

**Spectres of Sycorax: Spectral Orality and the Black Female Presence in the Figurings of Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona**

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## **DECLARATION**

I declare that “Spectres of Sycorax: Spectral Orality and the Black Female Presence in the Figurings of Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona” is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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## Abstract

The demands of modernity and globalisation present print culture as dominant in such a way that oral tradition is forced into a shadowy position, because the latter tradition cannot be exploited entirely for profit. Dominant scholarship on oral studies therefore positions orality in the background of writing, so as to suggest that it is a past tradition of, and serves as a reservoir for, written literature. However, such approaches reveal theoretical gaps, highlighted, as will be shown in the thesis, by the effaced position of the black woman as storyteller. Orality, in this light, becomes the spectre which haunts the writing of most African writers, in the same way that the black woman haunts man-centred nationalism. Such spectrality is precisely one which is embodied, if not exemplified, by the black woman in nationalist discourse and in society in general. I begin by examining the representation of an archetypal black woman, namely, Sycorax, in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Even though Shakespeare is quite ambiguous about her racial identity, I interpret Sycorax – whose story is told by male characters – as a black woman. I then also consider Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*, a postcolonial rewriting of Shakespeare's play, and interrogate the ways in which discourses on nationalism, such as Negritude, can plunge the black female presence into effacement. I seek to establish that Sycorax's present absence in the play allegorises the place of orality in black writing. I propose that the denigration of oral culture equates with the suppression of the authorial role of women as storytellers. From Sycorax, as a symbolic figure, I move on to political and literary "Sycoraxes", namely, Winnie Madikizela Mandela and Sindiwe Magona. I argue that while Winnie Mandela's role as the Mother of Nation – a storyteller in her own right – gets hidden in Nelson Mandela's shadow, Sindiwe Magona is reduced to a pariah figure by her community, while her narratives get forced into the shadow of the black literary canon.

**Keywords:** Sycorax; Spectrality; Negritude, Orality; Winnie Madikizela-Mandela; Sindiwe Magona; Representation; Biography; Female Subjectivity; Autobiography

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## Introduction

*Perhaps the best way of encapsulating the gist of an epoch is to focus not on the explicit features that define its social and ideological edifices but on the disavowed ghosts that haunt it, dwelling in the mysterious region of non-existent entities which none the less persist, continue to exert their efficacy (Žižek 3).*

The thesis considers the work and representation of two important female figures, Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona, by looking at various writings such as auto/biography, novels and media reports. I seek to examine the ways in which these two women feature and illustrate the obliteration of Sycorax in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. The representation of Sycorax as a witch in the play, who is not indeed present in the play but is only talked about by mostly male characters, announces her present absence. This sense of spectrality in her figuring signals the social position of black woman, in general, and Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona, in particular. South Africa's transition to democracy was not only marked by the release and presidency of Nelson Mandela. It was marked also by the presence of Winnie Mandela who, together with her husband, represented the "power couple" at the head of the new nation. But the transition to democracy also had a downside, allegorically represented by the separation of Winnie Mandela from her husband. The nationalist movement ushered the country, through negotiations led by mostly men, across the colour bar into a democratic dispensation with the face of Nelson Mandela as the "Father of the Nation", while Winnie Mandela, as a dominant voice of the banned ANC and "Mother of the Nation", was seemingly forced to retreat and allow men to spearhead the nationalist discourse. In the background of this situation were allegations of kidnappings, murder, and marital separation from her husband, which contributed to her demonisation. The male-dominant discourse of the period in question, which constructed Winnie Mandela as its spectre, can, then be read as a metonym for the woman's authorial role as storyteller.

Moreover, the way in which nationalist discourse imagines the nation as an extension of the African traditionalist household, forces black women to disappear to a shadowy position. Similar workings are almost already in motion in cultural spaces which are instantiated by Sindiwe Magona as a pariah figure of the Xhosa community. If Winnie Mandela faces effacement for being a militant mother as a woman-activist, then Sindiwe Magona suffers the same fate for being an educated single mother and writer in a literary space dominated by men. It is precisely the shared motherhood and disfigurement they face in male-centred nationalism and African traditionalist society, respectively, which is mirrored in the figure of Sycorax.

As the woman figure who is excluded in the list of characters in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* but is talked about by other characters, Sycorax exemplifies a spectre in the discourse of the play. *The Tempest* stages a story of an island invaded by Italian noble families in the era of early European modernity. Prospero, the Duke of Naples, is overthrown by his brother who tries to have him killed; however, the person who is supposed to kill Prospero pities him and allows him and his daughter, Miranda, to flee. We learn from Prospero's perspective that he finds on the island an aging "witch" named Sycorax, her captive, Ariel, a sprite, and her son, Caliban. When Sycorax dies, as the narrative suggests, Prospero rescues Ariel and enslaves the heir Caliban, trapping him on the island. What then ensues is the conflict between the usurper of the island and its inheritor. Their contestation over the ownership of the island in their exchanges extends to issues of representation that cast Caliban as the devil incarnate and his mother as a witch who was banned in Algiers. While Caliban is able to challenge Prospero's version of the history of the island and the representation of its inhabitants, Sycorax, the original inhabitant of the island, is discursively alienated in the discourse.

A marginalised spectre, Sycorax, haunts the play by uncannily creeping into the dialogue of the characters despite themselves. It is difficult for Prospero not to refer to the

woman who is the ruler of the island and mother to Caliban in historical accounts of the island, and it is virtually impossible for Caliban not to reminisce about his mother. Sycorax is the figure who marks the present absence, or is the spectre, that disrupts male dialogue. The Ghanaian feminist scholar, Abena Busia, provides a postcolonial reading of *The Tempest* which examines the silence and absence of Sycorax. She argues that:

She is actually constructed as being essentially absent from any locus of dramatic action or power. It is true that Sycorax is invoked quite insistently throughout the play, but only as the disembodied symbol of the men's most terrible fears. She is invoked only to be spoken of as absent, recalled as a reminder of the dispossession, and not permitted her version of the story. (86)

In any case, the predominantly male dialogue in *The Tempest* mirrors the very workings of African nationalism in which the absent woman stands for a threat that must be kept at bay. Prospero begins by polarising his wizardry with her magic which, he convinces himself and others, is the evil counterpart to his benevolent practice. His representation of the island and its inhabitants is not contested; as much as Caliban can attempt to challenge him, his contestation is limited because he uses Prospero's language of oppression that carries prejudice and racism against him. While Caliban can at least speak back, Sycorax is completely muted and effaced. It is precisely such functions of disfigurement – though she haunts male dialogue and occurrences on the island – that this study examines. Her position does not only equate to that of orality in the face of the capitalist print culture but also to the space of political and literary Sycoraxes such as Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona, respectively.

The Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, in the epigraph, relates the way in which the “ghosts of the past” (3) cannot be entirely suppressed, because they almost always have a way of haunting the present and, most significantly, the presiding ideology. Žižek brings up the figure



of the ghost in a consideration of the relationship of Judaism to Christianity. Žižek advises that it is precisely the dominant discourse which denies the existence (of the “ghosts of the past”), which, in turn, haunts the very same ideology that has pushed the previous dispensation to spectrality. Žižek’s ideas are only relevant here to aid my understanding of the power of the spectre. The epigraph to this chapter evokes one of the functions of deconstruction in inviting us critically to engage in not only the dominant discourse but also in what it conceals or buries in the process of constructing itself. For the purpose of this study, nationalism, as a discourse which positions men at its epicentre while it simultaneously jettisons women figures to the margins, renders black woman a spectre. In this study I contend that the spectre that haunts the imaginative island in *The Tempest*, multiplies outside literature and finds expression in the form of black woman, a figure whose irrepressible power haunts the social and ideological edifices of African nationalism and the racialised and masculinised South African literary canon. I argue then, that Aimé Césaire’s postcolonial adaptation of Shakespeare’s play, in a fashion typical of African nationalism, subordinates the female and thereby presents the woman figure as spectral.

Spectres of Sycorax, then, as alluded to in the title of this thesis, refers to the indomitable spirit of Sycorax, whose present absence signals her systematic effacement in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. I argue that the spirit of this resilient character in a play, which has been reinterpreted in many different ways in postcolonial contexts, is embodied by the spectral presence of Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona, in South African political and literary spaces, respectively. I seek to explore the figurings of these real life women in various literary genres from auto/biography to fiction. I specifically look at Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Césaire’s *A Tempest*, Anné Mariè du Preez Bezdrob’s biography *Winnie Mandela: A Life*, Antjie Krog’s chapter, “Mother Faces the Nation” in *Country of My Skull*, Njabulo S. Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, and Sindiwe Magona’s *To My Children’s Children* and

selected short fiction. I choose these particular texts because they are published post-1994 and, as different genres, offer more complex depictions of Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona than other existing texts on these iconic figures.

I argue further that the effacement of Sycorax in Shakespeare's play, and in the many postcolonial adaptations of it, functions metonymically as the effacement, not only of women, but also of orality in print culture. The "present absence" of orality in turn suggests the "present absence" of black women in postcolonial African contexts, through the specific study of the effacement of Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona in South African politics and literature.

Karl Marx, whose materialist theory has shaped anti-colonial struggles throughout the postcolonial world, refers to the "spectre of communism" in *The Communist Manifesto* (1888) as the force and power of the working class to overthrow the ruling class. By this expression, Marx alludes to the rise of the socialist republics to replace the bourgeois or capitalist states, since the latter were responsible for alienating and disenfranchising the proletariat as a class. Marx's spectre may be contrasted with the spectre of the black woman as she rises and haunts the racist, capitalist and patriarchal systems that seek to denigrate and repress her.

In this light, women like Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona, can be seen to embody the spirit of Sycorax. In the play, it is male characters who speak about her. She cannot provide a counter narrative, as she has been marginalised through both her death and her banishment from society. This is precisely what enacts her visible invisibility in the play: she signifies the spirit of irrepressibility that haunts the island and the imperialist and patriarchal order embodied by Prospero, and, finally, the nationalist aspirations of her son, Caliban.

In the fashion of a spectre, Sycorax collapses the dichotomy between past/present, death/life and presence/absence in unimaginable ways. Her exclusion in the *dramatis personae* and in the dialogue is undermined by the uncanny inclusion of her name in the dialogue of

others. Although she is represented as dead in Prospero's uncontested history about the island, she keeps returning like a spectre haunting the speech of male characters – as they seek to masculinise the history of the island. On the one hand, Prospero appears to fashion himself as a bearer of the early modernity of Europe through possession of books of liberal arts, thereby positioning himself in opposition to orality (signalled by the absence of books prior to his arrival). On the other hand, Sycorax seems to stand for the position of orality, one that has a spectral existence in the face of print culture. Therefore, the epistemic violence suffered by Sycorax equates with the fate of orality in the same way as it suggests the space of black women in society.

However, Sycorax's death paradoxically becomes that which returns to haunt Shakespeare's text. In *Specters of Marx* (1994), the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, is of the view that in the wake of the collapse of the Berlin Wall, communism (with Marx and Marxism) was thought to be dead to give way to globalisation and the free market as the dominant discourses. According to Derrida, this was not necessarily the case because Marxism itself could not be entirely repressed. Instead, it always returned like a spectre to haunt the dominant ideologies which sought to efface it, because "a spectre is always a revenant" and "one cannot control its comings and goings" since "it begins by coming back" (Derrida 11). In this case, a spectre is the uncanny return of a thing or person who is thought to be dead and thereby defies the dialectics of life/death and orality/writing. Sycorax's spectral presence, in the play, signals a form of transcendence of the dualism of orality and writing. It is a kind of transcendence which collapses the easy binary oppositions of absence and presence, and life and death, and which is amenable to the way in which the spectral presence of the woman figure refutes male-centred nationalism. Therefore, the ways in which the figure of Winnie Mandela subverts the masculinist nationalist discourse are similar to Sindiwe Magona's effect on the trajectory of black South African literature.

In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida argues that liberal celebration of the collapse of the Soviet Union becomes a dominant discourse in itself; one, however, which does not necessarily spell the death of Marxism. In refuting the perceived death of Marxism and alluding to Francis Fukuyama's "End of History", Derrida suggests that the title, "end of", also indicates the "beginning of" history and vice versa. The need for the killing of Chris Hani, as a communist in South Africa, is, for example, symbolic of the un-death of communism despite the dominance of liberal discourses of the free market and globalisation. Furthermore Marxism, through various interpretations over time, has multiplied into the "spectres of Marx", the originator of the inheritance. Derrida himself performs this fact through his writing, which shows that Marx returns to haunt the dominant discourse on free markets and globalisation. While in Marx's context, the spectre of communism connotes the proletarian movement to overthrow the capitalist system, the spectre in Derrida implies critical theory, as an inheritance from Marx, to critique oppressive ideologies.

Although Derrida's theorisation of the spectre is in the context of the assumed death of Marxism, the idea of the spectre does not only indicate the impossible possibility of the death as such, but it also signals the way in which deconstruction is already at work. If deconstruction is that which undermines structure by challenging binary oppositions, then spectrality functions in a deconstructionist spirit in collapsing linear divisions. Derrida puts it thus:

one must assume the inheritance of Marxism, assume its most "living" part, which is to say, paradoxically, that which continues to put back on the drawing board the question of life, spirit, or the spectral, of life-death beyond the opposition between life and death. This inheritance must be reaffirmed by transforming it as radically as will be necessary.

(67)

Derrida suggests that the legacy of Marx as our inheritance, is undecidedness, and a lack of fixity, in the face of the spectrality of discourse, even a discourse such as Marxism itself. In other words, the spectre of Marx, or Marxism, is that which lacks fixed meaning and interpretation; hence it requires a rather open-ended approach as a theory that seeks to revolutionise society. This is of course Derrida at his best, in rhyming with Marx for believing in critical inquiry and openended interpretation. In the cited passage he indicates that the legacy of Marxism undermines time as age or period in the same way history disrupts the dichotomy of the origin and the end. It follows that “critical analysis”, as our inheritance, should move beyond such binary oppositions in the fashion of the spectre. For Derrida, what makes us “heirs of Marxism” (67) is “critical analysis” (68), an inheritance not accorded but sought after; hence such inheritance always already plunges inheritors into mourning, and one that is “for what is called Marxism”. Put differently; the spirit of Marx and/or Marxism does not necessarily recur in communist formations per se, but is expressed in different forms of interpretation. Therefore, such a spirit of critical analysis still finds expression, albeit mostly in academia.

Derrida argues further that “the spectre is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some ‘thing’ that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other” (5). In this thesis I will argue that Winnie Mandela occupies such a “spectral” position, in that she haunts the African nationalism that centres her male contemporaries, while erasing her as a political player. A spectre is that which announces certain uncertainty even though its “there-ness” as a phenomenon cannot be doubted, due to its “tangible intangibility of a proper body without flesh” (6). Sindiwe Magona’s life, too, instantiates precisely this certain uncertainty as a pariah figure, *idikazi*, a single mother, in Xhosa society. I will suggest that, despite her considerable literary and educational achievements, Magona has never received the kind of recognition she deserves, but has been regarded as a cultural outsider who falls outside the South African

literary canon; in turn, she haunts the Xhosa society and the literary canon through her life and literary achievements.

The spectre challenges the very existence of the European Enlightenment figure, which is founded on the notion that the human subject is a centre of knowledge. Rationality demands both comprehension, through language, and the mastery of nature, which is achieved through hierarchical dichotomies such as man/woman, reason/emotion, and body/soul thereby privileging one over another. Moreover, the Enlightenment project “never succeeds entirely in exorcising its own ghosts. Instead of saying that there is an outside of reason which has been neglected, perhaps we need to inspect the inside of reason and see how it too is haunted by what it excludes” (Buse cited in Chen 249). This suggests that metanarratives or dominant discourses are premised on exclusion, thereby rendering themselves normal in opposition to what is thought of as difference. For this reason they are haunted by those histories from below and those who are forced into shadowy positions by the dominant discourse. For instance, if capital is built on the shoulders of labour but seeks to exclude those who are its very foundation, then racism and patriarchy gain currency by effacing that which gives it meaning. Thus, the spectrality of all that is suppressed and forced into absence returns to collapse the purportedly clinical binaries of reason/unreason, life/death and presence/absence. The Chinese literary critic, Jianguo Chen, in his study on contemporary Chinese fiction, argues that “[t]o haunt is to bring back the dead to speak what cannot be spoken and to make visible what remains in shadow” (247). I will argue that Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona can be regarded as political and literary Sycoraxes, respectively, in the ways in which they haunt the predominantly male political and literary spaces of post-Apartheid South Africa.

Examining Chinese contemporary literature in the new millennium, Chen comments on the increase of ghosts, showing how these writers grapple, in different ways, with what he calls “spectral imagination” (233). For Chen, to write about ghosts is a result of the social changes,

modernisation and globalisation that China has been facing. This spectral imagination relates to the growing sense of Chinese cultural nationalism, and shows an effort by Chinese contemporary writers of fiction “to cross over between the real and unreal; or to create a spectral romance so as to draw attention to women's social/cultural invisibility” (234). If the spectre is that which not only seeks to destabilise and disrupt the seemingly irreconcilable divisions or binaries, then Chen’s ideas on spectral imagination supports my contention that the black woman instantiates the power to haunt oppressive systems that seek to efface her. In the South African context, Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona seem to be irrepressible because their spectral presence collapses the dichotomy of presence and absence.

