimming in the thing! I would not expect much from him. What is disgusting is that when he is drunk, which is every weekend, he gets home and starts beating up Agnes and sometimes their three children. It’s heartbreaking—have you noticed how the worst men have the best hard-working wives? It’s as if all they ever do well in their lives is to pick out the very best women.’

‘Yes. I don’t know why it’s like that. I really hoped—not having heard about them all this time—that God would have entered that poor man’s heart and changed him. I even forget his name. I never want to think of him.’

‘Joseph: his drunken friends call him Bra-Joe. He makes a lot of jokes in the shebeens. I understand, and he teases children with funny stories in the streets. They follow him around and enjoy his company when he is drunk. He’s a sort of jolly person to the admiring kids in the streets, but he has no
Information relayed here has obviously, partly, been gleaned from other sources. “Nana tells me,” signals gossip, and “he teases children with funny stories” is obviously a rumour that has been picked up by Gramsy from a shebeen visitor. In the spirit of gossip Gramsy’s and Mmane Marta’s long dialogue in Chapter 6 introduces many diverse topics of domestic concern: personal complaints and illnesses, grandchildren in need of care, problems with bosses, Gramsy’s relationship to her grandchild Pholoso, her support of his actions, jealousy between family members, difficult sleeping conditions, the secret revolution of the children of Soweto, the dire problem of spies, policemen who are sell-outs to the regime, and unfaithfulness and drunkenness in the family. That such a diversity of topics can be handled in a few pages depends largely on the close bonds between the women: they speak within a shared context, each speech-act is grounded within a family context, each utterance is also shaped by the recipient; to re-iterate Bakhtin’s words, it is “directed toward an answer.”

But, at the same time the utterances have another meaning than the surface meaning—they are double-voiced. The message conveyed, for example, by the contrast between the reckless husband and the hard-working wife emerging in this question: “Have you noticed how the worst men have the best hard-working wives?” (42), implies a critique of men that goes beyond the dramatic dialogue used to forward the plot, becoming a comment on the times. Also, in the final lines of this conversation there is a hint of better times gone by, a time when men cared for their children, “our dear brother would have died of heart failure if he had lived to see all that cruelty become the fate of one of his dear children. Do you remember how he used to love them?” (41-42)

A more distinct double-voicedness regarding the domestic discourse’s relationship to contemporary patriarchal practices, and to the effects of the breakdown of traditional customs, can be discerned in the following excerpt. Here Mmane Marta gives a hint that some beneficial traditional structures, in the context of the township, have been irretrievably lost:

‘Look at my hands. They are worn out and chapped, washing napkins. When I got the message that you wanted to see me urgently about the preparations
for the tombstone-laying I decided to go on strike. You don’t know how I fought to come here. I forced the motsoetse (nursing mother) to ask for two days off from her work so that she could come and spend one night with that team of children. Sometimes I feel that it’s better to have only sons instead of daughters. It seems you and I have been loaded with girls to make up for the fact that we were the only two girls among six boys, don’t you think so? Mother and father and those sons of theirs all went to heaven and left us to pay! It may sound a bit hard on them, but I’m afraid my three daughters just don’t appreciate that I have to rest. They take turns having babies, and all they do is dump them on me. No sooner is one child out of nappies than it’s happening again. The next one is on the way. At times I wish I were dead.’

Historically, all dependants, such as older women, young mothers, and children, would have been cared for within the father’s clan, something that a reader who shares this interpretative horizon would know. However, the text conveys that contemporary patriarchal practice in the context of Amandla! is different: instead of fulfilling their traditional duties to their families, the husbands/fathers abandon both their wives and their children, which the sentence “I feel that it’s better to have only sons instead of daughters” implies. This double-voicedness surfaces as irony. Traditionally, as the daughter-in-law and her children would move in to live with the husband’s mother, sons would mean more of a social engagement for her (but she would also get help in the household). Modern practices (and apartheid rule) have, however, turned the tables; during this period black men often abandoned their wives and children, which explains why Gramsy claims that it would be better to have sons, as this would, in this time of forgotten traditions, entail no work for her at all. Instead, in the urban townships, the mothers and/or maternal grandmothers are left to care for the daughter’s children while these are at work. In other words, since the men have substituted one part of the patriarchal social contract for another, the older women are forced to step in and take over the men’s traditional duties. Although covertly embedded, this critique against contemporary patriarchal practice surfaces as irony. It is couched in a double-voiced discourse that appears to criticise the daughters for “dumping” the children on the speaker, but which mainly stabs at the fathers’ neglect of their children, thereby lamenting the loss of ‘ideal’ traditions.

406 Lauretta Ngcobo in And They Didn’t Die (1999) explains, as mentioned, that when a couple gets married, according to ‘ideal’ African customs, the wife moves to the husband’s clan and the subsequent children ‘belong’ to this clan, where they are duly cared for. In other words, a grandmother should not be helping to care for her own daughter’s children, and only be indirectly involved in the upbringing of her son’s children—an endeavour that, ideally, everybody would take part in. However, in the urban culture on the rise men are more often shirking this responsibility.

407 Traditionally, the older women would also have more time to participate in the affairs of the community at large, which this new patriarchal practice has made impossible.
Similarly, in the following passage, Gramsy conveys her conflicting feelings towards her grandchildren in two distinct voices. Although she is in dire need of care herself, she is highly enmeshed in the care of her daughter’s children:

How can I not love them? They are very noisy at times but they also make me very happy sometimes. Their little stories, their laughter—sometimes they sing hymns for me. They keep me from thinking too much of my condition. Especially Mummy—or Moni, the nine-year-old one. She’s so clever. I’m surprised she hasn’t stormed in here yet to bring reports of misconduct by the others. It’s always, “Gramsy, so-and-so is fighting so and so. Gramsy, so-and-so is busy dipping his finger into the sugar basin.” Gramsy this and Gramsy that, the whole day. . . . They are being watered by God’s mercy. They are real fun. I have to share my bed with three of them. One there, next to my feet with her pillow against the foot of the bed; and the other two girls up here against the wall, because at times they are very restless and they roll off the bed. Others, the boys, sleep on the floor. The two youngest ones sleep with their mothers because they refuse to sleep on the floor. Mummy, of course, insists that her place is next to me.’(39-40)

While this passage speaks of the love between Gramsy and her grandchildren, it also contains a critique of the conditions that the suffering old woman is forced to put up with due to the breakdown of the clan traditions. Although the overall tone used about the children is positive, “they are watered by God’s mercy” and “they are real fun,” another voice can be discerned. This voice insinuates that the children continuously disturb her with their demands and squabbles, and that, partly due to changed ‘patriarchal’ practice, she has to share her bed with no fewer than three of them at night, and that her room is shared, all in all, with no fewer than five children. According to tradition the grandmother should not be forced into such a subservient position. Gramsy’s speech here contains both these conflicting ‘voices,’ which evokes irony, and in turn implies critique of new patriarchal practices.

A final example of the split voices or undertones of this discourse is when Mmane Marta indirectly praises her daughter’s behaviour and that of other women belonging to the community in order to critique modern patriarchal practices of neglect: Nana, Agnes, and Mmamoni are shown to be very helpful in caring for Gramsy during her terminal illness:

‘Gramsy and I used to talk at length about the apparent misfortune of us both having had only daughters. . . . But what man could go on nursing the sick so patiently for so long? It is always us, the womenfolk, who, as we say “grab the sharp end of the knife.” After all it is true what the old people say: “Ngwana mosetsana ke Mme-gaa-loye: Wa mosimane gaare yalo – A female child says: Mother is no witch, whilst a son does not say that.”’ (268)
Seemingly, women, in contrast to the men, still adhere to their part of the social contract. Dominating the domestic sphere, they serve as nurturers who care for both the aged and their children. The final proverb in the quotation above, which begins “A female child says,” means that while a son is allowed to publicly voice his disrespect, the daughter is brought up to submissive solidarity with other women. Because it takes some time to work out its implications, with its double negatives, I find that the proverb illustrates how women conventionally embed their critique, an intricate manoeuvring of language that reminds one of the custom of hlonipha, mentioned in the introductory chapter.

Thus, the domestic discourse both cherishes and mocks certain aspects of tradition. This double-bind is especially noticeable in the story of how Bra-Joe seeks to overcome his drinking habits, a story incorporated in the domestic discourse, where the narrator deploys a characteristic double-voicedness that both celebrates and critiques traditional remedies and, by extension, patriarchal practices. Bra-Joe’s and Agnes’ combined story, like Pholoso’s, is largely told in snippets of conversation, or ‘rumour,’ throughout the narrative, embedded in the dialogues between the members of the domestic network. On New Year’s Eve, the night of bold resolutions, we are told that Bra-Joe, once again, abuses and batters his wife Agnes, who, taking refuge at Nana’s place, decides to leave him once and for all. The narrator takes Agnes’ side in the conflict, supporting her courage to leave her husband:

Agnes was still lying on the couch, with her lips slightly parted. The exhaustion caused by the anxiety of the previous months was still showing on her face. Even in sleep, the countenance reflected pain and suffering. The muscles were not relaxed, they twitched and stirred involuntarily. (176)

Also Agnes states that “[my children] have continuous nightmares. And now this. Look at my knees, my swollen elbows. How would they have felt seeing me being punched all over like that by their father?” (178). Addressing Nana, she expresses her bitterness:

‘I’m tired of him, Nana. One day we are a happy family and are seen carrying Bibles and hymn-books going to church with our four kids, and the next day (or that same afternoon) he’s kicking me around in the street again. You can’t say a word to him when he is like that. I’m tired. I just feel like leaving him and going away anywhere, far away from him.

‘I am tired of him. I am just waiting until the offices are open after the New Year—then I’ll go to the Commissioner’s office to open a divorce file. I’m tired!’ (179)

Deserted, Bra-Joe once again decides to give up drinking: “He had his plans all worked out. In accordance with African custom, he would go and fetch one of his uncles on his father’s side . . . . Together they would present
themselves to [Agnes’ and Nana’s clan] and ask them to please allow him to bring his wife back to their home” (202). In other words, he resorts to the traditional custom that stipulates the engagement of the older clan members to help solve the younger clan members’ marital problems. And as we shall see he seems intent on using the recommended traditional remedies.

The double-voicedness in the discourse comes to the fore in the comments given by the maternal community. Hearing of Bra Joe’s sobriety and of his intentions Nana seems to react positively by exclaiming: “‘Mehlolo ke linoha, mesenene ke batho! Hape lintho lia etsahala!’—Miracles are snakes, are people! Things do happen!” (204). But the ambiguity of this proverb implies a divided stance: miracles and snakes alike, it is suggested, can come upon you unexpectedly; and their movements, like those of people, are unpredictable. However, as “miracles” ultimately depend on “people” to come about there is also an implication that no supernatural forces are involved—a stance that foreshadows the intended mocking tone in the passage on animistic customs to come. Also, the image of the snake with a divided tongue both becomes a trope for the dual voices of the discourse and insinuates that Bra-Joe’s speech is not to be relied upon; he may say one thing yet mean another. Thus, there is one voice that applauds his attempt to take responsibility for the domestic sphere by resorting to traditional custom, while another questions his credibility and, as we shall see, questions the animistic beliefs to which he resorts.

First, there is the celebration of the traditional ways. Searching for help from his maternal uncle, he is served numerous proverbs and old sayings as reminders of traditional ways that did not tolerate violence between spouses: “A woman is never to be thrashed by her husband like a small child. She is to be treated with tenderness” (207), and “‘Ithute go boloka lalapa la gago,’ Learn to look after your family. Your home is your sanctuary,” and, “[w]ithout a home—a happy one—you are nothing, you lack a backbone” (208-209). Ideal societal structures are conjured up and presented as examples for modern township living. Thus tradition is again used to critique modern patriarchal practices. And, regarding Joe’s and Agnes’ children the uncle’s verdict is especially harsh. He says: “You make your children grow up with blood in their hearts” (207), implying that fathers like Bra-Joe must take responsibility for their wives, children and homes.

So far the narrator supports Bra-Joe’s endeavour but as the remedy is discussed at length and described in detail, keeping in mind Nana’s view that “miracles are people,” we can discern a sceptical note: “We shall let the blood of a young ox drip slowly into the soil, into the cool earth, in the shade of the trees round the ‘lelapa’ and we shall call all our ancestors by name. We shall implore them to come to our rescue” (209). And, to save Joe’s children from “the blood in their hearts” the uncle recommends that they “grind the thorny cactus plant and soak it in fresh river water . . . . With that mixture, we shall bathe your young from head to foot at dusk” (209). The
text thus conveys a critique of traditional patriarchal practices that demand different standards for men and women: while men neglect their responsibilities, drink excessively, and rummage around for animistic remedies with no direct link to the source of the problem, women have to bear the burden of child-rearing and are made the victims of domestic violence.

In sum, this section has examined how the domestic discourse embraces specific values such as the nurturing of young and old, and non-collaboration with the proponents of apartheid. The double-voiced nature of this discourse has been explored. Although oppressive patriarchal behaviour such as wife-beating is criticised, the discourse simultaneously shows that African tradition and negative patriarchal behaviour are not inextricably linked. In contrast to similar sections in *Muriel at Metropolitan*, where the narrator ridicules the old traditions, saying explicitly that they belong in a museum, the discourse here illustrates the strength of certain traditions, such as the communal nurture of children. Nevertheless, its double-voicedness mocks other traditions, for example, animistic customs, and certain present-day patriarchal practices.

### A Dialogue of Generic Discourses

This section will examine the dialogue of generic discourses in *Amandla!* that forms a subtextual critique of the values and politics of patriarchy. Mainly, it is the domestic discourse, in tandem with the heroic tale, that interrogates and undermines ‘official’ political rhetoric, as well as the discourses of the ‘spectacular,’ the action thriller, and the love story. In order to understand how Tlali uses these genres dialogically it is vital to again discuss what constituted black male writing at the time of, and the decade before, *Amandla!’s* composition. In addition, the oral genre of praise poetry will be examined here as it reverberates in the dialogue of discourses, especially the one that arises from the juxtaposition of the heroic tale and political rhetoric. It is also relevant to mention briefly the oral genre of women’s *sefela*,408 which deploys a hybrid discourse to subvert official political rhetoric similar to the technique used by Tlali.

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408 *Sefela* is an oral tradition of poetry developed during the 20th century mainly in the gold mines of Johannesburg by the migratory labourers from Lesotho. They often narrate the difficulties encountered in the mines, critique both the system of labour and the black chiefs. Women in exile developed their own form of *sefela*. See David B. Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals: the Word Music of South Africa’s Basotho Migrants* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994).

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African Black Male Literature in South Africa

The subverted discourses in *Amandla!* are all conventions of African black male writing in South Africa. ‘Official’ political rhetoric was a male domain, and, as we have seen, black women bearers of protest were rare. Moreover, the discourses of the ‘spectacular,’ and of the action thriller were male. The love story is mainly a convention of the yellow press, for example, *Drum* and the popular *foto-roman,* which was produced mainly by men, and in which gendered stereotypes, such as the active, male protagonist and the passive, susceptible, yearning woman, or one bent on revenge, flourish. Even in more serious black male writing, for example, in Can Themba’s “Mob Passion,” the love story is represented in a stereotypical fashion, albeit with a ‘spectacular’ twist.

Due to the censorship of black writing in South Africa during the 1960s and the 1970s there is little writing from this period with which to compare *Amandla!*. The bans did not begin to be lifted until the mid-1980s and only a few books by black South African writers in exile were smuggled into the country. Among these, Tlali mentions having read Mphahlele’s autobiography *Down Second Avenue.* Therefore, it is necessary to again read Tlali’s work against the foil of the Sophiatown writers publishing in *Drum.* Describing the Sophiatown writers, Paul Gready finds that they were influenced by American models, were generally “apolitical,” with a predilection for urban violence and gang-culture where the gangster ambiguously functioned...

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409 Cherryl Walker in *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991) tells the story of women’s resistance to apartheid. She begins by claiming that “[s]ocially, economically, legally—in all spheres of society—women occupy a distinct and subordinate position to men” (1), however, this subordination is not unambiguous. As mothers, and within the domestic (female) sphere, women do have power. As long as their political aspirations remain within that sphere they have been tolerated. This has been discussed in depth in the introductory chapter.

410 From the 1960s onwards, preceding the era of the televised serial (the medium of television came to South Africa as late as 1976), the love story in the form of the serialised picture story, in South Africa known by the Afrikaans word *foto-roman,* was extremely popular. The plots were simple, and the characters heavily stereotyped. There existed ‘white’ versions and ‘black’ versions of more or less the same trivial, escapist stories, and in several languages, for example, Afrikaans, English, and Zulu.

411 A more literary example of this kind of stereotype can be found in Casey Motsitsi’s “On the Beat [Kid Newspapers],” Chapman 180-82. Here, “Miss Fur Coat” is taken to represent all women: “He decides to go to Miss Fur Coat and tells her that they should sell the fur coat and get married on the takings, which will go to pay the lobola. Like a woman, she falls for the idea” causing the ‘miss’ to brood on revenge because “hell hath no fury like a woman shorn of her fur coat” (182).


413 Cullhed, interview I, 14.

414 It is possible to regard Miriam Tlali herself, who was born and bred in Sophiatown, as a Sophiatown writer. Although she had moved from Sophiatown at the time of her writing she was certainly influenced by the cultural climate of hybridity in Sophiatown, which is noticeable in *Muriel at Metropolitan.*
as both “cultural hero and villain.” Modisane confesses that his writing favoured “cardboard images of romanticism,” and the African man, in the yellow press, was seen as an “uncomplicated sentimentalist with an addiction for pin-ups.” One of the first black women journalists, Joyce Sikhakhane, who worked for *Drum* in the late 60s, supports this view in her description of the magazine as depending “a lot on crime sensation stories and pin-up girls [sic] pictures.”

After 1966, from a position of exile, many of the Sophiatown writers produced autobiographies, among which Modisane’s and Mphahlele’s may serve as points of reference. Both of these incorporate stereotypical depictions of women and/or misogynist values, as has been discussed above. Modisane’s values as a young reporter on *Drum*, which he describes in *Blame Me On History*, can be characterised as racist and misogynist:

> I am able to admit that my marriage decomposed because Fiki is black; the women in the sex pilgrimage left me in a coma of screaming loneliness because they were black. They need not have failed me or done anything, the fact that they were black was sufficient supposition that they were not good enough; only the state of being white could satisfy me, and in a tedious succession I thought myself to be—of course, always for the first time—lyrically in love with every white woman I met.  

Modisane confesses to sexist behaviour, perhaps harboured before his time of writing: “Every woman I met was valued in sex symbols, they were nothing more than naked bodies I caressed with sweaty lust; none of the women was an individual personality,” while the misogyny surfaces when he writes that “I was rude and disgusting to women I could not seduce.” Although Modisane may be read as distancing himself from these values, it is both the values as such and the discourse in which they are conveyed that are criticised in *Amandla!’s* dialogue of discourses.

With the advent of *Staffrider* magazine in 1978 the black short story emerged again, and many of its stories show traits similar to the earlier *Drum* stories, traits that *Amandla!’s* subtext resists. For our purposes Mputuzeli Matshoba’s stories are especially interesting as they dominate the

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416 Modisane 139.
417 Joyce Sikhakhane, “Working on the Mail,” Daymond et. al. 352. Sikhakhane first wrote for *World* magazine, from which she resigned because she could not “tolerate reporting sensational crime stories” (349). Apart from *Drum*, she also worked for the *Rand Daily Mail*, a post she was very proud of. In 1969, while working on the *Mail*, she was detained without trial under the Terrorism Act and kept in solitary confinement for sixteen months. In 1973 she left the country for London.
418 Modisane 220.
419 Modisane 209.
420 Modisane 210.
early issues of the magazine when Tlali was writing *Amandla*. Thematically, violence and crime suffuse his stories, which often describe in detail the horrendous physical violence that ordinary people suffered at the hands of both black and white policemen, or black and white overseers set to safeguard the apartheid system. Matshoba’s stories are written much in the vein of what, as mentioned, Ndebele has termed ‘the spectacular’ journalism of the early *Drum* writing, which sought both to shock and to inform the reader about the conditions of the blacks in the country at the time, hoping to rouse the readers’ empathy, or awareness.

The main vehicles of literary black protest during the 1970s were the genres of drama and poetry. Besides the short story, the other main prose genre that Tlali was writing back to, and one that evaded censorship in the 60s and 70s, was popular drama. After the popular musical *King Kong* in 1959, the forms of drama that survived were those that, according to Sole, “managed to adapt,” because they performed “a melodramatic and spectacular form of theatre,” including “[e]pisodes in everyday township life,” and introduced a number of “stereotyped characters (such as the cuckolded husband, the venal priest and the stupid policeman), . . . for audience recognition and amusement,” and finally, because the performances were “politically quiescent.” In *Amandla*! we recognize the cuckolded husband-cum-stupid policeman in the form of Mamabolo. We also recognize the melodrama of the love story and the ‘spectacular’ action. The most successful playwright was Gibson Kente, whose drama reached people in the townships. However, after 1974, influenced by the Black Consciousness ideology, his plays were to some degree radicalised, becoming more in tune with the political atmosphere of the time.

Theatre also flourished as a means of consciousness-raising in the political movements and within the growing union movement. “Theatre played a genuine role in mobilisation,” Ian Steadman writes, “dramatic sketches, performed poetry and didactic ‘teaching plays’ were presented at political meetings, on university campuses and at festivals, where they were an important factor in the rising tide of militant black resistance.” The stereotypes mocked in *Amandla*! emanate, I would argue, partly from Gibson Kente’s early plays, that is, the ‘popular’ forms of easy entertainment offered in the townships, while his later, more politically conscious plays, and the political theatre of the time, echo in *Amandla!*’s evocations of the Black Consciousness ideology.

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421 Matshoba’s stories were later published in an influential collection called *Call Me Not A Man* (1979), that took its title from one of the stories, a compilation that supposedly prompted the legendary social-worker, freedom-fighter and writer Ellen Kuzwayo to write her autobiography *Call Me Woman* (1985).

422 Sole 29-30.

423 Kavanagh xxiv.

Poetry, the other vital form of black protest, can be subdivided into, on the one hand, protest poetry written by poets such as Mongane Serote, Mafika Gwala and Oswald Mtshali, and, on the other hand, oral praise poetry (the Zulu variant is called ‘izimbongi’), a “poetry of remembering,” which is one form of ‘performance,’ executed at funerals, political rallies and union meetings. A third influential form of oral poetry is the Sesotho genre se-fela. As the generic discourses in Amandla! are novelistic prose discourses, protest poetry will be left out of the discussion here. However, praise poetry and sefela, firmly rooted in a long African oral tradition of story-telling, may be regarded both as bearers of African patriarchy and as influences on Amandla! and will therefore be considered.

Praise poetry was the dominant and most influential form of oral literature at the time and can be regarded in Amandla! as one source of inspiration for its dialogic fragmentation. Describing praise poetry’s “hybrid nature” as “an amalgam of discrete units, of many parts,” Liz Gunner observes that it can also “be the site of dialogue and conflict, as [it] contain[s] multiple voices and multiple memories.” She concludes that praise poetry’s fascination lies in its “capacity to exploit cultural memory and reconstitute it in a new configuration.” Traditionally, it was both a male and a female venture. As Mamphela Ramphele writes, women upheld the tradition of ‘praising’ within the family: “the welcome opened with loud praise-singing by my grandmother who sang the family praise song as well as our individual praises.” But, in recent times, in the public spaces of politics, praise poetry has been exclusively performed by men. Another parallel between Amandla! and praise poetry is the aspect of political rhetoric. Praise poetry, Gunner argues, is characterized by “political commentary” and ought to be regarded as a “serious political discourse” since it is “deeply engaged in debates about such issues as the nature of leadership, particular policies and actions.” Izimbongi often uses national symbols of Kings and the “warrior image,” and, as Gunner writes, incorporates “figures from the past” to evoke not only a sense of nationhood, or “atavistic traditionalism,” but also a more contemporary sense of nationalism. Therefore, when Tlali incorporates male political speeches in her text, as we shall see, or male political discussions, or when she makes use of the heroic tale to form a subtext, she may have had in

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426 David B. Coplan, In the Time of Cannibals: the Word Music of South Africa’s Basotho Migrants (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994). ‘Lifela’ is the name of the particular single artefact, while the genre, or the performances in the plural are referred to as ‘sefela.’
427 Gunner 54.
428 Gunner 56.
429 Ramphele 9-10.
430 Gunner 51.
431 Gunner 54.
mind this hybrid tradition of politically orientated praise poetry, performed by men.

Lastly, a second poetic source that may have influenced Tlali’s impetus to write back to the male tradition is the *sefela* of the Basotho migratory labourers. This dissident tradition of story-telling in verse form, according to David Coplan, is strictly subdivided according to gender, that is, the men are the originators and dominate its public performance in competitive form, whereas the migratory women have evolved a version that is performed as entertainment in the shebeens. This is an intertextual tradition where “genres draw freely upon one another” and where cultural knowledge is indispensable to “eloquence.” In the Basotho tradition, to which Tlali belongs, “heroic praise poetry became exclusively associated with chiefs,” which led to a decline of “commoners’ praises,” while the *sefela* came to support the formation of “the migrant’s own identity and status as citizens of an autonomous polity, in which commoners might still attempt to hold their leaders socially accountable.” Tlali’s subtext, as we shall see, is in the vein of critiquing the patriarchal leaders, holding them accountable. At the same time Tlali is writing back to male *sefela* where themes encountered celebrate a male, autonomous subject, romanticise the home in which women are confined, and strengthen bonding between men undergoing initiation ceremonies, wherein heroic praising is predominant.

The women’s versions were performed in the shebeens that provided “a rare public forum for women’s discourse” where “woman is chief.” However, strictly speaking, the women’s version is not called ‘*sefela,*’ and symptomatically, considering women’s subservient position, it has no name. Coplan has named it ‘*seoeleoelele*’ after the ululating sound the women make in accompaniment. These songs “proclaim a resolute, individualistic, and adventurous spirit imitative of male itinerant heroism, deliberately contrary to the stationary domestic commitment expected of adult women in Lesotho.” The analysis of *Amandla!* below demonstrates the influence of this genre on Tlali’s writing: in a hybrid of discourses, among which even the heroic is used to subvert ‘official’ political rhetoric, Tlali similarly fashions dissidence in a mocking tone.

The dialogue of genres that Tlali initiates in *Amandla!* takes its cues from the black male literary tradition in South Africa prior to her time of writing, which has here been described briefly. As we shall explore below, writing back to the ‘spectacle’ of early short stories, the ‘nationalistic’ trait of male political rhetoric, the stereotypes of township drama, the popular love-story,

432 Coplan 37, 61.
433 Coplan 85.
434 Coplan 71, see also 76.
435 Coplan 158.
436 Coplan 181, for commentaries on women’s ‘*sefela*’ see also 58, 157 and 168.
and the action thriller, Tlali, inspired perhaps by the dissident, intertextual sefela tradition, continues to grapple with patriarchal ideas.