The phantasm, then, is that which seeks to overturn our notions about society, particularly the ways in which our notions of epistemology and ontology are based on binary oppositions which limit our very own understanding about society, humans and things. He clarifies thus:

phantasm is understood as a discourse of the ghostly and the spectral that not only relates to phantasmal occurrences (as viewed traditionally in an ontological sense: “what is the ghost like? Is it real?”), but more significantly implies an epistemological interest in own existence, that is, how presence/absence/or non-presence/non-absence function as its ontological being. (236)

Clearly, the phantasm has the potential to account not only for the existential questions but also for the ways in which knowledge of the self can be posed anew, and outside dichotomies. What is then apparent in Chen’s reading of the phantasm is that the uncertainty of the spectral whose “there-ness” and being cannot be doubted. If the phantasm is a “situation in which the subject dissolves itself, or better yet, in which subject takes a subjectless ‘presence’ where the division of subject and object is erased” (238), then the spectre is that which foregrounds a kind of

critical inquiry which does not bring an end to inquiry itself. In other words, the phenomenon of the spectre captivates and holds power in itself through haunting not only the rational subject but also its own suppression. The present absence of the Sycorax figure, then, triggers a critical analysis of the space of the black woman in society. Therefore, the spectre is an enactment of that which is perceived as dead or erased but comes back, haunting the system which effects such effacements. If capitalism is haunted by the spectre of communism in a way that it gives rise to a revolt of the oppressed class by such a system, through socialist movements, patriarchy also self-destructs with its excess of power over women thereby giving rise to feminism. Therefore, the establishment of Soviet socialist republics is a sign of resistance to capital in the same way that feminism is a resistance to patriarchy in the mid-twentieth century and beyond.

In an overview of African feminisms, Susan Arndt holds that “motherism” is theorised as a form of African feminism. The space of the black woman, then, or woman as mother, is more telling in the construction of the nation. She describes three categories of African feminist literature: reform, transformation and radical (31). Arndt is of the view that reformist feminism seeks to find a common ground with patriarchy, while in a transformative approach “men are criticised much more sharply and more complexly” (33). Radical African-feminist literature, on the other hand, sets itself aside by dealing with the ways in which men “discriminate against women” and thereby use “tragedy and violence” (34). Such texts are unapologetic about the woman’s role and identity as mothers. In fact, African mothering, in African feminist literature comes out strongly and forms part of the broader theorising of motherism. It is precisely this aspect that sets African women’s writing apart from their male counterparts, because the former almost always builds its narratives towards nationalism.

Nationalism has presented itself as that which has masculinity at the centre of its imaginings, because it tends to centralise men in its discourse. Benedict Anderson asserts that “nationalism typically was found in popular movements against emperors, monarchs, and



aristocracies, and that nationalists in different regions regarded themselves as ‘brothers’ in a common struggle” (109). Although Anderson traces the origins of nationalism generally here, a pointer to its masculine lexicon is evident in the foregrounding of “brothers”. The “dark side” of nationalism, for Anderson, almost always presents itself in the ways in which “modern nations” themselves “are divided along the lines of class, religious affinity, ethnicity, gender, ideology and generation” (109). In the context of South Africa, then, the “dark side” of nationalism appears in the form of racial polarisation and gender. Of course this is not to say these features find expression in South Africa exclusively, because other African countries, too, bring their traditional patriarchy into the nationalist discourse. However, nationalist discourse in Africa has been diagnosed as that which is ambivalent in nature, due to the ways it is unambiguously male-centred, while its imaginings circle around the metaphor of the mother figure.

Nationalism in Africa came as a response to colonialism and that its protagonists were male and from the educated class of the indigenes. Colonialists and African households privileged men over women thereby believing that women would not make much of education since they get married into other families, whilst the man must be a provider for his parents and his wife’s children. At the same time men, who were the vanguard of the nationalist discourse in the fight against foreign rule, also expressed allegiance to the mother figure to the extent of referring to the continent as “Mother Africa”, a concept identified and discussed first by Florence Stratton. Elleke Boehmer, in her study on gender and postcolonial nation, is of the view that nationalism, as it appears in African literature written by men, can be understood through the “historical development of power defined by sexual difference” (22). She suggests that it is virtually impossible for a “modern nation” to elucidate itself without plunging into gender distinctions, perhaps, because nationalism as such gains currency through the patriarchal order. “[T]he postcolonial nation is historically a male-constructed space, narrated

into modern self-consciousness by male leaders, activists and writers, in which women are more often than not cast as symbols or totems, as the bearers of tradition,” (22) writes Boehmer. Such imaginings are dangerous because they seem or pretend to place the woman/mother figure on the pedestal of society. However, this seductive rhetoric never seeks to liberate or transform the social standing of black woman but silences her further thereby disfiguring her through a veil of symbols and metaphors. Boehmer goes so far as to argue that:

The image of the mother invites connotations of origins – births, hearth, home, roots, the umbilical cord – and rests upon the frequent and some might say ‘natural’ identification of the mother with the beloved earth, the national territory and the first-spoken language, the national tongue. (27)

In this case, nationalist discourse tends to romanticise the mother figure through images that connote the spirit of the place and all that is homely. The problem is within language since it informs oppressive practices such as the barring of women from the public sphere and partakes in the nationalist discourse along with men. Instead, one notices that the only entrance of women into the discourse of nationalism is by being reduced, as though cut to size, to be that which stands in for something else rather than herself; hence the allusions to domestication and domesticity so as to confine her to such spaces.

The struggle against colonialism – as liberationists seek independence – never extends to fight gender oppression or recognise that women have a stake in nationalist discourse. Instead, it forces the woman/mother to a spectral existence because while she is also a protagonist in the liberation struggle, she is systematically erased in the very same history of the struggle. The moment nationalist discourse advances, the woman is set up to fade into spectrality or in the crossfire of war between African and European men. Through reading Sol Plaatje’s writings, Laura Chrisman explores the complex ways in which he represents black

women's resistance to pass laws and the notions of fatherhood in relation to the ANC's ways of imagining nationalism. She is of the view that Plaatje offers a critique of "the constitutionalist liberalism of the early ANC" and that his work presents itself as that which "articulates a pro-feminism which complicates and extends his conventional vision of South African liberation" (57). The dominant feature in African nationalism, as detected through examples of Plaatje's narratives, is the familial language such as "the dead child" and "fathering the child", metaphors which connote both "the death of the 'nation' through land dispossession and deprivation of African's voting rights, and the "social and cultural impossibility of that nation" (59). Such excess of masculine-based language alludes to the fact that nationalism renders the presence of women spectral, and, for Chrisman, Plaatje seems to be aware of such shortcomings in the ANC's nationalist discourse, because the son of the nation is that specific gender which will father the nation. This would mean that Plaatje is an exceptional case among his contemporaries. The argument follows that Plaatje's representation of women, in the pass laws resistance, as "signifiers of a modern political radicalism which runs counter to those ANC modes" (63). This suggests that nationalism systematically denies and suppresses the militancy of women in the process to construct itself as sacred space for masculine power. It is precisely such repressive mechanisms, ostensibly evident in nationalism that forces black women, like Winnie Mandela, to a spectral presence in the history and the imaginings of the nation.

Natasha Erlank, in offering a historical overview of notions of gender masculinity in the first half of the South African twentieth century, explores the ways in which African nationalist discourse was also situated, in complicated ways, in the notions of adulthood and manhood. She asserts that "[m]asculine interest in the public sphere arose largely because the British stress on masculinity as politically mature adulthood and emphasizing the political responsibilities of men resonated with traditionalist African perceptions of adulthood. As a

result, the loss of the vote was a source of great concern to African men” (654). For Erlank, the historiography on African nationalism tends to focus on male political activity in spite of the existing work of “feminist research and theory” (654). “Women’s exclusion from the ANC is explained as a result of the dominant gender ideology of the period, originating from a model of domestic relations adopted by the emergent African elite at the end of the nineteenth century, rather than conscious political action”, writes Erlank (655). However, the character of the ANC at the time was elitist and it reflected the social climate enabled by liberalism, if not capitalism, as a by-product of colonisation. Therefore, Erlank’s contention is not without a tinge of exaggeration; it is rather the political lacuna, if not miscalculation, on the part of the ANC because it not only deprived middle class women but also the popular classes, since it was not necessarily mass based.

What is also intriguing is Erlank’s citation of the president of the ANC, Dr. A.B. Xuma, on Charlotte Maxeke which further illuminates the perceptions of African nationalists about their women counterparts. Xuma described her as ““a woman of refinement, culture and education; a devoted wife, a loving mother, a fine judge of human nature, a sympathetic healer and alleviator of human misery”” (Erlank 659). Erlank points out Xuma’s silence about Maxeke’s contribution and involvement in the liberation struggle which suggests that women’s entry into political life, any at all, is premised on motherhood rather than as contemporaries or fellow protagonists themselves. Similarly, Winnie Mandela is labelled as the ‘Mother of the Nation’ on the basis of her marriage to Nelson Mandela, the Father of the Nation, instead of as a revolutionary. This seems to deny her role and erase her from the pages of history of the liberation struggle. However, her undeniable presence then enacts her spectrality, if not the Derridean hauntological effect. Erlank writes, “Black nationalist activity, therefore, was not only premised on the exclusion of women for its own legitimation” (668). This suggests that nationalism as such depends on the perceived inferior Other in order for it to gain any sense of

currency. This is reminiscent of the Hegelian dialectic where the master's sovereignty and power is dependent on, or derives from, the slave in the same way that racism needs an Other to be legitimate.

Drawing from two prominent postcolonial thinkers', Frantz Fanon's and Homi K. Bhabha's, instantiations of the complexities of postcolonial subjectivity, Clare Counihan provides a psychoanalytical reading of the woman figure in African literature - *Things Fall Apart* and *Nervous Conditions*, in particular. She argues that "postcolonial theory translates sexual difference into racial difference (the mode) without ever acknowledging the change. This writing of sexual into racial difference, however, introduces a ghost into postcolonial theory: the figure of woman, in her oscillating presence and absence, functions within postcolonial theories of difference as the moment at which these translations become visible and haunting" (162). The spectral machinations of this "ghost" in African nationalism, and in the South African literary canon, in particular, are difficult to overlook. More often than not, the effacement of the black woman gets juxtaposed with the construction of "the son of the soil" who ultimately becomes "the father of nation". Counihan's belief holds that "[A]lthough postcolonial studies does have a model of gender analysis that draws heavily on feminist methodologies, reading for the ghost of woman would draw attention to the functions of her absences and presences" (Counihan 163). The kind of reading, then, that Counihan suggests may be that of deconstructing hegemonic discourses like nationalism which find themselves in African literature and postcolonial theory, in her case. Perhaps, it is a kind of reading that seeks to launch a critical inquiry on the forced effaced positionality of woman, one that is spectral and instantiated by the figure of Winnie Mandela.

Spectral orality, in this instance, refers to the way in which the position of orality is characterised by its ghostly presence in the face of print culture and how this can be instantiated by the presence of the political and literary Sycoraxes: Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona,

respectively. In more pointed ways, spectral orality is evident in Magona's *To My Children's Children* where she incorporates oral poetics for ideological reasons thereby collapsing the binary opposition of orality and writing. The features of orality – such as the appropriation of a Xhosa grandmother's role in storytelling, proverbs, songs and the deliberate usage of Xhosa language – are quite strong in her autobiography. However, such oral poetics are still rendered in writing, and the paradox as such announces not only the presence of absence, but it also signals the way in which the oral culture continues to haunt the text and the demands of colonial modernity and the latter's privilege of writing over orality. In the narrative, Magona nostalgically reflects on the apparently lost tradition, if not culture, threatening to fade away. By so doing, she seeks to revive a culture suppressed by colonialism. She seems to suggest that the effacement of oral tradition does not necessarily succeed, hence its spectral presence in her kind of storytelling. It is precisely its spectrality from which the power of orality emanates. Therefore, to say that orality is spectral in Magona's autobiography is to demonstrate the inadequacy of the progressivist approach in the debate of the relation of orality and writing.

Sycorax is a symbol of the effacement, absence or spectrality of women in patriarchal culture, generally, and in postcolonial nationalist culture, in particular. Sycorax is also a symbol of the complexity of the death of orality by modern colonial-capitalist print culture and its haunting by orality is similar to the effacement of women in patriarchal and nationalist culture. These ideas may be explored through two case studies, namely, the political representation of Winnie Mandela, and the literary positioning of Sindiwe Magona.

The seminal work of scholars like Walter J. Ong problematises the valorisation of writing over orality by suggesting that the latter is that which supplements writing. Ong argues that “[w]riting can never dispense with orality”, because “[o]ral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality” (8). He is of the view that writing is never created *ex nihilo* but it is also indebted to orality. If “oral dialects”

continue “to live and exist despite writing’s ability to expand the boundaries of language” (8), then it is not presumptuous to discern that orality precedes and exceeds writing because it appears to be able to preside, reside outside and inside writing and thereby rendering the latter a haunted house. Even though Ong’s is a progressivist approach whose polarisation simplifies the relationship of orality and writing, it gestures to the inseparable nature of orality and writing. Similarly, Harold Scheub emphasises the “unbroken continuity” (1) of oral tradition as that which manifests in literary tradition by traces of African tales, myths, riddles, proverbs and songs from different cultures and nations of the continent. “The oral tale is not “the childhood of fiction” (Macculloch, 1995), but there is no doubt that the epic and its hero are the predecessors of the African novel and its central characters” (1). Clearly, Scheub is of the view that orality, the oral and the literary are interwoven and inseparable traditions in African literature. However, does this all mean that orality maintains its initial form when it features in writing? The answer to that is an indication of the spectral orality, because finding orality in writing is itself a contradiction.

In his essay on teaching *Things Fall Apart*, Harry Garuba shows the often overlooked reciprocity between orality and writing and how in Nigeria the novel can be oralised for different purposes. “Such oralization of written texts is not just a matter of a low degree of literacy; it is a cultural practice that emerged at a period when literacy was not the dominant mode of communicating and transmitting ideas and that endured to become a new way of creating various kinds of publics around issues deemed important to particular groups” (326), writes Garuba. He seems to believe that the continuity of orality also works in reverse, due to the power of orality to subvert textualisation by “oralizing” writing, instead. This, therefore, challenges, if not transcends, the neatly drawn dichotomy of orality and writing and thereby signals the possibility of spectral writing. Similarly, James Ogude is of the view that “oral tradition is not something quiescent, but an expression of a dynamic culture embedded in the

past and present experiences of a community” (93). He suggests orality is never dogmatic and stagnant because it serves different purposes. Ogude believes that this shows in the fiction of African writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, since the latter is “redefining orality and subordinating it to the demands of the written form” (93). However, the reverse is also true, and Garuba has suggested this in the way in which texts like *Things Fall Apart* have been subordinated to orality and thereby undermining the progressivist approaches which views orality as an originary point towards writing.

P.N. Uwajeh in his essay, “Orature in Literature: Myths as Structural Elements in Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*”, provides a reading of Achebe’s novel, one that illustrates how this Nigerian novelist employs what he calls “orature” through myths of origins to depict the dire consequences of unbridled power. He asserts that “orature plays this generative role among peoples with unwritten cultures”, because “it is a common feature in the African writer’s style of writing” (298). Not only does this suggest that the incorporation of oral poetics is in many instances employed for ideological or political reasons but it also reveals how writing, in general, and African writing, in particular, is haunted by that which seeks to force orality into effacement. Moreover, Deborah Seddon, paraphrasing Isabel Hofmeyer, is of the view that “the relationship between written and oral cultures is often ‘unpredictable’” and “[t]here are instances when it is orality that transforms - or oralises - literacy, rather than the other way round” (134). This in significant ways undermines the progressivist approach to the relationship of orality and writing and thereby enacting the spectrality of orality. It is precisely such present absence that is amenable to the position of the Sycorax figure that I seek to explore in this thesis, due to the ways in which it has the potential of empowering rather than affirming the black woman’s shadowy position in society.

My purpose here is not to denounce one approach over another or to attempt to contribute anything new on studies on orality but to highlight the ghostly position of orality in



the face of print culture, so as to say that the denigration as such equates with the suppression of the authorial role of women as storytellers. I want to argue that it is significant that both Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona share motherhood with Sycorax and that it is this role in concomitance with storytelling that empowers African women, albeit in complicated ways. For instance, Obioma Nnaemeka acknowledges the intrinsic role of women in African oral tradition not as “performers but as producers of knowledge” (135), which supports my contention that it is through their role as storytellers that the power and influence of African women as mothers is augmented, if not gains currency.

I aim to establish that black women strategically position themselves in society, first and foremost, as mothers, even though motherhood is not necessarily a choice for them. In fact, one is not doing justice to the role of motherhood in African culture if one pigeonholes it to the binarist categorisation: agency and victimhood. Remi Akujobi argues that:

Motherhood as experienced and practiced in Africa is influenced by religious mythologies and local lore and it is coloured with examples of self-sacrifice/giving and much more in the name of motherhood. While mothers are revered as creators, as providers, cradle rockers, nurturers, and goddesses, they also inspire awe because they are known to wedge huge powers in their children’s lives. The idea of self-sacrifice emphasizes the centrality of motherhood in African society. (2)

It is precisely, then, through shaping consciousness of their children in storytelling and as subject producers that African women reveal their spectral presence in society, because they seem to elude binary oppositions, if not positioning themselves beyond such. It is of pertinence that I highlight that, unlike European women, African women do not necessarily perceive motherhood as oppressive. Instead, they find motherhood as both compensating and limiting. For example, Winnie Mandela in *Part of my Soul Went with Him* makes sense of her role in

the liberation struggle by identifying as a mother and, therefore, by embracing the given title, Mother of the Nation. Similarly, Sindiwe Magona, first and foremost, centres her motherhood in her writing. Motherhood, for both these women, is the way they construct their own identities and it shows in their (self) representation that there is, however, an inherent double bind in the role as such. I will now provide an overview of the thesis.

Chapter One interrogates the representation of Sycorax in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Césaire's anti-colonial adaption of the play, *A Tempest*. I propose that Sycorax is one character who epitomises the subaltern, and whose symbolic revolt comes in the form of haunting both the imaginative island and Shakespeare's text. I then submit that Césaire in the play incorporates the ideological currents of Negritude so as to decolonise the source text. My proposal is that Sycorax, in both plays, perpetually disappears in the lexicon of nationalism, due to the way in which the only reference to black woman is through metaphor or what Florence Stratton calls "Mother Africa trope".