The Domestic Discourse and Political Rhetoric

A recurring theme in Amandla! emanates from the juxtaposition of the domestic discourse and the political rhetoric of the men. This theme unveils the relative political complacency or inactivity of the adult men in the contemporary revolutionary situation (a theme that Sole, as mentioned, recognizes); there is a lot of talk on their part and little action. By critiquing the passivity of the men, and their then unsuccessful politics of resistance that advocated violent resistance from the outside, the text resists male domination of the public arena, invites men to share the domestic sphere, and suggests new political solutions. The juxtaposition of Chapters 2 and 3, on the one hand (written mainly in the domestic discourse), and Chapter 4 on the other (that incorporates political discourse), allows this subtext to surface. The first two chapters depict the impact on the domestic sphere of the events of June 16: the demonstrations, the shooting of young Dumisani, Nana’s nursing of Pholoso’s bleeding wound, the angry mobs who kill a white man, the burning down of the municipality offices, events in which the women and children are involved, either as active demonstrators, nurses of wounds, or as spectators. In contrast, Chapter 4 depicts Moremi, Nana’s husband, at times called “T,” and his male guests as being unperturbed by the events going on around them. While the community has been literally set alight, they discuss politics in the comfort of Moremi’s home. Arriving home with his visitors, Moremi T is surprised to find the house abandoned. Nevertheless, he takes pains to introduce his friends to one another, and finally they all sit down in easy chairs to smoke and talk politics, leaving the reader uncomfortably aware of the scenes taking place outside of this sanctuary:

‘Gentlemen, just sit and make yourselves comfortable,’ T said, offering the two men chairs and looking into the kitchen to see whether his wife and daughter were there, ‘Mooki, this is Mr. Zwane, my next-door neighbour. You two must know each other by sight, although perhaps you have never been introduced,’

The other two men shook hands and sat down.

‘It seems there’s nobody in the house here, and I’m rather surprised because the door was not locked. Nana must have left in a great hurry to do a thing like that. Quite irregular! Care to smoke?’ T asked, offering the two men cigarettes from his packet. ‘Banna, here’s “Rembrandt”—“Each cigarette a masterpiece!”’ he added, as they lighted the cigarettes and sat back in their chairs. (21)

This is the first mention of men talking in armchairs under a haze of smoke, and the smoke, as we shall see, later becomes an icon of the uselessness of
the men’s pursued occupation: in the midst of disaster “the three men sat puffing at their cigarettes, thinking, blowing out thick grey spirals of smoke through their lips and nostrils” (23). The men talk about Bantu Education and their own relationships to it; they boast about their own contributions to the revolution in the way of teaching the youngsters English, which, in contrast to the children’s revolution seems rather feeble; they discuss school-boards, and elevate the issue of the children’s demonstrations to the level of international relationships: “I tell you this is going to be quite an embarrassment to Vorster when he meets Kissinger in Zurich” (26). When Nana finally arrives home with her daughter Matshidiso, or Tschidi, filled with the experiences shared by the ‘community,’ an experience not shared by the men who sit aloof indoors, the reader is reminded about the chaos in the streets. The child’s and her experiences are a stark contrast to the men’s talk. Tschidi naively relates what she has seen: “We were watching the office, Papa. It is burnt out. The roof has fallen in. Our Moroka office” (24). Nana, however, cannot conceal her irritation and questions the men’s degree of participation by asking: “Have you people heard what the radio says? All the WRAB buildings seem to be going up in smoke. Everything is being burnt down” (24). When the men again elevate their talk to the level of international politics Nana’s impatience with them manifests itself in her “worried and reflective” (26) look, and she intrudes in the discussion to channel the talk back to the level of the local: “I’m more concerned about our children. Watching their school-mates shot and dying right in front of them” (26). Nana’s maternal concern for the communities’ children and her immediate engagement, both values of the domestic discourse, are notably contrasted to the more detached, high-flown political rhetoric of the men. Even when the men talk about the children it is from a distanced paternal position:

‘What do these people [representatives of the Government] think they can achieve with these kids? So the battle has been raging for a long time, eh? Look, in 1974, two years ago already.’

‘Yes. The school boards have been battling to have this Afrikaans removed for ages.’ (27)

It is true that the men take pride in having battled to get rid of Afrikaans as a teaching medium, and have resigned as teachers and from school-boards so as not to collaborate with the enemy. Zwane expresses this stand when he exclaims that “[w]orking against the thing from inside, what nonsense!” (27), where ‘the thing’ of course refers to apartheid. Nevertheless, their attitude, in contrast to Nana’s active engagement in current affairs, and her concern for the children, is still one of complacency. The subtext tells us that the women and children, silenced in the public sphere, are staging a revolution, while the men, who dominate the public political sphere from their comfortable position, enveloped in a leisurely haze of smoke, just talk and comment.
The women, in other words, who are denied agency, show active engagement, while the men, who have access to power, show complacency. In the final analysis it is not so much the complacency as the unequal access to the public, political arena that is being addressed here.

In a similar vein, when Moremi the next morning is awoken by the official news on the radio that the children are being shot at in the streets, he chooses to spend a lazy morning in bed being served several cups of tea by his wife, admiring his wife’s past and present fortitude in the face of adversity, before taking a perplexed stroll outdoors (28-33).

Another example of this sub-textual critique of patriarchal domination emerges in the lengthy political discussion in Chapter 24 between Moremi and Killer Molatudi. Here, the men’s propensity to talk, their complacency in action, and their domination of the public sphere are contrasted to the women’s active support of the children’s revolution, their stance of massive non-collaboration, and their enforced silence. Since the absent women’s voices create a significant lacuna throughout the discussion, it is mainly by way of implication that a domestic discourse is set against the men’s dialogue to create the subtext: while the men sit smoking and talking (now outside on the lawn at Gramsy’s tombstone unveiling ceremony), the women are relegated to the cooking area, listening, discussing, and waiting on them, and, as their voices are not directly represented in the text until towards the end, the reader must keep the domestic discourse’s engagement with the revolution in mind. However, there are a few hints in the text that Killer Molatudi, in the discussion, partly functions as the women’s stand-in. For instance, when the Killer, the more radical of the two combatants, arrives at the gathering, we are told that Nana’s face “brightened” and that she, in contrast to her husband, who is wary of him, regards him as a “family friend” (211).

Killer Molatudi’s presence, we are led to believe, assures Nana that the women’s policy of a wide “non-collaboration” with the system of apartheid, “[w]ith the boycott as our chief weapon” (240, 254), will be represented in the discussion. The Killer, we understand, regards the revisionist Moremi T as an “irretrievable ignoramus” (211), a view that by implication is shared by Nana and her women friends in the kitchen. This conclusion is supported by the overlapping of the Killer’s and the women’s views in the final section of the chapter. When the women eventually interrupt the discussion to suggest a stance of “total non-collaboration,” advocating a sit-down strike based on a massive communal rallying effort (255), the Killer responds positively, “obviously impressed” (257), and helps the women come to the fore by prompting them to speak (256). He is then given the final word in the debate, where he more or less sums up the sub-textual theme that constitutes a critique of the patriarchal domination of the public sphere, a criticism that emanates from the contrasts between the men’s political rhetoric and the women’s silence, or from their unobtrusive participation via The Killer’s voice:
‘I must confess,’ he said, ‘that I was calling for this explanation in order to give women the platform which men have been monopolising for too long. I am really proud of you ladies. I myself have been something of a lone disciple, trying to educate such incorrigibles and poor fumblers like my friend Moremi here.’ (259)

Killer Molatudi, the masked voice of the women, repeatedly criticises the men: he accuses the conservative Moremi of “harping about changes,” “indulging in a lot of self-deceit” (217), “accommodating complacency” being “a potential threat to humanity,” and of needing to be brought back to his senses (221). It is therefore fair to surmise that these views, as they are supported by the women, through their stand-in, partake in creating a dialogic subtext of resistance to patriarchy.

When we finally hear the unmediated voice of the women, their views and the Killer’s views are identical. This overlapping confirms that the Killer’s role in the narrative is to voice the women’s opinions. Moreover, the atmosphere created by their intrusion testifies to the anomaly of this occurrence. Towards the end of this forty-three-page political debate in which the women, at first, only take part in a mediated way, “one of the women,” a woman without a name, suddenly enters the male public sphere. Her intrusion, which in itself constitutes a measure of energetic agency, is a contrast to the male icon of leisure symbolised by the smoking, or, as here, by smoking paraphernalia:

[Killer] took the ash-tray from the table—it was already full of ash and the many cigarette-stubs he had been smoking one after another without a break—and handed it to one of the women to empty in the kitchen. Then he frowned in disgust, shook his head and pulled a fresh one from the packet near him. The woman returned with the clean ashtray and handed it to Killer, smiling. She gauged the tense atmosphere from the expressions of the men-folk and decided to come to the rescue. She asked:

‘If you cannot come to an agreement, why waste time—why not leave it to us, the women? I am sure we would do a quicker job if only you would let us.’

Some of the men laughed, shuffled their feet uneasily under the table, looked askance at the woman, and did not bother to ask what solution she would advance. They considered her remark a mere joke. One of the young students, however, did not think it funny. He was curious and he asked the woman:

‘How do you suppose you would solve this whole question?’

‘If every woman in every house in Soweto alone (let alone all the other townships in the rest of the Transvaal, and the other Provinces), if they were to make it a point to put away a good amount of groceries every week for about six months. Just pack away tinned foods of all kinds that could last for just one month, then we could stage a really successful sit-down strike.’

There was hearty laughter from the women in the kitchen and the other rooms. They had in fact been pondering over that suggestion earlier on while
they were busy working and listening to the debate. The woman was not discouraged by the laughter. She went on: (253-54)

The older women’s laughter exposes their embarrassment at having their views revealed publicly in such an outright fashion. The men are also noticeably uncomfortable with the young woman’s encroachment on their discussion: they “look askance,” “shuffle their feet,” and even laugh at her, to them, ridiculous suggestion that the women take over and solve the problem of apartheid. The text, however, concedes to differences among the men; a young man harbours other values. He does not “think it funny,” but prompts the brave woman to go on and explain herself. Finally, two young girls, Phokeng and Felleng, are condescendingly allowed to step forward into the public arena to explain in detail the women’s support of the revolution in projects, education, and self help, much in the empowering vein that the Killer has called for earlier.

The text vacillates as to the degree of the men’s contribution to the struggle for freedom. In a historical perspective their contribution is acknowledged: the Killer says that “[the young men] must appreciate the endeavours of our great thinkers, of the African men of vision who toiled day and night to extricate our people from this yoke of serfdom” (244). However, the Killer also criticises the lack of involvement of the men around him in the struggle. Further on, he and, by implication, the women say:

‘These children have merely stumbled into this. We lack real leadership. There’s no direction. When the police started mowing down the children engaged in a peaceful march, the youths ran amok and decided to vent their long-smouldering wrath on the West Rand Administration buildings and they set them on fire. It was all sporadic. What transpired after that—all this confusion and indecision prevailing now—demonstrates the lack of foresight of the leaders we have. They should have anticipated this state of affairs and provided for it. The next step in the struggle should have been embarked upon.’ (250-51)

This masked collective woman’s voice that substitutes for the silenced domestic discourse critiques male dominance in the political arena, as well as male complacency and self-indulgence within the struggle against apartheid. There is irony inherent in Tlali’s depiction of women as silenced, submissive servants to the men, changing ashtrays and asking permission to speak, and, at the same time, as resilient, active supporters of the communities’ spontaneous rebellion, who discuss and prepare themselves for a policy of striking. This irony escapes Sole and Madrassi who state that women in Amandla! are only given a supportive role within the struggle. Sole writes: “While it is illuminating to note that Tlali’s novel possibly shows the beginnings of a discernible shift in attitudes by and towards women taking place in black intellectual circles after Soweto, it must be said that women’s major role
here too is still in relation to men and the family: in other words, as supportive characters. The extent to which women’s needs are spoken for by men is disturbing.”437 It is easy to partly agree with Sole, because it is “disturbing” that men are shown to dominate the public sphere to such a large degree. However, Sole does not detect the hidden polemic that arises from the double-voicedness of the text (that the Killer is speaking for the women), nor does he discern the interventionist subtext created by the dialogue between the domestic discourse and political rhetoric that attempts to wedge a crack in, and to mock, the status quo, that is, begins to negotiate a future where women and men share both the public and the domestic spheres on equal terms.

The Heroic Tale and Political Rhetoric

Besides the domestic discourse another generic discourse permeates Amandla!, namely the heroic tale. First, it functions as a narrative frame for the novel. Also, as Pholoso’s story is largely told within the domestic discourse and is partly subsumed by it, the heroic discourse becomes one party in a dialogue of genres, involving, as the title of this section indicates, the heroic tale and political rhetoric. Interestingly, both the rhetoric of heroism and political rhetoric, as mentioned above, are aspects that belong to praise poetry, the dominating oral genre in Southern Africa, discussed above.438 This link between the heroic and the political, I suggest, is used in the novel to create a dialogue whereby the two form a subtext that, as we shall see, subverts patriarchy.

Tlali’s depiction of Pholoso, which highlights the exploits of the young hero, I would claim, echoes the genre of praise poetry. In praise poetry, Ruth Finnegan writes, a hero’s (often the chief’s) military actions and his personality are described in “emotional and high-flown terms,”439 and “the stress in praise poetry” Finnegan writes, is “on the building up of a series of pictures about the deeds and qualities of the hero.”440 I suggest that this applies to the depiction of Pholoso. He is nicknamed Moses and thereby likened to the biblical patriarch who led the Jews out of bondage in Egypt, which the narrator explicitly points out. The novel begins at the cinema where Pholoso and Felleng are waiting to see a film when news reaches them that the streets are teeming with police and soldiers as the Israeli embassy has been attacked by

437 Sole 304.
439 Finnegan 126.
440 Finnegan 136.
terrorists. Pholoso finds it hard to believe that the hour of freedom has struck (that the abolition of apartheid is near). Before the film comes on they see a trailer to the film *The Ten Commandments*, a film from the 1950s based on the stories of the Old Testament, which gives Pholoso reason to reflect on his role in coming events:

He saw the face of a white man speaking sternly on the screen. It was the face of Cecil B. de Mille. He was speaking of the birth of a Saviour—Moses. Pholoso remembered that some of his schoolmates had actually referred to him as a Moses. That his own name meant ‘salvation’ had been a striking and fitting coincidence. His election as the student leader for Ipopeng had followed almost naturally. But he immediately turned his mind away from such self-seeking thoughts. Hm. He, Pholoso—a Moses, a saviour. Fancy. What did those poor children think he could do, anyway? (3-4) 441

Here, the “high-flown” likening of the young hero to a saviour and the biblical patriarch, combined with the mention of the personal trait of modesty, is reminiscent of the heroic genre of praise poetry. And towards the end of the novel, thus framing it, on Pholoso’s and Felleng’s last sojourn together before Pholoso leaves the country, his discourse is similarly high-flown, filled with emotion and elevated feelings:

‘Let us not lose faith, Felleng. We are still young and the future belongs to us; it is in our hands. Let us continue to look ahead and work hard. It is only when we work towards the attainment of our ideals that there can be hope for Azania. We can never fail, we shall win because history is on our side.’

He held her in his arms without uttering a word. At that moment they were conscious of nothing about them. They were completely alone. It was as if they were drifting on a cloud, away from this troubled world. They could not even feel the hard ground beneath them. (293)

The elevated mode is here emphasised to such a degree that it almost becomes ironic, and with the metaphor “drifting on a cloud” it touches on the unrealistic, which, in addition, suggests that the hero is almost divine, bestowed with supernatural powers. This final element is also characteristic of the heroic genre and surfaces earlier when Pholoso miraculously escapes from imprisonment hidden by a sudden “mist and fog” (168), “[a]s if aided by some magical power” (166). Later, moreover, his escape is described as the result of supernatural intervention made possible by Gramsy’s prayers to his “badimo, his ancestors” (276).

Besides the idealisation of the hero Pholoso, the mention of his somewhat divine powers, and the fantastic resolution of his predicament, several other traits of the heroic tale are represented in *Amandla*! the hero’s identity

441 Cecil B. de Mille (1881-1959) was a famous American director and producer at Paramount Pictures who, among other productions, made this version of *The Ten Commandments*. 140
and/or his whereabouts are only vaguely suggested, he suffers, and has a romantic adventure. All we know for sure about Pholoso is that he is Gramsy’s grandchild; we never get to know his absent parents. We learn about Pholoso indirectly, just as we learn about the mysterious Bakayoko in Ousmane Sembène’s novel *God’s Bits of Wood* (trans. 1962), who is mysterious, Eileen Julien points out, precisely because “we know him through rumour,” and through “the speech of others.” In *Amandla!* only three sections exclusively narrate Pholoso’s story: the scene in the cinema which opens up the narration, the chapter that describes his sojourn in prison (143-50), and the ending. But mainly he is known through the relayed rumours within the domestic discourse, as when Gramsy mentions to her brother: “They say that if it should come to light that he is the student leader then he is sure to stay in jail for very long. They say that if he is sentenced for a minor pass offence, he will only pay a small fine and be released [Emphasis added]” (107). The suffering of the hero comes to light during Pholoso’s time in jail where he is tortured by the police during interrogation. And, lastly, discussed below, he has a love affair with his childhood sweetheart Felleng (66-72), described in romantic, highly emotional language as when Pholoso tells her: “There are certain things which are greater than our individual fancies, Felleng. Long after we are gone, they will remain true and undying because no man can destroy them. These are the things we must aspire to attain . . . . We must never let our selfish personal feelings drown the greater aspirations in life” (72). The text here elevates the young lovers’ discourse to the level of nationalist moralism/idealism.

As it is subsumed within the domestic discourse of rumour, this heroic depiction of Pholoso suggests an ironic twist. Pholoso himself, while in jail, questions his heroic name: “There was something repugnant about the very name ‘Moses’ to which he had found himself responding. It sounded artificial and somehow unreal, but he could not understand why” (152). This side remark puts his own heroic role in doubt and underscores the irony inherent in the fact that a young boy is more or less forced into the role of the ancient patriarch (in the Bible it is not until Moses is a grown man that he leads the Jews out of Egypt). This irony in turn signals that the genre of the heroic tale, being one part of the oral praise tradition, targets the other aspect of the oral praise tradition, namely political rhetoric. Thus the two aspects of the genre, the one subsumed in the domestic discourse, and the other representing the male discourse of political rhetoric, partake in the dialogue of generic discourses to the effect that one casts ironic light on the other.

The heroic genre, used in this novel, here attributes the role of the national hero to a young boy who still rightly ‘belongs’ in the domestic sphere dominated by women; the genre’s ironic dialogue with the political rhetoric

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443 Julien 74.
of the grown men questions their complacency and dominance in the political sphere. In other words, the heroic tale criticises the men in the public sphere, who, by right of their age, experience, and positions, ‘ought’ to be the heroes, the targets of praise. Of course, a young boy, whom Gramsy still pampers with sweets, cannot be expected to shoulder the mantle of the patriarch Moses, a mantle that by right of tradition should be worn by an adult. My conclusion is therefore that the heroic tale (the framework of the narrative) with its affinity to praise poetry, and the dominating domestic discourse function in tandem to undermine the patriarchal authority of the men manifest in the political rhetoric they pursue and to critique their domination and complacency within the public sphere, thereby resisting black African patriarchy and its values.

The Domestic Discourse and the Action Thriller

From the domestic discourse represented by Phokeng’s and Felleng’s brief appearance in the public arena towards the end of the long otherwise male political discussion above, the narrative makes a sharp turn in Chapter 25, reverting to the dealings between Sgt. Mamabolo and constable Nicodemus, a story that echoes the genre of the action thriller (260-66). In stark contrast to the final note of the preceding Chapter 24, which envisions the women’s resourceful contributions to the struggle and their pacifistic ideals, and the next one, Chapter 26, which stresses the domestic discourse’s values of nurturing, this chapter focuses on, and pokes fun at, the violent solutions propounded by the men. Chapter 25 begins on a humorous, mocking note: “The telephone rang and Sergeant Mamabolo’s heavy frame jerked spasmodically as though he had been pricked with a sharp instrument” (260). Imagining the cuckolded, heavy-bodied policeman jerking “spasmodically” evokes slapstick. We soon learn that Mamabolo has reason to question his wife’s fidelity, whereupon he is described as being “old as the hills,” and his age is further stressed and derided by his young wife’s submissive manner: “Papa’s food is now ready; or shall I first bring Papa a basin of warm water to rinse his hands?” (260). This ironic tone prepares the reader somewhat for the farce to come, when the cuckolded husband’s feelings of jealousy take on graver proportions, and, with the mention of murder, the narrative moves towards melodrama and the discourse of the action-thriller:

The thought of Teresa having clandestine dealings with anyone under his very nose was driving him out of his mind. As far as he knew, the girl was his. He had chosen her and had paid ‘lobola’ for her and that was that. He fought hard to suppress the fury which raged inside him, and would stop at nothing—even murder—to avenge himself. (262)
Hereafter the narrative picks up speed, a speed characteristic of the tempo of the action thriller, which is parodied by an exaggerated turn of events: a telephone call informs Sgt. Mamabolo that “the naked body of a fully-grown man, lying in a pool of blood” (262), demands his attention, whereupon he reflects: “If only that dead body was that of Nicodemus—the meddlesome dandy!” (263), and he quickly realises that a unique opportunity has arisen. The exaggeration escalates: soon three men have plans concerning this dead body. As it happens, a police informer in turn regards the dead body as an opportunity to lure the hated Sergeant out into the ‘veld’ where he can easily be shot down by some guerrilla fighters, with whom he is in contact. Unaware of this, Mamabolo pursues his own plan to kill Nicodemus: he will ask him to accompany him to the ‘donga,’ where he intends to shoot him. The real farce begins, however, when the third party, namely Nicodemus, also grabs this “godsent” opportunity:

His ancestors had offered the opportunity to him on a silver platter and he was grateful. He had it all worked out. As soon as Mamabolo told him to come with him to the scene of the tragedy, with his ammunition belt and revolver, his quick mind arranged the whole setting, to perfection. He would swap the guns. He would shoot the ‘postman’ [Mamabolo] through his heart with his own service revolver. (265).

Nicodemus conjures up his reward in romantic terms: “He would have Teresa all to himself and Mamabolo the tyrant would be out of their way for ever. Life would be bliss” (266), which, in its naivety, evokes the superficial melodrama of the popular action thriller. In the final part of the passage the melodrama is itself ridiculed: since this whole narrative section is framed by the domestic discourse that values pacifism and nurturing, which it therefore contrasts with, the exaggerated ‘action’ pace of this section touches on parody:

But the guerrilla fighters stood poised. From the shelter of the tall grass they watched the two policemen approach the corpse, each man’s hand caressing a revolver.

‘Cover me,’ the sergeant said to the other man as he knelt down to inspect the body.

‘Look, Sarge!’ Nicodemus called, aiming his gun at the other’s chest, then shot straight into his heart, at close range.

‘Why? . . .’ he asked weakly, clapping his chest as the numbness spread through his whole body and his hand failed to grasp the weapon tightly.

‘That is for Teresa, Sarge,’ Nicodemus said triumphantly.

The hidden guerrillas watched the two men for a brief moment. It was apparent that they were quarrelling. They aimed at the two figures, emptying their Russian-made bullets into them before they disappeared into the darkness. (266).
Mamabolo and Nicodemus aim at one another, Nicodemus shoots first, but just then both are shot dead by the guerrilla fighters. Here the terminology aligns itself with the discourse of the action thriller, phrases such as “Cover me,” and “emptying . . . bullets into them” are borrowed goods designed to evoke the mimicked genre. The word “caressing,” used here to describe the policemen’s fond relationship to a revolver, adds to the ironic tone, while Nicodemus’ attempt to use Teresa as an alibi in his “triumph” over the Sergeant again evokes melodrama that parodies the genre.

On the thematic level the heroes of this scene are, of course, the guerrilla fighters, and the real joke is on the policemen. On the dialogic level, however, considering the humorous, mocking tone of the whole chapter, and the stress in the following chapter on the nurture and care of one’s fellow human-beings, the joke rubs off also on the guerrilla fighters, and on the political methods of violence these men have chosen. The values of the one discourse put the values of the other into question: whereas men’s choices of violent methods to solve problems, combined with their easy access to weapons, lead to excessive killing (in the ‘male’ discourse of the action thriller), women’s agency is portrayed (in the domestic discourse) as more productive to the community.

The men in the episode are derided precisely because their deeds are immediately preceded by Phokeng’s and Felleng’s explication of the women’s political stance of pacifism and empowering projects, and immediately succeeded by Nana’s concern for Gramsy’s suddenly deteriorating physical condition. Only two paragraphs after the above quotation, in contrast to the guerrilla fighters, Nana, in a characteristically ‘gossipy’ chapter in the domestic discourse, is described as one who is “always concerned about the welfare of others,” “always ready to come over to Gramsy’s home . . . in the evenings and nights, to be of help in whatever manner was necessary” (267). She “relieve[s] Mmamoni in nursing the dear old woman” (267), and the maternal community take “turns at her bedside day and night” (268). Moreover, in the commemoration of the anniversary of June 16, the reader is reminded of the values inherent in the domestic discourse in the mention of the combined shock and satisfaction experienced by Gramsy as a result of the events. Pholoso is convinced that “Gramsy had ultimately had her dream realised” (270). In other words, the subtext that arises in the gaps between these two discourses tells us that in the nurturing of young and old, and in their support of the children’s revolution, it is the womenfolk who, in the end, “grab the sharp end of the knife” (268), while the men who dominate the political arena choose methods that are counter-productive to communal, domestic concerns, here represented by the genre of the action thriller.
The Domestic Discourse and the Love Story

In *Amandla!* the discourse of the love-story is used in two contradictory ways: its stereotypical portrayal of women and its romantic expectations couched in patriarchal terms are undermined by its juxtaposition to the more tragic, true-to-life relationships depicted within the domestic discourse. At the same time, though, the love story’s propagation of the individual’s free choice in place of societal coercion into marriage is celebrated. The main love stories in the narrative are the ones between Pholoso and Felleng and between Teresa and Nicodemus. In contrast to these romantic narratives, or the stereotypical images and intrigues of the *foto-roman*, we come across the more tragic relationships rendered in the domestic discourse: the relationship between Agnes and Bra-Joe, and Seapei’s earlier, more disastrous, relationship to Nicodemus. It is in the dialogue between these two sets of love stories, but also in the contrasts between the traditional marriage of Teresa and Mamabolo and the more ‘modern’ relationship between Teresa and Nicodemus, built on choice, that the love-story genre is both subverted and cherished.

Against the tragedy of Agnes’ predicament due to her husband’s abuse of her, discussed in the previous section, is pitted the romantic gullibility of Teresa and Seapei. Teresa is described in romantic terms as a susceptible woman who falls for Niki and his uniform at a glance (52-53), passively waits at home (55), submissively calls her husband ‘papa’ and dares not look at him (45, 260), self-centredly keeps looking at herself in a mirror (49, 55), and longs for sex (“her tender voice . . . yearning for him” (97)). In short, she is a woman shaped by stereotypical patriarchal expectations. Moreover, the readers are served male views on women by Mamabolo and his friend, constable Lazarus, in connection with their first encounter with Teresa. Mamabolo talks appreciatively about his wife’s “well-proportioned figure, her legs, . . . her captivating downcast eyes,” the latter which, to him, symbolize an “innate womanly sign of respect for manhood” (45). He regards Teresa as a “rare precious pebble” in contrast to the Johannesburg women who are “poisoned and polluted” and who think they are “as good as any man” (45). Evincing sentiments that reflect the *Drum* stereotype of the good-time girl always ready for sex and booze, Lazarus, in *Amandla!*, sums up his views on township women as compared to rural traditional women:

‘Women are “shit”. They won’t leave you alone until they have sucked and milked you dry! Johannesburg women are always demanding more . . . It’s sex and money, sex and money all the time . . . All I want to do now, is to buy a farm and a tractor and retire peacefully in Vendaland. The woman I paid “lobola” for long ago when I was a young man has been waiting long for me to stay with her. She is the only woman I trust—a woman who can wait.’ (46)
In gullibility Teresa has a counterpart in Seapei, Mmane Marta’s daughter, who has a child by Nicodemus, but has now found a lover “in order to make him jealous,” and, proves her naivety by clinging to Nicodemus’ lies: “Although it was obvious to all of us that that policeman was not sincere, she kept on hoping and believing his stories about being the son of a very rich farmer” (43). When the narrative, in the discourse of the love story, then describes Nicodemus’ seduction of Teresa, and her subsequent loss of control, their story is tainted by the reader’s prior knowledge of Seapei’s dilemma and Agnes’ marital problems. This knowledge casts Teresa’s romantic yearnings in an ironic light, undermining the love-story discourse in which they are written: “In that moment, Teresa had been won. She was completely mesmerised. Her passion for the young, dashing policeman was one of desperation, of utter helplessness. From that moment onwards, her infatuation took control of her, and his memory haunted her all the time” (54). In stereotypical romantic images that remind us of the popular foto-roman we learn, moreover, that Teresa repeatedly cheats on her husband to meet her young lover, and pines for the latter in his absence.

But, eventually, this mocking tone is superseded by a more supportive one: towards the end of the novel Teresa’s predicament is rendered in a way that instead functions to redeem the genre of the love story. Romance, or the popular love story in a West African context, according to Jane Bryce, “far from being ‘normative,’” instead “posits an ideal alternative and thereby implicitly critiques the sexual and social status quo.” Rather than being escapist trash, she explicates, “romantic love becomes a trope for the desire for change, both personal and social, and for the belief in the possibility of change.” In the face of tradition, the romantic love story, where the heroine is allowed to choose her own partner out of love instead of just being coerced into marriage for the benefit of the mutual extended families, functions as an enabling ideal that fosters respect for the individual will. At first, Teresa embodies the traditional African wife: “She belonged to Mamabolo, and that was that. The whole transaction had been concluded between her parents and Mamabolo. No one had stopped to ask whether she was in love with the man or not” (98), and she has “accepted (more or less) her situation as it was” (97). The words “more or less” function as key words to redeem her own agency, because obviously her love affair with Nicodemus is evidence that she wants to implement change: “To her . . . meeting him and having sex with him when they could . . . was a privilege she thanked God for” (97-98). Although she knows that, due to African custom, she can never abandon her husband in favour of Niki, she is nevertheless happy to have grasped the opportunity to follow her own desire, even at the cost of losing him and having to return to her previous caged-in existence: “[S]he won-
dered what would happen to her without a man like Niki in her life” (98). Tlali’s narrative opens up a crack of hope for women who are in a similar position, and, what is more, it opens up a literary space for a woman’s jouissance.\footnote{Here I use the term to connote the existential pleasure, or even bliss that a person may feel in life, and especially in relation to his/her own sexuality. I do not intend it in the sense that Barthes and Kristeva use it to connote a state of loss that bring on a crisis in a person’s relation to language.}

But then again, the tragic marriage between Agnes and Bra-Joe has also been built on personal choice, a fact that causes Mmane Marta to remark to Gramsy that “It’s a real pity that we cannot help our children to choose whom they get married to” (43). The women here deploy the double-voiced discourse characteristic of the domestic discourse: one voice is critical of the ‘new’ romantic ideas of choice because, due to the breakdown of clan tradition, the chosen men are not taking responsibility for their children. The other voice, however, says that if the men were to rise to the task of traditional fatherhood it would be a good thing, but it would be even better if, partly disregarding tradition, the girls be allowed to choose their own partners. This freer attitude to sexual relationships and jouissance is noticeable in a sentence referred to above: “surely her new lover should make her forget the other man” (43).

The love story between Pholoso and Felleng is also couched in a stereotypical romantic discourse that Sole calls a “romantic aura,” which he illustrates with the following passages:\footnote{Sole 304-05.}

Two doves fluttered their grey wings gracefully as they flew towards the so-called Sotho Section.
‘Two for Joy!’ Felleng muttered softly to herself as she watched the birds disappear into the distance.

She thought of Pholoso, the man of her dreams (66) . . . Throughout their one-year-old courtship, the hours that separated them had been just so many minutes, so many seconds of yearning, of waiting until they could be together again (67)

. . .

Her knees sagged as she turned round and looked up into the eyes of Pholoso. She abandoned herself into his outstretched strong arms where for a moment she nestled while trying to regain her breath and composure. (68)

The romantic stereotypes here, similar to the ones depicting Teresa and Nicodemus, are thrown into an ironic light by the seriousness of the more realistically depicted marriage of Agnes and Bra-Joe in the domestic discourse. One example is when Agnes relates to Nana how Bra-Joe once came home “stumbling in through the gate with his trousers hanging below his stomach, the fly wide open . . . retching and spitting . . . landing with a heavy thud . . . in a drunken stupor” (191), from which he awakes and urinates into
her “brand-new brown leather shopping-bag” (192). Thus, the pragmatic, down-to-earth domestic discourse is pitted against the stereotypes and intrigues of the love-story genre.

In sum, while the subtext created by Tlali’s complex dialogue between the discourses criticises the objectification of the female, and the stereotypical patriarchal expectations on women within the conventional love story, it also opens up space for a woman’s own desire, agency, and jouissance in this field. Such a treatment of the genre renders plausible Bryce’s view that African romantic fiction functions in Africa “as a testing ground for new ideas, new permutations and new constructions of gendered identity.”

Political Rhetoric and the Love Story

In the gap between the romantic depiction of Felleng, in Amandla!’s Chapter 10, written, as shown above, in the discourse of the love story, and the political rhetoric in the two chapters that succeed it, a subtext emerges. It suggests that, although the rhetoric of the Black Consciousness ideology pays lip-service to women’s equality, there is no deep structural change taking place in black African society concerning gender expectations on the personal, practical level. In other words, the two discourses reciprocally undermine one another. In the light of Tlali’s views on politics, and her insistence on a woman’s right to claim space in the public sphere, voiced in Muriel at Metropolitan, it is noteworthy that the main part of the political rhetoric in Amandla! is voiced by men, by Pholoso, Moremi, the Killer Molatudi (although, as we have seen, he functions as a stand-in for the women’s absent voices) the young lawyer, and a minister of the church. Apart from the last few pages of the long political discussion at Gramsy’s tomb-laying ceremony, where the women demand to be heard, women in Amandla! are not assigned any ‘official’ political agency, or voice. Instead their opinions mostly emerge in the text’s hidden polemic, that is, in its double-voicedness and subtexts, or, as mentioned, when they are prompted by the men to speak. And despite the visions of Pholoso, who epitomises a young Black Consciousness leader, women still seem to fulfil the roles of submissively waiting for their male counterparts, or cooking for them. Speaking to his comrades, Pholoso voices the aspiration that change may come (and here the voice of the author is audible):

Our girls and women can accomplish a lot if we let them. Let us avoid the pitfalls of the past when women were confined to the kitchen, and were never allowed to read. . . . The women were brainwashed into believing that the only thing they could do was to wait on us and be at our disposal. Now the reverse can be accomplished. Criticise them, make them feel inadequate be-

448 Bryce 122.
449 In Amandla! these roles, as we have seen, are undermined.
cause they are not reading politics and the newspapers. . . . I also encourage them to discuss political topics with me and amongst themselves. . . . Let us liberate ourselves from this destructive kind of thinking. (89)

But, as the text shows, this is an ideal far from the contemporary situation. Framed by male discourses of political rhetoric, and the above-mentioned hope for change, Chapter 10, which relates how Felleng (whose name literally means “the one who stays behind”) patiently waits for a sign from Pholoso, is cast in an ironic light. Waiting is a trope often connected to black African women in South African literature. In The Cry of Winnie Mandela (2003), for example, Ndebele depicts four famous black women, one of them Winnie Mandela, whose waiting for their exiled, or imprisoned husbands, he compares to the tribulations of Penelope as she awaits Odysseus’ return in Homer’s epic. 450 Millions of black women in the rural areas, or ‘homelands,’ in South Africa shared the experience of waiting for their husbands who worked far away from home as migratory labourers in the cities. Irony, in this chapter, is created both by the juxtaposition of the love-story and the political discourse, that is, by comparing the present within the novel’s fictional framework, where men voice political opinion while women are silenced, to the new order envisaged by Black Consciousness. Felleng’s submissive yearning for Pholoso mirrors the words above with which he paints the negative picture of women as those who believe that “the only thing they could do was to wait on us and be at our disposal.” Ironically, his own woman is shown to do exactly this: “[T]he hours that separated them had been just so many minutes, so many seconds of yearning, of waiting until they could be together again” (67). While waiting for him in this manner, instead of applying her mind to politics, she “remained aloof, recounting the treasured experiences they shared” (67). When Pholoso finally arrives, Felleng is overcome with delight: her “knees sa[g]” (68) and she must “regain her [lost] breath” (68); but when she animatedly tries to discuss politics with him (as he himself has urged), by reaching for a paper to read about a political incident that has thoroughly perplexed her, Pholoso, with an exaggerated romantic gesture, hushes her with a kiss:

He picked her up like a feather and carried her to the settee against the window. He deposited her gently on it and looked at the attractive curves of her body. He knelt down beside her and looked into her tearful eyes. She longed for Pholoso until her whole being ached. She sighed:

‘It was so painful without you and . . .’

Before she could speak further, Pholoso’s lips pressed hers hard. She closed her eyes, and the tears rolled down her cheeks and sank between their lips. (70)

In words that again echo the popular love story, Felleng is here regarded solely through the male gaze, depicted as one thoroughly engrossed in her own longing. And contrary to the ideals evoked by Pholoso, when wanting to define herself as a politically active person, she is not taken seriously by him. Juxtaposing the romantic and the political in this manner the text conveys that while a new ideal is slowly being forged, reality is far from living up to this ideal.

Moreover, the irony in this section is conveyed by hyperbole. The discrepancy between the ideal and the real is parodied by the exaggerated romantic, sentimental climax of this scene. Felleng, with an image of self-effacement claims to want to “drink” Pholoso, become part of him or die, while Pholoso, changing his tone from the romantic to the pompously sentimental, when reason fails him, finally conjures up the age-old metaphor of Mother Africa:

‘I am part of you already, Felleng. If you drank me and kept me inside you, then I would stop coming to you, and that alone would destroy me. I have to keep coming to you. The prospect alone of coming to you makes me feel greater than human. It makes me feel immortal! I will always want to come to you and I could break all barriers to do so. You awaken all my senses. All my life I shall always look forward to coming to you, and nothing will stop me. I shall live on and on. Even the bullets of the Boers will never stop me from coming to you. You are like a prize. I must fight to get you. You are like a whole package of . . . of . . . what shall I say? A package . . . of sweetness . . . of bliss. And to think that you are all mine . . . You are Mother Africa—and how I love you!’ (71)

Pholoso’s sentimental discourse transforms Felleng into a symbolic figure. Moreover, Pholoso’s patronising view of her, his staccato speech in contrast to his pompous words, his feelings of immortality in contrast to Felleng’s feelings of utter abandonment, become more and more exaggerated and consequently create irony. The ironic subversion of the Mother Africa trope here echoes Tlali’s resistance to symbolic depictions of women in Muriel at Metropolitan.

The sharp contrast between the political rhetoric of Black Consciousness and the discourse of the love story is followed up in the final paragraph of the novel. Felleng and Pholoso have said farewell and, as a metonym of the nation, he confidently runs off into “the starry void ahead” (294) feeling that “history is on our side” (293), while Felleng, because of her romantic naivety, and her circumscribed role in the patriarchal economy, is left with one choice only, to turn back to the chaos of home in Soweto and face her uncertain waiting (294), seemingly abandoned by him and by the agents of the main struggle against apartheid. If, on the surface, the contemporary situation in the text is predictable, the subtext is attempting to drive in a wedge
that envisions a future for black women in South Africa where they take part in nation-building publicly as well as domestically.

Conclusion

In this chapter the hidden polemic in *Amandla!*, introduced by the narrative strategies of double-voicedness and dialogic fragmentation, has been shown to create a subtext of resistance to patriarchy. The values of the women who traditionally dominate the domestic sphere come to the fore in a domestic discourse, characterized by heteroglossia, carnivalism, and the aforementioned double-voicedness, a term appropriated from Bakhtin. In accordance with the Black Consciousness ideology this domestic discourse revisits traditional roots, and while a maternal protagonist in one voice cherishes an aspect of traditional patriarchal practice, such as the men’s responsibility for their families, her other voice has been shown to subtly critique contemporary patriarchal practices. Such a covert criticism, it has been argued, is motivated by the hegemony of the patriarchal Black Consciousness ideology and black African patriarchy at large. Within the domestic discourse, however, men are invited to take a more active role in the domestic sphere, and at times, are therefore incorporated into the discourse.

The domestic discourse and its inherent values are contrasted to the values expressed in the inserted ‘male’ discourses. Appropriating a convention of eclecticism from the orature, Tlali fashions this convention so that it functions dialogically: the domestic discourse subverts interspersed fragments of discourses that have been shown to be patriarchal in mode. Contrasting values such as closeness to the community, nurturing, pacifism, and self-empowerment to high-flown, male-dominated political rhetoric, a rhetoric shown to lack contact with current events in the townships, engenders an ironic subtext of criticism that mainly targets the men’s domination of the public sphere. In addition, the inserted discourses harbour values of violence or of sexism, and their juxtaposition to the domestic discourse critiques the adult black men’s lack of participation in the children’s revolution and the family fathers’ neglect of their homes and children.

The genres of the heroic tale and the love story are both, however, specific cases. The heroic tale frames the narrative and is largely told by way of rumour within the domestic discourse; therefore these two, the heroic tale and the domestic discourse, work in tandem to deride the grown-up men’s complacency and their voicing of a politics of armed guerrilla warfare. The women are shown, instead, to be in line with the young people’s revolutionary ideals, and a politics of boycott. Moreover, Pholoso, it has been argued, is virtually still a child, and far too young to be praised as a societal hero in the terminology of heroic praise poetry. Therefore, the contrast between the two dominating aspects of praise poetry, heroism and political rhetoric, gen-

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erates irony throughout the novel subverting the high-flown political rhetoric deployed by the older men.

The love story, together with the domestic discourse and political rhetoric, forms the most dialogic dialogue of them all. The love story’s gendered stereotypes of male proprietorship of women, women’s confinement to the home, and its construction of women through the gaze of men are contrasted to, and thus subverted by, the more realistically portrayed relationships between men and women, rendered in the domestic discourse. At the same time, the love story, in contrast to traditional expectations on women, for example, on Teresa, celebrates a woman’s own choice of partner, and her own jouissance. Furthermore, the love story reveals the discrepancy between the political rhetoric of the Black Consciousness movement and contemporary patriarchal practice: although Felleng tries to live up to the Black Consciousness ideology’s ideals of politically correct personal betterment, in the eyes of her heroic lover, she is nevertheless stripped of her individuality only to become a stereotyped object of desire and a symbol of the land—surfacing in the Mother Africa trope—before she is left to share the fate of thousands of black women: to wait for her beloved. This final twist underscores the text’s dialogically construed subversion of the authority of the patriarchal voice permeating the politics of resistance.

Lastly, I want to align myself with Desvaux de Marigny’s view that Amandla! actively negotiates a different future free from oppression by patriarchy for black women in South Africa. It is, of course, hard to discern to what extent a work of art may contribute to the forming of the future, but, taking into account the historical, geographical and political circumstances of the context of writing, I suggest, it is possible to examine whether a text envisions a different future. In the case of Amandla! it is also necessary to consider the extent to which, at the time, it was necessary to, “conceal” this vision, in Wicomb’s word. Thus, in contrast to Elleke Boehmer’s claim that “the [black] writer’s craft [in South Africa at the time] is shaped by circumstance, it does not actively shape,”451 my study suggests that Amandla!, in its recognition of resilience and resourcefulness in the female community, in its critique of patriarchal structures that endorse violence towards women, and its hints at a future where women are guided by choice and have redeemed a political voice, does “actively shape” the future.

CHAPTER THREE

Developing a Sacrificial Discourse on Gendered Violence

“[A] book like Footprints is not very popular because it starts to bring out the feelings of the women, and exposing the abuse in the homes . . . with the African wife”—Miriam Tlali

Introduction

Tlali’s short story “Fud-u-u-a!” depicts a rape-like incident on a crammed commuter train. Nkele, who suffers the abuse, complains that the other passengers on the train do not react, and her screams are drowned in the loud singing of “Lifela tsa Sione” initiated by the women: “There was a whole deafening chorus. But at that moment, I really wished they would stop singing and praying . . . (39) I wanted the music to stop because, instead of helping, the very noise was being used as a ‘shield’” (41). Both the perpetrators of this gendered violence and the people who refuse to acknowledge it contribute to the victimisation of Nkele. Tlali says about this story that “unknowingly the women are in fact protecting the perpetrators.” Also, commenting on this specific passage Zoë Wicomb writes: “There is no chance of the victim’s protest being heard; the abuser is concealed by the community and the very definition of community is thrown into question.”

452 Cullhed, interview II, 6.
454 “Lifela tsa Sione” is a genre of Christian hymns.
455 Cullhed, interview I, 11.
456 Zoë Wicomb, “To Hear the Variety of Discourses,” Current Writing 2 (1990): 41. As Wicomb points out, the title of the story, “Fud-u-u-a!” means “stir the pot!” and according to an explanation in “Fud-u-u-a!” it is a chant used by the commuters who turn their backs to train doors and “wriggle their bottoms in order to make a space for themselves” (27). Wicomb comments on the relevance of the title for an understanding of the story: “The chant has specific illocutionary force: those inside are forced to shift, to re-occupy the space in order to accommodate more people, and the contextual meaning of the title quietly transfers to the
In other words, the passage suggests, the culprits and the passengers alike are complicit with the oppressive apartheid regime. But, a few passages further on in Tlali’s story the abused woman also claims that the men refuse to listen to her or to the other women’s complaints; they treat the women “like animals” (42). Thus, the gendered violence and the community’s silencing of it are shown to contribute to upholding the structures both of apartheid and patriarchy. Therefore, I would add, not only is the idea of community being questioned, but also the patriarchal basis of this ‘community.’ To use Julia Kristeva’s terminology, Tlali’s discourse represents gendered violence as “sacrifice” which is “simultaneously violent and regulatory,” having the effect of reproducing social structures.457

This chapter aims to explore Tlali’s discourse on gendered violence in Amandla!, in “Detour into Detention” from Mihloti (1984), and in several short stories from her collection Footprints in the Quag (1989). It will examine the narrative techniques whispering and distancing that Tlali devises to negotiate the taboo on sexuality and the code of respect termed hlonipha (discussed in the introduction), which makes this discourse possible. Applying Kristeva’s sacrificial theory458 as explicated and developed by Martha J. Reineke,459 I will show how Tlali’s discourse on gendered violence, through the use of these narrative techniques, reveals the sacrificial nature of gendered violence and how it mobilises resistance to both Western and African patriarchies. Kristeva’s theory, already introduced, will be discussed in depth in the section called “A Theory of Sacrificial Violence.” Briefly, it posits that human societies, via religious practices, have developed economies of sacrifice, whereby, in times of conflict, or threat, people are scapegoated and life may be sacrificed to restore social order. At the basis of this theory lies Kristeva’s idea of the unstable subject and her discussion of the individuation process, which moves between the semiotic and the symbolic spheres. In Tlali’s texts, gendered violence is shown to be rooted in the victimisation of black men and women in apartheid society, which seems to repeat the pattern of threat and sacrifice outlined in Kristeva’s theory.

Initially, because of their centrality in my discussion, two terms need to be discussed: gendered violence and discourse. The first concept includes sexual harassment, domestic abuse, and rape. At times I use the term ‘near-rape’ to indicate that a rape-like situation without penetration of the vagina is implied. Mostly, gendered violence is instigated by men against women, but,

457 Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language 75.
as will be discussed below in the theory section, it may also entail violence inflicted by a woman on her own body. The term discourse is here used in its wider meaning, that is, in the Bakhtinian sense of a type of language “in its concrete living totality”\(^{460}\) (as opposed to its linguistic features), with its own markers and nuances, its own specific features and flavours, embodying the values of a specific group.\(^{461}\)

Tlali’s engagement with gendered violence is first noticeable in *Amandla!* (1981). While writing this novel, she says, a woman “actually came to me and said please can you write about my pain, the pain that we black women suffer, can you write? She approached me. And she read it and she said it was beautiful.”\(^ {462}\) This resulted in the embedded story about Agnes and Bra-Joe, already discussed in chapter two. Subsequently, Tlali has also pursued the subject in several short stories: she addresses domestic abuse in “M’m’a-Lithoto,”\(^ {463}\) rape, or near-rape, in “Detour into Detention,”\(^ {464}\) “Fud-u-u-a!” and “Devil at a Dead End,”\(^ {465}\) and finally, rape and paralysis in “’Masechaba’s Erring ‘Child,”\(^ {466}\) which focuses more directly on African patriarchy and both women’s complicity in and their refusal of the system of patriarchy.

One common denominator in all of Tlali’s stories that address the issue of gendered violence is the simultaneous depiction of the perpetrators of violence as victims of the apartheid system. Under the rule of apartheid (1948-1994) black people in South Africa were totally victimised by the hegemonic white culture. Due to the apartheid laws discussed above, (the enforced inferior education for blacks, legislation which barred blacks from qualified jobs and stopped people from starting businesses), blacks were unable to take a creative part in the economic life of the country. Also, it was compulsory for black men (and later for women) always to carry a pass containing a work and a residence permit and, if found without one, they were often arrested on the spot and either sent to prison, or to work-camps to do slave labour for white farmers. What is more, millions of blacks were forced to leave their homes and were relocated in remote ‘homelands.’ A few of these examples of oppression, and subsequent victimisation are mentioned in Tlali’s texts in connection with the gendered violence.

But blacks were not merely victims. Many took active part in the resistance movement, often resorting to violence; others directed their vengeance towards their own community, and Tlali includes both groups in her stories.

\(^{460}\) Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 181.


\(^{462}\) Cullhed, interview II, 4.


\(^{465}\) Miriam Tlali “Devil at a Dead End,” *Footprints in the Quag* 102-18.

\(^{466}\) Miriam Tlali, “’Masechaba’s Erring Child,” *Footprints in the Quag* 138-62.
Drawing on Robert Connell’s theory of masculinity based on the interconnectedness of personal agency and social structure, Robert Morrell acknowledges such a reciprocal relationship: “masculinities in southern Africa both reflect the region’s turbulent past and have been a cause of that turbulent past.”

Black men’s “harshness of life on the edge of poverty,” Morrell writes, “and the emasculation of political powerlessness gave their masculinity a dangerous edge.” Asserting that “[m]asculinity and violence have been yoked together in South African history,” Morrell also acknowledges the men’s role in gendered violence: “[h]onour and respect were rare, and getting it and retaining it (from white employers, fellow labourers or women) was often a violent process.”

During the state of emergency in the 1980s, young men especially were both marginalised and victimised. Quoting Steve Mokwena’s study from 1991, on the violent youth culture in the townships, the social psychologist Kopano Ratele writes:

> The crisis created social conditions which spawned a survival-oriented, violent subculture. These conditions included the collapse of civic culture, high levels of youth unemployment, high drop-out rates in the schooling system and high failure rates, as well as the breakdown of the community fabric. . . .

It might then be said that these social conditions were not conducive to a (re)negotiation of male power vis-à-vis black females or the production of open, multiple understandings of what it means to be a black man.

Tlali, as we shall see, rendering her perpetrators both as victims of apartheid and as agents of sexual violence, is similarly aware of the interconnectedness of victimisation and agency.

As women too were restricted by most of the laws mentioned above, to some extent they had the same reasons as the men to take recourse to violence. In “Devil at a Dead End” the protagonist is victimised by the system to the extent that she is prepared to sacrifice her own body. However, reflected in several other of Tlali’s narratives are two reasons that explain a difference between the sexes in this respect: first, according to the patriarchal tradition men reigned over the public sphere of social life, and therefore the men’s subjectivity was more direly affected by this marginalisation/victimisation than were the women’s (by tradition black women belonged to the domestic sphere). Also, the widespread tradition in South Africa of women’s church groups that met and continue to meet weekly every

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469 Morrell 18.

470 Morrell 12, 18.

Thursday afternoon, a tradition that was popular during the second half of the 20th century, constituted, perhaps, an alternative way of dealing with the threat to their subjectivity. Religion, Kristeva claims, is one sacrificial economy that mediates the subject’s “death work,” the process whereby the subject in a socially accepted form manages its constitutional lack.472 As we shall see, Tlali mentions that women are zealous church-goers, or, as in “Devil at a Dead End,” have ready recourse to biblical teachings, areas that pertain to the symbolic sphere.

But before analysing the sacrificial discourse of gendered violence in Tlali’s text there are three issues that need to be addressed. As it has a bearing on the narrative strategies used, in the following section I first discuss the discursive taboo on sexuality within black African society in South Africa. Second, as it informs my thesis, Kristeva’s theory of sacrifice will here be examined in depth. And lastly, I will briefly outline the occurrence of gendered violence in South Africa and discuss the issue of gendered violence in relation to South African black literature. It is only when Tlali’s texts are pitted against the background of this tradition that her contribution becomes visible.