In Chapter Two I explore the representation of Winnie Mandela in both fiction and non-fiction such as Anné Mariè du Preez Bezdrob's *Winnie Mandela: A Life*, Antjie Krog's "Mother Faces the Nation", a chapter from *The Country of My Skull*, and Njabulo S. Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*. I seek to establish that Winnie Mandela becomes a Sycorax figure for facing effacement through solitary confinement, banishments, vilification and suppression by her own political party, the ANC. I argue that such repression enacts rather her spectral presence, with the potency of its irrepressibility as that which collapses even the binarist logic of voice and silence, presence and absence and so forth, and thereby rendering, if not invoking, the spectre of Sycorax. I propose that that the uncertainty of the story Winnie Mandela enacts is performed through the form and content of *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* so as to mimic the idea of ambivalence with which the protagonist herself is treated.

In Chapter Three, I read Sindiwe Magona's *To My Children's Children* and "Drowning in Cala" from *Push Push! and Other Stories* and argue that it is not by coincidence that Magona incorporates oral poetics and thereby evokes the role of the Xhosa grandmother as a storyteller in order to transcend both the orality/writing and private/public divide. Moreover, the oral tradition she evokes in her writing undermines the clinical polarisation of orality and writing. I then relate this to Magona's protagonist, Sindiwe, as a pariah figure for becoming a single mother in a cultural space where having children while unmarried is frowned upon. I aim to establish that Magona's narrative suggests that the lack of stability in the dualism of orality and writing and private and public, especially in relation to the social position of black woman as mother.

In the thesis I aim to argue that orality becomes the spectre which haunts the writing of most African writers in the same way that black woman haunts man-centred nationalism. Such spectrality is precisely one which is embodied, if not exemplified, by the black woman in nationalist discourse and in society in general. I seek to argue that the spectral present of Sycorax in *The Tempest* equates to that of black woman in nationalism. I propose that the denigration of oral culture equates with the suppression of the authorial role of women as storytellers. From Sycorax, as symbolic figure, I move on to political and literary "Sycoraxes", namely, Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona.

# **Chapter One: The Storm of Epistemicide: Searching for the Traces of Sycorax and Orality in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest***

## **1.1 Introduction**

William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* are plays about usurpation and power contestation. Both plays deal with European expansion and colonisation of the "New World" where such imperialist endeavours are met with dissent and resistance. *The Tempest* focuses on its protagonist, Prospero, who gets dethroned by his own brother and exiles himself to an island which he colonises together with its inhabitants, Ariel and Caliban, and then leaves after reconciling with his enemies, whom he causes to be shipwrecked on the island. As an anti-colonial adaptation of Shakespeare's play, Césaire's play foregrounds both Prospero and Caliban while dramatising the decolonisation project through Caliban's rebellion. However, Césaire's play does not make Caliban reject his name, as a name of bondage while, at the same time, Césaire changes Ariel to a mulatto slave. The island, in both plays, becomes the space for the contestation of power and land ownership among male characters: Prospero and Caliban. What is then hidden to the readers or audience is not only the stake of Sycorax in such contestation, but also her version of the story. As an absent character in the list of characters, her story is told by (male) others. Therefore, Sycorax's very absence becomes a strong presence which haunts the speech of male characters and the island in both plays.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* seems to suggest that the discourse on nationalism may efface female characters like Sycorax. Recent criticism on the play provides, mostly, postcolonial and feminist interpretations of the play, highlighting both the usurpation and the silencing of Sycorax. Even though Rachel Bryant offers an ecological perspective, she notes the problematic attitude of "explorers and colonists" (94) towards colonies. Although Bryant highlights the exploitation of the resources and the bodies of the island, she overlooks

Sycorax's predicament as a woman whose body is exploited through reproduction in order to bear the labour force – a point elaborated through Spivakian lenses in Chapter Two. Brittny Blystone argues that “[w]hile one can analyze male characters directly by their actions on stage, one can analyze Sycorax only by her influence on these characters” (73), perhaps, because the language used by these male characters presents itself as a window into their ideologies. This is precisely what this study seeks to do; to search for Sycorax through Prospero's and Caliban's discourses so as to read the silences of the play.

Abena Busia unequivocally interprets Sycorax as a black woman. In her postcolonial reading, she is of the view there is a systematic centralisation of male characters in the play which seeks to imprison the female characters in general, and Sycorax in particular. For Busia this serves as a continuation of valorising the alpha male ranging from theorist to liberationist figures, as epitomised by Prospero and Caliban in the text (85). It then becomes apparent that the focus on Caliban's and Ariel's oppression, in such criticism, initiates these male characters into discourse and power while dismissing Sycorax into perpetual silence; hence “[i]t is crucial that her absence takes the form of voicelessness - voicelessness in a discourse in which sexuality and access to language together form part of the discourse of access to power” (87). Similarly, Arleen Chiclanay Gonzalez finds odd the “emphasis that critics place on Caliban's discourse” and believes that it “makes the silences of the female characters more prominent” (44). However, Gonzalez falls into the same trap, because in the essay *Sycorax*, and maternal powers in general, rely on Miranda in order to be “restored” (53). The problematic, here, lies on the fact that Sycorax is further effaced in favour of Miranda. The essay, then, circulates around Prospero's usurpation of the powers of femininity from Sycorax and how Ferdinand becomes Miranda's surrogate mother and, therefore, suggests that Sycorax speaks through others. It is precisely such centralisation and valorisation of Miranda that is problematic here, because it further effaces Sycorax.

Both Ildikó Limpár's and Stephen Orgel's essays fail to recognise Sycorax's denigrated femininity. On the one hand, Limpár posits Miranda as the embodiment of different characteristics of femininity, while she acknowledges Sycorax's "ghostly presence", her "dark femininity" and "her pregnancy" that is "associated with the source of the wicked on the island" (53), she ironically reiterates Sycorax's demonisation and thereby valorises Miranda's "angelic representation" – a quality endorsed by patriarchy. On the other hand, Stephen Orgel attempts to investigate women's silences in the play by enquiring about the whereabouts of Prospero's wife, but he ends up being taken in by Prospero's powers. For instance, he argues that "The absent presence of the wife and mother in the play constitutes a space that is filled by Prospero's creation of surrogates and ghostly family" (2). By according Prospero the status of "surrogate and ghostly family", Orgel renders his interpretation as complicit in effacing not only Miranda's mother, but also Sycorax. Therefore, both interpretations further efface not only Sycorax but all women characters in the play.

It has been noted by commentators, notably Rob Nixon, Abena Busia and Rachel Bryant, that anti-colonial appropriations of *The Tempest* have tended to focus on resistance instantiated by Caliban and thereby reducing Sycorax to a maternal metaphor for Africa or the colonised land. This is evident in Césaire's adaptation of the play where Sycorax is not necessarily brought into the life of the text. Instead, she is associated with the topography of the island, the spirit of the place and thereby relegated to the cliché of Mother Land/Nature (18). This, in many ways, invokes Florence Stratton's concept of the "Mother Africa trope" which she finds prevalent in the work of African male writers. She suggests further that African woman functions as a trope working in two strands: The first one she calls "the pot of culture" which "analogizes woman to traditional values or a bygone culture", while the second strand is "the sweep of history" and one that "revises the Negritude analogy into woman employed as an index of the changing state of the nation" (112). Stratton, here, is of the view that,

whatever the intent, “this trope operates against the interests of women, excluding them, implicitly if not explicitly, from authorship and citizenship” (112), due to the fact that it does not allow space for women’s counter-sentence.

Xian Bouza explores the anti-imperialist appropriations of the play, and problematises the ways in which such interpretations render themselves inadequate in making us understand the implications of Sycorax’s silence because they limit her to “her motherhood and her analogy with Africa” (194). However, woman as mother is not only an oppressive construct, because this construct is rather complicated when it comes to African women since motherhood in this context is not exclusively oppressive. (This idea is further considered in the chapter on Sindiwe Magona.) Following Bouza’s argument, such interpretation “connects ‘nation’ with notions of motherhood and honour, and leads to risky identifications of women with passivity .... and also of the nation with the female body (entailing the analogy between colonization and sexual violence against women)” (194). The suggested reason, here, is that womanhood/motherhood and nationalism have complicated relations that are not without their own problematics. Even though Bouza provides an overview of the anti-colonial interpretation of Shakespeare’s play in comparison to Warner’s novel, *Indigo*<sup>1</sup> (1992), the limitations in liberating Sycorax become evident not only in Shakespeare’s text but also in Césaire’s adaptation – as I show and discuss at length in the second section.

It is in Latina feminist’s, Irene Lara’s, article that Sycorax finally surfaces and comes to life. Lara overturns the dominant criticism that mainly focuses on Caliban and his resistance

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<sup>1</sup> Warner’s novel, *Indigo*, is a modern appropriation of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* which centralises the characters of Sycorax and Kit Evererd. Like *The Tempest*, it is a story about a clash between islanders in the Caribbean and Europeans in the form of a European family that invades and settles in *Enfant-Beate*, the Caribbean island; an event which enacts the colonial encounter of the natives with English intruders. The story circles around Sycorax, a herbalist and a sage of the village who mothers – after her own daughter dies in her teens – an abandoned little girl named Ariel and the orphaned, Caliban, whom she delivers from a pregnant corpse of a shipwreck and then names Dulé. Sycorax, here, does not only come to life but she is also an influential woman in the village who comes from a royal family.

and Miranda's (dis)obedience by inviting us to pay attention to what she calls "literacy of Sycorax" so that we "learn to listen, speak, write, and read through Sycorax" (81). The suggestion here, promises a radical critique of Sycorax's present absence, because her effacement unequivocally announces the epistemic violence in which Prospero, perhaps Shakespeare himself, and also critics are involved. Lara argues that the "literacy of Sycorax" she envisages "is the literacy of healing such discursive distortions and fears of the interrelated concepts of the female sex, spirituality, and sexuality so that we can create relations with ourselves and others beyond the oppositional relations signified by Caliban's language of cursing" (82). This indicates that learning through Sycorax may heal the discursive effects of the epistemicides that demonised the spirituality of black women while sexualising their bodies and thereby rendering them "witches" and "whores". In this chapter, then, I propose that while Caliban is ventriloquised through using a European language, and represents assimilation and rejection amenable to colonial subjects, Sycorax can never be ventriloquised and her powers represent orality and its refusal/resistance to be effaced; hence its spectrality. I extend my argument further by asserting that Césaire's play is by no means an uncritical appropriation, albeit its limitations, because its ideological currents reveal themselves to be complicit in the unfolding political war waged by history on black women.

## **1.2 Can Sycorax Speak? The Subaltern and Ventriloquism in *The Tempest***

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, I am interested in the character of Sycorax and how she is represented in the play and how such representations seek to delegitimise black women's role in the struggle against imperialism/colonisation. She is invisible and visible in the play at once, simply because she is not in the list of dramatis personae, but she prevails in the speech of chief characters. The same goes for Caliban; it is Prospero who tells us that he is a devilish slave with no language. The play depicts the period of European exploration of other nations



and the encounter with the other. It begins with the storm that seems to drown the ship, one that registers Prospero's magical powers that he claims are harmless. However, we learn that the shipwreck itself is an illusion. Prospero is presented as a sovereign subject, a wizard and a duke in exile with his daughter, Miranda, whose mother died giving birth, perhaps, due to the coup d'état related death waged by his own brother, Antonio. It happens that after Sycorax dies due to aging Prospero invades and assumes the role of master to both Ariel and Caliban. While Ariel is made a trusted servant who executes his master's plans, Caliban gets enslaved. On the one hand, Prospero marks his dominance over other characters, the island and the play while, on the other hand, he tries to portray Sycorax as an insignificant "witch" who dies due to aging. What we know about her is through Prospero whose position— as a European invader of the island— is worthy of serious investigation. I, then, argue that, through Prospero's uncontested narratives about Sycorax, and her fellow islanders, ventriloquism is at work in *The Tempest*. I propose that the play's effacement and silencing of Sycorax, in the face of Prospero's historical discourse of the island, is reminiscent of the dichotomous representation of orality and writing.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* tells the story of invasion and conquest of foreign lands by early modern European nobilities. The play begins with a shipwreck that is magically orchestrated by Prospero, the fled Duke of Milan. The shipwreck devastates Alonso, the King of Naples and his on board subjects and Prospero's brother, Antonio. The reader/audience is assured by Prospero himself when he tells his daughter, Miranda, that there is no harm done. The story revolves around the chief character, Prospero, who is also accorded the narrative power to provide the history of the imaginative island and the inhabitants he encounters on his arrival. We are told that after his dukedom gets toppled by his brother, Antonio, he flees Italy with Miranda, whose mother we learn died during birth, and finds himself on the island. He then claims that he rescued Ariel from partaking in Sycorax's witchcraft and that he finds the latter was banished from Algiers because of her black magic, whereafter she came to the island

and died. We later learn in the heated dialogue of Prospero and Caliban that the former, upon his arrival, was courteously received and shown the spoils of the island, but betrayed Caliban by choosing to enslave him.

Throughout the play, Prospero's exchange with Caliban takes the form of abusive language which depicts the violence of the encounter which is linked to colonisation. On the island, Prospero fashions himself as a custodian of European modernisation by displaying books which he "prize[s] above [his] dukedom" (1.2. 182). He foregrounds the power dynamics between himself, as a representative of print culture, and Sycorax who best epitomises the suppression of the oral tradition. It is precisely here that the civilization/primitiveness divide is enacted, because through the language of difference Prospero is able to privilege his wizardry from Sycorax's witchcraft, and when Miranda is refashioned as the "cherubin", Caliban gets to be reconstructed as devil incarnate. By so doing, Prospero throws Sycorax and Caliban outside language and discourse; although Caliban can string a few words together to challenge him, albeit in filtered ways, Sycorax as a dead "witch" figure is doubly silenced. I then argue that, in Shakespeare's play, the act of ventriloquising Caliban and effacing Sycorax suggests the attempts at disfiguring oral culture embodied by the space of black woman.

Having arrived on the island, appositely an abject place, away from his native land, Italy, Prospero sets out the differences between Europeans and the native islanders. We learn this in his implicit description of his family – his daughter Miranda and his dead wife – contrasted with the family made up by Sycorax and Caliban. When Miranda is concerned about the drowning ship which carried the Italian king Alonso, his countrymen, and Antonio, Prospero assures her that "There's no harm done" (1,235 – 172), referring to his magical powers; he later describes Miranda as "a cherubin" (1.2. 154 – 186); and he refers to his wife as "a piece of virtue" (1.2. 68 – 175). What can be noted here is that these phrases connote all that is godly and just, or good human characteristics analogous to Christian religion. By so

doing, Prospero seeks to present himself as an embodiment of goodness itself, and one that can be aspired to. He rather sees himself as a barometer of European civilisation to which both Sycorax and Caliban must aspire. In *The Tempest* I am interested in the silences of the text, particularly the death of Sycorax and her representation. Using Gayatri Spivak's ideas as the basis of my reading the considered text(s), I examine the space of the subaltern in the play by reading her death and the accusations of witchcraft as attempts to erase her and her story on the island. Spivak, in her seminal essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", interrogates the discursive practises of the West, particularly the way in which western intellectuals whitewash the "desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject" (Spivak 271). The contention is that when the Western intelligentsia attempt to speak for the oppressed in history and political economy, they obscure the "sovereign subject" which is themselves, hiding their subject positionality as though it "has no geo-political determination" (271-2). According to Spivak, the ubiquitous notion of decentring the subject – the European rational "man" – disserves poststructuralist discourse, simply because it paradoxically reinstates the same Subject it seeks to decentre (272). It is precisely the act of gesturing towards the impossible that even the representation of the subaltern can, perhaps, be rendered a possibility. However, Spivak maintains that:

both as objects of colonialist historiography and a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (287)

The intriguing paradox in this passage is the way in which the subaltern assumes a double role: the subaltern becomes the object of historicist discourse but also the subject of revolt. Spivak, perhaps, realises that the act of according the position of the oppressed subject to the subaltern suggests that the subaltern paradoxically speaks but such voice is deliberately not listened to

because it is a voice of dissent, revolting against imperialism. (In any case, it is precisely insurgency that is muted by imperialism due to the forces of the latter's refusal to engage meaningfully with the "popular classes".) For instance, Sycorax as the double other, does not have access to cultural imperialism, racism and sexist discourse that denigrate her and, therefore, she is denied the possibility to offer or provide a counter-sentence. The discourse that constructs her as a witch is premised on disavowal and erasure so that it cannot be challenged by the very "object" of its discourse.

Moreover, it seems to Spivak that representing the subaltern is an impossible possibility. She goes further to assert that "For the "true" subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; the intellectual's solution is not to abstain from representation" (285). What I gather from Spivak's argument is that the subaltern is created by the "sovereign subject's" modes of writing of the self. The subaltern, then, needs to be representable in order to be "unrepresentable", precisely because it is through the words of others that we can know and articulate our selves. However, the subaltern is situated on the periphery of language. If that is really the case, how can the subaltern speak for herself? In this light, I am persuaded to think that the subaltern connotes all subjects who are forced into effacement and placed beyond the borderline of language and discourse, thereby enacting her spectral presence/position in society. Therefore, the subaltern is a text to be engaged critically so as to avoid "dangerous representations" (Alcoff 23). In this case, Sycorax, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, is one character who best epitomises the subaltern due to her deprivation of access to the dominant discourse of the island. Even so, I am not implying that Miranda and Caliban do not fall in the same category, albeit they do in varying degrees, but the intriguing case is Sycorax because she is a totally muted character. My task, here, is to explore the political implications of her absent presence and, then, argue

that her effacement, in Shakespeare's and Césaire's plays respectively, foregrounds the ghostly presence of orality which is analogous to the space of black woman in politics and culture.