The Taboo on Sexual Discourse

Over the centuries sexual discourse in the West has been placed, as Foucault writes, “within an unrelenting system of confession,” 473 guilt and scientificity,474 while, in Africa, partly due to colonialism and the ethics implanted by the missionaries, he claims, it has instead evolved into a discourse “of initiations and the masterful secret.”475 In most African societies initiation ceremonies are still observed. In these ceremonies boys and girls are initiated into sexual discourse apart from one another; in other words, the socialisation of sexual behaviour has been/is preserved within a strictly gendered context. Often, too, there is a strict taboo on divulging any secrets or procedures imparted or undertaken during these month-long sessions to persons outside the initiation group, even persons of the same sex.476 The silence

472 Death work and lack are discussed in the introductory chapter.
474 Foucault speaks of sexuality in the West as becoming repressed in the 17th century and only re-admitted as a developing “scientia sexualis” in the search of ‘truth’ from the Enlightenment and onwards with a peak during the 19th century (68).
475 Foucault 58.
476 Ellen Kuzwayo, Call Me Woman (London: The Women’s Press, 1985) 70-71. Describing Lebollo, or “circumcision or initiation schools” for boys and girls, where “sex education was one of the strong areas given attention,” Kuzwayo mentions that “[o]n their return . . . they refused to share their experience of the Lebollo or give any information related to it with anyone of their age group who had not been there” (71). Further, December Green in Gendered Violence in Africa (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999) writes: “In every region of Africa, traditional associations based on mutual aid have been formed around kinship, membership in lineages; age, age sets; and/or gender, based on society-wide puberty rites, secret
surrounding initiation, as Foucault’s claim above indicates, can partly be the result of the negative attitudes towards initiation enforced by the Christian missions. “[P]eople accepted the prohibitive stance of the Christian churches discursively,” Heike Becker claims, “without, however, relinquishing the practice.”477 Nevertheless, even if we disregard the source of the taboo on sexuality, it seems that it is a discursive taboo rather than a general one.478 The discursive taboo means, for example, that family members in a black South African context do not talk about sexual matters, black African men often expect unmarried women at least to pretend innocence in sexual matters, and black African women are “not supposed to express a desire for sex.”479 I will return to this discussion below. Of course, modernity in Africa has also entailed a break with traditions: “Old and indigenous practices,” Jo Helle-Valle writes, “exist alongside modern ones and it is up to each and every member of society to ‘reconcile’ these conflicting socio-cultural elements.”480 But, even if Western openness and ‘scientificity’ are gaining ground, and changes between the generations are noticeable, secrecy and initiation are still an ideal among both educated and uneducated black South Africans from all classes.

As the taboo on sex is discursive, to say that sexuality is taboo in African societies in southern Africa is not correct. For example, in “Life,” one of Bessie Head’s short stories, set in Botswana, we find the following statement made by the omniscient narrator:

People’s attitude to sex was broad and generous—it was recognised as a necessary part of human life, that it ought to be available whenever possible like food and water, or else one’s life would be extinguished or one would get dreadfully ill. To prevent these catastrophes from happening, men and women generally had quite a lot of sex but on a respectable and human level, with financial considerations coming in as an afterthought.481

Head here describes a black Botswana context to which she did not belong from childhood but grew to know intimately as a grown-up, and, what she


479 Green 136.


conveys here does not conjure up a tabooed sexual culture. As outlined in the introductory chapter, the life spheres of men and women are traditionally kept apart, but, within their own spheres, at least in parts of Africa, men and women were/are traditionally allowed a great deal of freedom.482 Men, for example, may have several wives and lovers, and same-sex relationships are/were often not incorporated into the realm of sex, and are/were thereby not seen as deviations or anomalies.483 And since procreation is more important than marriage, Arnfred writes, and polygamy emphasises the mother/child unit, women too are allowed to uphold systems of sexual networking, even to accept payment for sexual services, and be promiscuous.484 In some African cultures in southern Africa sexual networking, such as bobolete485 both has been and is still being practised.

However, these sexual dealings may exist as long as they are not talked about openly outside a specific group of peers.486 For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa it is the messenger, not the perpetrator of gendered violence who is to blame. As Arnfred writes: “The transgression . . . seems to be the discursive act rather than the sexual one: the one to blame is not the mother and not her lover, but the son who brought word to the father.”487 Moreover, to understand sexuality in the context of Tlali’s writings it is necessary to realise that “engaging in sex [in Africa] is to engage with strong, even sacred powers, and rules and restrictions are accordingly manifold.”488 These three words, of course, define the idea of taboo. “Certain sexual words necessary to describing rape” Green writes, “are secret, hardly ever used and women find them very hard to say at all.” 489 The naming of the female genitalia in public, according to Mumbi Machera, is so taboo that it is described as “not pronounceable.” 490 Moreover, towards the end of her paper on sexuality in Africa, significantly entitled “Opening a Can of Worms,” she confesses that “writing this paper was rather unnerving. Issues of sexuality in Africa, especially when they touch on the pleasurable aspects of sex are rather touchy.”

482 Arnfred, “‘African Sexuality’/Sexuality in Africa” 69-73.
483 Arnfred, “‘African Sexuality’/Sexuality in Africa” 73.
484 Arnfred, “‘African Sexuality’/Sexuality in Africa” 71.
485 See, for example, Jo Helle-Valle’s article “Understanding Sexuality in Africa: Diversity and Contextualised Dividuality,” Arnfred 196, where she describes the promiscuous ‘new’ custom of engaging in informal sexual relationships for economic gain, termed ‘bobelete,’ which is similar to the much earlier custom described by Head, quoted above. See also Katherine Wood and Rachel Jewkes, “‘Dangerous’ Love: Reflections on Violence among Xhosa Township Youth,” Morrell, which describes the inherently violent sexual culture of young blacks based on hierarchised multiple relationships that boost the young people’s sense of selfhood and respect.
486 Green 232.
487 Arnfred, “‘African Sexuality’/Sexuality in Africa” 74.
488 Arnfred, “‘African Sexuality’/Sexuality in Africa” 68.
489 Green 128.
And, judging from her choice of metaphor to describe the act of talking about sex—the opening of a can of worms—all aspects of sexuality are ‘touchy.’

What is more, for men the discursive taboo on sex is less rigid than for women. For instance, men may initiate the subject whereas women may not. One example in Tlali’s *Muriel at Metropolitan* is when the flat-cleaner called Ben initiates a discussion with Muriel about how he earns money on the side renting his room to mixed couples for the night, explaining to her that he accepts as customers “any two people who come to me looking for a place where they can hide and make love.” It is here indicated that a woman may, and, in compliance with the code of respect, should respond when the topic of sexuality is raised by a man. Another example of the gendered discursive taboo on sexuality, however, shows that it restricts a woman’s initiative in this field. Discussing the silence that surrounds issues of rape and HIV/AIDS in South Africa, Tlali describes how in the 1980s the black male writers with whom she used to travel around the world actually told her that on issues such as these “a mother must shut up:

I travelled with very knowledgeable people. You know, I would be invited and would be with these men, and we were on tour, and they would look disgusted and say: “Why, what are you going to read about, what are you going to read, what is it?” Reading “Fud-u-u-a” really embarrasses them. And they say I shouldn’t be reading such stuff.

Precisely because Tlali breaks the enforced silence, she becomes ‘embarrassing’ and evokes feelings of ‘disgust’ among the male writers. These examples bear witness to what Arnfred, echoing Becker, calls “different types of silences,” and suggests that the taboo is not only discursive instead of performative, but also ‘gendered.’

This socially ordained ‘gendered’ silence is especially noticeable in the field of sexual victimisation. “[M]odern variants of counseling,” Green writes, “are not popular in Africa . . . because rape and violence against women are such sensitive topics. . . . for many Africans it is taboo to discuss such matters with outsiders, such as counselors.” In *And They Didn’t Die* Lauretta Ngcobo hints at the difficulty of alluding to sexual violence in con-

491 Machera 168.
492 *Muriel at Metropolitan* 33.
493 Cullhed, interview I, 11.
494 Cullhed, interview I, 11.
495 Arnfred, “‘African Sexuality’/Sexuality in Africa” 73.
496 Green 232.
connection with the abuse the women suffer in prison; silence seems to be the ordained strategy: 497

Often, after the naked parades, some of the young women would be called out of their cells; sometimes for the rest of the day. No one dare speak out. But as with their nakedness in the yard, they all pretended it was not happening. They looked anywhere but into the eyes of those unfortunate women. 498

Lucy Valerie Graham points to what Veena Das calls “a code of silence” surrounding sexual violence, because, as she notes, uncovering these ‘poisonous’ narratives can “damage the lives of those who tell them.” This was especially noticeable during the ‘women’s hearings’ conducted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 499 which began its work in 1994, with the result that “[t]estimonies of rape in particular exposed victims to stigmatisation and other traumatic experiences [such as silencing].” 500 Despite the organisation of special ‘women’s hearings,’ reporting from these sessions in Country of My Skull (1999), 501 Antjie Krog bears witness to the difficulties experienced by women in speaking out: “Although rumours abound about rape, all these mutterings are trapped behind closed doors.” 502 Thnjiwe Mthinsto confessed, Krog reports, that while writing her opening speech for one of these sessions, “I realized how unready I am to talk about my experience in South African jails and ANC camps abroad. Even now, despite the general terms in which I have chosen to speak, I feel exposed and distraught.” 503

Searching for reasons behind the silence and the discomfiture experienced in talking about rape, Krog quotes the clinical psychologist Nomfundo Walaza, who states that “[t]he silence is locked into loss and cultural differences. . . . [Black w]omen who have been raped know that if they talk about

497 Ngcobo 56. And They Didn’t Die is a novel; however, the introductory chapter indicates that it is also a social document that describes customs in the rural parts of what is now KwaZulu Natal in the 1960s.
498 Ngcobo 101.
499 The publisher’s note to Antjie Krog’s Country of My Skull (1999) states that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was drafted in the new constitution of South Africa that made the general elections in 1994 possible. Legislation then set-up this seventeen-member Commission with the task of “establishing as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross human rights violations committed in the period between 1 March 1960 and the cut-off date [6 December 1993], by conducting investigations and holding hearings. It also had to facilitate the granting of amnesty to persons who made full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective. In addition, the Commission was required to restore the human and civil dignity of victims and recommend reparation measures; and to compile a report of its findings and activities and recommend measures to prevent future violations of human rights” (viii).
502 Krog 277.
503 Krog 273.
it now in public they will lose something again—privacy, maybe respect. . . . There is also a culture of not discussing these things with your own family.\textsuperscript{504} And, because of the taboo, this culture is governed by shame. In Tlali’s short story “Fud-u-u-a!” the narrator complains that “we were too hurt, too shamefully abused, to speak. Who would we speak to? Who would we accuse? Who would listen to us ever if we tried to complain? Everyone would tell us that ‘it is too shameful to say anything about this.’”\textsuperscript{505} Tlali, in the interview, underscores this, saying: “These things are not spoken about.”\textsuperscript{506} However, though Tlali has her narrator describe the silence surrounding these issues, the narrative itself partakes in breaking the taboo, and thereby Tlali resists patriarchal expectations on her as a woman.

In sum, within the African tradition, even if there is no taboo on sex generally and a certain amount of equality and freedom in sexual liaisons, there is circumscription and secrecy surrounding the subject, especially gendered violence. The performative aspects of sex, though regulated by kinship relations and reproduction, are not restricted by taboo; it is mainly speaking about sexually related topics in public, between the sexes and age groups, and even between members of the same sex who do not belong to the immediate peer group, that is taboo. However, the taboo is not absolute. There is some leeway that is gendered: men may initiate a discussion while women are the ones who are compelled to silence. If female silence is the general norm, in Tlali’s texts, however, talking, or at least “whispering” about sexual matters such as gendered violence is certainly undertaken outside the immediate initiation group.

A Theory of Sacrificial Violence

The human subject is condemned to live with uncertainty in terms of identity and subjection, always in-process-on-trial. Kristeva writes: “To identify with the process of signifying, subjective, social identity is precisely to practice process, to put the subject and his theses on trial [en procès].”\textsuperscript{507} In other words, the subject’s identity is not fixed, once and for all, and humans must learn to master this uncertainty. Reineke claims: “Precisely because identity-failure is constitutive in humans—to be human is to endlessly repeat and relive a history of coming to be, without ever wholly accomplishing it.”\textsuperscript{508} It is the subject’s struggle with its own subjection, and its belonging in the symbolic sphere, that underlies violent social behaviour.

Kristeva attributes violence between humans to the individuation process, whereby the nascent subject breaks out of the semiotic into the symbolic

\textsuperscript{504} Krog 277.
\textsuperscript{505} Tlali, “Fud-u-u-a!” 41.
\textsuperscript{506} Cullhed, interview I, 11.
\textsuperscript{507} Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language 178.
\textsuperscript{508} Reineke 36.
sphere, the so-called thetic breach.\textsuperscript{509} “The regulation of the semiotic in the symbolic through the thetic break, which is inherent in the operation of language, is also found on the various levels of a society’s signifying edifice,” she writes; “[i]n all known archaic societies, this founding break of the symbolic order is represented by murder—the killing of a man, a slave, a prisoner, an animal.”\textsuperscript{510} Deeply indebted to Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalysis she insists on the importance of the border crossing between the semiotic (that he calls the Imaginary) and the symbolic order, revealing the heterogeneous nature of the subject.\textsuperscript{511} For Kristeva it is the separation into two, the split, that is both painful and unstable; and boundary failure due to outside threat is the nodal point of her thesis: the subject who is threatened, or who has not learnt to ‘live at loss,’ to overcome the fear of a shattered subjecthood, attempts to re-do the thetic breach.\textsuperscript{512} To instil a feeling of subjecthood, a sense of control, the subject on a symbolic level returns to the semiotic to negate, or abject it. Kristeva writes: “[abjection] seems to be the first authentic feeling of the subject in the process of constituting itself as such, as it emerges out of its [semiotic] jail.”\textsuperscript{513} Each time the subject’s sense of a ‘stable’ identity is threatened, s/he experiences abjection, which constitutes the negativity needed to attack the semiotic in order to re-enact the thetic breach,

\textsuperscript{509} Kristeva alternately refers to the boundary between the semiotic and the symbolic spheres as the thetic break, the thetic phase, or the thetic bar. In Revolution in Poetic Language she writes: “We shall call this break, which produces the positing of signification, a thetic phase. All enunciation, whether of a word or of a sentences, is thetic. It requires an identification; in other words, the subject must separate from and through his image, from and through his objects” (43). If a person’s sense of identity is vastly threatened, or s/he experiences abjection, this is elsewhere designated a “thetic crisis.”

\textsuperscript{510} Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language 70.

\textsuperscript{511} Kelly Oliver, Reading Kristeva (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993) 34-39 finds that Lacan leaves the semiotic/Imaginary behind once the split is accomplished. This view is not shared by Reineke or Kristeva, who acknowledge Lacan’s heterogeneous subject. See Reineke 20-21.

\textsuperscript{512} In “Women’s Time,” The Kristeva Reader, ed. Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) Kristeva explains how all subjects are ‘constituted by loss’ (198). And Reineke writes, “all subjects live at a loss” (39), or “When Kristeva refers to signifying processes that bound the Semiotic and the Symbolic, she traces the contours—the linguistic space—of a lack that shapes human identity” (37). Furthermore, she says, “the Symbolic order is underwritten not only by linguistic processes that accommodate humans to loss and enable them to come to terms with the lack that they are, but also by a communicative ethos that hears in conversation the possibility for communion in difference” (54).

\textsuperscript{513} See Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror (New York: Columbia UP, 1982) 47. The abject, constituted by feelings of disgust and nausea, is the spark of subjectivity. These feelings may, because the subject cannot tolerate them, also be the spark of mimetic violence, because, a person, not bearing to live at a loss, uses abjection to re-enact the acquisition of subjecthood, or to stabilize a sense of self. However, if the ‘stability’ of the subject is threatened, the subject again experiences abjection, which leads to mimetic violence. Abjection is a universal phenomenon, and it is linked to symbols of defilement and taboo. Kristeva writes: “abjection, just like prohibition of incest, is a universal phenomenon; one encounters it as soon as the symbolic and/or social dimension of man is constituted, and this throughout the course of civilization. But abjection assumes specific shapes and different codings according to the various ‘symbolic systems’” (68).
and once more bring about a sense of a stable subjectivity. Since some cannot endure to live constantly “in process/on trial,”\textsuperscript{514} in order to release the tension built up by the pain caused by the separation from the semiotic, the subject thus resorts to ‘mimetic violence’—what is being mimicked, as mentioned in the introduction, is the thetic breach.\textsuperscript{515} Abjection and mimetic violence are directed towards another being, “killing substance to make it signify,”\textsuperscript{516} and often, in patriarchal cultures, it takes the form of the sacrifice of a woman.

To explain why women are more at risk of being victims of mimetic violence, or sacrifice, Kristeva, introduces the idea that our sexually differentiated bodies put humans in different positions in relation to the nascent subject, and these varying positions come to be generalised on the symbolic level as symbols of the semiotic and the symbolic respectively. The mother, being bodily closer to the nascent subject during its first phase, is associated with the semiotic phase, whereas the father, because of his relative distance to the nascent subject, is associated with the symbolic phase. Under threat, when the thetic breach is re-enacted, or in the absence of a successful entry into the symbolic sphere, there is re-immersion into semiotic ‘being,’ in search of “the maternal matrix” from which to break free.\textsuperscript{517} But, since the space of the maternal matrix is now empty (and therefore inaccessible), attention is directed to a woman’s body, which is similar to the ‘remembered’ maternal body.\textsuperscript{518} This re-immersion into the semiotic becomes symbolic and may take the form of immersion into soma, which is achieved through vio-

\textsuperscript{514} Kristeva, \textit{Revolution in Poetic Language} 58. This is Kristeva’s term for the unstable self, and designates what Reineke calls a “subjectivity . . . fundamentally enacted, by way of language, as intersubjective process.” Also, “Kristeva asserts . . . : because humans come to be in places where they are not, any desire they might express for definitive claims on identity must forever be deferred” (19).

\textsuperscript{515} The mimesis of ‘mimetic violence’ refers to how the sacrificial violence mimics the violence experienced when the nascent subject moves from the semiotic sphere via the thetic breach to the symbolic sphere. In sacrifice it is the thetic breach that is being symbolically re-enacted. In \textit{Revolution of Poetic Language} Kristeva writes: “all order is based on representation: what is violent is the irruption of the symbol, killing substance to make it signify” (75); also, “[s]acrifice represents the thetic only as the exclusion establishing social order” (78). This does not imply that humans are forever obliged to resort to violence; on the contrary, the nascent subject, if s/he is successfully weaned from the semiotic over the thetic breach into the symbolic order, can learn to overcome feelings of abjection and learn to live at a loss. Reineke in \textit{Sacrificed Lives}, writes: “To the contrary, conceived in the drifting of a possible metaphor, a child is born to write its life on terms other than those dictated by a sacrificial economy. A sentence, a phrase formed in the gestural dialogue of love, a child can affirm the sacred work of language and live out a heretical ethic oriented toward the productive potential of jouissance: enfleshed, infolded, and free” (175).

\textsuperscript{516} Kristeva, \textit{Revolution in Poetic Language} 75.

\textsuperscript{517} Reineke 30.

\textsuperscript{518} Reineke 23-24. Instead of regarding the maternal body, after the mirror stage, as a discarded site, which Lacan does, Kristeva sees the maternal matrix as a lingering ‘trace’ that the threatened subject returns to in a thetic crisis. This trace does not, however, contain any maternal body, but a woman’s body may come to symbolise this maternal trace.
lence: it is by grabbing, cutting, torturing, raping the being of an Other that the subject experiences symbolic contact with the semiotic, with being, which is the starting point of the compulsive repetition of the thetic breach. Reineke writes: “Under threat of a radical loss of place, subjects turn to soma in order to reinscribe, resecure, and commit to memory the border-securing work of negativity that first saw them emerge out of the mimetic violence of a primordial difference into the world of the sign.” It is, as Reineke notes, specifically “when their ordered existence is under threat” that persons “attempt to replicate the founding of the Symbolic order.” Such mimetic violence may result in the sacrifice of a woman, a sacrifice instigated to master the subject’s death work and to restore a sense of subjective—and social—stability.

“[P]ower claimed over [women’s] bodies [is] . . . a power asserted in the social sphere to effect order.”

This replication of the founding of the symbolic order can also be copied as a more general form of scapegoating on a societal level, which does not necessarily focus on women. In Kristeva’s words quoted above, it may be found “on the various levels of a society’s signifying edifice.” As Reineke contends,

[m]oreover, because Kristeva observes a preoccupation with the thetic break and its accomplishments or failures at multiple levels of the signifying economy, she observes that a fascination with origins pertains not only to individuals, but also to social aggregates. Indeed, Kristeva detects a common pattern in responses that individuals and communities make to potentially lethal threats. Just as a subject under siege may deploy defensive strategies modelled on the initial bounding-practices of emergent subjectivity, so also may a community under threat engage in boundary-building ventures based on those that first brought it into existence as a social order. Indeed, practices

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519 The violence is motored by feelings of abjection, and the marks on the women’s bodies may therefore be referred to as ‘abject marks.’
520 Reineke 28-29.
521 Reineke 68.
522 Reineke writes: “Kristeva’s typology of matricide, attentive to the historical legacy of matricide, is articulated most fully in Powers of Horror. Her typology is characterised by three moments. First is her account of the conflict that is associated with that most archaic aspect of emerging subjectivity: abject violence. Second is her description of a modality of death-work that, rooted in the movement of abjection, serves as precursor to sacrifice: defilement. With her account of defilement, Kristeva claims that, before sacrifice places death-work as an abject threat to be contained, they map that threat so that steps can be taken to excise all corrupting powers and rebound order from disorder. Finally, Kristeva’s typology culminates in a review of efforts the subject makes to submit death-work to the full force of the sign: sacrifice. An examination of each moment in this typology indicates that, because sexual difference plays a decisive role in the sacrificial economy, Kristeva’s sacrificial theory is, above all, a theory of matricide” (93).
523 Reineke 105.
524 Kristeva is indebted to Renée Girard’s theory on scapegoating. See Renée Girard, Violence and the Sacred (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1977) and The Scapegoat (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986).
aimed at re-securing order—the border-bounding efforts of diverse entities—tend to be mimetic counterparts of each other.525

On a societal level, as we know, large groups of people may be scapegoated and subsequently sacrificed as being the cause of ‘evil,’ or internal threat. Feelings of abjection are targeted towards this Other, who is different but ‘uncannily similar,’526 which releases tension. History has numerous examples of this form of violence: the witch-hunts in Europe and America, the Holocaust, and more recently, the apartheid doctrine in South Africa and the annihilation of the Tutsi people in Rwanda. In times of social stability, or, when the subject manages to see the Other in him/herself, that is, learns to live with difference, with the uncertainty that the symbolic entails, s/he less often resorts to scapegoating, or mimetic violence.

Scapegoating and mimetic violence can also be channelled to religion where it becomes a ‘legitimate,’ mystified form of sacrifice sanctioned by society. Kristeva writes: “The sacred—sacrifice—which is found in every society, is, then, a theologization of the thetic . . . sacred murder merely points to the violence that was confined within sacrifice so as to found social order.”527 Most human societies practise religion that with its clear delineations of good and bad and/or its taboos on food and fasting offers accepted forms for dealing with feelings of abjection. Sacrificial practices in religion, then, function just as scapegoating does to alleviate the tensions built up in the subject who is under siege, or who cannot stand living at a loss. Both religion and its sacrificial practices have so permeated society that it is fair to speak of most human societies as being governed by an ‘economy of sacrifice.’528 And, at this point, Kristeva’s theory shows the interconnectedness of the individual and the social planes of existence. Kristeva, Reineke writes, “looks at signification not only as reflective of social agendas and meanings, but also as productive [of them]. As a consequence, she observes an economic process that links jouissance and rejection in human society and in emergent subjectivity within a common nexus of negativity.”529 The word ‘economy’ here connotes that sacrifice is instigated not only on a personal level, but also on a societal level. Notably, in the religious field, despite the dominating position of the sacrificial figure of Christ within Christianity, it is most often women who have been sacrificed. Reineke writes: “The full-blown theory of sacrifice that emerges from this conversation with Girard [scapegoating] and Kristeva [semiotics and sacrifice]” converge in the thesis

525 Reineke 68.
526 Reineke 181-83.
527 Kristeva, Revolution in Poetic Language 78.
528 Reineke 114 and 123 points out that in Christianity, it is God’s own Son who has been sacrificed to relieve mankind from its fear of death, and in commemoration, in the ritual of the Holy Communion (the Eucharist), Christians still symbolically take part in this ‘sacrifice.’
529 Reineke 119.
that “linguistic and cultural codes, especially religion, are structured by a sacrificial economy oriented toward matricide.”

Hence, in a gendered sacrificial economy that we may call a patriarchal sacrificial economy, in times of threat, women in particular are sacrificed in order to maintain control, or to release tension, both on the personal and on the societal levels. Both men and women may seek release from such existential tension in mimetic violence, and women, thus, may become complicit with the patriarchal system. However, since women come to represent the semiotic they often project the maternal matrix onto their own bodies. “Mimetic violence among women,” Reineke writes, “is more likely to be implosive and suicidal.” By way of anorexia, masochism, or suicide, women thus sacrifice themselves. Reineke demonstrates how women in the West, by means of religious sacrifice have projected mimetic violence on their own bodies, for example, the self-inflicted violence of religious mystics, the flagellants, who often beat themselves and/or fasted to death.

Drawing on Kristeva, Reineke states that inter-personal violence and self-inflicted violence can only be overcome if subjects learn to contain abjection, to live-at-a-loss, that is, to tolerate difference by recognizing the stranger within themselves: “Those who draw on this ethic direct the force of signification toward practices that neutralise violence-precipitating threats by engaging an other who is always already within.” She similarly claims that, “instead of searching for a scapegoat in the foreigner, I must try to tame the demons in myself.” Thus, an efficient method of overcoming compulsive mimetic violence, according to Kristeva, is the psycho-analytical process, the ‘talking cure,’ wherein the subject, under guidance, learns to contain feelings of abjection and is invited to re-enact the thetic break without taking recourse to violence. Thereby, the analysand is offered verbal tools to manage his/her ‘death-work’ that living in the symbolic sphere entails;
s/he is trained to endure feelings of abjection and strangeness, and to live with lack. “Kristeva’s analytic method,” Reineke writes, “invoking productive alterity, is oriented toward creating and sustaining conditions that can shelter and support radical strangeness within human community: an other that is an other in the same.”\footnote{Reineke 192.} Once again, having internalised the Other, and accepted lack, the subject no longer experiences a need to call forth scapegoats.

To understand gendered violence within a sacrificial economy (also one that is secular) in the terms of Kristeva, I find, is to demystify it and to break the stasis and the paralysis women experience in the face of it. However, understanding the psychological mechanisms behind mimetic violence and its social implications does not free the perpetrators of such violence from blame but may give both perpetrator and victim an insight which restores their agency to overcome it. Kristeva’s sacrificial theory is pertinent, not only in the sacrificial, scapegoating economy of South African apartheid, but also in the “rape cultures” of South African patriarchies, or any patriarchal society, where women are targeted to release pent-up frustration.\footnote{As we shall see in the following section, during apartheid, and presently, rape has been endemic in the country.} Since all subjects are, what Kristeva calls, “constituted by lack,”\footnote{Kristeva “Women’s Time” 198.} living in process/on trial, any person of any race or sex, under dire threat to his/her personhood, may be compelled to seek release from existential tension by way of sacrifice. In the complex of economies in South Africa people have been victimised within the one economy, only to become perpetrators within the other. For example, the subjecthood of a black man was/is sacrificed to uphold apartheid, while he, in turn, as the abusive head of his household, may sacrifice the well-being of ‘his’ woman to uphold the order of patriarchy. Such a sacrifice in the name of patriarchy thereby also functions to secure apartheid. The system of apartheid was, of course, a system of scapegoating often compared to the Holocaust, and, for its perpetuation, people of both genders were sacrificed. Patriarchal economies, on the other hand, maintain control by means of the seemingly interminable sacrifice of women through violent abuse, rape, and murder, crimes often not duly punished by society because of the law enforcers’ implication with patriarchal values. The revelation of this double sacrifice in a discourse of gendered violence, and the insistence of this discourse on society’s impact on individual agency, is what I aim to demonstrate in Tlali’s texts.
Gendered Violence in South Africa and the Black Literary Tradition

The concept of gendered violence as used here includes domestic abuse, sexual harassment, and rape. Wife battery is a term used by the sociologist December Green to connote all forms of domestic violence where the perpetrator has a close relationship to the victim:

Wife battering is commonly described as the violent victimization of women by the men to whom they are married or with whom they share a marriage-like relationship. This abuse usually involves a variable combination of the threat of violence, emotional violence, forced sex, and physical assault. Like torture, wife battery commonly involves some form of usually escalating physical brutality. Methods of this intimate violence resemble the common methods of torture: beating, biting, spitting, kicking, slashing, stabbing, strangling, scalding, burning, and attempted drowning. The consequences include physical and mental pain and suffering, disfigurement, temporary and permanent disabilities, miscarriage, maiming, and death.\(^\text{541}\)

Green’s definition shows the severity of gendered violence and that domestic violence may include all forms, including rape. Often, too, gendered violence in the home that involves spouses is regarded as “natural or traditional.”\(^\text{542}\) “Wives often believe in the authority of their husbands,” Green writes, and that it is “right to defer to them,” with the result that “[a] battered woman may view herself as a child that needs correcting.”\(^\text{543}\) Therefore, it is wrong to surmise that rape takes place only in the public domain. Instead, as Meg Samuelson claims, most occurrences of rape in South Africa, even during the apartheid era, took place in the homes and were therefore intraracial.\(^\text{544}\) In Tlali’s narratives, as we shall see, perhaps as part of a toning-down strategy, rape is not mentioned in connection with domestic abuse and is only suggested for incidents that take place in the public domain.