Furthermore, the other possible reason to silence Sycorax is that she is "strong" and her "witchcraft" could "control the moon, make flows and ebbs, / And deal in her command without her power" (5.1.276). Such powers are contrasted with the earlier characteristic which described her as a crone who has "grown into a hoop". It is possible that Sycorax is neither a bent crone nor dead but that her supposed death should be read as akin to Spivak's notion of the "imperialist subject-constitution" (295). She maintains that such "subject-constitution "[mingles] epistemic violence with the advancement of learning and civilization" that renders the "subaltern woman... as mute as ever" (295). The "epistemic violence" referred to, here, is the manipulation of such scientific and theoretical tools that legitimises the metaphysics of Enlightenment. Such discursive effects presuppose the silence of the subaltern. The discourses of knowledge render the possibility of the speaking subaltern degenerate. In this case, Sycorax's history, as written by Prospero, is the a priori that formulates and legitimises her otherness. The danger in Prospero's representation of Sycorax is that it is not contested because the represented is located outside language, hence the accusation of witchcraft and subsequent death.

Shakespeare's text reveals the silences of both Miranda and Caliban, especially the former because she is presented as an empty character – a mere carrier of Prospero's aspirations. This is the aspect which evidences ventriloquism at work, where the ventriloquist is Prospero and Shakespeare respectively. Both Miranda and Caliban are Prospero's puppets, precisely because their language functions within the limits of his leash. On the one hand, Miranda is commanded by her father to teach Caliban language so he can be able to communicate his orders. Then he sexualises her, albeit indirectly, by making her conscious that she is a woman who ought to get married. As a result, Prospero trades her to Ferdinand for

power, presenting her as a “gift and thine own acquisition/ worthily purchased” (265). The way Prospero uses economic language when he speaks about Miranda to Ferdinand indicates that her union with Ferdinand is predetermined so whatever she has to say to him is an affirmation of his powers as her father.

If Shakespeare’s Caliban is not ready to fight for self-determination and self-reliance, then Césaire’s Caliban already situates himself within the discourse of the liberation movement. In Césaire’s adaptation, Caliban not only rejects Prospero’s projections and exposes his hypocrisy but he also calls for freedom. The play poses itself as an unapologetic decolonisation project, one that espouses the tenets of Negritude – a concept I explain fully below. The manner in which Césaire’s play embodies Negritude is the way it strategically introduces KiSwahili language through the speech of Caliban, the Yoruba deities, Sango and Eshu as characters in the play, and the allusion to Sycorax as an ancestor which is most telling of the African presence and valorisation of African cultures that colonial discourse totally disregards. It is also in Caliban’s rejection of European civilisation, his name and the European language he is taught and, most importantly, his defiance towards colonial rule that Prospero represents. Negritude, as a cultural and literary movement that situates its discourse in black consciousness, is thus evident in the play especially through Caliban’s self-assertiveness, his occasional verses (1.2. 18; 2.1. 25; 3.2. 45) and as he calls upon Sango in verse in his “battle song” (3.4 52) thereby invoking his African spirituality.

It is, therefore, such anti-colonial preoccupations that drive Césaire to fashion Caliban as some sort of alter ego. By so doing, this Martinican writer risks ventriloquising him, because Caliban is unable to rewrite himself and the history of the island outside the cloud of the ideology of Negritude or African nationalism. He is, therefore, cast as an ideologue and proponent of the writer’s school of thought; as a result, he barely critiques his mother’s denigrated position. The ways in which Caliban enunciates his liberationist cause fail to

crystallise his own historical account of the island and this renders him unable to clear space for his own mother, Sycorax, to contest the male characters' narratives about her and the island. Moreover, it is also most telling that there are no significant changes in the female characters of the play, because Miranda, too, is still entrapped in Prospero's discourse – the same way Sycorax's silence is rubberstamped by the ways in which Césaire's play privileges African nationalism over women's oppression.

Césaire's thematic strand, then, presents his play as a performative discourse of Negritude and it is virtually impossible to read it outside such ideology. It is through the understanding of the conceptualisation of Negritude that *A Tempest* begins to shed some light. As the movement which began in the forties, spearheaded by the French-speaking African intelligentsia, Negritude was the reaction against white supremacy and the colonial discourse which viewed black people as primitive and racially inferior to their white counterparts. Negritude, as both a concept and literary movement, can be said to be the means with which poets like Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Léon Damas forge a counter-ideology against racist ideologies that have forced the black people to denigration. It is from this background that Senghor asserts that Negritude enunciates “the whole range of values of civilization of all black peoples in the world” (270). Clearly, Negritude can be said to be a resuscitation of African heritage, one that has been disparaged and exorcised by the West. Senghor goes on to argue that Negritude, as a literary movement, “can be essentially summed up in the rhythm and the symbolic image” (270), precisely what has come to be known as surrealism: its device. However, Negritude, as a machinery of African nationalism, is not without its ideological lacunae because it does not necessarily account for the socio-economic and political questions; and also the gender question, in this case. Its focus on racial and cultural oppression leaves a remnant of black women oppression; thus it is by no surprise that Césaire unwittingly perpetuates Sycorax's effacement.

### 1.3 Negritude and the Spectre of Sycorax in Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest*

*“We no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the  
African Mother who, in his anxiety, man confuses with Mother  
Africa”* (Mariama Bâ cited in Omofolabo Ajayi 36)

Aimé Césaire's *A Tempest* begins with a prologue that plays with self-reflexivity, which highlights role-play prevalent in theatre. Unlike the original text, Césaire shows, from the beginning, the attitudes of the survivors of the shipwreck, emphasising the foreignness and difference of the island through the fears the Europeans have about Africa. It does not take long for the play to pronounce its political preoccupations as a postcolonial interpretation of Shakespeare's play. After calming Miranda and assuring her that there is no harm done in the shipwreck – because this after all is theatrical work – Prospero lets his mission be known; namely, the usurpation and colonisation of the island. The play digresses from its source text by rejecting the notion that Prospero flees Milan due to the coup d'état orchestrated by his brother and suggests that he goes to exile, running away from the execution he faces in The Holy Inquisition because of his scientific endeavours which have been found to be blasphemous to “The Holy Scriptures”. It is precisely here that Césaire's vision becomes clear; he makes alterations for ideological reasons, because not only does he make Prospero a coloniser, but he also interprets Caliban as a black slave and Ariel as a mulatto slave and this indicates that he might have intended to represent Sycorax as a black woman, even though he does not bring her to life. Out of the pool of existing postcolonial adaptations of *The Tempest*, I select Césaire's play due to its direct link with African nationalism, through Negritude, which opens a window for us to glimpse the space of black woman in nationalist discourse.



Césaire's play is a postcolonial adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* that overturns the representation of Caliban and Ariel. The play is about these two inhabitants of the island who get invaded by an Italian dukedom in exile that, upon its arrival, subjects Ariel and Caliban to servitude and slavery respectively. Prospero flees and ends up on an African island, because he finds himself being set up by his brother, Antonio, who plans to overthrow him from dukedom. He saves himself from execution. Like in Shakespeare, the play begins with a shipwreck of Antonio's allies, in the coup he orchestrated, arriving on the island that Prospero has already usurped. From the beginning, the reader learns that the survivors of the shipwreck find the island foreign and different. The attitudes towards the island and its inhabitants are informed by the very fact that they perceive it as different. This is exactly how Prospero himself relates or behaves upon his arrival; for we are told that he subjects Ariel and Caliban under his rule, and, then, takes ownership of the island itself. These events trigger Caliban's rebellion as a rightful inheritor of the island in such a way that he struggles for his independence. It is in such events that Césaire's text evokes the history of slavery and colonisation, especially as the play was published in the late 1960s – a decade of decolonisation of African countries. The play shows us that Prospero, as a coloniser, disregards Caliban's language, name, history and civilisation by imposing his own by dehumanising him first through enslavement. This becomes more apparent in Prospero's insistence that Caliban must "be polite" and say "[h]ello" (1.2. 17) and speak a European language rather than his own indigenous language. It is then suggestive of power relations inherent in the master/slave dialectic. However, Caliban uses Hegelian dialectics because he is unpredictable, to his master, as a defiant servant who even refuses to acknowledge Prospero's authority. Caliban ripostes and challenges Prospero's narrative about him and goes as far calling him an "old goat" (1.2. 19).

Césaire's play diverges from the source play by not only making The Inquisition the reason Prospero escapes Italy, instead of the coup only, but he also goes as far as making Ariel

a mulatto slave and Caliban an African slave. While Ariel negotiates his freedom from Prospero, Caliban defies the latter's colonial rule to the point of rejecting the name given to him and opting for X as his name (1.2. 20); a name reminiscent of the American civil rights movement leader, Malcom X. The presentation, then, of Ariel as a character advocating for nonviolence in his quest for freedom while Caliban as one who does not shy away from violence in his quest for independence also evokes the polarisation of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X respectively. Moreover, similarly, Césaire introduces Yoruba deities thereby asserting an African presence in the play in the same way that Caliban evokes KiSwahili language in his call for freedom: "uhuru!" (1.2. 17). Towards the end of the play Prospero does not leave the island, as in the case in the Shakespeare text; instead he certifies his colonial rule. The play goes on to introduce Eshu, the Yoruba trickster god, and makes reference to Sango who is a god of the Yoruba people, so as to show that Africa has its own cosmology. Similarly, Césaire's Caliban does not only speak back to Prospero, he rejects the name given to him and goes as far as speaking KiSwahili language. Even though towards the ending of the play Caliban gets the last word, "FREEDOM HI-DAY!" (66), Prospero does not leave the island. This, in many ways, signals colonial settlement and the continuity of the decolonisation project in the colonies. However, Césaire fails to make significant changes in the representation of female characters, and this is more telling especially in the case of Sycorax. I argue then that Césaire's preoccupation with African nationalism, in the play, further entrenches the effacement of the Sycorax figure thereby rendering Negritude a discourse effacing black women's discourses.

It has noted been in Negritude poetry that the mother figure has been romanticised and this representation itself has not been met without criticism. For instance, Omofolabo Ajayi, in her critique of Negritude and feminism on Mariama Bâ's novel, *So Long A Letter*, asserts that this novelist's call to African women's writers to shape their own destinies is "directed at

Negritude” and its “thematic constructs of ‘Mother Africa’ and an idealized African womanhood in its literary quest for an African identity” (36). However, the liberationist approach as such does not do justice to woman; instead, the “idealization of the African woman privileges male identity” (36). Césaire does something to this in his play; through one of the speeches of Caliban, Sycorax is represented not as dead but as being part or one with nature and the spirit of the place in the island. However, such romanticisation of Sycorax as a silenced and disfigured character highlights the privileged positionality of Caliban as a subject in language and discourse. The woman/mother figure in Negritude, according to Florence Stratton, appears as “pure physicality – always beautiful and often naked. Her body either takes the form of a young girl, nubile and erotic, or of a fecund, nurturing mother; and it is frequently associated with the African landscape that the speaker seeks to explore or discover. As embodying mother, she gives the trope a name: Mother Africa trope” (113). Clearly, Negritude poetry is ambivalent about the black woman, because it attempts to lock her down to a paradox in the manner in which she is expected to be pure while she is simultaneously sexualised.

It is precisely the paradox to which Mariama Bâ alludes in the above epigraph, which presents African men facing a dilemma in their relations with the African Mother. The same workings of paradox are prevalent in the mother figure; Negritude poets seeming to be nostalgic, like Caliban, about the mother. They seemingly treat a figure as such as a symbol of the African land, as a place which they regard as a point of their origin, and also as the mother of the nation – a given role that does not liberate her or accord her power and authority equivalent to the African father. It is in this view that I find Omofolabo Ajayi’s argument echoing Stratton’s conceptualisation of the Mother Trope, since the former notes the preoccupation of Negritude poetry on what she calls “*la femme noire*, the black” which itself is a trope. She asserts that Negritude almost always features a “[d]ark, beautiful, regal, and unspoiled [woman], [and] she is canonized in one of Léopold Sédar Senghor's poems, ‘Femme

noire' (1984, 16), written as a praise song to the beauty and 'naturalness' of the African woman'" (37). Albeit the political limitations of Negritude and its ideological blind spots pertaining to the black woman question, Césaire's play does provide a significant contribution in the critique of colonial discourse.

In his provocative treatise, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Aimé Césaire critiques Europe's deception in its "civilising mission" that it is premised on "Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equations Christianity = civilization, paganism = savagery, from which there could not but ensue abominable colonialist and racist consequences, whose victims were to be Indians, the yellow people, and the Negroes" (2). Césaire clearly highlights the hypocrisy prevalent in the "civilising mission", one that sought to justify colonisation of other nations. Such unwarranted domination, for Césaire, was based on the economy of difference by posing colonies as antitheses of the Empire. According to the European conception of itself, non-European civilisations and religions equate barbarism and idolatry. If Césaire believes that the ways in which Europe sought to colonise other nations in the guise of modernity and thereby using difference as a basis of domination and to exploit them, then the play, *A Tempest*, dramatises this conviction rather strongly.

The emphasis on difference in the text is illustrated right in the beginning through Gonzalo's perception of the imagined island and that it is not only a foreign land but also a place of difference. We learn that the ship that transported the Italian nobility with its servants finds itself on the shores of a foreign island, due to a shipwreck orchestrated by Prospero's magic: "Did you see that? There, at the top of the masts, in the rigging, that glitter of blue fire, flashing, flashing? They're right when they call these magic lands, so different from our homes in Europe... Look, even the lightning is different!" (1.1. 11). Here, the European perception of Africa is not only comic, in the exaggerated graphics intended to connote sorcery, but also it amasses images associated with estrangement and evil. The point would be driven home by

the prince, Ferdinand, with finality that “Alas! There’s no one in hell ... all the devils are here! (I, 1, 12) and thereby buttressing the idea with sadness that the island is indeed a habitation of devils incarnate. This kind of opening sets the tone for the play of what is then to follow; it provides the reader with a glimpse into the subsequent events, so as to indicate that the treatment of the inhabitants of the island is informed by their perceived difference and one that is taken for evil and inferiority. I argue that although Césaire dramatises the excesses of African nationalism – through Caliban’s rejection of foreign rule seeking to collaborating with Stephano and Trinculo (III, 2, 44), and evoking African cosmology by calling upon Shango so as to indicate independent African culture and civilisation – is suggestive of this fact ( III, 4, 52). Such ideological stances of Negritude, which unwittingly silence Sycorax, are most telling about the position of black women in such discourse(s).

As the postcolonial adaptation of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Césaire’s play seeks to portray and challenge Europe’s representation of Africa. While the survivors of the shipwreck, as discussed above, are seemingly intrigued and estranged by the island in which they find themselves, Prospero does not hesitate to differentiate his wizardry from harming “witchcraft” that Sycorax supposedly possessed. When his daughter, Miranda, opens the second scene, and announces a “sinking ship”, Prospero assures her that “It’s only a play” and that “There’s nothing wrong” (12). Apart from the self-reflexive response, a teasing reminder by the playwright that this indeed is a theatrical performance, Prospero suggests that his magical powers are harmless by also implying that there is an antithesis to his powers. The act, then, by presenting his powers as pure does not only construct Europe in a good and superior light but it also represents the imagined African island as devilish and simply evil. Such an act involves de-familiarisation and de-humanisation of Africa in order to legitimise the violence European invaders unleash to subjects of colonisation. Césaire puts it succinctly, in his essay, through the colonial logic, thus: “colonizer = “thing-ification”” (6), so as to suggest that

colonialism reduces its subjects to objects. In the play, this Martinican writer depicts such domination through Prospero who invades and appropriates the island; demonises Sycorax; subjects Ariel to servitude, and enslaves Caliban. In this case, Prospero does not only appropriate the island and makes it his own stage while making Ariel, Miranda and Caliban objects of his ventriloquism, but he also makes them his property.

Postcolonial interpretations of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* are unambiguous about their intent to write back to the Empire, and rewrite history. For instance, Rob Nixon observes that "hints of New World culture and history were dragged to the surface, while at other moments the play was unabashedly refashioned to meet contemporary political and cultural needs" (559). Seemingly, it was significant for anti-colonial adaptations of the play to pose an ideological outlook, so as to rewrite the play in order to challenge the representation of Africans in the literary canon, generally, and in Shakespeare, particularly. Césaire's play, then, appositely places itself precisely in this context. Nixon further argues that African appropriations of *The Tempest* were not without challenges of their own, due to both the identification and alienation that the play entails:

Given the resistance during decolonization to this kind of cultural dependency, those writers who took up *The Tempest* from the standpoint of the colonial subject did so in a manner that was fraught with complexity. On the one hand, they hailed Caliban and identified themselves with him; on the other, they were intolerant of received colonial definitions of Shakespeare's value. They found the European play compelling but insisted on engaging with it on their own terms. (561)

Clearly, it is not surprising that Césaire would interpret Caliban as black, as in the same manner that this study endorses the idea of Sycorax as a black woman. Such interpretations seek to disturb the original play's discursive manifestations which find themselves in traditional

interpretations of the source text which perpetuate the effacement of Sycorax by focusing on Caliban's fight with Prospero. For instance, while Judith Holland Sarnecki observes that Césaire's "Creolization" of Shakespeare attempts to use "language to pursue a revolutionary goal in his play" (276), Laurence M. Porter argues that *A Tempest* "parodies Shakespeare's original, satirizing the jarring contrast between the theory and practice of Post-Shakespearean colonialism, between benevolent words and ready threats and uses of violence" and thereby poses itself as a critique of "imperialism and racism" (361-362). Both readings locate themselves within the framework of anticolonial discourse and, therefore, do not offer insights beyond Césaire's own nationalist project. Interpretations as such uncannily echo the discourse which proliferates in Césaire text and thereby announcing the compelling ghostly presence of Caliban's mother.

Joseph Khoury, in his essay, "*The Tempest Revisited in Martinique*", provides a kind of reading which is interested in the coloniser-colonised dialectic and believes that Césaire, in a way, "was unabashedly Hegelian in his thinking" (23). Moreover, if "Césaire's play becomes a kind of scrubbing cloth with which to clean up the layers of ideology imposed on *The Tempest*", as Khoury avows, (25) then this Martinican writer, by so doing, is engaged in a competing discourse and one that seeks to replace one with another: nationalism, that is. Khoury's argument follows that in such engagement the "site of resistance is largely based in and on language, especially considering that neither Caliban has an arsenal with which to launch a physical struggle" (25). It is true that language is central in "resistance" and untrue that Caliban does not have linguistic weaponry to fight back, unless Khoury does not recognise Caliban's autochthonous language, or Creole in Césaire's case, and thereby falling prey to the Eurocentric view of the play. What critics like Khoury fail to recognise is that Caliban partakes in public discourse, albeit under constraints as a slave, but can offer, at least, a "counter-sentence" unlike his mother who is textually and discursively annihilated - hence the

allegations of witchcraft and supposed death. Similarly, James E. Robinson, in “Caribbean Caliban: Shifting the “I” of the Storm”, explores the “metamorphosis” which Caliban undergoes by providing a comparative study of both Césaire’s and Lamming’s texts. George Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile* is a collection of essays which ranges from life-writing as a writer, critical engagement with Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and to cultural politics while incorporating his own writing by assuming the voice of Caliban as a linguistic, cultural and geographical immigrant in England. If Césaire and Lamming, then, use their respective texts to “speak with the Caliban voice because of what they derived from Shakespeare’s play as applicable to their experience and to their need to expose the effects of colonization” (Robinson 458), then the focus on black nationalism by Césaire and such critics further cements my contention that such interpretations signal Sycorax’s absent presence. Therefore, the preoccupation with the Caliban figure almost always pins the coloniser-colonised dialectic down to a ‘boys’ club’; by so doing, the gender question is always left unattended.

In, “Césaire and Shakespeare: Two Tempests”, James Arnold recounts the ways in which Césaire digresses from Shakespeare by means of language use to sharpen Marxian class contradictions. For instance, he argues then that “Césaire has differentiated the characters linguistically according to social position” (244) by drawing examples from the key characters of the play. Arnold maintains that the language used by Prospero represents bourgeoisie – hence it ranges from “Balzacian lawyer” to “military officer” and these in any case signpost authority and sovereignty (244) – while Ariel “aspires to the values of Prospero”, and that Caliban’s “is proletarian as befits his station” (245). He further asserts that the “language of Stephano and Trinculo is of course proletarian as well, but completely lacking in those qualities present in Caliban’s” (245). To follow in this Marxian spirit of reading the language of Césaire’s play, one can argue that in Marxist terms Arnold’s argument is not entirely correct: Ariel would fittingly epitomise, rather, the *petit bourgeoisie* as an aspirant of class as such



while Stephano and Trinculo represent *lumpen-proletariat*, due to their lack of consciousness – hence their drunkenness. And, it is, of course, not far-fetched to render a Marxist interpretation of the play, since Césaire’s is not entirely cut off from such ideological currents – even though this is not primarily his focus. However, such reading brings closer the power dynamics that manifest in the play through class, language, race and gender. Therefore, the access to discourse – even a nationalist one, for instance – is determined by these four components which further deprives Sycorax’s participation. The rise then, of Negritude movement and African intelligentsia generally reproduced the subaltern, albeit internally so.

#### **1.4 Searching for the Sycorax Figure in the Lexicon of African Nationalism**

Césaire’s play reveals that the decolonisation project as incomplete, if not falling short in realising the broader liberation that should include the problematisation of the further effacement of Sycorax. The exchanges between Caliban and Prospero reveal the former’s rebellion and self-assertion by invoking an African language, calling for freedom in the Swahili language: “Uhuru” (1.2. 17). Most importantly, the text shows Prospero’s inconsistent narratives about Africans for not having their own language since he ironically claims to have “taught” Caliban language (1.2. 19). Upon hearing Caliban speaking in his so-called native tongue, he complains and gets irritated: “Mumbling your native language again! I have already told you, I don’t like it. You could be polite, at least, a simple “hello” wouldn’t kill you” (1.2. 19). Here what seemingly presents itself as European conventions imposed on Caliban is nothing more than silencing and taming Caliban’s rebellion and thereby showing a total disregard of his language and heritage. After casting aspersions at each other, Caliban exchanging phrases like “hooked nose”, “you look like some old vulture” and “scrawny neck” (1.2. 17), Prospero reminds him: “Since you’re so fond of invective, you could at least thank me for having taught you to speak at all. You, savage .... A dumb animal, a beast I educated,

trained. Dragged up from bestiality that still clings to you (1.2. 17).” Not only does Prospero situate Caliban in the animal kingdom by referring him as such and thus “rescuing” him from his supposed animality, he claims to have “civilised” him by teaching language as though teaching him a European language is tantamount to “humanising” him. However, Prospero’s claims are at odds with Caliban’s use of his mother tongue. If Prospero is proved to be prone to distortion of history, then one is bound to be sceptical of his representation of Sycorax. It then becomes virtually impossible to overlook not only the discrepancies in his historical narrative about the island and its inhabitants but also Césaire’s own epistemic violence for further effacing Sycorax, because one is left with the question: who might possibly have taught Caliban his mother tongue? It is precisely attending to such questions that the play’s nationalist politics seems to perpetuate the oppression of the black woman.

Although Césaire’s text produces more than a Spivakian “counter-sentence” through Caliban by contesting Prospero’s representation of the island, the female subaltern, once again, remains a “double shadow” due to the loud silence of Sycorax. The play succeeds in challenging Empire through the imaginative guise of Prospero or Shakespeare – as the author of the critically engaged. However, Césaire’s critique of *The Tempest* is confined to nationalist and representation politics because, while it is by no means uncritical about the representation of Caliban, it overlooks Sycorax. Unlike Caliban, who can “speak back” and tell Prospero that the latter selfishly equips him with a colonial education, one that mainly prepares him for servitude, Sycorax cannot speak back. Caliban, then, asserts himself thus: “[y]ou didn’t teach me a thing! Except to jabber in your own language so that I could understand your orders” (1.2. 17). In the process of this male dialogue, Sycorax fades into the shadow of Caliban and African nationalism. Seemingly, the text forces Sycorax to stand on the other side of the fence, deprived of participation in the discourse on colonialism which is depicted as an exclusive space for African and European men to engage. The play, therefore, depicts the way in which African

nationalism can be reduced to men's power struggle game – where the black man appears to be envious of his white counterpart, rather than acting out a widely inclusive struggle for emancipation for all. For instance, Caliban emphasises his inheritance and asserts himself as the rightful heir of the island. We learn this when he corrects Prospero for suggesting that Caliban cannot “survive without [him]”: “Without you? I'd be king, that's what I'd be, / the king of the Island. The king of the Island given / me by my mother, Sycorax (1.2. 17).” Here, Caliban reflects nostalgically, once again, when he talks about his mother Sycorax, however, he does not seem to consider the implications of Sycorax's having owned the island. His interest appears to be in decolonisation, and a decolonisation that does not open the space for women's discourse on colonisation and patriarchy. In the same vein, Césaire posits Sycorax as an ancestor who once owned the land and never presents how she might have fought for decolonisation herself, and thereby further commits her textual effacement both in the play and in the discourse on decolonisation.

*A Tempest* depicts Sycorax as the spirit of the place, one that haunts the imagined island and its inhabitants. Although Sycorax is introduced in the play in absentia, as is also the case in Shakespeare's play, the very same absence becomes an ironically strong presence. It is as though, in both plays, she poses herself as a defiant and irrepressible character who demands her space in the imagined island and the play's discourse. For instance, while Shakespeare, through his male characters, refers to Sycorax in terms of the past, Césaire's Caliban uncannily speaks of her in terms of the present, and as his constant companion by suggesting that her spirit lives in the island. As a result, he even contradicts Prospero when the latter says Sycorax is dead by poetically enunciating her into life and the environment of the island:

Sycorax. Mother.

Serpent, rain, lightening.

And I see her everywhere!

In the eyes of the stagnant pool which stores back at

me,

through the rushes,

in the gesture made by twisted root and its awaiting

thrust.

In the night, the all-seeing blinded night,

the nostril-less all-smelling night! (1.2. 18)

What I find intriguing in this long soliloquy are the images of all that is mysterious and natural which are associated with Sycorax. Césaire does not only provide an African cosmological understanding of Sycorax as an ancestor in surrealist terms, but he also depicts her as a feminised spirit of the place – hence the mother nature trope, as discussed earlier. The phrases, “serpent”, “lightening” and “eyes of the stagnant pool”, invoke mystery, obscurity and the sense of enigma and power associated with Sycorax. Césaire's *Caliban* reiterates the “Mother Africa trope”, as it is prevalent in Negritude poetry, which Stratton – already deals with the gender question in male African literary tradition – rightly problematises the ways in which these writers sugar-coat the real issue that black women are oppressed and that any romanticisation does not change their position in society. Stratton, explicating Bá, argues that “the Mother Africa trope, in its idealization and romanticization of the African Mother, belies the real “position of women in Africa,” camouflaging their subordination by the patriarchal socio-political systems of African states from which they need to be liberated” (121). This observes the kind of denialism evident in adherents of Negritude, which Stratton herself alludes to quoting Senghor saying, ““contrary to what is often thought today, the African woman does

not need to be liberated. She has been free for many thousands of years” (121). Similarly, the way Caliban romanticises the effacement of his mother falls within the shortcomings of Negritude; thus it is no surprise that Césaire himself does not recognise the lack of substance in Shakespeare’s *Miranda* and, most importantly does not challenge the epistemic violence under which Sycorax suffers.

It appears that the only way Caliban himself has access to his mother is through metaphor. In his attempts to get at her, she disappears into metaphor. Similarly, Khoury relates to Caliban’s riposte at Prospero that the former “win[s] the combat in dialogue is his recuperation and full affirmation of his mother, a metaphor for history” (28), and indeed such metaphor can appositely allude to the oral account of (her)story in which her effacement stands for. It is, then, precisely Caliban’s counter-narrative to Prospero when he challenges the latter’s insults that “[s]he’s ghoul. A witch from whom – and may God be praised – death has delivered us” (18). Caliban’s attempt to disrupt the misrepresentation of Sycorax by Prospero speaks of his ambivalence, because he seems to be torn between his adherence to the struggle against the “primary” oppression, alluded to earlier, and the “secondary” allegiances to his mother. Even though Césaire and Caliban seek to give Sycorax honour by making her an ancestor and spirit of the island, they fall prey to romanticising her effacement and her history – whereas they ought to be in solidarity with her oppression by rescuing her from the obscurity of epistemic violence. It is, then, precisely here that the discourse of African nationalism presents itself, once again, limited because it seemingly does not find black women’s oppression readily recognisable and legitimate. Therefore, the way in which Sycorax is represented, in the play, is best illustrated by the paradox used by Caliban which highlights his own ambivalence about her; hence he probably only sees her “[i]n the night” as “the all-seeing blinded night”, and thereby attributing supernatural powers to her.

Moreover, Caliban's self-assertive spirit, by rejecting the imposed identity, disturbs the colonial discourse which maintains that Africans are "savage[s]", "dumb animal[s]" (1.2. 17) and, therefore, cannibals. What I also find interesting here is Caliban's blind spot on the projection of his own mother as a witch and Negritude's ideological silence on the representation of black women as witches and whores. Such discrepancies risk to present African nationalism as a masculine orientated discourse that contributes to the denigration. Consequently, Césaire's privileging of Caliban's oppression and black liberationist discourse over Sycorax affirms the notion that black women are third class citizens. In the text, Caliban can reject his name while seeking to reverse and undo his dehumanisation, but Sycorax is thrown to the periphery and outside language where she is deprived space for power contestation.

In a similar vein, the representation of Caliban's hyper sexuality, through allegations of sexual violence, rhymes with the unconscious of Césaire's text, which legalises the act of sexual assault committed against Sycorax. While Caliban rejects the depiction of himself as a rapist, in Prospero's discourse, he does not analyse and point out that Prospero himself is a rapist on the basis of the history of colonial invasions and subsequent forced miscegenation, but he is concerned about the image of the black man in the European imagination. We learn this in the exchange with Prospero about his denigration to the "ghetto" environs (1.2. 19), Prospero asserts: "It's easy to say "ghetto"! It wouldn't be such a ghetto if you took the trouble to keep it clean. And there's something you forgot, which is that what forced me to get rid of you was your lust. Good god, you tried to rape my daughter!" (1.2. 19). Clearly, Césaire's text does not only seek to critique the colonial occupation for constructing the ghettos – through land dispossession of African people – but also seeks to engage the ways in which colonial narrative about black bodies pathologise the standards of living and that African men have uncontrollable sexual desires for white women. As a result, the projected hyper sexuality onto

black men, according to such narratives, equates sexual violence with which they are associated. Such violence is one that can only be targeted at white women, since black women cannot apparently be raped due to their bodies being objectified through the history of slavery. However, Caliban's narrow fight against the negative stereotypes about black people is limited to black men's representation; thus he protests, "[r]ape! Rape! Listen, you old goat, you're the one that put those dirty thoughts in my head" (1.2. 19). By so doing, he reverses the hypersexualisation of African men even though he fails to see that African women's is much worse because patriarchal order demands that their bodies be relegated to the ownership of society and particularly of men.

What I find equally intriguing is the reworking of Ariel who is introduced, in the *dramatis personae*, as a mulatto slave. It would not be far-fetched to propose that Césaire's text, here, signals to the history of miscegenation, one that is immersed with the sexual violence targeted at black women. To be sure, the originary reference of Ariel in Shakespeare's play is in the proximity of Sycorax, and Prospero tells us as much. Even though in the source text Ariel is a spirit that gets adopted by Prospero when Sycorax dies, Césaire chooses to historicise Ariel's identity the same way he does so in the case of Caliban who is interpreted as a black slave – for political or ideological reasons, of course. Césaire goes on to give Ariel attributes amenable to those of black slaves and servants accused of "Uncle-Tommism": those who are said to be assimilationists who protect the master's interests and believe that their freedom depends on their masters. For instance, the allegations that Ariel is "a privileged servant," "a lackey," "the embodiment ... of the perfect and unspeakable secret police" (Lamming cited in Robinson 435), however, provides a limited and problematic view at once because they delegitimise his own bondage by reducing him into a willing collaborator. Moreover, we learn that when Ariel returns from setting up the shipwreck of Prospero's supposed enemies, and through the latter's magical powers, the former complains that he is tired of executing the tasks

given to him and reminds Prospero thus: “You’ve promised me my freedom a thousand times, and I’m still waiting” (16). Prospero retorts, rather furiously with a rhetorical, if not a patronising, question, “Ingrate! And who freed you from Sycorax, may I ask? Who rent the pine in which you had been imprisoned and brought you forth?” (16). Prospero’s consternation, here, for Ariel’s supposed ungratefulness, for having been released and freed by him, suggests that he is forever indebted to Prospero and, therefore, he owes him servitude. This, in many ways, certifies Ariel’s perpetual enslavement.

However, Khoury provides a different view of Ariel and rejects the assumption that he is naïve. For Khoury, Ariel’s conniving ways – in making Prospero believe that he accepts his uncontested history about the island – enable him to negotiate his way to freedom. For instance, he argues that:

Ariel’s repetition of his master’s version of history is also an unspoken conspiracy that will guarantee his own release from bondage. Ariel is not as “delicate” or “dainty” or “fine” as Prospero declares, but quite pragmatic, as the contrast between his later speeches and actions and his earlier speech to Prospero shows, when he expresses exasperation at not being freed (1.2.241-43). (29)

Clearly, a reading as such counteracts the dominant narrative among liberationists, which reduces Ariel to “uncle-Tommism” and thereby whitewashes his own victimhood. It is therefore suiting to situate Césaire’s Ariel in a historical context. Khoury also believes that “[i]t is also likely that Prospero knows Sycorax’s story from Ariel, for it would be far-fetched to believe that Caliban would have told it to the magus, and certainly not in the manner Prospero reports it. Because Ariel was punished by Sycorax- we cannot be certain as to why - his version of events is probably biased against her and Caliban” (29). Even though I find Khoury’s reading useful in this regard, my purpose is to establish that the perpetual effacement of Sycorax in the



play instantiates the effacement of orality. Due to the dichotomous thinking apparent in both Shakespeare and Césaire, one cannot fail to notice that Prospero's authorial historicism represents writing while Sycorax's effacement connotes that of orality. Thus, I later maintain that it is not presumptuous to submit that Ariel, too, is Sycorax's child, as explained below, but unacknowledged due to the shame such conceptions would bring to the Empire.

If Ariel is a mulatto slave, who cannot be delinked from Sycorax, then the play may be suggesting that he is a product of rape. However, the shame that is attached to miscegenation means that Prospero cannot possibly acknowledge Ariel as his own child in the same way he would not recognise the violation of Sycorax's body, because it would affirm the black woman's personhood, rather than objecthood, and render her a silenced rape victim. Put differently: Prospero's act of ventriloquising Ariel, or making him say exactly what he wants to hear, is most telling about the power relations apparent in the imagined island; they mirror the relationship between Prospero's historiography and Sycorax's oral history. It, then, becomes his (written) word against the muted Sycorax; thus, it is possible that Prospero may have arrived on the island prior to the conception of Ariel. As Césaire's play allows, the argument can go as far as to say that Prospero's encounter with Sycorax may have resulted in the conception of Ariel, albeit through rape; hence, the history of miscegenation teaches us about sexual violence women slaves suffered under the hands of their masters. In this light, Sycorax can be said to be mother of both Ariel and Caliban, but her oral narrative cannot be heard because she is effaced by capitalist print culture, racist and patriarchal nationalist discourses.