Rape in South Africa, both domestic or within the public domain, Samuelson writes, “is an endemic—and proliferating—social disorder.”\(^\text{545}\) However, statistics on gendered violence are not easily amassed. This is due to the discursive silence which Green calls “an official silence on wife battery in most of Africa,” underwritten by “the sensitive nature of the topic.”\(^\text{546}\) According to the scant statistics that exist for 1994 approximately 40% of the women in southern Africa live in abusive relationships.\(^\text{547}\) In Tanzania a
government-sponsored survey reported that 90% of the interviewed women had experienced wife battery in some form. This, I find, suggests that the figure for South Africa, as regards the black African section of the population, may be much higher, at least somewhere between these two figures.

Rape enforces patriarchal structures. Defined as “a deliberate, hostile act of sexual violence,” as Green notes, “[e]nacted to intimidate and inspire fear,” rape enables “men to control women.” She writes:

“Rape is an expression of the ideology of male dominance. Where women do not participate in decision making and males express contempt for women as decision makers, rape is likely to be prevalent. A rape culture is the result of a complex of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and support violence against women. In “rape prone” societies the incidence of rape is high, and likely to increase during periods of stress.”

Since all women may be vulnerable to attack, and, as Green states, all women “hear the message that rape sends,” gendered violence sustains the social hierarchy based on the oppression of women. What is more, “it is women who are seen as jeopardizing the patriarchal order who are most at risk.” For instance, Green says, self-assertive women who report rape are often re-victimised in the legal system; it is “the complainant who is put on trial.” At the trial, a woman becomes what Carol Smart calls “a sexualised body,” and is most often treated as the guilty party, a treatment that “underscores the subordination of women to men.” In other words, the treatment functions to strengthen patriarchy.

It is noteworthy that the discussion that Green pursues supports Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory of sacrifice. Green, like Kristeva, links gendered violence to societal and personal periods of stress, while she also acknowledges a crisis of subjectivity: “wife battery is most likely to occur in partnerships where the husband lacks personal power but lives in a society that expects him to be powerful.” In this ‘sacrificial’ vein, Green regards violence as “a compensatory mechanism” for some men, “aimed at gaining some semblance of control over their lives,” which simultaneously “works to maintain the system.” Like Kristeva, Green highlights the interconnectedness of the personal and the social, and finds that it is “during periods of economic, political, and social upheaval and uncertainty that violence against subordi-
nated groups escalates,” taking the form of “remasculinization.” Commenting on the veritable “rape-culture” in South Africa she writes:

The [gendered] violence occurring today must be understood as part of a wider political conflict in South Africa. On the one hand, apartheid reinforced the use of violence and a “macho” definition of manhood. At the same time, apartheid contributed to the erosion of traditional African systems of patriarchy. This combined with rising male unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s to create a situation in which young men became incapable of raising lobola and were unable to establish households. Young men are seeking to reassert their masculinity in the face of a system that has dis-empowered them. For many young men independence has meant rising frustration as expectations have been slow to be fulfilled. In such a context violence functions as a means of control over one’s environment. It provides an outlet for aggression as exemplified by the gang fights, assaults, and rape that are common features of life. As a symbol of strength and power violence may be viewed as a means of regaining human dignity, esteem, and respect.

In Tlali’s texts, as we shall see, the perpetrators of gendered violence are often regarded in the light of their victimisation by apartheid, and their deeds are therefore seen as sacrifices made by men who try to re-instate their sense of security in the face of threat. Tlali’s discourse on gendered violence is path-breaking not only because she addresses issues of gendered violence, but because, in contrast to male writers, she places the subject within a black African context. But before we look closer at Tlali’s narratives, and in order to assess her contribution, it is necessary to examine depictions of gendered violence in black literature in South Africa from this period.

Depictions of sexual violence in black South African apartheid literature from the 1970s to the 1990s mainly focus on rape. Although, as noted, rape is often an intra-racial occurrence, rape narratives from this time most often feature inter-racial rape. Rape is often narrated as a symbol of the oppression of apartheid, or as a symbol of the feelings of revenge fostered by apartheid. Hence, either a black woman is raped by a white man, symbolising political expressions of dominance and control, or a black man rapes a white woman symbolising vengeance and hatred. This version of gendered violence is mostly found in male fiction. For example, in Arthur Maimane’s Victims (1976), reissued as Hate No More (2000), the black perpetrator, Philip, rapes a white woman as an act of retribution for the humiliation he has experienced at the hand of the whites. Here, “the primary authorial impulse appears to be the exoneration of Philip,” as Samuelson writes, and “[t]he gendered body evaporates and is transfigured into a symbol of race,” whereby

557 Green 60.
558 Green 70.
Maimane, having simply turned the tables of racial oppression, unwittingly aligns himself with the gendered apartheid ideology that his narrative attempts to counter. Lewis Nkosi’s *Mating Birds* (1986) is another early rape depiction. Similar to Maimane’s narrative, it depicts a black man who, in vengeance, rapes a white woman, a rape in the vein of the ‘Black Peril’.559

Female writers also deal with interracial sexual violence and rape. Apart from several of Tlali’s short stories that depict near-rape, her play “Crimen Injuria,” performed in 1986, depicts how a white soldier rapes his black childhood friend in his mother’s servants’ quarters.560 In Lauretta Ngcobo’s *And They Didn’t Die* (1990), protesting, imprisoned women are raped by their presumably white warders, and the black protagonist is raped by her white master, and subsequently ostracised by her own community. Towards the end, the protagonist’s son of mixed blood, conceived as a result of the rape, dies, which transforms him into a symbol of the fear of miscegenation. And finally, the protagonist’s daughter is almost raped by a white soldier, an act that is avenged by the mother who stabs him with a knife during the act. Thus, rape in both Tlali’s play and in Ngcobo’s novel is steeped in a context of apartheid. With Farida Karodia’s *Daughters of Twilight* (1986) black literature ventures to describe what Samuelson calls the “social reality of rape.”562 More importantly, avoiding the “clichéd discourse of the South African miracle,” as Samuelson writes, or the fear of miscegenation, this novel pursues the matter further to deal with the consequences of the (inter-racial) rape for the victim.563 Tlali’s play from 1986, I suggest, can be described in similar terms.

Miscegenation is a frequent symbolic trope of black men’s and women’s rape narratives, as noted by Samuelson: the mixture of blood between the races is either regarded as a threat of racial impurity, as in Ngcobo’s *And They Didn’t Die*, or as a positive racial mixture that points towards the ‘rainbow’ nation of the future as in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999).564 However,

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559 Samuelson 89. In a note to her text Samuelson offers the following information: “The separation of racial groups (‘apartheid’) was maintained through legislation grouped around the female reproductive body in the form of the Mixed Marriages Act of 1949, that forbade interracial marriages, and the Immorality Amendment Act of 1950, that outlawed sexual relations between members of different ‘racial groups.’ In the wake of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), solidarity between English-speaking and Afrikaans-speaking whites was in part achieved through the dissemination of ‘Black Peril’ scares, which constructed white womanhood as under threat of black sexual assault” (98).

560 See previous note on the ‘Black Peril.’ Lucy Graham notes that Sol T. Plaatjie, as early as in his pamphlet “The Mote and the Beam” (1921) pointed out how the ‘black peril’ was used to justify early segregation laws in South Africa (12).

561 This play is not in print. See footnote 158.

562 Samuelson 95. Here, however, Samuelson disregards Gcina Mhlophe’s short story “Nokulunga’s Wedding,” discussed below.

563 Samuelson 96. It may be noted that Farida Karodia is of coloured and Indian descent and therefore has a different cultural experience.

564 Samuelson 88-100.
realistic depictions of domestic violence like those mentioned above, which either refuse the trope of miscegenation, or focus on *intraracial* sexual violence, are almost exclusively the woman writer’s venture. Bessie Head was the first black writer to deal with the issue of sexual violence (but not rape) as an intraracial phenomenon. In *The Collector of Treasures and Other Botswana Village Tales* (1977) two short stories narrate domestic violence that results in murder: in “Life” the husband kills his unfaithful wife with a knife,565 and in “The Collector of Treasures” the wife, Dikeledi, is so frustrated by her husband’s abuse and promiscuity that she finally kills him by cutting off his genitals. Moreover, the proximity of domestic violence to rape is exemplified in Head’s story where Dikeledi, in prison, complains to another inmate that “[o]ur men do not think that we need tenderness and care. You know, my husband used to kick me between the legs when he wanted that. I once aborted with a child, due to this treatment.”566

As mentioned, the black woman writer Gcina Mhlope depicts rape in her short story “Nokulunga’s Wedding” (1983).567 Like Head, she addresses intraracial rape, related in unswerving, realistic terms. From the victimised woman’s perspective, Mhlope’s story dramatises the socially ordained custom of forced abduction to obtain a wife, often resulting in rape. On the first night of the abducted Nokulunga’s imprisonment, her intended husband, Xolani, tries to rape her, but she resists him: she “dug her teeth deep [into his arm] and tore a piece of flesh out.”568 Eventually though, with the help of Xolani’s male friends, he brutally rapes her. The following passage describes the kind of sexual violence that has been socially sanctioned:

Hands pulled her up and her streaming eyes did not see the man who shouted to her that she should lie like a woman. She wiped her eyes and saw Xolani approaching her.

She jumped up and pushed him away, grabbed at her clothes. The group of men was on her like a mob. They roughly pulled her back on the bed and Xolani was placed on top of her. Her legs were each pulled by a man. Others held her arms.

Men were cheering and clapping hands while Xolani jumped high, now enjoying the rape. One man was saying that he had had enough of holding the

566 Bessie Head, “The Collector of Treasures” in Bessie Head, *The Collector of Treasures and Other Botswana Village Tales* 89. In her novels, however, Head does not engage in issues of rape or sexual abuse.
leg and wanted a share for his work. Things were said too about her bloody thighs and she heard roars of laughter before she fainted.⁵⁶⁹

The marriage, thus secured, brings immediate joy to the village. The women’s complicity in the act is hinted at in the description of the joy they experience at the news of the ‘successful’ coitus: “happy and light-footed,” “ululating joyfully” they go about their chores, because, as they say: “To give birth is to stretch your bones!”⁵⁷⁰ that is, they regard the ‘wedding,’ albeit constituted by rape, only in positive terms. Mhlope’s narrative is prominent among South African rape narratives in that it resists this African patriarchal culture embraced by men and women alike.

As intimated, black male writing that depicts intraracial sexual violence is almost non-existent. One exception is Njabulo Ndebele’s novella Fools (1983). This narrative circles around several rape episodes, but here, in contrast to the women’s narratives, rape is merely a background feature: the rape is not described, only its consequences in the form of a child, are mentioned.⁵⁷¹ Moreover, the rape is presented solely from the masculine point of view; in Ndebele’s story, apart from the pregnancy, the consequences for the girl are hardly suggested at all. Nevertheless, the novel acknowledges the commonness of rape in the African patriarchal context: “[Teachers] like you,” the girl’s brother says, “are paid to be killers of dreams, putting out the fire of youth, and to be expert at deflowering young virgins sent to school by their hopeful parents.”⁵⁷³ In the wake of Ndebele’s story, however, there is a notable silence on the issue of intraracial sexual violence in black male writing.

After apartheid, male writing seems to take a different turn. In, for example, K. Limakatso Kendall’s collection of short stories Basali: Stories By and About Women in Lesotho (1995),⁵⁷⁴ the stories that engage with the topic of male abuse of women are written by the few male authors in the collection. In “Give Me A Chance” by Mzamane Nhlapo,⁵⁷⁵ sexual abuse is mentioned, as well as patriarchy, and Inhahaneng Tsekana’s “How She Lost Her Eye”⁵⁷⁶ addresses female circumcision and the custom of ritual killing of young girls for valuable body parts in order to make muti. Also Mapheleba Lekhetho’s

⁵⁶⁹ Mhlope 43.
⁵⁷⁰ Mhlope 44.
⁵⁷¹ In Njabulo Ndebele’s Fools (Cape Town: Francolin Publishers, 1997) rape is euphemised in the text as the land being ravished.
⁵⁷² Similarly, in Njabulo Ndebele’s The Cry of Winnie Mandela (Claremont: David Philip, 2003), although all the narrators are women, their stories ventriloquize a male position. Thus, the voice of Ndebele can be heard throughout.
⁵⁷³ Ndebele, Fools 16.
⁵⁷⁶ Inhahaneng Tsekana, “How She Lost Her Eye,” Kendall 51-60.
story “The Decision to Remain” concerns domestic abuse and the role of patriarchy. In contrast to Ndebele these male writers depict the rape episodes, without exception, from the victim’s, that is, the woman’s perspective.

In general, in post-apartheid literature depictions of domestic sexual violence and rape have not been uncommon. For instance, in Agnes Lottering’s *Winnefred and Agnes: The True Story of Two Women* (2002), the protagonist narrator lives the main part of her life in an abusive relationship, and the ritual rape of her mother by the village chief is narrated. Also, Zakes Mda, in *The Madonna of Exelsior* (2002) depicts the rape of a black woman by a white man who wishes to dominate and control—a rape that has dire social consequences for the woman. Likewise, Sipho Sepamla’s *Rainbow Journey* (1996) portrays interracial rape. This literature, however, has not yet attracted much scholarly attention. “South African literary criticism,” Lucy Graham notes, “has tended to steer away from analysing rape portrayal, and the topic is under-represented in recent critical anthologies.” Her own forthcoming dissertation on rape in Southern African literature is, therefore, a much-needed contribution.

In sum, male narratives mainly depict interracial rape, the one exception being Ndebele’s novella *Fools*, and here, as elsewhere, especially before 1995, it is not narrated from the victim’s perspective. Women writers, by contrast, more often address intraracial rape, and from the woman’s perspective, even representing instances of female resistance to male abuse. Moreover, rape is often given symbolic meaning. “The South African literary imagination,” Samuelson says, has been “unable to extricate itself from [the] web of legislation grouped around the female reproductive body,” which prevents “the nation from being imagined in terms beyond the all-too-familiar ones of blood and race.” This statement, I find, does not hold true for black women writers, such as Bessie Head, Gcina Mhlope, Miriam Tlali, and post-apartheid male writers, who, as we have seen, do imagine a realistic context of sexual violence beyond symbols of blood and race. In the next section I will show how Tlali, making use of specific narrative techniques, depicts domestic violence and rape in a realistic fashion, both as an inter- and intraracial phenomenon. Initially, she deploys a muted discourse that takes its cue from the abject marks on the woman’s bodies, but that, nevertheless, resolutely breaks the discursive taboo on gendered violence.

577 Mapheleba Leketho, “The Decision to Remain,” Kendall 70-76.
578 Graham 9.
579 Samuelson 97.


‘Whispering’ in Public: Gendered Violence in Tlali’s Narratives of Sacrifice

Like *Amandla!,* where the domestic discourse renders the community from the women’s perspective, “Detour into Detention,” “Mm’a-Lithoto,” “Fud-u-u-a!,” and “Masechaba’s Erring ‘Child’” also revolve around domestic community issues. In these texts, which will be analysed in this section, women are victims of gendered violence, such as domestic abuse and near-rape, and are also the agents of resourceful change. Mostly, the narratives depict *intraracial* incidents of gendered violence, which sets them apart from the contemporary male narratives in the black literary tradition. Given the silence surrounding sexual matters, this difference in itself constitutes resistance to patriarchy. Besides illustrating Tlali’s addressing of these tabooed issues, and the narrative techniques she deploys, the aim here is to highlight her rendering of these issues in a discourse of *sacrifice.* Tlali adopts a conciliatory attitude towards the perpetrators of gendered violence, where their victimisation by apartheid and their lack of education and meaningful work are shown to underlie their behaviour. By insisting on reasons behind the sexual abuse, I find, Tlali is not condoning the perpetrators, but attempts to lay bare the sacrificial mechanisms involved: women are targeted to release the victimised men’s tensions, which reproduces the social structures of apartheid and patriarchy.

The main narrative strategy deployed to negotiate the discursive taboo on sexual matters is the one I have called *whispering.* When Mashadi, Nkele’s fellow passenger in the passage in “Fud-u-u-a!” quoted on the opening page of this chapter, discusses her fear of travelling on a specific commuter train as she is afraid of being sexually harassed, she draws the other women around her and says: “we are all women; come, let us whisper to one another” (33). Similarly, Tlali’s discourse on gendered violence is characterised by a subdued tone, and incidents of gendered violence are often merely implied. The other narrative strategy Tlali uses is *distancing.* In these texts there seems to be a connection between the type of gendered violence and the relationship of the perpetrator to the black African community: the more violent the rape scene is the more Tlali marginalises the perpetrator within

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580 An account of the incident that this story is based on was first published in *Staffrider* 1.1 (1978) as “Soweto Hijack!” It was then reworked into fiction and appeared as “Detour into Detention” in *Mihloti* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1984). “Soweto Hijack!” is more outspoken about the violence than “Detour into Detention.” The wounds inflicted on the people involved are described more in detail. Since I am here dealing with fiction I have chosen to limit my analysis to “Detour into Detention.”

581 Margaret Lenta, “Two Women and Their Territories: Sheila Roberts and Miriam Tlali,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 11.1 (1992) partly recognises such a technique used by black women writers although she calls it “conventions of concealment” 108. My term, however, implies that although the issue is partly concealed it is nevertheless mentioned, albeit in a subdued fashion, i.e., whispering about it.
the black community or distances the perpetrator from the community. These two techniques, I suggest, are partly a concession, first, to the discursive taboo on sexual matters in the patriarchal context, and second, to hlonipha, the code of respect clarified above. But partly, too, they are used to negotiate these restrictive codes. Albeit in an initially restrained voice, or by projecting the violence to the margins of the community, the texts explored below constitute the beginnings of a discourse on sexual violence in black writing, a discourse that opens for a wider understanding of the personal/social mechanisms that underlie the formation of patriarchy. In other words, unlike women’s whispering about such matters within the community, the whispering in Tlali’s novels and short stories is a suggestive technique that functions to break the taboo and shame culture surrounding these issues in order both to condemn the gendered violence and explain it.582

Therefore, this section is structured according to the type of gendered violence being depicted. First, I will explore Amandla! and “Mm’a-Lithoto,” which depict domestic abuse within the African community. Second, I will examine “Detour into Detention,” where Tlali first mentions rape, and “Fud-u-u-a!” and “Devil at a Dead End,” where Tlali depicts scenes of sexual harassment bordering on rape, which I have called near-rape. Finally, I will analyse “‘Masechaba’s Erring ‘Child,’” where, almost abandoning the distancing technique, Tlali ventures to place the sensitive issue of rape within the black community. The perpetrator here is a respected black man of the community. In doing so, however, she relies instead on the technique of whispering. Although Tlali resists the discursive taboo and the code of respect, these circumscriptions nevertheless seem to shape the narrative strategies used to negotiate the sensitive topic of gendered violence.

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582 Tlali’s play “Crimen Injuria” underscores the sacrificial economies of the violence perpetrated against women noticeable in the stories analysed here. And, as the following quote indicates, so does her novel in progress. In Interview I Tlali talks about her present work in the following way: “I was recently writing about the rapes in South Africa. I felt so moved by [a television programme] . . . by the fact that men came together to discuss about this domestic violence. My novel, the new one, is all about the violence. Mainly about how women live through the violence and how women, from one generation to another, have been able to overcome it. How they have dealt with it, are dealing with it, and how the new generation is dealing with it. So this is what I am concentrating on just now. You remember that Footprints was an introduction into this problem, it incorporated the violence, like the rape on the train in ‘Fud-u-u-a!’ and ‘Mm’a-Lithoto,’ all that domestic violence” (10). In Interview II, also talking about her work-in-progress Tlali says: “it’s very much about [the violence], from one generation to another. We follow these three nurses, they are the same generation, to see what their lives were like, what happened to them when they got into society. One could not even complete her nursing career because of what happened to her, the others did complete but what happened to them is important—they are the burden carriers. Like all the women in black society. Then it spills over to the now generation, to their children. What happens to their children. And one of the main characters, the daughter, she gets out of this, deciding not to marry at all. Caught up in this web of what it means to get married, how your dreams are shattered, how you ultimately just totter off to your grave. Even if you are highly professional. They are tottering just now” (6).
Domestic Violence, Whispering, and Sacrifice in *Amandla!*
and “Mm’a-Lithoto”

Whispering, Tlali’s foremost technique to break the taboo on the issue of gendered violence, is characterised by implication and a subdued tone. In *Amandla!*, for example, only the effects of the domestic abuse, that is, the abject marks on the abused woman’s body, are outlined. We are told that Agnes often has “scratches and black eyes,” (180); that her face shows traces of exhaustion that reflect “pain and suffering” (176); and that she has swollen knees and elbows (178). Moreover, we are informed that she suffers from nightmares wherein she tries to stop her frightened little daughter’s heart “from beating so fiercely” (182). From these descriptions the reader must then deduce, or imagine the amount of mistreatment. Abuse is only vaguely hinted at in expressions that further tone down the violence: violence that is the cause of the bodily injury described above may afterwards be referred to as “this horrible row between you and your husband” (177).

Similarly, in “Mm’a-Lithoto” the domestic abuse can only be deduced from the forces it sets in motion. The story begins *in medias res* when the protagonist, M’m’a-Lithoto, or Paballo, sits at a train station together with her young companion surrounded by their ‘bundles’ of belongings (her name literally means Mother of Bundles (13)). Between Mm’a-Lithoto’s musings as to whether she will ever see her husband, Musi, again and her memories of how she finally “managed to tear herself away from the unhappy circumstances which made up her married life” (12), the reader concludes that she and her companion have just recently left home because of her husband’s violent treatment of her. Again, the abusive event itself is diminished by the expressions used: the quarrel that preceded Mm’a-Lithoto’s decision to leave is described as a “nightmare” (20)—but the word “bickering” (20) used immediately afterwards reduces the intensity of the occasion. At times, irony is evoked by the downplaying of the abuse. For example, when the narrator discusses the communal punishment dealt out to Musi the last time Mm’a-Lithoto had left home as a result of her husband’s violent behaviour, the word “ill-treatment” (22), used to describe the crime that Musi was fined for, is set within quotation marks, which suggests an awareness in the text that to call the abuse ‘ill-treatment’ is an understatement.

In addition, the narratives readily offer explanations for the abuse, which derive from the impact on every day life of apartheid. In “Mm’a-Lithoto,” for example, trying to remember how the ‘bickering’ sessions between herself and her husband began, Paballo reminds herself of the forced removals implemented by the regime:

In fact she could even trace them to when they started living under the same roof with his people. The removals of his parents from the farm Klippgat in the northern Transvaal had forced them to come to their son in Soweto. Musi
could not bear to stand by while his elderly parents were being shunted around from one bare veld to another. (20)

The text here evokes a man robbed by the apartheid regime of all power to effectively intervene in the course of events, someone who is forced passively to look on while his parents are maltreated. “Tlali’s indignation,” Margaret Lenta points out, “is directed not only, or mainly, against the male oppressor, but against the life-impoverishing physical settings and inhuman laws that whites created.”583 Moreover, living under the same roof with his parents is an additional frustration on the relationship which, due to the technique of whispering may only be implied: “Lack of marital privacy,” Lenta writes, “is not mentioned in ‘Mm’a-Lithoto’ . . . because such a lack would imply a strain on their sexual relationship, which is not open to discussion in [black] fiction.”584 Contrary to Lenta’s suggestion, I find, the nature of these explanations and their link to the abuse, instead of bypassing the perpetrator, show the text’s awareness of the sacrificial nature of the abuse. The integrity of the perpetrator Musi is shown to be severely threatened by outside powers, and, in order to regain a sense of selfhood, it is suggested, he takes out his frustration on his wife. In Kristevan terms, Paballo’s well-being is sacrificed by Musi to re-instate his own sense of self. In turn, the awareness of the sacrificial nature of this violence is shown to empower women. Since the reasons behind her husband’s abuse of her is evident to Paballo, instead of feeling sorry for him and therefore remaining, she has the power to leave him—despite her lack of viable alternatives and the fact that she faces being forced back to him—not only once, but also a second time.

Likewise, in Amandla!, the first time Bra-Joe and Agnes are mentioned the reader is given explanations for his abuse of her. First, the abuse is associated with excessive drinking: “when he is drunk, which is every weekend, he gets home and starts beating up Agnes and sometimes their three children” (42). When Agnes seeks refuge at Nana’s house, for instance, Bra-Joe is described as “an eccentric character” (180), at times peacefully going to church with his family, “carrying Bibles and hymn-books” (179), yet under the influence of liquor, he abuses his wife and children; he seeks solace in the bottle, we learn, to give “renewed courage to face whatever lay ahead of him” and to hide “[t]he bleak emptiness ahead of him” (201). The phrase “bleak emptiness” evokes a state of non-belonging; we are also told that Bra-Joe becomes abusive and violent “when he is in that depressed state” (42), a phrase that implies similar reasons behind his drinking. Other specific reasons suggested are Bra-Joe’s lack of education and his subsequent marginalisation. For example, whereas Agnes is described as a hard-working woman who has found a meaningful role in society through the care of her

583 Lenta 106.
584 Lenta 106.
children, her work, and her church group, Bra-Joe’s language only suffices to tell drunken “jokes in the shebeens,” and entertain “children with funny stories in the streets” (42). He complains that he once thought it “silly going on with school” and deeply regrets that he is only “a lousy factory-worker,” and not an engineer like his esteemed friend (203). In other words, even before the reader is shown the effects of the domestic violence, several underlying, conciliatory reasons are proposed, where apartheid looms large.