## **Conclusion**

While *The Tempest* centralises nationalist politics in the conflict between Prospero and Caliban, and the attendant politics of representation, the chapter has shown that it is difficult not to imagine the presence of Sycorax in such debates. Her silence, as a character who is only

spoken about, does not only render itself loud but it also reveals the ways in which Shakespeare's male characters seek to erase her from the history of the island. What is apparent in Prospero's and Caliban's political clash is narcissism which is transfixed in their achievements. On the one hand, Prospero egoistically articulates his magical powers he uses to get what he wants, his scientific endeavours, that are not really specified, and how he has usurped the island and made it his own. On the other hand, Caliban boasts about his hospitality, knowledge of the topography of the island, his ownership of the island due to inheritance and his ability to learn Prospero's language. It is precisely their narcissistic and egoistic attitudes that plunge them both into the masculine discourse on nationalism, one that turns a blind eye on the female voice and presence in the issues pertaining to landownership. It seems they are both aware that the presence of Sycorax and her space to speak would render their claims null and void. Similarly, in Césaire's *A Tempest* the politics of race, culture and representation, through the Negritude movement, highlights the discursive effects suffered by the Sycorax figure, because of the ways in which discourses as such do not only render black woman's liberation unnecessary but also insignificant. Thus, it is imperative that Césaire's play does not make significant changes on the character of Sycorax by bringing her into the life of the text; it merely shows the limited political goals of Negritude and African nationalism and thereby reveals, perhaps, political and intellectual jealousy that proponents of such discourses might have about black women. Such discursive manifestations, as a result, have strong bearings on the figurings of Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona.

## Chapter Two: Winnie Mandela Bewitching History and the Nation

### 2.1 Introduction

The passing of Winnie Mandela on the 2 April 2018 evokes her symbolic deaths, suggested by her representation in the public sphere that borders on the present absence, which marked her political life. The response of the public and the media highlighted her militancy and motherhood as a stalwart of the liberation struggle, while pointing at the attempts of her effacement by the apartheid government and the African National Congress. To identify Winnie Mandela<sup>2</sup> as a Sycorax figure is to recognise and invoke the trans-historical significations that may be relevant to woman's social position globally. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Sycorax is a "witch" in Prospero's uncontested narrative about her, but to Caliban she is a mother and the first inhabitant from whom he inherited the island that Prospero appropriates. In the play, the mechanisms with which Sycorax to silence come in the form of allegations of witchcraft and her subsequent death due to ageing. What she shares with Winnie Mandela is an uncanny present absence in the text, and the way in which she haunts the imaginative island. Similarly, Winnie Mandela becomes a witch to be exorcised in the eyes of the apartheid government – and, later, in the public imagination – in numerous imaginable forms, hence the banning, solitary confinements and misinformation campaigns. It is through such mechanisms such as the accusations of infidelity and her portrayal that "were designed to damage her reputation" (Bezdrob 131) which seek to efface her. This, therefore, supports my contention that the construction of Winnie Mandela as a Sycorax figure seeks to efface her and

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<sup>2</sup>I am using a familiar diminutive of her name as a public figure; otherwise, her full names are Winnifred Nomzamo Madikizela Mandela. I am also very much aware that the diminutive, Winnie, may suggest both intimacy and lack of respect; however, I opt for it to highlight her undeniable presence in the public and she is better known by this name. The unavoidable contradiction though in the usage of the name, Winnie Mandela, is that it has the potential of undermining my aim to redeem her, because it is very much attached to, if not dependent on, Nelson Mandela. However, I strategically use the name for its empowering effect in the public discourse.

mute her voice as a storyteller of a special kind, one that tells the story of the oppressed during apartheid and arguably beyond. My purpose is not necessarily to assert that the notion of spectre, witchery and shadow can be used in interchangeable ways – as they seem in this study – since they relate to each other and thereby highlight the position of Sycorax. Rather, it is to buttress that they stand as a metonym for incomplete effacement, to signal the present absence of the black woman figure in dominant ideologies like nationalism and, its by-product, patriarchy. This chapter, then, seeks to establish that Winnie Mandela becomes a Sycorax figure due to her spectral presence as a demonised political figure, one who is entrapped in her husband’s shadow. By so doing, I interrogate her figuring in Anné Mariè du Preez Bezdrob’s *Winnie Mandela: A Life* (2003), Anjie Krog’s *Country of my Skull*’s chapter, “Mother Faces the Nation” (1998), and Njabulo S. Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003).

The way in which Winnie Mandela faces suppression from both the apartheid government and arguably the ANC but emerges as resistant and resilient are akin to the workings of the uncanny. In the essay, “The Uncanny”, the originator of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, argues that it is the psychical experience that usually takes place when one confronts the return of that which has been repressed. He defines the uncanny as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (220). This suggests that the repressed resides in the *id* (unconscious) and therefore its return disrupts the *ego* (conscious). Freud, citing Schelling makes allusions to the notion of the “unhomely” (*unheimlich*), maintaining that it is “the name for everything that ought to have remained...secret and hidden but has come to light” (224 original italics). In this view, the uncanny is not the unknown but it is that which is constituted by “infantile complexes” (249) and has found way to surface to the conscious as strikingly frightening. What Freud is suggesting here is that the experience of the uncanny is evoked by childhood experiences or by what we can appositely call the past. Moreover, Freud surmises that “for this uncanny is in

reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (241). To encounter the uncanny moment, then, is to be estranged or “un-homed” by the strangeness of what is familiar. In this light, the uncanny refers to the eerie feeling enacted by the return of the past to the present and thereby collapsing a dichotomy as such. For instance, the spectre, as the phenomenon which disrupts the clear distinction between life and death and presence and absence, takes up on the uncanny, because the latter is also that which signifies irrepressibility of that which belongs to the past but comes back to question or haunt the present. The significance of the uncanny, in this study, is the way in which it speaks directly to the notion of the spectre, because the latter is that which the present tries to bury in the past but which returns to haunt the very systems that seek to suppress it. In the case of Winnie Mandela, then, the empowering effect of her spectral presence in the racist regime of apartheid and patriarchal ANC, which sought to suppress her, renders the spectre of the liberation struggle that uncannily finds expression in the male dominated public discourse.

There is, of course, a suggested paradox in the uncanny, particularly the allusion to fright and familiarity which is nonetheless indicative of ambivalence. Such ambivalence is always already amenable to the spectre of Winnie Mandela in the history of the South African liberation struggle. The spectre, then, can be said to have an uncanny effect, since it is also the return of that which triggers the certain uncertainty. The spectre is both there and not there but its effect haunts, and arouses ambivalence. As the repressed phenomenon, it guarantees its return – in the manner in which history is never frozen in its “pastness” – as if to defamiliarise the familiar. Instead, the haunting of this Derridean spectre is an injunction to justice which the figure of Winnie Mandela instantiates. Winnie Mandela’s resistance, then, shares qualities with the uncanny/the spectre since she is the constantly suppressed woman revolutionary for both the apartheid forces and her own political party. She becomes the defamiliarised familiar,

suppressed as a black person and as a woman; she also gets demonised as a militant woman in the liberation struggle. However, the attempts at effacing her entirely do not necessarily succeed; hence she continues to haunt the racist regime, the patriarchal ANC and the public imagination. Therefore, the spectre of Winnie Mandela, like the uncanny, finds expression in mystery or in the undoubted “there-ness” of the invisible as a public figure constantly facing effacement due to her race and gender.

In the eyes of the apartheid government, then, Winnie Mandela becomes a witch to be silenced and disfigured. The apartheid government, through state apparatuses such as stratcom, the media propaganda called Strategic Communication, launched a campaign to tarnish her. As a public figure, this meant to dismantle and dis-figure her public image so that the effacement could be achieved entirely. In any case, such attempts were met with resilience. She seemed to be constantly negotiating her way between silencing and effacement, absence and presence in the fashion of the spectre. She faced effacement because she was a vocal black woman, a speaking subaltern, a professional and an intelligent woman, one who posed a threat to the status quo shaped by racist and patriarchal values. The contradiction of a professional woman and a subaltern not only highlights her ambiguous character but also the fact that she was a black middle class woman who did not have access to imperialist culture and African nationalist discourse. Her conspicuous defiance as a black woman posited the unthinkable to the oppressive regime and refuted its power. What qualifies Winnie as a Sycorax figure, then, is first and foremost, her race and gender – as the radical other to the ruling class. By being a witch, she becomes an embodiment of “monstrous femininity,” to borrow the phrase of the Belgian-French psychoanalyst and feminist, Julia Kristeva, which relates to the woman’s body as a horrifying sight that stimulates fear of castration.

The idea of the witch is akin to Jeffery Cohen’s monster theory, because it results in demarcations of society against a subject that embodies horror. The monstrous, according to

Cohen, resides on the borders of difference. If “[p]olitical or ideological difference is as much a catalyst to monstrous representation on a macro level as cultural alterity in the microcosm” (8), as he contends, then Winnie Mandela as a Sycorax figure fits this category on the basis of her radical otherness to the regime. She is the other to the regime, but like Frankenstein’s monster, she is also a creation of the regime, and one that is created through its excess of violence. As an outspoken black woman, who is characterised by dissent and “ideological difference,” Winnie Mandela needs to be silenced even through torture, banishments, solitary confinements and “malicious rumours” (Bezdrob 124) – at least this is what the apartheid government seemed to believe. Cohen argues further that “[f]rom the classical period into the twentieth century, race has been almost as powerful a catalyst to the creation of monsters as culture, gender, and sexuality” (10). The argument follows that the construction of the monster does not only rely on ontological difference, but it is also a social and cultural production. It is therefore a process in which the Self constructs itself in negation, if not through difference. “The monstrous body is pure culture,” writes Cohen, “[a] construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read” (5). This suggests that the monster, as a body, is a social text, one that needs to be interpreted. In this light, the monstrous bears some resonance to the ways in which witches are imagined and constructed, because they, too, are social and cultural constructs. Like the monster, then, the witch is forced to the periphery of language and society, to delegitimise or mute her voice. Therefore, this is precisely what the figuring of Winnie Mandela as a witch – appositely a Sycorax figure – reveals.

In *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, Sylvia Federici traces the history of the witch-hunt from medieval Europe, showing how the witch-hunt was a war against women. She argues that “the witch-hunt in Europe was an attack on women’s resistance to capitalist relations and the power that women had gained by virtue of their sexuality, their control over reproduction and their ability to heal” (170). For Federici,

apart from the fact that the witch-hunt was a class war, it was significantly a policing and colonisation of women's bodies and, subsequently, a strategic silencing of their voices. Since "the witch-hunt was also instrumental to the construction of the new patriarchal order where women's bodies, their labour, their sexual and reproductive powers were placed under control of the state, "(170), thereafter it was the state machinery that sought to relegate women to objecthood, to mere resources of labour through reproduction. This relates precisely to the domestication of women, to deprive them of the possibility to be actors in the forms of economic production – hence their subsequent exploitation. The significance of the witch-hunt, here, is that it shows us the ways in which women have been appropriated by the patriarchal system to fulfil its own purpose; by so doing, it sought to take ownership of women's bodies. Most importantly, the construction of women as witches mirrors the exploitation and the victimisation of women due to their class, an aspect which the Salem witch trials also reveal unequivocally. The notorious story in these trials, and one that Arthur Miller appropriated in his allegorical play, *The Crucible*, is that of the young girls, Abigail Williams and Elizabeth Parris who have fits and then claim to having been bewitched. As the trials suggest, race, gender and class appear to be the criteria on which these allegations were based, which also suggests that the construction of the pariah figure was already in place.

If the widening of class contradictions cannot be uncoupled from modernity, as class tensions are quite evident in witch-hunt movements, then those that were carried out in African countries fall within the framework as such. Todd Sanders draws examples from examples of rain witchcraft and how the Ihanzu people in Tanzania believed that there are rain witches who orchestrate drought or prevent rain, and thereby sought to eradicate such through witch-hunts. Sanders argues that "[o]f the varied Ihanzu witches, none is more menacing than the rain witch: To attack the rain is to attack all Ihanzu willfully, shamelessly, and without remorse" (342). The suggestion here, is that rainmaking is at the heart of Ihanzu tradition, and in the face of



drought speaks to their livelihoods and other related issues of group sustenance. It follows that the witch-hunts in Ihanzu mirror the ways in which peoples under colonial modernity seek for “the indigenization of modernity, their own cultural space in the global scheme of things” (Sahlins quoted in Sanders 347). Therefore, the Ihanzu rain witch-hunts reveal the way in which such witch-hunts become the mechanism to cope with changes brought by colonial modernity. Through their discussion of the anthropological literature on witchcraft containment in different parts of Africa, Diane Ciekawy and Peter Geschiere show how difficult it is to contain witchcraft even in the hands of politicians, traditional leaders and administrators. They hold that the intervention of politicians, however, “resulted in less violence” (7). They are of the belief that witchcraft in Africa, “is reproducing itself hand-in-hand with modern changes, and on a rapidly increasing scale” (3). They ask pertinent questions concerning the suggestive connection between witchcraft and modernity. This then tells us that witchcraft discourse appears to be a consequence of political, social and cultural changes facing a society in transition.

Isak A. Niehaus argues that the witch-hunts of the South African Lowveld, during the period of transition to democracy, should be placed in the realm of symbolic politics. He then asserts that such campaigns “have been variously interpreted as indicative of intergenerational conflict, political intimidation, or attempts to attain political legitimacy by eliminating evil and misfortune” (94). This shows further that witch-hunts are not divorced from politics and social conflicts, a point that Johannes Harnischfeger makes unambiguously. Reading the witch-hunts of the 1990s in the chiefdom of a South African Lowveld, Niehaus submits that these witch-hunts were reflective of the political uncertainty of the time; hence they were political symptoms. He is of the view that upon the un-banning of the political parties like the ANC, the young activists resorted to witch-hunt when they thought they lost political control in the communities since senior leaders of the ANC were assuming a central role. According to

Harnischfeger, witch-hunts gained momentum in the mid-1980s when youth activists, from the “ANC youth League, pupils and students' councils” believed that “the elimination of witches was part of the black emancipation movement” (103). While the youth involved in these activities were “usually young men between 16 and 25 years old”, their main targets happened to be “mostly women in their sixties” (103). For Harnischfeger, this happens against the backdrop of absent fathers engaged in “migrant labour on white farms or in the mines” (104), a dominant social phenomenon which subjected the protagonists of these witch-hunts to be “raised by single mothers and grandparents” (103). The witch figure, in this light, seems to be the scapegoat for something deeper: the helplessness to confront the oppressive system and rising capitalism whose demands dismantle families for wage labour. Nonetheless, it is believed that the young people used “the struggle against witchcraft” as one of the means to gain political relevance in their communities (104). It is then reported that some of the ANC leaders claimed not to believe in witches, but they “merely exploited the superstitions of the population” (105). He suggests that the ANC leadership may not have entirely disavowed such violent practices since the leadership believes in the existence of witchcraft and its eradication while it is also concerned with its own image as a modern political party that does not want to be judged as backward by the West.

The relevance of the history of the witch-hunt, in this study, is that it shaped the subsequent social position of women in their transhistorical significance since “the witch was also the rebel woman who talked back, argued, swore, and did not cry under torture” (Federici 184). It is then discernible that subversive acts by women may be interpreted as “witchcraft” and, therefore, considered a threat to patriarchal order. The witch-hunts, in the discussed scholarship of witchcraft, reveal power relations in society. Such discursive manifestations, then, foreground the ways in which the patriarchal order constructs itself and impacts women’s positions. What can be drawn from the construction of the monstrous and the witch figure,

respectively, is that they are consonant with that of Winnie Mandela as a Sycorax figure in the public imagination. Moreover, as a political activist, it is her racial and gendered identities that usher Winnie Mandela in the public discourse as a liability. It should also be noted that Winnie Mandela is one figure in the older generation whom the militant youth of the times related to and identified with, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, more so than other elderly comrades. The radicalism she displayed in the mid-1980s may have been her way of interpreting the changing politics, influenced by the Black Consciousness Movement, and led to the disapproval of the old guard of the underground ANC and the liberal United Democratic Front's reproach of her actions. The ANC's way of exorcising her, then, may be the ways in which it sought to generate a smear campaign against her in order to pave way for Nelson Mandela. Winnie Mandela's rebellion against, and defiance towards, the underground ANC and UDF leaders, may have been a consequence of the UDF taking the centre stage in the political theatre of South Africa. This, then, may have resulted in her "taming" even though she would have been sacrificed for her husband in either way. Thus she is forced into her husband's shadow. In the words of Rob Nixon, then, she "vanishes behind the long shadow of [Nelson Mandela's] apostrophe" (55), one that trivialises her agency and denies her role as a protagonist of the liberation struggle in her own right.

## **2.2 'Ukusikwa Yinimba<sup>3</sup>: The Burden of Mothering the Nation in Anné**

### **Marié Preez Bezdrob's *Winnie Mandela: A Life***

Anné Marié du Preez Bezdrob's *Winnie Mandela: A Life* (2003) is a sympathetic project that seeks to retrieve Winnie Mandela from her husband's shadow, and which goes even further to

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<sup>3</sup> *Ukusikwa yinimba* is an isiXhosa expression which connotes empathy and solidarity in motherhood; it refers primarily to birth pains. I use this phrase to highlight the sympathetic nature of Bezdrob's project to attempt to rescue Winnie Mandela from her husband's shadow, and also to the fact that Winnie Mandela's motherhood appears throughout the text. The generic use of *ukusikwa yinimba* phrase relates to the case of compassion when a mother pities or sympathises over the plight of another mother's child.

re-orient her as a political actor in her own right. I choose this latest biographer, as a case study, with an awareness of the existence of the preceding biographers – such as Emma Gilbey whose biography is titled *The Lady: The Life and Times of Winnie Mandela* (1994) and Nancy Harrison whose book is called *Winnie Mandela; Mother of the Nation* (1985; and the most recent ones: Fred Bridgland’s *Truth, Lies and Alibis: A Winnie Mandela Story* (2018) and Sisonke Msimang’s *The Resurrection of Winnie Mandela* (2018). None of these biographies cover the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings. Unlike her predecessors, Bezdrob covers the full scope of Winnie’s active political life, including the TRC hearings. Writing against the dominant narrative that posits Winnie as mouthpiece of her husband, Bezdrob highlights the political agency of her subject in the liberation struggle. She, then, asserts that “Winnie was emerging as a major player on the political stage, a protagonist in her own right and with her own support base. To the downtrodden masses, she had become a heroine, an African Joan of Arc: a leader to be reckoned with” (170). Employing literary techniques with aesthetic effect, so as effectively to write Winnie Mandela back to the epicentre of history, Bezdrob puts Winnie Mandela centre-stage in the political theatre of South Africa. However, this also occurs in the backdrop of Winnie Mandela’s autobiography, one which does not do justice to her representation due to its nature as a series of recorded interviews.

*Part of my Soul* is a mediated life narrative by the editor Ann Benjamin. The tone, in this autobiography is set in the introduction where Ann Benjamin acknowledges being captivated by Winnie Mandela’s “dynamic” character (17) and thereby driving the point home that she is “not a heroic woman: she has not become a single-minded political fighter, tough and immune, but has remained vulnerable” (16). The latter view, nevertheless, corresponds with her iconic photograph – used as cover for both her autobiography and Bezdrob’s biography – which portrays Winnie Mandela’s alluring beauty and vulnerability as a young wife of the most famous political prisoner. The autobiography by Benjamin follows precisely

this line of thought: Winnie Mandela identifies herself first and foremost as a mother, caregiver, social worker and then as a freedom fighter. The narrative begins in Brandfort, in the small town of the Free State where she is banished, and flashes back to her upbringing which leads to her life-changing union with Nelson Mandela. Her story is punctuated by editorial notes on historical events along with personal testimony from friends and family members, and the exchange of letters with her imprisoned husband. What is hard not to notice is that Winnie Mandela highlights her victimisation as a symbol of resistance and in ways which suggests that the targeted audience is the international sympathiser. She then presents her life as that of sacrifice and selflessness: “there never was any kind of life that I can recall as family life, a young bride’s life, where dreams of what life might have been, even if we knew that it would never be like that” (65). The emphasis on the notion of the ideal family life is hard to miss throughout the narrative, so as to say that the apartheid government was also a home-wrecker and a thief of a life that could have been. Most certainly, Winnie Mandela does not only situate her selflessness in the context of the liberation of her people, but she also, occasionally, effaces herself through her storytelling by centralising her marriage to Nelson Mandela; hence the title, *Part of my Soul (went with him)*.

When Winnie Mandela enters what she calls the “spotlight”, right after her husband’s life imprisonment, she claims that she “wasn’t ready” but was “ready to deputize for Nelson” (87). She goes on to tell us her predicament in trying to emerge out of his shadow thus: “[before], even if I battled to put my own ideas across in a meeting, it was Mandela speaking. And suddenly, he was not there” (87). She appears to be aware that that her deputising status in her marriage with Nelson Mandela comes in two forms: that Mandela was already a household name in South African politics and a prince of abaThembu who was also viewed as a leader of the house in the context of African traditional patriarchy. Winnie Mandela thus is culturally viewed as her husband’s proxy and spokesperson every time she expresses herself

in the public discourse. She knows not only the patriarchal nature of her political organisation – one that deprived its women members voting rights for thirty years in its existence – but also the perpetual subordination of women in the party. Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter provide the history of women's struggle in South Africa, dating from 1912 to 1982 in their essay, albeit with no mention of Winnie Mandela and Lilian Ngoyi. They argue that the ANC's constitution:

provided for an upper house of chiefs, a lower house where elected representatives of Congress would meet annually in conference and an executive committee. Three types of membership were laid down: ordinary membership, which was open to all men over eighteen 'of the Aboriginal races'; honorary membership for those who had helped the African people; and auxiliary membership for women. Auxiliary membership denied women the vote in the Congress conference. (18)

The history of the ANC clearly shows that women in the organisation were not only deprived of full participation, but were also silenced and reduced to political appendages to their male counterparts. For Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter, it took the ANC three decades to accord women full membership and voting rights until a moment before the Women's League was formed; perhaps to allow less contestation of women in upper structures of the ANC (21). Winnie Mandela, then, appears not to be delusional about the position of black women in South African politics and culture. She depicts this succinctly:

Looking at our struggle in this country, the black woman has had to struggle a great deal, not only from a political angle. One has had to fight male domination in a much more complex sense. We have the cultural clash where a black woman must emerge as a politician against the traditional background of a woman's place being at home! Of course most cultures are like that. But with us it's not only pronounced by law. We are

permanent minors by law. So for a woman to emerge as an individual, as a politician in this context, is not very easy. (83-84)

She offers, here, a critique of black woman's suppression, and one that is legitimated and legalised by African traditional patriarchy and the apartheid government, respectively. This, therefore, suggests that she is located at the crossroads of racism, and both black and white gender discrimination, the violent ideologies that seek to disfigure her.

Winnie Mandela seems to be engaged in forms of self-effacement, and selflessness. Commenting on the violence meted out against her by the state, she insists that "I have ceased a long time ago to exist as an individual .... My private life doesn't exist. Whatever they do to me, they do to the people in this country. I am a political barometer" (26). She is well aware that there is a reward for selflessness: empowerment and heroic status. It is similar to the case when she relates her feelings of vulnerability for having her husband taken away from her while she was still young: "when you suddenly realize that you are stripped of a man of such stature, to whom you were just a shadow, you find yourself absolutely naked" (85). What is intriguing, here, is Winnie Mandela's own depiction of her shadowy place in relation to her husband and also the way she admits to feeling exposed in the absence of Nelson Mandela. However, Winnie Mandela's allusion to her shadowy position is contrary to her conspicuous public presence and bravery, thereby revealing her ambivalence about her position because she is also frustrated by how her public speeches are interpreted as a directive from her husband. Her spectrality, as a result of her shadowy position, is evident in her autobiography and is illustrated by Nelson Mandela's centrality in her own life-writing and, most significantly, in her on-going struggle to negotiate her way out of her husband's shadow. However, Bezdorp, Winnie Mandela's latest biographer, seems to be aware of this default position; and, as a result, she decentres Nelson Mandela in Winnie Mandela's biography.

Bezdrob maintains that Winnie Mandela “was a tragic heroine [who] was never accorded the credit she rightfully deserved” (204) in the crucial moment in history when the country was ushered into a democratic dispensation. However, for Bezdrob, Winnie Mandela was an iconic figure of the “Free Mandela Campaign,” especially “at a time when the youth in particular had no idea what Mandela or the other jailed or exiled leaders even looked like” (204). Bezdrob goes on to assert that “the ANC leaders realised that she was a highly marketable commodity (...) the visible face of the liberation struggle” and that she “had a sales value” (203-4). That Winnie Mandela had to be “packaged” for commercial use and for the international “market” – to echo Bezdrob’s “economic” language – means that the ANC exploited her aesthetic performance for political goals; hence she had to be presented to an international audience as the beautiful young wife of a famous political prisoner so that the international sympathisers bought into the Free Mandela Campaign. Perhaps, this means that she had to be presented as a sight of pity: a vulnerable wife of the incarcerated husband, depicting, albeit implicitly, the image of a disrupted marriage or home, due to the draconian laws of apartheid. Moreover, such figuring of Winnie Mandela may have foregrounded the general perception of her as Mandela’s appendage, forcing her into his shadow again – as soon as Nelson Mandela gets released. In many ways, this is akin to Mamphela Ramphele’s notion of “political widow” because “[p]olitical widowhood is a particularly ambiguous status. It is both an acknowledgement and a denial of women as social and political actors” (101-102). For Ramphele, the problem with “political widowhood” (101) is that while it recognises women’s political agency, it ironically effaces the woman by reducing her to her man’s “carbon copy” (Mandela 83) However, Bezdrob emphasises Winnie Mandela’s credentials in the struggle and reminds the reader that she was also “educated, eloquent and charismatic” (204), so as to restore her political agency. By so doing, this biographer avoids the dangers of focusing on Winnie Mandela’s aesthetic appeal and, thus, falling prey to taking women’s looks and support of a



man as the main qualifications for entry to the public discourse. The Free Mandela Campaign is of high importance, here, not only because it is about the representation of Nelson Mandela and the ANC, but also Winnie Mandela herself. This then shapes the ways in which she is remembered by the public.

Bezdrob tracks Winnie Mandela's life from rural Bizana to Johannesburg where her political activities commence. In this biography, Bezdrob portrays Winnie Mandela as a woman, whose life is marked by pain and loss; losing her mother as a teenage girl; for having had a short-lived marriage; for experiencing torture and harassment at the hands of the Security Police. Bezdrob later further suggests that Winnie's life represents a case of post-traumatic stress disorder. This biography is divided into three parts: the first part is titled "Winnie Madikizela", covering her life before her union with Nelson; the second part is called "Winnie Mandela", and focuses on her married life and her political activism; while the third part, titled "Winnie Madikezela-Mandela", documents her dealings with the notorious Mandela United Football Club that would later lead to the TRC hearings, and her separation from her husband which leads to the divorce. In an unambiguously feminist spirit, Bezdrob rightly seeks to refute the notion that Winnie Mandela's politicisation and political activism are enabled by her marriage to Mandela.

The figuring of Winnie Mandela in the media lingers between her marital relationship with Nelson Mandela and her gendered identity as woman and mother. The seemingly forgotten initial status – of being a politician apart from everything – fades into meaninglessness in the public imagination. Her political activism during the liberation struggle is trivialised and, therefore, has rendered her a representative and a mere mouthpiece of her incarcerated husband. For instance, Winnie Mandela's highlighted motherhood is not only enacted by her mothering Nelson Mandela's two daughters, Zenani and Zindzi, but it is also extended to the mothering of the nation; hence the title "Mother of the Nation," due to her

marriage to the imprisoned “Father of the Nation.” The implications of emphasizing Winnie Mandela’s motherhood and attaching her political role to her husband presupposes her entrapment and “housewifization” (Knight para 9). Meg Samuelson contends that “[w]omen’s waywardness is repressed and abjected in order to reconstitute them as domestic subjects who will remake the nation as Home” (199). Seemingly, Samuelson is of the view that the “metaphor of the nation as Home” limits women’s mobility and forces them into the private sphere.

On the contrary, Winnie Mandela as an African woman does not view “home” as imprisonment; instead, motherhood and home are sites of life purpose and empowerment. Moreover, her symbolic role as a storyteller seems to be expose the artificiality of the private sphere/public sphere divide. She is able to transcend the role of the storyteller, which finds expression in the confines of home, by taking it to the public in the form of podiums and political rallies. Therefore, complete repression is itself an impossible possibility to women like Winnie Mandela, because they enact the “unhomely” moment by collapsing the virtual division of the private and the public. If the uncanny could be said to be “something repressed which *recurs*” like a spectre (Freud 241), then the attempts at repressing Winnie Mandela’s radical politics by the apartheid government and the ANC do not entirely succeed in eliminating her spectrality. In the fashion of the embodiment of orality, Winnie Mandela uncannily enters the public sphere in a spectral form as a woman activist repressed by the state and hidden by Nelson Mandela’s monumental name, or “apostrophe”, in the political landscape, and thereby shows her power through storytelling. The ways in which the private and public sphere are divided and constituted are political and cultural. While western feminists may view the home as a space for their oppression through domestication, the home may be a space of power in African cultural imaginings. Therefore, Winnie Mandela’s identification as mother outside the confines of home collapses these binaries thereby enacting her spectrality.

In African cultures the private/public divide does not appear as linear and simplistic as may be the case in European conceptions. For instance, Dominica Dipio in her article, shows this by analysing gender myths in Madi folktales of Uganda around gender roles. She reveals that “men go hunting while women go out to collect wood” (142), and that “there is no evident discrimination in the activities and roles the different genders play” (142). Such seemingly equal distribution of gender roles are contrary to western division of such where women themselves find these to be oppressive and confining. Dipio, paraphrasing Oppong and Abu, maintains that “maternity is [African woman’s] principal role” (143). Most significantly, this particular role provides Xhosa or African woman an empowering role since it makes her an influential figure as one who “socialises her children” (143). The private/public divide is duly undermined by the Xhosa woman as a mother; this role does not only give her a formidable status in such society but also provides her with a sense of identity and meaning. In this case, one cannot simply pose the question, can a Xhosa woman choose not to be a mother? The role as such is desirable among Xhosa women because it also brings about social privileges like power and status. Of course this is not to say there would not be women, in the now fully-fledged modern and liberal South Africa, who choose not to be mothers. Moreover, the division of private/public spheres in the context of African culture does not hold, providing a Marxist perspective in reading of the division of labour among the “Bantu speaking people” in the rise of industrialization in South Africa. Belinda Bozzoli is of the view that “internal domestic struggles” (147) – a term she uses to connote “domestic sphere” as a “site of labour, income and property relations” (147) – show themselves in such division and renders woman’s labour subordinated to that of men. However the inequalities may emerge, she notes that it is true that the “subordination of women’s labour cannot be reduced to a struggle between ‘men’ and ‘women’. Perhaps it is more accurately described as a struggle between patriarchal chiefs and women” (Bozzoli 151). This suggests that the African household, in this period, may not be

inherently patriarchal rather than class conflict between the royal family and the ordinary women. In any case, patriarchy is still a system that oppresses women across the class lines. Therefore, cultural and historical specificity may show the division of private/public as culturally relative.

It is significant that Bezdob's biography on Winnie Mandela highlights the ways in which she was politicised by, and through, the stories of her grandmother and father. The tone is set in the early chapters of the biography where we are told that it was Winnie Mandela's paternal grandmother who entertained "the children with her stories of how white men with blue eyes, long beards and straight hair came to Pondoland, warning the little ones that with their bibles and their money, the strangers had come to steal their people's cattle and destroy their customs" (Bezdob 16). What is suggested here is that it is through the oral tradition that Winnie Mandela's political education was enacted, one that is carried and treated as a medium of entertainment. Bezdob seems to place the culture of storytelling as the a priori of Winnie's coming of (political) consciousness, to refute the commonly held view that her husband was responsible for her politicisation. Spivak, on "Feminism and Critical Theory", provides a deconstructive criticism of Marx's concept of alienation and Freud's notion of normality and health. She then challenges the way in which both thinkers seek to masculinise "human sexuality and the production of society" thereby disregarding the possibility of the "womb envy" in the process (58). Spivak argues that the "ethical charge" in Marx's argument lies on the "labour process" and the ways in which capital seeks to alienate the worker from the production his labour power produces (56). In such a process, the capitalist system hides the fact that the value of the production is the consequence of the volume of labour vested in the product; by doing so, capital separates the worker from the object of his labour, thereby concealing the fact that the labour power and the production are both inseparable commodities. She maintains that this "picture of the human relationship to production, labour, and property

is incomplete” (56) as long as it overlooks “the sentimental situation of the woman’s product, the child” (56). Spivak goes on to argue that ‘the possession of a tangible place of production, the womb, situates women as agents in any theory of production’ (57), and this alone qualifies their “womb as a workshop” (58). She is of the view that Marx, in particular, fails to account for exploitation of women as reproducers.

To recognise “the womb as a workshop”, in the context of this study, is to appreciate women also as economic agents, thereby highlighting their role as both biological reproducers and social subject producers for giving birth, nurturing and being responsible for the socialisation of the child. While western conceptions of these functions are divided – where the domestic space is regarded as a site of oppression of women – African women view home as a space which yields purposeful life and a sense of identity. Therefore, Winnie Mandela’s upbringing depicts this, because her socialisation and politicisation originate from her home: while she learns politics and cultural history from her paternal grandmother and father, respectively, she follows ways of faith from her Christian mother. The argument can be stretched further by suggesting that to black women, home is the source of power, because it is where women are both biological reproducers and social subject producers. In Western conceptions, these functions are divided; women reproduce and men create social subjects. We are then told that “[i]t was not her marriage to Nelson Mandela that made Winnie an activist, but the germination of seeds planted many years earlier by her father and teachers” (Bezdrob 38). To place her family as the point of reference for her politicisation, is to suggest that her upbringing paved her way to political activism, and therefore her life was predestined for mainstream politics. Such assumptions are rather precarious, because one can involve oneself in political activism by chance and not necessarily through the teleological pattern that the biographer suggests. However, the significant point driven home here is that Winnie’s politicisation was effected by different influences and factors, and also by chance. To be fair,

Bezdrob's project seems to enunciate an alternative viewpoint, one that seeks to liberate Winnie Mandela from her husband's shadow, which in many ways is akin to the relationship of Narcissus and Echo – as theorised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Spivak's essay, "Echo", provides a cultural critique of Ovid's "Echo and Narcissus" in ways which seek to "give woman" or substance and womanhood to Echo thereby rescuing her from relative epistemic violence ranging from her treatment by Ovid leading on through cultural history to Freud (17). In Ovid's version of the myth, Echo was a Nymph and a talkative girl who is punished for backchat and then denied speech except to repeat words spoken by others. Echo later gets attracted to a young man, Narcissus, who is said to be handsome but who does not pay attention to Echo because he is in love with his own image. When he rejects Echo, she disappointedly fades into an echo. Spivak, then, proposes that Ovid's narrative is the "tale of the aporia between self-knowledge and knowledge for others" (19). She suggests that the tale depicts the undecidability inherent in the self-other dialectic, which obscures, if not confuses, what the Self perceives of oneself with what the Other knows and what he perceives of the Other. For Spivak, this irreconcilable contradiction is almost already apparent in Ovid's tale, especially in the characters of Narcissus and Echo. She contends that there has been a constant lack of engagement with the absence of Echo in the cultural critiques of this tale or character. Consequently, Spivak questions the ways in which theoreticians like Freud perpetuate the silencing and effacement of Echo by according narcissism to women whereas the character of Narcissus in the myth was a boy.

Such echo, in Derridean terms, demands the repetition of that which stands in for something. In the case of Winnie Mandela such workings are already noticeable; not only does she bid farewell to her voice as an emerging woman activist by entering into marriage with a politician of Nelson Mandela's stature, but she also mourns for her own presence in this union, since she is forced into the shadow of her husband where her public orature is treated as that

which echoes the speech of her incarcerated husband. Like Echo's, Winnie Mandela's reward is punishment for being a speaking subaltern and of daring to assert herself into the political space in her husband's absence, a space characterised by male domination. This act is not left unpunished; hence she faces suppression and attempts at "disfiguring" her by both the apartheid government and the ANC. If "Echo [marks] the moment of textual transgression in Ovid" (Spivak 35), Winnie Mandela, then, comes to mark that of both cultural and political transgression in this social text.