Thus, the socio/political context is shown to foster frustration and personal instability, offered as explanatory factors, and, in toto, the explanations suggest a disadvantaged person whose poor education and unchallenging work have deprived him of full access to the symbolic sphere. This interpretation invites a connection to Kristeva’s theory of a threatened sense of subjectivity, and subsequent mimetic violence, which the following incident exemplifies. In the act of hitting his wife, Bra-Joe seems to attain contact with the semiotic sphere, which is suggested by Agnes’ everyday phrase: “You can’t say a word to him when he is like that” (179), where ‘word’ is highlighted. Of course, the phrase may simply be regarded as an idiomatic expression. However, the added emphasis, I suggest, implies an awareness that the perpetrator in the abusive act actually leaves the world of reasoning; in Kristevan terms he is no longer in contact with the symbolic sphere, but instead withdraws to the realm of the semiotic, in order, once again, through mimetic violence to attempt to gain entry into the symbolic sphere.

Tlali’s narrators are frequently aware of the significance of the symbolic sphere for the perpetrators’ process of victimisation/sacrifice. For instance, intoxicated, Bra-Joe urinates in Agnes’ shopping-bag, an incident that becomes a trope for his alienation from the symbolic sphere. Apart from her pass-book, the document that embodied black subjectivity during apartheid, some of her most valued tokens of literacy are wetted to a pulp: her “letters, documents, purse, book of addresses” are thus made useless (192). Agnes, the educated one who, in her habit of writing letters, is shown to cherish the written word, feels shamefully abused when her symbols of literacy are thus degraded. In the face of constant threat to his subjectivity by apartheid, the text suggests, Bra-Joe, the one who is hopelessly left in the margin, punishes Agnes in order to strengthen his own sense of selfhood; his compulsive attempts to gain access to the symbolic sphere by abusing her are here symbolized by his drunken attack of her symbols of subjecthood. The marginalisation and the victimisation of black men in apartheid society, as discussed above in reference to Morrell’s essay, is here offered as a reason behind the sexual abuse of women, and places the gendered violence within an economy of sacrifice. In the case of Bra-Joe and Agnes in Amandla! the economies of sacrifice are apartheid, which underlies his victimisation, but also

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585 As mentioned, it may be argued that religion offers an alternative way of handling what Kristeva terms “death-work,” i.e. the re-enactment of the thetic breach.
African patriarchy: despite Agnes’ superiority in several fields of life, Bra-Joe’s violent behaviour has, for years, effectively kept Agnes in a subordinate position.

The semiotic and the symbolic are also evoked in Amandla!’s inventory of a cure for the perpetrator’s compulsive abuse of his wife. When Bra-Joe, in the example explored in the second chapter, finally resorts to traditional remedies, these are shown to emphasise the importance of herbs, magic places, and cleansing rites (209). Such purity rites, as Mary Douglas, Kristeva, and Reineke point out, serve to demarcate boundaries, which is one way of handling the ‘death work’ that living in the symbolic sphere entails; they repeat “the body-bounding practices of the emergent subject’s proper self.” In other words, these rites belong to the boundary between the semiotic and the symbolic. Hence, by suggesting a cure that entails ‘body-bounding’ practices the narrator once more places the gendered violence within an economy of ritualistic sacrifice. However, the questioning/mocking tone that surrounds this passage also suggests that through agency the individual can break free from the traditional practices of the community: modernity, in the wake of education, exemplified by several of the women in the story, has opened up different channels for a subject’s handling of the thetic breach, and of successfully gaining access to the symbolic order without recourse to violence, or to traditional cleansing rituals.

To summarise, the technique of whispering in Amandla! and “Mm’a-Lithoto” suggests domestic abuse in the bodily signs of the abuse, the abject marks. On the one hand, this narrative technique defers to the discursive taboo on private matters, and, on the other hand, it is an over-all attempt to soften the abusive act in order to promote the readers’ understanding of the perpetrator’s actions. Conciliation, then, is stressed by the explanations of the social and psychological backgrounds to the abuse offered in the narrative. The perpetrator in Amandla! is shown to be rejected by the hegemonic symbolic sphere, whereas his wife has at least partial access to it through education, or has other means of handling her death-work, such as religion, which give her a relatively more stable place in society. By linking the violence to subjectivity the narrators suggest that domestic abuse is part and parcel of a sacrificial economy, here mainly constituted by apartheid.

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586 Reineke 96. Reading Kristeva’s reactions to Freud’s Totem und Tabu (1924) and Mary Douglas’s Purity and Danger (1966), Reineke explores the functions of the ritual and of the sacred, and shows them to be vital in demarcating boundaries of person and of society. She writes: “Kristeva establishes the logic of abjection within processes of emergent subjectivity and cultural practices while documenting their maternal cast. Although abjection may be variously coded in culture—defilement, food taboo, sin—its logic recalls the death-work of emergent subjectivity. In that most basic form, defilement enables the human subject to come into being as an expressive organism. Neither sign nor matter, defilement is a translinguistic spoor of the most archaic boundaries of one’s clean and proper body. Belonging to ‘a scription without signs’, defilement constitutes the primal mapping of meaning at the somatic hinge of human being” (96). Cleansing rites are, of course, the antithesis of defilement.
sequently, the abuse restores the perpetrators’ sense of self and stabilises the system. Such mimetic violence also functions to secure the patriarchal hierarchy. In *Amandla!*, as a consequence of her husband’s abuse of her, Agnes, like Paballo, spends many years living in a subordinate position to him. Nevertheless, the text also imparts that such a patriarchal structure can be resisted: the abused wives break away from their violent husbands to attempt to secure a freer life for themselves, refusing to become sacrificial victims.

**Sexual Harassment/Rape, Distancing and Sacrifice in “Detour into Detention,” “Fud-u-u-a!” and “Devil at a Dead End”**

This section examines how, despite the hampering social codes discussed above, Tlali’s texts address rape-like sexual harassment by evincing techniques of whispering and *distancing*. Furthermore, it explores how this form of gendered violence is framed as sacrificial; how these stories show that the status quo of both apartheid and patriarchy rests on the sacrifice of black women. In the context of black South African writing, the depictions of intraracial sexual harassment/rape in “Detour into Detention” and “Fud-u-u-a!” go against the grain. They do so cautiously though: no rape in the sense of penile-vaginal penetration ever occurs here. Nevertheless, the sexual harassment, it is implied, is severe, indicating rape-like violence; the narratives, as we shall see, most often subtly accentuate the association to rape. The third story, “Devil at a Dead End,” also depicts a rape-like situation, but here, in contrast to the other two stories, the perpetrator is a white man. However, this perpetrator has one thing in common with the perpetrators of rape in the other two stories: none of them belongs to the established community.

In these three stories, to negotiate the restrictive context constituted by the taboo on sexual matters and the code of respect Tlali makes use of a distancing technique: there is a clear cut distance between the community at large and the perpetrators of the implied rapes. All are, in some sense, socially disreputable, being either anonymous hoodlums, or traitors to the cause of the struggle against apartheid, such as policemen or, as in “Devil at a Dead

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587 As discussed, Gcina Mhlope’s “Nokulunga’s Wedding” is also one such early exception.
588 Green writes: “The narrow legal definition of rape utilized in most countries contributes to the disqualification of large numbers of rapes; despite recent reforms in several countries, definitions of rape typically have been confined to forced penile-vaginal sexual intercourse that takes place knowingly or recklessly, without the woman’s consent. Until recently all other forms of penetration—oral, anal, digital, object—have been excluded. If penile-vaginal penetration cannot be proven, the accused may be found guilty of indecent assault or attempted rape. These crimes are considered to be less serious than rape and warrant lighter penalties. Consequently, a broad range of sexual assault is excluded or treated less seriously than rape. Many of these acts are just as degrading and violent, and perhaps even more humiliating than forced penile-vaginal penetration. The trivialization of these acts institutionalizes sex-gender bias” (122-123).
End,” a white man. Sexual harassment is hereby projected onto marginal characters, or outsiders, which in turn marginalises the occurrence of sexual harassment within the community. What is more, unlike the domestic violence discussed above, the rape-like scenes in these stories take place in the public domain and the abusers in these stories are all strangers. Thus, rape is placed, not in the heart of the community—in the private domain—but in the public domain, and, due to the choice of perpetrators, even in the margins of the community.

Such a distancing technique makes it easier in this restrictive context to address the sensitive issue of sexual abuse as an intraracial phenomenon.\(^{589}\) Whereas domestic violence, as Green notes,\(^{590}\) often incorporates rape, I suggest that Tlali, by severing rape from this sphere and placing it in public space is deferring to the restrictive codes. If whispering is a technique common to all Tlali’s stories that incorporate gendered violence, distancing is mainly used when broaching the more sensitive topic of sexual harassment: hlonipha and the discursive taboo on sex, as we know, make this topic extremely sensitive. On the other hand, the distancing is also part of Tlali’s sacrificial discourse. By portraying the perpetrators as traitors to the cause of freedom from apartheid Tlali not only marginalises the perpetrators, but also plants the sexual violence within the context of apartheid. The gendered violence can thus be regarded as sacrificial violence that reproduces the status quo of apartheid: the perpetrators, victimised by apartheid, in turn victimise black women, keeping them in a doubly subordinate position. In the case of the white perpetrator, who represents the oppressive system more directly, the victimisation of black women in the name of apartheid is more obvious. Furthermore, especially in “Devil at a Dead End,” apartheid is shown to be informed by a patriarchal ideology, and therefore the sacrificial discourse involves both apartheid and its patriarchal structures. Only in “Masechaba’s Erring ‘Child’” does Tlali venture to address African patriarchy more directly, partly abandoning the distancing technique.

Like the stories examined in the previous section, these narratives deploy a technique of whispering to address issues of sexual harassment/rape. “Detour into Detention,” merely implies sexual harassment/rape, yet, its implica-

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\(^{589}\) Such a conclusion is, of course, difficult to draw, and Gcina Mhlope’s “Nokulunga’s Wedding,” is a striking example to the contrary. This story, as mentioned earlier, tells of the repeated violent rapes sanctioned by society of a young bride by her husband at the place that is to be their mutual home.

\(^{590}\) In real life, as mentioned above, rape is often a part of wife-battery, or domestic abuse. The view that rape in public is more of a crime than rape in the home is a general view that also permeates the law. December Green in Gendered Violence in Africa writes: “Except for when it is so sensational that it is impossible to ignore, intimate violence is considered apart from other forms of violence. It remains on the margin and is regarded as less severe and less deserving of condemnation or sanction than public expressions of violence. Worse, if not completely ignored, such ‘private’ acts are frequently romanticised or sentimentalized by the state and society” (103).
tions are nevertheless unequivocal. In this story, the narrator Masoli, Miriam Tlali herself, or her alter ego, describes the ‘hijacking’ of people at the Zenzele Y.W.C.A in Dube, where Soweto mourners were lining up to board buses to take them to Steve Biko’s funeral in “Kingwilliamstown,” when, unprovoked, the police attacked with tear-gas and arrested hundreds of people who were brutally crammed into kwela-kwelas (police-vans), and taken to prison without being told what they were being charged with. Among those arrested is Masoli. During the journey in the kwela-kwela the police officers maltreat her and the other ‘passengers’ by repetitively lashing out at them with their batons, trampling on their feet, and, it is insinuated, abusing a few of them sexually, one girl to the verge of rape:

The poor girl had been struggling with the strong arms of the policeman. He was trying to pull down the zip in the front of the pair of jeans the girl was wearing. For a short while, they were locked in a tussle and when his hand broke loose, his fist went flying towards the girl’s face, hitting her on the eye so that her eyelid started swelling immediately. I looked at him, but my eyes were attracted to the open fly of his trouser. His naked male organ was protruding rigidly, and at right angles to his body! (12)

After this passage there is a telling break in the text before the next paragraph begins: “The police van gurgled to a jerky halt in front of a big gate, and I breathed a sigh of relief because it appeared that we had as last reached our destination” (12). The break gives the reader an instant in which to imagine what might have taken place in the van. In this way, the silence surrounding these issues is represented by an actual blank space in the text. Only much later in the narrative, when Masoli is relating this “shocking” incident to her friend Mabel, are we assured that no rape, in the sense of vaginal penetration, actually took place:

– And shame, that poor girl, she must still be in a state of shock. She has been so quiet. She has bruises and a very swollen black eye. It was fortunate that she was not wearing a dress but a pair of jeans.

– I think it was a blessing that the distance between Dube Hall and Meadowlands was not longer. Many of us would have been raped. (28-29)

In this incident the jeans saved the victim; however, Mabel blatantly states what the reader has been invited to imagine as a possibility all along: beyond doubt, during transports such as this, black women, at this time, were sometimes raped by black police officers. Moreover, there is no doubt that rape-like sexual abuse is implied, because the incident, as we are told, apart from the mentioned marks of abjection, leaves the girl “in a state of shock” (28-

591 In Interview I, Tlali explained to me that “Masoli” is her African name, which she seldom uses officially (1). When she guided me around Soweto, showing me the Anglican Church in Dube, Tlali mentioned having been arrested there, and that it is this story she is telling here.
which it would take her a long time to get over. The hiatus in the text invites an insinuation of worse violence than that which is ultimately depicted.

Another narrative technique deployed in this story to induce the intensity of a rape situation is the profuse use of the body in language. For instance, the narrator describes the assailant’s “thick shiny lips showing a set of pure-white teeth and the strong lower jaw,” and accentuates the picture by mentioning how “his pink tongue kept rubbing over the lips as he spoke and it maintained a fresh coat of saliva over them.” These sentences reflect the cramped nearness in the van and impart, not only the intensity of the bodily contact, but also the nausea/abjection experienced in such a forced intimacy, two factors that call to mind a rape-like situation. The narrator continues piling up words related to the body: “buttocks” (5), “tarsus bones,” “groin,” “eyeball,” “back-bone” (101), and “the nerves in my abdomen” (11). This repetitive mention of body parts, connoting medical terms used at an autopsy, evokes the change that people in this kind of situation undergo when they cease to be regarded as subjects and are, instead, reduced to being merely bodies. The interconnectedness between the social and the personal ties into Kristeva’s theory of sacrifice, which, in turn, is indebted to Douglas’ acknowledgement of the human body as an arena where “the social structure is reproduced in small.”

The words pertaining to the body in Tlali’s text accentuate how the personal body reflects the social body; the violence of the apartheid system is literally shown to be imprinted on the bodies in the kwela-kwela and the use of explicit terminology highlights the manner in which the system depersonalises the body. This sequence of naming body-parts culminates in the mention of the police-man’s “naked male organ” that was “protruding rigidly” (12). The use of the body in language, I find, calls forth associations to the rape culture and serves to prepare the reader for his/her own elaboration of the depicted incident.

In “Fud-u-u-a!,” the second story under analysis, the attempted rape is narrated as the victim’s first-hand memory. As in “Detour into Detention,” penetration does not actually take place; nevertheless, the “painful, harrowing experience” (35) leaves the woman with a feeling of having being “shamefully abused” (41). As in “Detour into Detention,” the perpetrators are anonymous, but here the women do not even see their faces. Unlike in the previous story, the sexual violence here is shown to be an everyday occurrence. Two woman friends, Nkele and Ntombi, meet a third woman, Mashadi, on the platform at the central station in Johannesburg. They have just missed the “Six-Nine,” a crammed train to Soweto, and are awaiting the scuffle to get onto the next, more notorious “O-Five.” In the meantime they “whisper” about the horrors of travelling on these trains because of the way men take advantage of the crush on the train to abuse the women sexually.

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As it happens, all three have had such “most nasty” (34) experiences when travelling on the trains, experiences shared by countless “helpless misused and derogated bitter women of all ages” (35). As mentioned above, Nkele tells the others how she and Ntombi both experienced sexual harassment, or near-rape, on the “Four-Six” on which they once travelled together:

I jumped on to the bunk and was forced into that upright position by the many bodies around me. All along, when I was being “carried”, I could feel that my clothes were moving from around my calves upwards and there was nothing I could do to lower them. How could I? . . . I had to keep my arms firmly crossed over my breasts all the time . . . [the women passengers start singing hymns] . . . (38-39) I was trying to scream that someone was busy massaging my thighs and backside, trying to probe into my private parts and nobody was paying attention. It was embarrassing and awful!—That day, I thanked God for having given me big powerful thighs because all I did was cross them over one another and squeeze as hard as I could. I clenched my teeth and wished that I were grinding those fingers between my thighs. . . . By the time the train got to Park Station, we were too hurt, too shamefully abused, to speak. (41)

Nkele’s agency suggests resistance to being victimised. As mentioned above, she shouts to get attention, but her voice is drowned by the other women’s singing, and only by squeezing her thighs together does she manage to stave off the abuse. Nevertheless, the experience is painful to such a degree that it effectively silences her, the implication being that black men’s rape oppresses black women and restricts their freedom. Indignant at society’s complicity with patriarchy Nkele concludes: “What is even more annoying is that no one wants to even talk about this whole “nonsense”, as they regard it. It is not nonsense because who suffers? We [the women] suffer. They [the men] just don’t care” (42). Here, patriarchy is shown to provide oppressive societal structures, and the gendered, sacrificial violence on the trains directed towards women, it is implied, functions to strengthen these structures.

Like “Detour into Detention,” Fud-u-u-a!” deploys the technique of preparing the reader for the rape scene by mentioning parts of the body. The narrator describes how she hides her pay-check: “over her pubis” and claims that “No one could get his hand in there” (31). And when the second narrator tells of her near-rape, she mentions that her “thighs and backside” were massaged, while fingers probed “into my private parts,” the names of which, due to the discursive restraints, may not be set in print. Earlier on, the explicit mention of body parts, such as “calves” and “breasts,” alludes to the way the subjecthood of the woman is slowly being reduced to object-hood, which becomes explicit in the quotation above where Nkele claims that men treat women like “animals.”

Distancing effectively marginalises the occurrence of sexual harassment within the community. The assailants in these stories are impersonal, they have no names, and in “Fud-u-u-a!” they have no faces: the victim com-
plains that “with so much congestion, it was impossible to see who the culprits were” (41). In “Detour into Detention” we know, of course, that the culprits are two black Soweto police officers. More importantly, though, their behaviour strikes the narrator as shocking and unreal; Masoli simply cannot understand how a black man can do such things to other men and women “of the same flesh, colour and blood” (11); a black man that tortures his own people cannot easily be regarded as a person by other people.  

Masoli mostly gives vent to unbelief when confronted with the black policeman: looking at him she sees only “something resembling the face of a black man” (5). Here, too, a conciliatory attitude that outlines the violence as sacrificial can be discerned. Tlali encodes into her language a discourse of solidarity, the implication being that for a black man to be able to rape black girls something has gone severely wrong with his aspiration to person-hood within the community, that is, his subjecthood has been crushed by apartheid.

Although the narrator in “Detour into Detention” frames the perpetrators as enemies of the community, she nevertheless points out mitigating reasons behind their violent behaviour: precisely because the apartheid regime, as the mass-arrest of innocent people exemplifies, has repetitively unsettled, threatened and brutalised people they in turn stoop to committing criminal acts against their ‘own.’ Conciliation also surfaces in a discussion about the black prison-guards: the narrator explains that “they are very cruel and hard to begin with, but they are also human and they sometimes sympathise—to which some remarked: ‘Of course, they also want a free Azania.’ They are in chains” (21). Such attempts to unveil and to understand the reasons behind the violence may seem to excuse the assailants. Instead, I suggest, such attempts function to render the sexual harassment as sacrificial. Since the perpetrators in these stories are represented as oppressors of their own people, the sexual harassment is undoubtedly shown to uphold the status quo; in the face of chaos the sacrificial violence inadvertently functions to stabilise both the oppressive regime and to keep the patriarchal structures in place.

In “Fud-u-u-a!” several mitigating reasons mark the gendered violence, here sexual harassment, as sacrificial. Explanatory passages coax the reader into an understanding of the perpetrator’s actions, and apartheid is again given the blame. The apartheid context is stressed by the very fact that the story depicts the commuter congestion caused by the regime, which did not cater for the transportation needs of the black population. Before the sexual harassment is depicted, Nkele expounds on her frustration when comparing the ‘white’ people’s trains and the ‘black’ trains: while the white trains are

593 According to the unwritten law of Ubuntu, a black African life philosophy, a person is a person because of other people.

594 ‘Azania’ is the African name given to the national state of South Africa during the years of struggle against apartheid.
never overcrowded, and there are more carriages than are needed, in the ‘black’ ones people are packed “sardine-like” (36); sometimes people’s feet do not even touch the ground. Moreover, ‘black’ trains leave erratically from the stations, and are fewer. “Sometimes this very difference,” Nkele warns “is so bad that it can easily lead to a “black” against “white” war” (36), because, she says, “[p]eople lose their self-respect when they are made to feel like they are dogs.” Further, Nkele gives an elaborate example of the frustration the black men once felt at this state of affairs: “They were furious! They even wanted to throw knives and other dangerous weapons at them [the whites]” (37). By placing this passage before the near-rape scene Tlali makes it clear that, in addition to patriarchy’s treatment of women like ‘animals,’ it is also because the regime “treat[s] us [all blacks] just like dogs” (37), that atrocities such as the rapes on the trains can occur. Once again, in “Fud-u-u-a!” the sacrificial economies of patriarchy and apartheid, in which the sexual violence takes place, are evoked.

In “Devil at a Dead End,” the third story to be examined in this section, we find certain similarities but also a few differences to the ones discussed above. Here, it is the victim of sexual harassment, the black girl, whose subjecthood is systematically shaken by representatives of the apartheid regime. A succession of white, male guards break down her sense of self to the point that she almost complies with the abusive treatment she is the victim of; her victimisation presses her to the point where she is prepared to sacrifice herself, projecting the mimetic violence onto her own body.

Part of this victimisation is the insistence in the text on the girl’s objectification by the white men. The girl has no name; we know her only as a young girl from Lesotho, who “smell[s] sweet, and look[s] like a fresh peach” (112), two factors that construct her as an object more than a subject. The girl is on her way to Johannesburg by train, and when the white train guard (or conductor) comes across her in the aisle the narrator depicts the girl through the guard’s male gaze on her “ebony torso and the pronounced umbilical groove” (112). Such a direct focus on specific body parts, here too with anatomy-lesson connotations, adds to the construction of the young girl as a body, and functions to show how the male gaze objectifies women. The objectification victimises the protagonist and sets the stage for the sexual harassment: in the sleeping compartment in the early hours of the morning the girl is sexually harassed by the guard.

The white man’s gaze and its effect on the girl is a recurring motif in the story. The girl encounters a white booking clerk at the station in Ficksburg, an encounter explained in a footnote to the text: “Crossing into South Africa [from Lesotho] is always confrontational and often traumatic for Blacks” (105).\footnote{Of course, it is impossible to know whether this footnote is inserted by the editor or if it is Tlali’s own comment to the text.} When she wants to buy a second-class train ticket the clerk demands
to see her reservation. As she does not have one, he issues her a third-class ticket, shouts at her, and gives her a look of disgust, “[t]he clerk gazed at her, his fierce-looking, cat-like . . . eyes” causing her to “flinch” (103). Throughout the story his eyes haunt her: again and again she remembers this gaze, sometimes it is just “those eyes” (104, 108, 113, 115), sometimes his “horrible eyes” (105), his “furious eyes” (109, 116), his “cruel” (110) or “fiery, bottomless” eyes (117), seemingly re-iterated to remind the reader of the feeling that causes her to “drop her eyes” (103). Repeated ten times, the male, white gaze diminishes her, objectifies her and brings home to the reader her state of victimisation by the system of apartheid.

Another instance adds to the girl’s uncertain sense of self. On the platform, as she approaches two white guards in order to convert her third-class ticket to a second-class ticket the girl’s self-confidence is shaken by the mere looks they give her:

"Reluctantly, and with a feeling of apprehension, the girl moved towards the two guards, who looked at her questioningly as she approached. She suddenly became conscious of her high platform shoes. She moved slowly. She would have to avoid the risk of tripping, she thought. She was thankful that her wide-bottomed balooba denim pair of slacks concealed her knees which were by now impulsively knocking against each other. Her step, which was normally graceful and confident, was faltering. . . . She thought of the white booking clerk at Ficksburg. (109)"

Under the male gaze of white power the girl becomes aware of how she is dressed, she is robbed of her confident gait, and starts shaking from nervousness—her subjecthood is obviously impacted. The narrator also underlines the similarity between this situation and the previous one, when, like a Vedic mantra, the eyes of the Ficksburg clerk are mentioned once more. The white, male gaze frames the narrative in the context of patriarchal apartheid; white men construct the girl in terms of blackness and gender—if she later becomes a victim of sexual harassment, the text informs us, it is because of these two features. In other words, she is victimised in the name of apartheid and patriarchal hegemony.

The story contrasts the white men to black men. While the white guards objectify the girl, the black men are shown to be gallant in their treatment of her: one courteously helps her onto the train while another “extended his arms to receive the girl’s bags” (104). Further on in the story this same “kind young man” (108) who is either “coloured or Indian or African” (105), again offers to help her with her bags, this time calling her “my sister” (108). The contrast between white and black men underscores the apartheid context, and the girl’s victimisation is shown to be caused by the patriarchal apartheid regime.

Prolepsis anticipates the sexual harassment of the girl. Her older female companion emphasises the girl’s vulnerability by remarking on the guard’s
interest in her, and suggesting that he perhaps “wants to pay you a visit” (110). Furthermore, when the girl reveals her naivety on these issues the older woman points to the white soldiers on the opposite platforms and explains to her that these soldiers are known to “chase [black women] into the dongas and grab them by force” (111). Later, when the guard pays the women some extra attention, the older woman underlines her anticipation with the words: “Didn’t I tell you that he’d pay you a visit?” (112). At this point in the narrative, and especially when the older woman disembarks in the middle of the night, leaving the young girl alone in the compartment, the reader expects the guard to pay the girl an additional visit, even, perhaps, to attempt to rape her. Such anticipation in the text helps the reader imagine what might have occurred on trains in similar situations.

The ‘rape’ scene in “Devil at a Dead End” is more overtly depicted than in the other two stories. The overtness is noticeable in the choice of terms: the guard suggests “a little love-making” (115), the girl sheds “her flimsy nightie” (114) and is naked (117) while the guard’s hands explore “down her midriff and below” (117), and he caresses her breast. As we shall see below, too, the descriptive language is more specific. One factor behind the overtness may be that the perpetrator is white, and the harassment is thereby distanced from the community and the social restrictions that apply. However, the language is not only overt, it is almost sensual. A phrase such as “his warm quavering, salivating tongue groped towards the girl’s navel, and spotting it, sank into its hollow warmness” (117) brings on associations of sexual intercourse, rather than rape. Also, the perpetrator’s view that the girl has a “beautiful face” (114), has “so beautiful” eyes, (116) and a “tender body,” together with the mentioning of his “warm, impetuous body” (116), how he “gently stroked her back,” his “warm neck” and words like “his strong muscles,” “the girl’s firm nipple” (117)—all with positive connotations—add to this sensuousness. And, that the perpetrator represents the enemy enhances the portrayal of intimacy and the use of sexual connotations. Nevertheless, this context does not sufficiently account for the sensuousness, and it is not outweighed by the mention of how the guard forces her to embrace and kiss him, how the girl “drew away” (114) or “receded, petrified” (115), or of her “shaky, reluctant arms” (117). Since the context is one of apartheid, and the issue being addressed is white men’s sexual harassment of black women, this sensuousness, I find, begs an explanation.

The sensuousness, I suggest, serves the purpose of revealing the sacrificial aspect of the sexual harassment. Unlike the earlier stories, “Devil at a Dead End,” does not mention any mitigating reasons in connection with the perpetrator of the sexual harassment. But, as we have seen, there are reasons mentioned in connection with the reaction of the victim, reasons that explain her victimisation. The girl, we are led to understand, is victimised by apartheid to such a degree that she almost becomes complicit with it and readily takes on the role of the victim—at least initially. Returning to the scene of
intimacy in the sleeping compartment, we may note that, while the forced intimacy is developing into rape, the girl’s feelings are reluctantly aroused, which results in a bewildered state of paralysis on her part. When the train stops at a station the guard is forced for a while to leave the girl alone in her compartment, and during this interlude

[She] the girl sat trembling and feeling guilty. She reprimanded herself, I should be screaming for help or something. She sat waiting. She was surprised at herself. She had been like a bewildered beholder, powerless. She had abandoned herself into the arms of a strange white man who did not even know her name. An expert who obviously knew what he was doing. She was taken aback at what seemed to be a response by a part of herself over which she had no control. She felt like a being apart, looking on. She waited, dismayed. (116)

Her unexpected response “by a part of herself over which she had no control” draws attention not only to her treacherous body but also to her role as part of a system—a patriarchally informed system of apartheid—that she had not bargained for. Against her will, “like a being apart,” the male gaze of power (and the anticipation of the woman companion, mentioned above) has victimised her, that is, has transformed her into a *sacrificial lamb*, into a more or less willing accomplice to the sacrificial act: her mixed feelings towards the perpetrator, and her sexual arousal testify to this. Her shattered self-hood leads her to willingly implode the mimetic violence on her own body—a sacrifice that functions to reinforce the two oppressive systems of apartheid and of patriarchy. When the guard returns to her compartment, he again closes in on her “with one powerful wrench” (116), and she seems to submit to his wishes, albeit reluctantly: putting her arms around him they kiss.

She could feel his strong muscles move as he gently stroked her back. He moved his exploring hands down her midriff and below. His knees seemed to sag and he knelt on the edge of the cushioned bunk. As his left hand caressed the girl’s firm nipple, his right hand felt for the switch and lowered it. The darkness surrounded them completely, isolating them from the rest of the world. *She thought of the fiery, bottomless eyes of the booking clerk at Ficksburg station.* [Emphasis added] (117)

Here again, the clerk’s eyes come back as a reminder of her own victimisation, of her role in the system over which she does not seem to have control.

However, in the end, her battle with her own guilty conscience and the religious teachings of her childhood, icons of the symbolic sphere, help her break this impasse of paralysis. Ultimately, she resists becoming a victim of sacrifice; instead, it is the guard who finds himself to be ‘the devil at a dead end.’ When the guard’s tongue is groping towards her navel “like Pavlov’s dog” (117), the girl suddenly remembers a phrase from the scriptures, “Fa-
ther, do not touch me because I am unclean” (118), whereby she cries in the vernacular that she has a venereal disease, “mokoala,” a word that the guard instantly recognizes and which makes him retreat like a “devilish figure” (118). In the end, it is her recourse to the symbolic order that saves her from the role of sacrifice. Education, enlightenment and the symbolic order are shown to give her the power to resist the mimetic violence. She refuses to become a sacrificial victim and thereby resists both apartheid and its patriarchal connotations.

This section first explored the technique of distancing in “Detour into Detention,” “Fud-u-u-a!” and “Devil at a Dead End,” that is, the act of projecting gendered violence onto outsiders, or marginal figures in the community in order, perhaps, to be able to address the topic of intraracial sexual violence. The narratives often insist on the marginal figures’ alliance with the system of apartheid and point out their victimisation, and it has been shown that consequently, distancing is also a characteristic of the sacrificial discourse. In line with the sacrificial theme, the first two texts, like the ones examined in the previous section, supply the reader with mitigating reasons behind the violence, which accentuates the violence as mimetic, chiefly within the economy of apartheid. Differing somewhat from the other two stories the female protagonist in “Devil at a Dead End” is shown to target the mimetic violence onto her own body. In the end, however, her recourse to the symbolic order, the text imparts, mobilises her resistance to the sacrificial role. Sacrifice in “Detour into Detention,” “Fud-u-u-a!” and “Devil at a Dead End” has mainly been connected to the patriarchal apartheid ideology.

The next and final section of this chapter examines sacrifice vis-à-vis African patriarchy, again stressing that an awareness of the sacrificial nature of gendered violence fosters women’s agency to resist it.

**Sacrifice, Patriarchy and the Complicity of Black Women in “’Masechaba’s Erring ‘Child’”**

“’Masechaba’s Erring ‘Child’” is the final and longest story in *Footprints in the Quag* (1989). Here, Tlali both addresses and resists African patriarchy directly: Senatla, the perpetrator of sexual harassment, is a well-respected man in the Soweto community, and his victim Tholo openly fights back. This is also the most complex of Tlali’s stories in terms of focus and narrative techniques. Halfway through the story the narrator glides away from blaming the perpetrator of sexual harassment/rape to focus on the complicity of his wife, ’Masechaba, and her submissiveness. The main form of the story is dialogic, a form that Tlali, as we have seen, uses in both her novels. Here, the dialogue is organised around three women, the older ’Masechaba and her young friend Tholoana (called Tholo), and Lindi, who, after Senatla’s death, first discuss the lingering trauma of Tholo’s victimisation, second, try
to make 'Masechaba see her own role in it, and third, reveal her own vic-

timisation—eventually inspiring her to change her ways. In this dialogue,

where Tholo’s memories surface, both past and present events are depicted.

And, as we shall see, although the women’s discussion also includes the

sensitive topic of sexual harassment, they manage to keep the discussion on

a friendly note; thus, the form is used to negotiate contested ground.

The title points to the two main themes of the story, where the word

‘child’ indicates the ‘child-like’ relationship between 'Masechaba and

Senatla, while the epithet “erring” refers to Senatla’s sexual harassment of

Tholo. The title’s unfavourable description of Senatla is initially not shared

by 'Masechaba herself, who has found his behaviour acceptable over the

years, and who submissively defers to him. However, in the course of the

story, and under the influence of the radical young women, she comes to

realise her own part in the oppression of other women and towards the end

her own opinion of Senatla echoes the title—she regards her husband as a

grown child in need of correction. The word ‘child’ also introduces Senatla’s

insecurity in his patriarchal role, perhaps aggravated by apartheid, and his

dependence in life on 'Masechaba, whom he regarded as a mother to whom

he could turn for assurance. As we shall see, that Senatla deprived 'Masech-

aba of her freedom and independence is suggested as being his way of re-

enacting the mimetic violence that restored his contested ego.

This section explores sacrificial discourse in a community context.

Senatla’s social position is shown to be based on the sacrifice of two women,

Tholo and 'Masechaba. In contrast to Tlali’s depictions of domestic abuse,

these texts, where rape is addressed, focus less on the shattered subject of the

perpetrator, and more on the impact the harassment has on the subjecthood

of the victim: oppressive patriarchal structures are here shown to victimise

women into complicity with the system; meanwhile, the text imparts, re-

course to the symbolic sphere, and the revelation of the sacrificial economy,

releases human agency to resist compulsively resorting to mimetic violence.

Just as men can stop sacrificing women, so can women resist being victim-

ised and sacrificing themselves.

Senatla was a well-respected and well-to-do member of the community

who lived with his wife in a luxurious house, “the ‘big’ house” (139) in Or-

lando Extension, a house with a built-in bathroom; he wore a “shimmering

signet ring” and had “the self-confidence of a man who was not without

means” (139). What is more, he made a show of his wealth when he came

“swinging the keys of his latest brand new Biscayne” (140) a brand that re-
curs in the victimised girl’s nick-name for him “u-Biscayne” (142). Also, his

position is underscored when 'Masechaba, describing his funeral, explains to

Tholo why the church was “packed full,” simultaneously revealing his posi-
tion in society: “As you know, he had been a person serving the people in

the church and as an agent for the African Burial Society. Many of the clients he

had served so well in the East Rand, Brakpan, Benoni, Springs, Kwa-Thema,
etc., they all came to pay their last respects” (144-45). Tholo too, talking to Lindi, emphasises his status when she mentions that “[p]eople knew him to be a respectable churchgoer you know” (150). Here, though, in contrast to Agnes in *Amandla!,* the church is not shown to channel the sense of lack, but mainly highlights Senatla’s position in society.

This well-respected man is also shown to embrace patriarchal norms. For instance, he finds it perfectly in line with his patriarchal position to have several relationships with other women besides his wife: he lies to his wife, and tricks Tholo into meeting him, he sexually harasses Tholo, and, as we are told, he once tried to convince Tholo that she needed him, thereby displaying his patriarchal attitudes: “You need a man. If we, married men, never come to keep you company and take you out, what would you do? You’d sit and wait for some struggling ‘tsotsi’ to come along and take you to the bioscope. . . . The divorcees, widows, spinsters—they’re all happy to meet men like me to carry them in posh cars. . . . What makes you think you’re different? Wake up, girl, wake up!” (149). Furthermore, in his relationship to his wife, Senatla is the patriarchal head whom 'Masechaba submissively refers to as “Ntate” (151), meaning father, and he takes advantage of his position to keep his wife ignorant. 'Masechaba once explains her own ignorance to Tholo saying: “Ntate was the one who read papers. In any case he never said anything about what he read in the papers and I only used them to make fire” (157). Further, he does not question the patriarchal laws that make him the sole owner of property; he owns both the car and the additional property referred to. At one point 'Masechaba confesses to Tholo: “To tell the truth, I never bothered to ask about the property or the car because Ntate said that those were a man’s business, not a woman’s” (158). In line with his endorsement of these laws he will not let her drive the car since he believes that she is “too soft” to drive; he has once told 'Masechaba that “driving was for tough people” (159), implying men. Finally, we learn that Senatla has not informed his wife of the sale of his property, and she has no knowledge of how he has spent the money he thus acquired. Obviously, he regards these issues as a man’s business.

However, it is not only Senatla who represents patriarchy; 'Masechaba is shown to be complicit with the system. For example, although Senatla treats his wife as a ‘minor’ we are told that “the dear lady really loved her husband” (142); she calls him “my dear husband” (146) and likes to keep her house “just as Ntate wanted it” (147). Also, 'Masechaba confides to Lindi, that “in marriage, it is the husband’s wishes which are important, not the woman’s” (152). Furthermore, 'Masechaba is shown to fully endorse the relationship between her husband and Tholo when she says, “I know, Tholo my dear. I know everything about you two” (145); “I even know that you refused him. . . . How could you be so cruel anyway? Ntate loved you so much. . . . He was nearly sobbing like a child when he told me. I couldn’t help feeling very sorry for him” (151). The two young girls, who hold a dif-
ferent view of the relationship between Senatla and Tholo, on their visit to 'Masechaba find this piece of news astounding. 'Masechaba, however, defends her standpoint:

‘Of course I did not mind at all. I know Tholo very well, I think. She is not the kind of woman who would snatch Sam from me, no; that much I know, Lindi. That is one of the reasons I really did not mind. Isn’t it better to know everything your man is doing than to sit waiting for him to come home and he just goes for days or goes about dodging and bringing with him a whole lot of lies? I think that would just kill me. I certainly do not want to die slowly of heart failure like most women who never know what their husbands are about; who suffer, tearing themselves to pieces and suffering knowing and feeling that something must be wrong.’ (151)

It seems that 'Masechaba is quite happy sharing her husband with a young girl whom she believes only has aspirations to him as a lover. And, according to Tholo, Senatla once spoke about his wife in the following terms: “what happens between us is our business. She’s very happy with how we live” (148), which underlines the attitude of complicity with patriarchal norms that comes to the fore here. Above all, 'Masechaba’s tolerance with this arrangement keeps her economically secure, though dependent:

It’s better if he tells you everything so that you can also make your demands. Senatla used to make sure my refrigerator is full of meat and other things that I need. He also used to go with me to the clothing shops and I would choose whatever I wanted and he would pay, and of course I knew that he also banked what was left. He used to satisfy me with what I wanted and then tell me that he will be going with whoever he was going out with. (153)

Senatla’s ability to provide for her is obviously appreciated by 'Masechaba and is in line with her ideas of genuine masculinity, since she reacts “in dismay” on hearing about the demands on the men that the young girls propound, such as sharing the household chores, saying: “Ao, Ao, Ao! Then you would be turning him into a woman” (159). But 'Masechaba is not merely complicit with patriarchal ideals. When the focus in the story shifts from Senatla’s crime to 'Masechaba’s complicity, the young girls point out that she too is a victim.

In this text, where Tlali places the issue of rape at the centre of the black community, she nevertheless defers to the code of respect. Addressing the sensitive issue of rape means resisting the code, but, to maintain some degree of respect for the code, a certain amount of negotiation is necessary. In this story some strategies used previously are abandoned, while others are continued, even enhanced. For example, the strategy of distancing is only sparingly deployed. In this story both the victim and the perpetrator are named, and the perpetrator is not a marginal figure. However, there is still a certain amount of whispering in this text, and, in a sense the degree of whis-
pering here is greater than in Tlali’s previous texts. Although sexual harassment is definitely implied, there is no direct reference to rape; the amount of violence involved, to a greater extent than in her other stories, is left to the imagination of the reader: no bodily injuries are mentioned, only psychological implications are mentioned along with, as we shall see, a few metaphors that evoke sex, perhaps rape. Moreover, the way the narrator turns the focus from Senatla’s guilt to 'Masechaba’s complicity may be read, in part, as a strategy of whispering. Such a change of focus blurs the perpetrator and almost erases his crime. On the other hand, the change of focus is instrumental in raising the issue of women’s complicity, victimisation, and their possibility to resist being defined by an Other.

One reason behind the whispering may be that the incident of sexual harassment is narrated in the first person, which brings the crime closer to the narrator, making it more compromising to her. Another suggestion is the lack of distance between the perpetrator and the African community: Tholo is here seen to accuse one of the established patriarchs in the community, which makes it plausible that the code of respect more strongly intervenes and hampers the narrator’s openness on these issues. Finding it difficult to criticise her husband, 'Masechaba admits: “She felt like she would be cruel and not respectful to the man she worshipped so much. She spoke softly in mediation [emphasis added]” (160). In order to mediate, or to negotiate the code of respect in connection to the sensitive topic of sexual harassment and patriarchal oppression, treading within the glasshouse of her own community, like 'Masechaba, the narrator chooses to speak softly, that is, to whisper. For example, when she is relating the incident to Lindi she says: “I never told you the ghastly details”; however, as this is followed by three dots it seems that she is not prepared to do so on this occasion either. Instead, she simply adds that “he must have gone elsewhere to try his luck” (147), which, at least, suggests that he actually did “try his luck” with her.

Despite the whispering, the text indicates that Tholo’s experience of sexual harassment has entailed some degree of trauma for her, implying rape. For instance, not since the time Senatla harassed her sexually, “a nasty experience which had made her resent the very mention of ‘u-Biscayne’” (142), has Tholo visited her friend 'Masechaba, since, “[s]he had sworn, on that last occasion, that she would have nothing to do with the couple after he had cunningly enticed her” (140). Her recollections of the incident, Senatla locking the gates and her meeting with the fierce Alsatian dog, two factors that leave her “shocked and trembling,” (140), become metaphors for her remaining sense of threat. Moreover, the reader is alerted to the surroundings where the incident took place, and made aware that these have made an indelible impression on the victim. For example, seeing the room again on her visit to 'Masechaba six years later Tholo observes that “the tidy polished pieces of dining-room furniture were arranged in exactly the same manner in which they had been the last time she was there, so long ago” (143). As she
goes on to describe the furniture and the decorations in the room in detail finishing off with a list of animal sculptures on display, her focus finally lands on some bird sculptures made of horn. Similar to the trope above, these become a metaphor for the threat of rape that she is reliving: “Birds of every description—owls, peacocks, ostriches, doves, etc., all carved from horns of animals—black horns, white horns, grey horns—they were all still standing there, at the same spots as if they were nailed on to the shiny glass surface” (143). The trope may, of course, stand for her memories left intact over the years, but the emphasis on horns, I find, suggests an erect penis, and the trope of the nails on “the shiny glass surface” evokes the idea of a clean surface being penetrated by something sharp; perhaps a virgin surface being spoilt, and/or somebody being crucified, which evokes the idea of sacrifice.

Tholo’s trauma is subtly implied by the “emotional conflict” she experiences when she steps into that room once again, which “brought [her] ‘face to face’ with the shadow or image of a man she wanted to forget” (144). Further, she is “unable to shake off the imposing ‘familiar’ feel of the surroundings” (144), where the word ‘familiar’ has negative connotations, implying that a breach of her integrity has taken place. As ‘familiar’ is linked to ‘imposing,’ this in turn insinuates rape. The lingering trauma is suggested, too, by Tholo’s confession to Lindi that “I hated setting my foot inside this room” (147). As she later relates the incident in its entirety to Lindi, the memory of Senatla’s threats results, in the text, in the italicised statement, “I hope he dies in gaol! I hope the Boers castrate him and strangle him!” (149).

This drastic wish foregrounds the impression that rape, or a rape-like incident of sexual harassment, occurred in ‘Masechaba’s home, with Senatla as the perpetrator and Tholo as the victim. The deceptive coercion that Senatla applies underscores this reading: under the pretext that his wife is ill and needs her he lies to trick Tholo into visiting his home, locks the gate and the door after her, and when she attempts to leave he refuses to open the door. Unexpectedly, though, Tholo challenges Senatla both verbally and physically, thus, perhaps, avoiding further victimisation. When Lindi asks her why Senatla suddenly stopped (doing whatever he was doing), Tholo replies: “because I rebuffed him and said things to him that he did not expect’ (147). At this point the focus is moved from Senatla’s implied force to Tholo’s explicit resistance. Thus, the narrator avoids describing what actually happened between Senatla and Tholo, merely suggesting a rape-like incident. However, when describing her violence towards Senatla, Tholo is more explicit:

‘When I took my bag and wanted to go, he would not open the door. I told him that if he thinks that women were created for him to play around with, then he must think he is the Almighty. I said he can go to women who are waiting for him to do them a favour like he said, not me. He would not open the door. He thought if he softened and begged me I would relent. He
pleaded, “Look... Let’s not fight, Tholo, please. Let’s enjoy ourselves. I took "Masechaba to the farms so that you may get a chance to be with me, please. Just this once, please.” He came towards me and I pushed him away... against that display cabinet and I was sure he would crash into it. He staggered, you see. I did something he did not anticipate. He came towards me again mumbling, bitterly, “No bloody single woman has ever done this to me; not me... I grabbed the vase from the table and flung it into his face... His eyes bulged out like balloons. He did not think I would be brave enough to do that. His words had provoked me and I no longer cared what happened. I yelled at him: “Coward... Don’t touch me!”... He was standing there, dazed. (149)

That she actually threw a vase in his face is bluntly stated. However, the switch of focus tones down the sexual harassment to the level of an intermezzo from which the victim may simply arise, take her bag, and leave at will. In other words, this passage contradicts the earlier implied “ghastly details” and the trauma that the incident has evoked in the girl. Here, the violence instead seems to be triggered by the girl: it is when she resists him that his anger is provoked. This switch of focus has a dual agenda. First, the narrator defers to patriarchal expectations by blurring the perpetrator and his deeds. She seems to have difficulty describing the force that Senatla uses, while there does not seem to be any inhibition, on the part of the narrator, in describing the force that Tholo uses to retaliate. This reversal may be an effect of the code of respect, one example of the strategy of whispering encountered in other texts. However, at the same time the reversal points to a way around the impasse of female passivity. Tholo’s agency shows how her awareness of the sacrificial aspects of her victimisation has freed her to resist it. She does not let her assailant have his way with her but unexpectedly challenges him.

Interestingly, Tholo’s open resistance evokes another toning-down strategy familiar from Tlali’s fiction: the strategy of distancing. The frankness displayed here, where Tlali places the sexual harassment within the established community with her female protagonist openly resisting a male patriarch, seems to necessitate distancing him somewhat from the community, which she does by portraying him as a traitor-to-the-cause. Senatla is shown to “speak ill of our heroes” (149), heroes who, as Tholo stresses, “are sacrificing their lives to free you from bondage” (149). He is portrayed as being uninterested in politics, and of aspiring more to an affluent Western way of life than to the Black Consciousness ideology. Such a distancing technique mitigates the open resistance; it makes it less necessary for her to show the elder man respect. Hence, the first time Tlali allows her narrator to openly resist an established member of the black community, a representative of black African patriarchy; she downplays this resistance by deploying the strategies of whispering and distancing.
Second, and more importantly, Tholo’s resistance points to a way out of the double-bind of patriarchal expectations, a term used by Kelly Oliver, who recognises Kristeva’s argumentation that women are not necessarily caught in the hopeless situation of solely being represented by the oppressors, defined by the symbolic order dominated by men, but may, through their own agency, represent themselves.\textsuperscript{596} In other words, Tholo’s example emphasises a path of agency which leads out of the impasse of victimisation/sacrifice. Her resistance proves that she does not only have the choice of being either silent/passive/accepting or hysterical/suicidal, she can also use (or change) the tools of the symbolic order to resist oppression. In her retaliation, Tholo, gives vent to several grievances that black women in this context may harbour against patriarchal men: as we have seen she accuses Senatla of believing that he is God who can play around with women at whim (149), of unjustly demanding her infidelity (148), and of having denied his wife the opportunity to become self-reliant, “after the marriage you told [your wife] that her place was in the home and not outside” (148).

Finally, there is one point in “’Masechaba’s Erring ‘Child,’” where the gendered violence is overtly outlined as being sacrificial. First, the metaphor of the birds made of horn nailed to the table, mentioned above, may be read as pointing the reader in the direction of sacrifice. This metaphor suggests that, like Jesus nailed to the cross, sacrificed for the sake of humankind, Tholo’s well-being is sacrificed at the hands of Senatla in order to perpetuate the oppressive structure of patriarchy. Moreover, as the perspective switches from Tholo’s memories to the three women’s general discussion of these, tension slowly builds up, and we learn of Tholo’s experience of sexual harassment. Not only can the reader then imagine Senatla’s crime, but by now also understands ’Masechaba’s complicity. The pent-up tension seems to beg the question that Tholo, in the following, pivotal scene between the two perspectives, is simply dying to ask: who, in this set-up, has considered her integrity, her wishes? Here, for the first time in Tlali’s texts, sacrifice is mentioned directly. When ’Masechaba has admitted that she has known about her husband’s love for Tholo (151)—when this knowledge is brought home to Tholo—she suddenly feels “impatient to speak” (155), and the tension in the story underscores her impatience. Breaking into the argument between ’Masechaba and Lindi she says:

‘From what I gather, in this eagerness of yours to assist your husband, it would seem that you totally ignored the fact the I am a human being with feelings. All you wanted to do was to do everything in your power to get him what he wanted. Unfortunately this mere “object” which is to make your husband happy come what may, happened, in this case, to be me. I do not know what his other “friends” in whom he was interested from time to time

\textsuperscript{596} For a discussion on the double-bind see Kelly Oliver, \textit{Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-bind} (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993) 108-09.
would have felt like. Of course I would not speak for them. But for goodness’ sake, what about me? What was I to be in this case; a lamb to be sacrificed; a dumb thing? You never stopped to think about my feelings. You just thought that in my case, your husband would remain safely “near” you to maintain the image of a real husband and not leave you or drive you out of the house and deprive you of everything you had worked hard for. Did you ever consider that I might be having my own man whom I loved and wanted to stay faithful to? Even if that had not been the case, I might not necessarily have wanted to play second fiddle to you. Surely I have my own pride?’ (155-56)

Tholo’s impatience to speak is explained by her sudden realisation that both Senatla’s sexual harassment of her and ’Masechaba’s complicity have turned her into a mere object, “a dumb thing”—more precisely, into “a lamb to be sacrificed [my emphasis].” The sexual harassment is thus constructed as belonging to an almost ritualistic patriarchal practice where the well-being of women is disregarded in order to create social stability along patriarchal lines. The entertaining of multiple lovers is shown not to be based on a young woman’s choice and preference, on her jouissance, but on coercion, even violence, and a total disregard for these ‘lovers’’ own lives and aspirations, that is, a total disregard for their personhood; the subjecthood of men is based on the obsessive need to suppress women. In short, African patriarchy is revealed as being grounded on the sacrifice of women.

It has here been suggested that the switch of focus in the story from Tholo to ’Masechaba defers to the discursive restrictions in the context of writing. However, this switch, I suggest, also moves the focus from one type of sacrifice in the name of patriarchy to another: although ’Masechaba is complicit with the situation that sacrifices Tholo, she is also shown to be a victim of sacrifice herself. Gendered violence may not only be physical violence. In her term sacrificial economy Reineke also includes psychological violence, which she terms paralysis: “a way of life for so many women, radically occluding their agency.”597 ’Masechaba’s complicity may not be her choice but an effect of her lack of choice. As Tholo explicitly informs Senatla, “[’Masechaba ] told me sadly one day that she had always wanted to own a dress-making business one day. She said that when you got married to her you promised her that you would even assist her. But after the marriage you told her that her place was in the home and not outside” (148). The power of his patriarchal word, the symbolic order which he dominates, has confined her to the home—to looking after him. Further, ’Masechaba is not allowed such icons of independence as driving the car; she is not encouraged to read the newspapers and does not have a share in the money he makes from his property. And, as mentioned, he bribes her into accepting her lot by replenishing her stocks and buying her plenty of clothes, while the alternative for her, in this patriarchal social context, is to be left “eating grass” (154). To-

597 Reineke 3.
wards the end of their conversation Tholo remarks to 'Masechaba: “So Senatla was the kind of man who would enslave one woman in order to pamper another woman, as long as she is not his wife” (160). Here, she is referring explicitly to the sacrifice of 'Masechaba’s selfhood in order that the patriarch may continue satisfying his own whims: whether he chooses to just pamper a girl, or to rape her, thus (doubly) strengthening his ego.

Senatla’s semblance of security, his sense of a unified self, is based on the sacrifice of 'Masechaba. The reference to Senatla as a child evokes the picture of a person who needs to run to his mother for reassurance. Senatla in the face of threat to his person, either by apartheid or economic threat, the trope suggests, often experiences what Reineke calls boundary failure:

> Boundary failure ensues when subjects’ carefully crafted images fail, threatening to return the subjects to the inchoate chaos of their origins. All kinds of situations may precipitate boundary failure. Kristeva asserts that not only intimate and familial relationships may initiate this failure, as psychoanalysis regularly has observed, but global factors as well: economic and political disarray, cultural and social conflict also set the stage for boundary failure.598

Senatla’s chaos, in turn, may be avoided by suppressing his wife, which momentarily relieves the fear evoked by such a failure. Reineke writes that “[Kristeva discerns] that subjects regularly perceive their positions in the world as hard-won,” which one may argue that Senatla in this apartheid context surely has done, and, “when subjects feel threatened, they register along sexually differentiated lines their efforts to resecure their position.”599 Thus, death-work becomes sacrificial (and gendered) when it “leads humans to reenact the moments when the most archaic markers of identity are drawn at the somatic hinge of being,” producing a mimetic conflict in the sense that is recalls “clashes of a nascent subject who struggles for position in the world when the stakes are ‘me or mommy.’”600 Keeping his wife 'Masechaba in a dependent, submissive position Senatla assures himself that he always has “mommy” to run to. At the same time, this sacrifice of 'Masechaba’s own personhood, her paralysis, ensures his own sense of control, his own sense of wholeness in the face of chaos, which in turn secures patriarchy.

The story is organised dialogically around the continuing discussion between the three women; since Senatla is dead he has no say. In their discussion, the patriarchal structures represented by Senatla and 'Masechaba are pitted against the new ideas that belong to the political Black Consciousness platform represented by Tholo and Lindi. Tholo is even the girlfriend of one of the Black Consciousness leaders, which is suggested when Senatla is remembered as saying, “I know he is known to be some kind of a leader and

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598 Reineke 27
599 Reineke 20.
600 Reineke 27.
that many people admire him for what they say is ‘his courage as an organiser and fighter for rights,’” whereby Tholo replies: “He is a fighter for your liberation” (148). Thus, the demarcation between the two parties is clear. As we have seen, this narrative form is not new to Tlali, and it is a form that functions both to stage her political agenda and to negotiate the context.

The dialogic form ventilates both parties’ arguments and lets the reader draw his/her own conclusions. Hence, the discourse between the parties, perhaps in reverence of Senatla’s memory, is far from antagonistic. For example, when talking to ‘Masechaba, Tholo “resist[s] the urge to show her resentment” (145). Instead, the discussion is shown to be kept on a friendly note, each having their grievances to nurse, and each attempting to understand and to pity the other. The tone of the discourse quickens the parties’ knowledge of one another which in turn leads to an understanding between them. This women’s collective is thus shown to function therapeutically as a psychoanalytical ‘talking cure.’ In the conversation between the parties Tholo ‘remembers,’ and mentions how the rape-like incident has affected her; together the women manage to resolve their feelings of guilt and muster courage to get on with their lives. The narrative thus suggests that an awareness of the causes of the gendered violence, here the reproduction of patriarchy and the sacrificial nature of the violence, fosters the agency of those affected by it to resist such oppressive structures. “[A] space of agency,” Reineke writes, “freed of its conscription to sacrifice, could empower women to lift the weight of the sacrificial contract from their shoulders.”601 In this way, the sacrificial discourse Tlali develops both resists patriarchy and at the same time empowers men and women.

Dialogism highlights the different positions in a discourse. As we know, the main contention between the women is the fact that ‘Masechaba accepted her husband’s fancies, and was prepared to share her husband with Tholo and with other women. When the young girls realise the width of ‘Masechaba’s ‘generosity’ they show their feelings openly: “The two girls stared at ‘Masechaba, astounded by what she was saying. Lindiwe managed to find her breath to say something. She asked, ‘You really don’t mean that you would have been happy to have the two . . . well . . . get along together when you were fully aware of it and you would not care, do you?’”(151). Henceforth, it is Lindi who voices the girls’ shock and surprise, and who keeps the discussion going: “I’m really puzzled,” she says, “I would never just be satisfied to sit back and wait for a husband who is interested in going out with other women and leaving me at home all alone” (152). The contention between the parties, as well as the dialogic technique, may be illustrated by the ensuing discussion between Lindi and ‘Masechaba on the topic of men’s unfaithfulness:

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601 Reineke 48.
The trouble with these irresponsible single women is that they always want to take a man and keep him. That I cannot have. The man must always know that he must come back to me.’

‘Then you are just as good as his grandmother. Come back to you to do what, smile and ask you to wash his shirts and iron his trousers so that he is spic and span when he goes to the other women? That would be the day!’

‘Do you mean to tell me that you want to sit and fret, while some woman somewhere (who perhaps even knows you) is laughing privately and making a fool out of you while you talk and smile with her when she is “eating your heels” (“a u ja lirethe’)? I would rather know her, my dear sister.’

‘I would only want to tear her to pieces every time I met her. I would never stand the sight of her. The fact that a man leaves me with a fridge full of meat or not has nothing to do with our life as husband and wife. It is not the meat I married, but him.’

‘If you did not know what your husband is doing when he is not with you, you would always be insecure. You would imagine all sorts of things. I have seen men who are infatuated with other women leave their wives or drive them out when they did not even suspect that they were having affairs. What a nasty experience it is when you suddenly see your husband walk in one day all sulky and not smiling, telling you from nowhere, “Lindi, just pack your clothes and leave, I have found someone else”? I have actually seen women go crazy because of the shock of being driven out by husbands they never knew could look at another woman. Have you not met such women?’

‘Yes there are such cases I know, but still for all, a woman is also a person. She can refuse to go.’

‘How can she refuse when she is already mad and fit for Sterkfontein Mental Hospital? I don’t want to go about “eating grass” as we say. I must know what is happening. I knew and approved of Tholo, for instance, because I could see that she is a hard-working and serious young lady who was also proud of herself and not just one of these smiling snake man-snatchers. I do not want to lose everything I have slaved for in my house just because my husband is weak. Where should I go and look for another one? Most of them are like that anyway. (153-55)

The women address each other “dear sister,” and despite their opposing views they remain friends. The dialogic technique enhances the contentions without overly critiquing the ways of the older woman, and each contender is allowed sufficient space to speak her mind. Thus, the dialogue evokes the double-bind that suppresses ’Masechaba: Senatla has kept her ‘shackled’ in the home, and she has had to depend on his money in order to give her some kind of security in life. The discussion suggests too that men’s fickleness and infidelity are enough to drive a woman mad, which again points to the double-bind that secures ’Masechaba within her home: she is either paralysed (silent/passive/accepting) or becomes mad (hysterical/suicidal). The dialogic technique brings out these different standpoints, leaving the reader to judge. Part of Tlali’s agenda seems to be to fire the discussion and to keep it ablaze. However, as we have seen, she also points to a way out of the impasse.

If the dialogic discussion makes it possible for two opposite viewpoints to be explored, the ending nevertheless underscores the modern, egalitarian
standpoint embraced by the two young girls. Finally, 'Masechaba is shown to be 'punished' for having put her trust in the patriarchal tradition: in the end, the property that she believes to have inherited has been sold off and the money spent without her knowledge:

She felt helpless and without strength; too drained of all energy—like a weightless, tempest-torn being—hurled hither and thither by strong winds and violent waves in this life’s journey. She felt many more years older than her fifty. She was disillusioned and her spirits were broken. The truth stared at her in her face. The man she had trusted and worshipped had betrayed her. (161)

The narrative imparts that patriarchy, as it has developed, devastates women’s lives. On the other hand, the final note, as it highlights women’s agency, is also one of hope. Having admitted her betrayal 'Masechaba asks the girls whether they might arrange for her to learn to drive (161), thereby showing that she is far from being conquered. Driving, here, functions as a trope for an independent life where one is no longer carried around at the convenience of the “boss,” like an object, or “a parcel—removed from point A and delivered to point B” (158), but where one, resisting patriarchal norms, takes charge of one’s own life.

Finally, “'Masechaba’s Erring Child” suggests an additional way out of the South African impasse, a suggestion that takes a woman’s jouissance into account. The suggestion is only made in passing, and is so subtle that it needs to be somewhat unravelled. In the discussion on unfaithfulness between Lindi and 'Masechaba, Lindi, who is trying to understand her older friend’s behaviour, wonders if it may not be accounted for by a tradition practiced by the Southern Sotho. “Oh now I see,” she suddenly remarks, “It must be because you are a Southern Sotho. But most Basotho do not practise that tradition of accepting the husband’s (or the wife’s) lover any more” (152). It is here suggested that 'Masechaba’s generous attitude may be explained by the liberal Sesotho tradition, discussed in the introduction, where both husband and wife may have lovers. Lindi finds the older custom rather attractive: “Well, if the whole thing were to be fifty-fifty then perhaps one would tolerate it. If he can take a young woman and go out with her, then I must also be free to take a young man and do the same. That at least would be fair” (152). In answer to Lindi’s direct query as to whether Senatla allowed her any such freedom, 'Masechaba says, “[t]hat would have been the last thing even to think of,” since “these men of ours now” find such an arrangement “totally unacceptable” (152). Hence, the narrative concedes, traditions are undergoing change and patriarchal mores in the modern township are not what they used to be, at least among the traditional Basotho. 602 Nev-

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602 The Basotho are the people and their language is called Sesotho. There are Northern Sotho and Southern Sotho and consequently also northern Sesotho and southern Sesotho.
ermessell, there is a note of wistfulness for this deserted tradition. There was a time, it is suggested, when women had a wider range of freedom and were allowed to recognize their own desires. So, instead of cementing current practices, the text suggests, women could resist them by adopting the more traditional practice of having several lovers themselves.

In sum, this section has shown that "Masechaba’s Erring ‘Child’" negotiates the restrictive codes by means of whispering, distancing and a dialogic form, making it possible for Tlali to focus on the issue of sexual harassment in the black African community. As shown, here, black African patriarchy is unequivocally resisted. The core of this section examines the sacrificial aspect of the implied sexual harassment in the story. Power is seen to be asserted over Tholo’s body, to re-iterate Reineke’s words, “to effect order,” revealing patriarchy to be “a culture of violence” that “is most productively understood in terms of a sacrificial economy.” 'Masechaba is also shown to be the victim of such a sacrificial economy; Senatla personally benefits from keeping her in an inferior, restricted position, requiring the sacrifice of her selfhood to keep his own position within patriarchy unchallenged. Finally, the sacrificial discourse makes it possible for Tlali to demystify patriarchy and to break the stasis, showing that it can be mastered: Tholo’s resistance to her perpetrator, the women’s brave and sincere discussion about such sensitive topics, Lindi’s celebration of a woman’s jouissance, and 'Masechaba’s determination to become more independent—all point towards avenues of empowering women in the face of patriarchal oppression based on sacrifice.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to explore the sacrificial discourse of gendered violence that Miriam Tlali develops as a strategy of resistance to patriarchy in her short stories and novels that depict domestic abuse and sexual harassment. Drawing on a theoretical framework of sacrifice, which attempts to explain why societal violence is often gendered, I have tried to show that Tlali’s narratives inscribe sexual violence within an economy of sacrifice, even in multiple economies of sacrifice, such as those constituted by apartheid and patriarchy—Western as well as black African patriarchy. Parallel to Kristeva’s theory, Tlali’s narratives insist on an interconnectedness between the personal (psychoanalytical) level and the social (political) level, and attribute gendered violence to the individuation process.

In her writing, with one exception, Tlali depicts gendered violence within the African community which, historically, in the black literary tradition, is a
topic shown to be, above all, the domain of the woman writer. Examining first the stories that depict such intraracial domestic abuse, I attempt to show how a conciliatory attitude to the perpetrator in Tlali’s texts functions, not to excuse the perpetrator, but to induce an acceptance of the explanations of the men’s behaviour given in the texts, and to pave the readers’ way to an understanding of the gendered violence as sacrificial. The supplied reasons often foreground the threat that apartheid constituted to black men’s sense of subjectivity; the perpetrators are portrayed as being victimised and/or excluded from the hegemonic symbolic order. Under threat to their sense of selfhood, the discourse suggests, the men project their anguish onto their wives and are shown to resort to mimetic violence—ultimately to sacrifice. In the terminology of Kristeva, in order to attempt to gain access to the (hegemonic) symbolic order Tlali’s perpetrators of gendered violence project their feelings of abjection on women, who are taken to represent the semiotic sphere from where they may attempt to re-enact the thetic breach in order to re-establish a sense of subjectivity.

In “Detour into Detention,” “Fudu-u-a!” and “Devil at a Dead End,” the perpetrators of gendered violence are represented as ‘traitors’ to the cause, that is, they run the errands of the apartheid state. Considering the sensitive topic of sexual harassment, this technique of distancing, I find, negotiates the restrictive codes. At the same time it frames the violence towards women as sacrificial, functioning to uphold the status quo of apartheid. In “Devil at a Dead End,” the young girl is victimised to the point of becoming complicit with the system and sacrificing herself. Here, it is the victim of the gendered violence whose sense of self is shattered by the system with the result that she projects the violence onto her own body, i.e. she initially succumbs to the sexual harassment. In the end, though, her recourse to the symbolic sphere saves her from the impulse to sacrificial, mimetic violence.

In “Masechaba’s Erring ‘Child’” African patriarchy is shown to be based on the sacrificial crimes of rape and the oppression/subordination of women to men. The story takes the form of a dialogue between two distinct views on women’s roles in society, and the revelation of the patriarchal crimes are part of the ‘talking-cure’ of the narrative that functions to empower black women to resist patriarchy. What is more, the complicity of black women in actively upholding the patriarchal system is addressed—’Masechaba is shown to be both a culprit and a victim.

The conciliatory attitude to the rape perpetrators in the fiction explored here partly defers to the code of respect, but more importantly it contributes to empower both men and women to combat patriarchal practices; avoiding an accusatory voice the story frees both men and women to take accurate steps against gendered violence. Refraining from valorising women’s and men’s differences, Kristeva’s theory, Reineke writes, “can advance innovative signifying practices,” which are not “constrained by the gravitational forces of the sacrificial economy,” but instead “allow for the recognition of
difference—plural and multiform discourses—which the paternal order has not permitted.\textsuperscript{605} In other words, by developing a discourse on gendered violence which engages with the reasons behind this violence, Tlali resists patriarchal expectations and aims to empower both men and women for a different gender dispensation.

To defy the silence surrounding sex in patriarchal African society, and to enable a discourse on sexual violence that is placed within the black African community, Tlali initially deploys covert narrative strategies; only when dealing with a white perpetrator does she allow her discourse on gendered violence to become more overt. When addressing African patriarchy more directly, as Tlali does in “'Masechaba’s Erring ‘Child,'” whispering takes the form of subtle tropes that imply rape and evoke the aspect of sacrifice. Part of the whispering technique is here also the switch of focus from the perpetrator to the victim’s resistance and the complicity and victimisation of the culprit’s wife, which, it has been suggested, has three functions: it defers to the restrictive patriarchal codes, it highlights the sacrifice also of 'Masechaba, and, by juxtaposing her way of life to the young girl’s resistance to patriarchy it points to a way out of the sacrificial impasse. However, the discourse on gendered violence that reveals how South African patriarchies are based on the sacrifice of women (realised by means of these narrative techniques) may also be regarded as a narrative strategy of resistance to these patriarchies. Kristeva finds “no route for an immediate escape” from patriarchy but calls instead for “the subversion of the Symbolic order from within.”\textsuperscript{606} By foregrounding gendered violence and the sacrificial economy that reproduces patriarchal norms, I contend, Tlali’s texts similarly function to implode patriarchy from within.

\textsuperscript{605} Reineke 165.
\textsuperscript{606} Reineke 165.
Conclusion

At a time when black men and women needed to unite in their struggle against apartheid Miriam Tlali grappled with the dilemma of resisting patriarchy. In an interview with Rosemary Jolly she confesses that, while writing *Muriel at Metropolitan*, she

> did not want to overemphasize the problem between the men, African men and African women, because the success of the struggle [against apartheid] depended on how united we were against it. If I were to emphasize that—for me to bring some kind of trouble between men and women, as far as the struggle is concerned—it would be confusing, it would confuse the struggle.\(^607\)

First, apart from signalling the ‘problem’ of apartheid this quote also testifies to a problem between men and women. Second, the word “overemphasize” suggests that Tlali in fact does address patriarchal oppression, albeit in a subtle, unobtrusive way reminiscent of the ‘diplomatic’ technique she uses in her handling of her opposition to apartheid. As Tlali states, “[w]hen I wrote this one [*Muriel*], I decided to [critique apartheid] in a very diplomatic manner, and to hit at the same time, to cover up as I went along with it. Hitting while appearing not to do so. I tried to use a lot of that.”\(^608\) This thesis explores the techniques that Tlali devises to “hit” at, or to subvert, patriarchy, while sometimes “appearing not to do so.”

Although Tlali, in several works, especially in “Devil at a Dead End,” addresses the patriarchal base of apartheid, her opposition mainly targets black African patriarchy. Talking about her latest, as yet unpublished work (in 2001), seven years after the free elections in 1994, Tlali reports that she is currently developing that topic [domestic violence], taking into consideration the life of the African woman in the townships. The emphasis is no longer on apartheid or the struggle for independence but the emphasis is now on: what do we do now with our lives which have been so shattered by apartheid, by oppression and colonisation? What do we do, how do we go about to solve our problems? What happens inside the African homes? Now I am dealing with

\(^{607}\) Jolly 146.

\(^{608}\) Jolly 145.
the relationships between Africans themselves rather than with the fighting of the system.\footnote{Cullhed, interview I, 10.} However, as this thesis shows, Tlali’s writing has always dealt with issues related to the “Africans themselves” and to “the life of the African woman in the townships.”

In order to convey a subdued, but nevertheless poignant, critique of mainly African, but also Western patriarchal practices, Tlali deploys subtle narrative strategies, techniques shaped from elements that belong to both African and Western literary/cultural traditions. The dialogism in Amandla!, for example, although the term is Western, is not new to the African oral tradition of “internal responses,”\footnote{Hofmeyr 35.} whereas Tlali’s appropriation of the novel form in Muriel at Metropolitan may be regarded as influenced by Western practices. To articulate Tlali’s subversive strategies this thesis has made use of the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva. Bakhtin’s view that genres and discourses develop in reaction to the hegemonic symbolic sphere, and his exploration of the subversive techniques that thereby surface, have proved fruitful in the reading of Tlali’s texts. The strategy that emerges in Muriel at Metropolitan is best formulated, I find, through his theory of the novel, since it considers how the novel differs from the epic tradition—one mode of the black male tradition against which Muriel is set in relief. Kristeva’s psychoanalytical theories, on the other hand, are valuable for the discussion about how difference per se can be regarded as subversive, and her sacrificial theory has helped to clarify Tlali’s specific discourse on gendered violence. In line with these theorists’ shared view that novelty is introduced into language as a reaction to tradition, I identify two additional strategies that emerge in Tlali’s oeuvre, especially in her discourse on gendered violence, namely whispering and distancing. In the face of social discursive restrictions, these techniques help Tlali to develop what I have called a sacrificial discourse on gendered violence.

Within Tlali’s oeuvre the subversive narrative strategies vary over time and depend on the socio-political context, or the topic, being negotiated. At a time when African patriarchy had not begun to be questioned Muriel at Metropolitan (1975) defied patriarchal notions and carved out a space for a woman’s voice within a male arena. Also, its novelistic elements marked it as different from the contemporary male literary conventions. Thus, Muriel renewed the black African novel, which earlier had been either historical (epic in mode) or autobiographical. Applying Bakhtin’s theories about the emergence of the novel in Europe, my thesis attempts to show that the incorporation of several specific novelizing elements in Muriel, while forwarding the novel as an emergent black genre of fiction, are simultaneously instru-
mental in subtly critiquing African patriarchal mores and sexist conventions. The novel’s focus, for example, on contemporary issues, its emphasis on modernity, and its thematic questioning of nationalism create what Bakhtin calls a distance to the epic ‘absolute past,’ a distinguishing element of the novel as a genre, which, in this case, resists nationalism as a patriarchal ideal. Moreover, in *Muriel*, Tlali emphatically resists male conventions such as the Mother Africa trope.

On the other hand, *Amandla!* (1981), written ten years later, at a time when the quick spreading of Black Consciousness had promulgated new ideas about the role of women in society, negotiates highly contested ground. Reflecting this state of affairs, and in order to highlight patriarchal structures, Tlali again sets off her writing vis-à-vis black male writing: *Amandla!* pits a domestic discourse dominated by women against ‘male’ discourses represented by generic conventions such as the heroic tale, the action thriller, or male political rhetoric. My discussion of *Amandla!* focuses on these dialogically juxtaposed generic discourses—its *dialogism*—and teases out the subtext that emerges. Characterized by *double-voicedness* (another Bakhtinian term) the dialogue of discourses produces an ironic, subversive subtext that critiques male domination of the political arena, men’s lack of responsibility within the domestic sphere, and male writing’s gendered stereotypes. In addition, this intricate dialogue, in defiance of patriarchal expectations, celebrates a woman’s *jouissance* and her right to choose her own partner. But besides questioning patriarchy dialogically *Amandla!* also initiates a discussion on gendered violence within the black African community.

In her short fiction, “Detour into Detention” from *Mihloti* (1984), and in four stories from her collection *Footprints in the Quag* (1989), Tlali further addresses the sensitive subject of gendered violence. Broaching the topic, however, meant negotiating not only a discursive taboo on sexual matters in African culture, discussed in Chapter 3, but also, as discussed in the introduction, the code of respect that many black women were brought up with, known as *hlonipha*. The whispering technique, meaning that the issue of gendered violence is merely implied, and the distancing technique, which frames the issue, especially the issue of rape, as a marginal occurrence in society, make it easier to criticise the perpetrators without being unduly disrespectful of black men at large. Despite patriarchal restrictions, then, these techniques allow Tlali to develop a specific sacrificial discourse on gendered violence, explored in Chapter 3, which, in itself constitutes her most fundamental critique of patriarchy—both African patriarchy and the Western patriarchy that informed apartheid. In fact, Tlali is one of the first black writers in South Africa to address the question of intraracial rape, and to frame gendered violence as sacrificial.

611 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* 15.
Applying Julia Kristeva’s psychoanalytic theory, as explicated by Martha Reineke, I claim that Tlali’s narrators regard gendered violence as a result of a crisis of subjectivity that is resolved by way of ‘mimetic’ violence. The narrators’ conciliatory attitudes towards the perpetrators of gendered violence emphasise the effect that the apartheid regime has had on their self-esteem, or their sense of alienation in the hegemonic symbolic sphere. This attitude, I argue, does not excuse them, but instead invites the reader to understand the perpetrators’ violent behaviour and the tendency of gendered violence to preserve societal structures. The assaulted women are portrayed as sacrificial victims: the perpetrators sacrifice women’s well-being in order to experience relief from frustration or trauma with the effect of stabilising/perpetuating the apartheid regime as well as strengthening the patriarchal structures on which this regime relied. Tlali’s sacrificial discourse, I find, enhances the understanding of the social and psychological mechanisms that underlie gendered violence. Given that violence against women ultimately constitutes the basis of patriarchy, critically addressing these issues is to refuse victimisation and to resist patriarchy.

This study examines Tlali’s writing within the context of black African Anglophone writing. Historically, critics have tended to treat white and black writing separately, as, for example, J. M. Coetzee’s *White Writing* (1988) illustrates. Of course, for South African literature created after 1994 a division according to race is no longer valid. It is necessary, however, to consider the divided roots of South Africa’s literary heritage and the difficult conditions under which black writing was produced during the years of apartheid. In line with Coetzee’s claim that “[w]hite writing is white only insofar as it is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African,” I claim, it is necessary to discuss black literature from this period separately, insofar as it is “generated by the concerns of people” placed, by the regime, in a highly specific position. If critics deployed the same grid when examining South African literatures written by black and white writers working under such different conditions, and from such different cultural vantage points, then, this study shows, a significant part of the national heritage would risk being unfairly marginalized. It may be tempting for a Western reader to characterize *Muriel at Metropolitan*, for example, as a romantic, didactic novel, or to fault *Amandla!* for being unduly disrupted by fragments of different genres. If this writing instead is placed within a black tradition/context, the ironic intricacies and playfulness in Tlali’s texts, their intertextual references and the dialogue with black writing conventions, emerge. To discuss black African literature from the period of apartheid in a category of its own therefore makes it possible to uncover, for example,

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613 Coetzee 11.
Tlali’s subversive strategies created to negotiate not only an oppressive apartheid context, but also a highly restrictive African patriarchal context.

When examining writing produced in a different cultural sphere from one’s own there is always a danger of cultural bias. Scholars have not always approached Tlali’s writing with caution. Instead, as this study has demonstrated, they have at times overlooked traits perhaps borrowed from African traditions, or traits that may be accepted within the African context but are frowned upon in the Western one. For example, calling Tlali’s writing didactic, Cecily Lockett614 obscures the importance in black narrative of the writer as teacher and ignores the convention in the oral tradition of staging long dramatic dialogues where many aspects of a problem are ventilated and an “informed participation” by the audience where the norm is for the audience to be invited both to draw its own conclusions and to influence the outcome of the story.615 Thereby, Lockett overlooks Tlali’s dialogic technique. Another characteristic of the indigenous literary tradition that risks being bypassed is the eclecticism whereby a writer may show off his/her familiarity with several genres by incorporating them into his/her texts,616 sometimes ironically, such as, for instance, the four excised epigraphic verses in Muriel and the dialogism in Amandla! And lastly, since “one of the difficulties of appreciating African literature arises from the unfamiliarity [in the West] of much of its content or context,”617 as Ruth Finnegan writes, Western critics are likely to miss subtle intertextualities such as the one pertaining to Tlali’s suggested title “I Am … Nothing!”, discussed in Chapter 1. Of course, there are other such “subtle intertextualities” and more indigenous techniques that have escaped me. Therefore, I look forward to future studies on Tlali’s writings by scholars who share her cultural background.

South Africa, a nascent nation undergoing monumental change, has been and still is an extremely heterogeneous society. In 2003 Antjie Krog wrote: “We are a nation that consists of two genders, more than three colours, more than eight political groupings, fourteen ethnic groups, nine provinces, eleven languages, more than twenty cultural groupings, more than thirty different churches, and around forty-five million individuals, ranging from the dirt poor to the super rich.”618 To unite such diversity is, of course, an enormous challenge, which assumes that people are prepared to learn about one another’s cultures and to accept and respect one another’s differences. Also, Krog asks: “How on earth can we understand each other’s sexual codes in a country where people have lived apart for so long?”619 In order to exemplify how greatly sexual mores differ between cultures, she quotes from an infor-

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614 Lockett 277.
615 Hofmeyr 33-34.
616 See for example Newell, Ghanaian Popular Fiction.
619 Krog, A Change of Tongue 196.
mal discussion in the new millennium at a workshop on sexual codes. One black participant says: “If a black man does not have sex every day, his heart and kidneys become weak, his legs lose their power, his shadow disappears. That is why we need more than one woman. In the olden days, we had several wives to fulfil the quota, so we were faithful and prosperous.”620 This quote illustrates first, that, at least for men, it is now easier to talk openly about sex than 20-25 years ago when Tlali wrote the main body of her texts; second, that African patriarchal mores still have strong adherents. In the 1980s, Tlali, as we have seen, despite anticipated rejection, defied the discursive taboo on broaching the sensitive topic of gendered violence; now, in the African cultural sphere it is slowly becoming more accepted to talk openly about sex and gendered violence. Nevertheless, at this stage in South African history, underpinned by a lack of education, a lingering silence surrounding sexual matters, and stubborn patriarchal mores, HIV/Aids is spreading at disastrous speed. Therefore, the questioning of South African patriarchies and the discussion on gendered violence that Tlali initiated, and an understanding of gendered violence as sacrificial violence, which she propagated, is more important than ever.

620 Krog, A Change of Tongue 198.
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