Moreover, while Echo becomes a spectre because of her spurned love for Narcissus, such workings in the case of Winnie Mandela are quite apparent, albeit with a twist. Not only does she slip into spectrality through her marriage to Nelson Mandela – whose image as a "saint" plunges her into effacement – but she also becomes a spectre through his imprisonment. To be her husband's shadow in the public imagination suggests a form of suppression that she defies by coming back like a spectre to the limelight. The nexus between the shadow and spectre, in this case, is enacted by the way in which she haunts the repressive public discourse that seeks to register her involvement in the liberation struggle on the basis of her marriage, whereas her revolutionary legitimacy is in stark contrast with her perceived shadowy position. The argument can be extended further by contending that Nelson Mandela can be read as a Narcissus figure who falls in love with his own (public) image. His is the portrait of himself by the public as a moralist, humanist, saint and as a revolutionary who suffered but opted for peace and forgiveness upon his release, while Winnie Mandela's has been represented as a militant and radical revolutionary: his anti-thesis. By filing for separation and, later for divorce – due to allegations of infidelity and Winnie's ties with the Mandela United Football Club – one can read Nelson Mandela as a narcissist, in his attempt to protect his image from being tarnished by association with his wife. For this reason he rejects her.

The shadow constitution of Winnie Mandela, in this case, is the consequence of the construction of her husband as a political demigod, an image that cannot possibly be sacrificed in order to restore her. In “Narcissistic” fashion, Nelson Mandela is unable to act beyond himself in relation to Winnie Mandela, because he is entrapped in “self-knowledge” and knowledge that is “an accession to a clarity that is so clear that it will not lead to relation” (Spivak 32); for knowledge as such is concealed as self-referential and downright narcissistic. Therefore, Nelson Mandela cannot open up himself by “respond[ing] to the desire of others” (25) due to his entrapment in the mirror image or what Lewis Gordon appositely calls ““narcissistic fantasy” (12). If fantasy as such about self-image necessitates a “hatred toward limitations on one’s desire to live without limitations, which amounts to being the most beautiful; intelligent without limitation ... to the point of becoming, in a word, godlike” (12), then Nelson Mandela’s fight against the contamination of his image reveals the urge to safeguard his good public image. As a result, Nelson Mandela’s narcissistic act of rejecting his wife is in line with the workings of self-imaging, on the one hand, while it gains currency through the construction of his wife as a Sycorax figure – if not the spectre that haunts the very foundations on which such “social and ideological edifices” that rejects her are erected (Žižek 3).

Bezdrob’s *Winnie Mandela: A Life* attempts to retrieve and place Winnie Mandela outside her husband’s shadow. One sees this in the way Bezdrob traces possible forces that may have enacted and shaped her activism. Even though she figures Winnie Mandela as seemingly independent from Nelson Mandela’s influences, the image of Nelson Mandela himself, from which she is uncoupled, hovers over her in public spaces. On the one hand, one has to admit that Winnie Mandela was introduced into the public sphere through her union with the famous lawyer and politician. On the other hand, she became a political activist of note in her own right. It is mostly the public imagination that seeks to trivialise her into a mere



housewife: Mandela's wife. Therefore, when she speaks, she must be listened to because of her platform accorded by her marriage, hence she becomes "his spokesperson". Seemingly, her speaking is mediated by her marriage to Nelson Mandela.

On the other hand, we learn not only that the public believes Winnie's activism is the product of her marriage with Nelson, but also her husband's friends were of the view that "Mandela seemed to be grooming her to play a significant role in the movement," because she "was becoming increasing involved in the work and operations of the ANC" (75). Apart from the assumption that Nelson Mandela may have been preparing Winnie Mandela for his imminent absence and the hard work of upholding his name and that of the banned African National Congress, the language used here is disturbing – that of reducing her into a child. "Grooming," suggests bringing up a child into maturity, a problematic term that not only reduces a woman to a child, but also takes away her agency. This underlying paternalist language invokes the child metaphor for the other, in this case a woman as the other. It would not be appropriate that Nelson Mandela's friends, and perhaps the ANC, place Winnie Mandela at the crossroads of childhood and womanhood/motherhood. As a result, this renders her Nelson Mandela's political child in the public sphere and his spouse in the private sphere.

Bezdrob's representation of Winnie Mandela presents her as both her husband's spokesperson and the protagonist of the liberation struggle. It is seemingly difficult, particularly to the public imagination, to divorce Winnie Mandela from Nelson Mandela's shadow. As a result, Bezdrob depicts this predicament, evident in Winnie Mandela's frustration, by maintaining that "[s]he hated having everything she did or said automatically interpreted as a directive from her husband, and tried hard to reconcile her own views with what she knew or thought Mandela would expect" (129). The question that follows is whether such a voice is reconcilable on the borderline of independence and self-ventriloquism by speaking what the incarcerated husband "would expect"? It is therefore imperative to say that

Winnie Mandela is a subaltern that unambiguously speaks, but her voice is compromised by her struggle to “reconcile” with the expectations of her husband and how she is heard by the public, one that hears her only if she delivers Nelson Mandela’s “message.” And also, she seems to be ventriloquising herself in the act of desiring to say what her husband would say in order that what she says gains currency. I find the idea of ventriloquism intriguing, here, particularly the way it is not uncoupled from power relations. The act is premised on the excesses of the puppet-master as a sovereign subject who controls and sponsors the “speech” of the object of his/her ventriloquism. In this case, the puppet-master is the originator and dictator of what is said by the puppet, because the latter has no agency and sense of subjectivity; it is erased by the very nature of ventriloquism. This act is staged, make-believe and quasi-communication and, therefore, it is a self-referential communication which pretends that the performance as such is of a dialogic nature. Moreover, such workings are akin to spectral communication, outside the puppet show, when one would claim to have seen and communicated with a ghost, or claim to commune with spirits and have the spirit speaking through them; and this is also apparent in cases where evidence is itself spectral. In the social context, the workings of ventriloquism are slightly different; here, a sponsored view and speaking the specific words of others unreflectively, qualifies as a form of ventriloquism. Put differently: having no view of one’s own can be categorised as ventriloquism.

In the same vein, Winnie Mandela is not only seen as a mouthpiece of her husband, but she also finds herself engaged in spectral communication with Nelson Mandela. She knows very well that she is viewed as her husband’s puppet. As a result, she strategically conforms to this presupposed role in ventriloquism, one that works to her advantage because it is no doubt empowering and amplifies her political career. However, her domineering presence in the public, and her self-imagining as the African mother highlighted by her traditional Xhosa regalia – she often wears in public – suggests that she embraces motherhood as a role that gives her

meaning and identity. It is undeniable that she speaks, because she had kept the name of her husband and the ANC alive, especially when there was “barely a trace of Mandela’s name in the media” and “resistance inside South Africa seemed to have been crushed” (125). However, the question that comes to the fore is, how does the public hear Winnie Mandela? Or does her voice reach the public ear, or does it get lost in what Nixon calls “Mandela’s apostrophe”? The silencing of Winnie Mandela, then, through demonization can, perhaps, be related to the construction of her husband as saint. In his attempt to deconstruct the myth of Mandela, Noel Solani traces the genesis of the construction of Mandela as a saint. For Solani, this began in Mary Benson’s biography on Nelson Mandela (44). He is of the view that this myth had been generated mostly by the “media” and “perpetuated at Robben Island Museum” (42). Even though Solani critiques Benson’s Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress for “[overlooking] the weaknesses of [him] and ANC” (44) – and the media and the Robben Island Museum for perpetuating the myth of Mandela as a saint – he falls short in accounting for the effacement or negative construction of Winnie Mandela which is almost automatically enacted the moment the construction of “saint Mandela” takes flight. This often becomes inevitable, particularly in the popular media, due to its reliance on dichotomies. However, Bezdrop reverses Winnie Mandela’s demonisation by empathising with her which is the consequence of universal sisterhood across race.

*Winnie Mandela: A Life* takes two strands as its structure: it presents the case of Winnie Mandela both as a protagonist in the revolution and a victim of effacement, hence her representation is ambivalent. Firstly, the presented case of ambivalence shows that Winnie Mandela is Nelson Mandela’s shadow who is not a shadow, and that she was politicised by her grandmother and people in her life, and also by her husband. This point is crucial, because it reveals the complexity of the Winnie Mandela story, because there are many different factors contributing to the power of her personality. Even though her union with Nelson Mandela may

have amplified her persona, her character shows a strong sense of agency and intelligence as a consequence of her personal history. This is precisely what makes her emerge out of her husband's shadow, albeit not entirely; thus supporting my argument that hers is a spectral presence next to the towering one of Nelson Mandela.

Secondly, Bezdrob introduces the argument of victimhood, one that I disagree with. Here, Winnie is argued to be suffering a case of post-traumatic disorder, due to the torture she suffered in solitary confinement and other related abuses; and that she also fell victim to the informers by whom she was surrounded; the allusion to the conspiracy theories which hold that the security police and the ANC plotted schemes to discredit her so as to barricade her from ascending to leadership in the new dispensation. Perhaps, this may have attributed to the attempts at effacing her. However, the danger in placing Winnie Mandela in the category of victimhood may erase her political agency, and therefore, render her a naïve woman in the hypermasculine political field. This is the dimension that, for me, does disservice to Bezdrob's project in restoring Winnie Mandela's agency, because it ironically delegitimises her as a protagonist in the liberation struggle.

On the contrary, Bezdrob's biographical narrative seeks to endorse the view that the security police sought to discredit Winnie Mandela as an iconic figure of the struggle through misinformation – hence the rumours that she was collaborating with the regime – so as to present her as an informer and an untrustworthy leader in the eyes of her comrades. Bezdrob recounts Swanepoel's<sup>4</sup> intimidating remarks to Winnie Mandela: "He threatened that if she didn't tell them what they wanted to know, they would tell her people a few things about her. That, Swanepoel said, would finish Winnie's ambitions of being a great ANC leader" (145). The question that inevitably arises then is, what kind of "information" the security police

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<sup>4</sup> Major Swanepoel was chief interrogator and torturer in the special branch that kept Winnie Mandela in solitary confinement for almost two years.

withheld, one that would destroy her political career? Was it the kind of ‘information’ that is damaging and defamatory? This nevertheless was suggesting that she had been a collaborator. Whatever the case, Swanepoel was implicating Winnie Mandela into a dirty political game that the security police mastered. Also, by forcing her to speak, to give them information, was an attempt to, ironically, silence her afterwards. This subsequently, led the status quo to engender the narrative that sought to demonise her in the public sphere, one that would render her a Sycorax figure.

Like most women who reclaim the engendered identity of motherhood, Winnie Mandela too fashions and identifies herself as a mother, perhaps for strategic reasons. Emily Bridger compares her to Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth, due to the former’s apparent ambiguous identity as “revolutionary” and as “mother” (446). Bridger argues that “[a]s [Winnie] became engaged in a type of violence far removed from the bounds of acceptable female behaviour, she was increasingly portrayed by the media not as the ‘mother of the nation’ but as a murderous monster more akin to Lady Macbeth”<sup>5</sup> (447). The suggested argument here is that the media interpret sexually/socially deviant acts by women as that which equates with the monstrous. Therefore, Winnie Mandela’s construction as a witch emanates from her fashioning herself as a militant mother. Seemingly, the media’s ability to reconcile her identity as both the revolutionary and a mother engenders the clash of motherhood and militancy, rendering it a sign of the monstrous – thus, her suggested “transition from ‘mother’ to monster in public discourse” (448).

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<sup>5</sup> In this regard, Lady Macbeth is the mastermind who constitutes and directs her husband; in the play, she is depicted as a strong willed and decisive character compared with the indecisive Macbeth even though she commits suicide at the end. It is also worth noting that Shakespeare is notorious for his renegade and unconventional women. The references to Shakespeare, even at this postcolonial moment, are necessary because his canon, in general, is a cultural icon/symbol of the metropole.

Bridger reads Winnie Mandela's involvement in the violence associated with the liberation struggle as that which is comparable to a Lady Macbeth, due to the ways in which it encompasses gender ambiguity. She is of the view that such acts have "transformed [her] from the 'mother of the nation' to the 'mugger of the nation'" (454) without elaborating or stating exactly what Winnie Mandela 'mugs' from the nation. (It would have been understandable if she was referring to the post-apartheid role of Winnie Mandela in the government when she served as the minister of Arts and Culture and Technology, and was accused of maladministration.) However, Bridger goes on to argue that "people either criticised her as a failed militant who stepped too far beyond the struggle's demarcated bounds of organised, disciplined action; or as a failed mother, woman and wife who had transgressed the limits of acceptable female behaviour" (454). Here, one gets the sense that Winnie Mandela's implication in the acts of violence attributed to Mandela United Football Club, and references to infidelity, are viewed by the public as unbecoming of her gendered identity. It is also worthwhile to note that her actions seemed to contradict the image of the mother she fashioned in the public, one whose role is nurturing. By so doing, she violates the expectations of the public for her to embrace the motherly and feminine side that would represent other black mothers who do not have access to public discourse like her. It is therefore not presumptuous to suggest that Winnie Mandela's feminine image and masculine actions – Mandela's mouthpiece and independent activist – become intertwined and yet are irreconcilable, presenting themselves as worthy of further investigation. Exploring the ways in which auto-/biographies on Nelson and Winnie Mandela feed on iconic images of gender, Cheryl-Ann Michael suggests that the representations of these figures extend to the limiting metaphor of nation as family. She argues that "[w]hile Nelson Mandela's image conflates "father" with "leader", Winnie Mandela's identity fluctuates ambivalently between that of Mother of the Nation and African Warrior" (75). Clearly, the persona of Winnie Mandela surfaces with

seemingly irreconcilable views: motherhood and militancy, roles that Winnie Mandela herself carries out successfully.

Furthermore, Bezdrob notes that “rumours begun while [Winnie] was in Brandfort, that she had lost perspective on her role in the struggle, and especially as Mandela’s representative, where they were fuelled by her own actions” (220). Here, Bezdrob depicts the ANC leaders’ perception about Winnie Mandela whom they trivialised as Mandela’s spokesperson, and how they interpreted her banishment as a lack of political involvement, while they overlooked her transformative actions and social activism in the small town by acting as a social worker in the poor black community to which she was confined. Similarly, the reference to “her own actions” in Soweto, elaborated by her acts “becoming MORE defiant than ever, often wearing a khakhi military-style outfit, and making statements that evoked strong criticism” (220), may suggest that Winnie’s was an uncalculated response. This, however, may fail to view her as a political strategist, albeit strategising in problematic ways, accelerating her politics into radicalism that rhymes with the political miasma generated by the youth of Soweto and beyond – since political violence was at its peak in the 1980s. Instead, Winnie’s actions are seemingly read as political naivety, if not recklessness. Such perceptions, then, can be attributed to the negative gender stereotypes that result in epistemic violence prevalent in the ways in which black women’s political activism is positioned and represented in history.

Such “epistemicide” is theorised by Pumla Dineo Gqola as “invisibilisation.” By “invisibilisation,” she refers to the ways in which “women’s intellectual agency” (75) is erased through history. This South African feminist philosopher is of the view that black women’s intellectual activism is effaced in the public sphere and that “[d]ominant assumptions about how history takes shape in the world and, consequently, the memorialising of South Africa’s past, speculate that all leadership is masculine” (74). Gqola alludes to the problematic masculinisation of the history of liberation struggle, one that seeks to delegitimise black

women's intellectual activism. She then, refers as a case in point to Albertina Sisulu's funeral where "journalists and political commentators" sought to "[bestow] on her the title of the mother of the nation," an attempt she deems disingenuous since it is rather a "burden disguised as honour" (68). For Gqola, this "burden" does not only feminises women's activism, but also limits women to mothering and therefore confines them to private or domestic spaces. Thus Albertina Sisulu was "cited as a revolutionary mother, rather than a towering revolutionary" (68). This is akin to Winnie Mandela's "invisibilisation," as the mother of the nation. Unlike western feminism, motherhood in African literature and culture is seen as affirming in complex ways rather than limiting and oppressive. Paraphrasing Adriene Rich, Obioma Nnaemeka asserts that mothering is viewed in two different forms: "motherhood as an institution and motherhood as experience" because "patriarchy constructs the institution of motherhood while women experience it" (5). However, Nnaemeka believes that there has been a shift. Although "in the 1970s and 1980s" feminist arguments were "against motherhood as an institution" (5), African women writers have sought to "give a human face to motherhood" since these writers as such embrace the benefits that come with being a mother and not necessarily the experience of wifehood (5). In this light, the home has never been wholly confining to African women, because homes also play an integral role in their communities and in society as a whole. This needs to be seen against the backdrop of cultural imperialism where the West presents its culture as universal. The home space, for African women, is a source of power, since it generates purpose and an esteemed social status as mothers.

If Gqola believes that the commentators at Albertina Sisulu's funeral were missing the point by accentuating her role as mother of the nation while attempting to disfigure her identity as a political activist, then these comments as such seek to erase the element of threat to masculinised leadership, thereby dismissing Albertina Sisulu into the shadow of Walter Sisulu, her husband. Such depictions mean to condition and manage the ways in which women enter



nationalist discourse, so as to represent the acceptable mother figure, and not as equal political actors to their husbands. Similarly, Winnie Mandela's space in the discourse on nationalism is negotiated through her marriage with Nelson Mandela; and her organisation, the ANC, is male-centred and functions within the framework of "modernity", one that "[intensifies] the masculinisation of the African tradition, and thereby deepening the marginalisation of women and creating instances (for the women in particular) where tradition is progressive and modernity reactionary" (Nnaemeka 171). Therefore, to eliminate the intimidating element in a much contested terrain such as politics, women like Winnie Mandela are subjected to "epistemicide", through demonisation, so as to declare the discourse on nationalism as a sacred space for men, enabling her husband to be delivered as a true messiah of the people at her expense. Moreover, there are many attempts at effacing her; namely, the focus on her as Mandela's wife, mother of the nation and the militarised mother, especially the latter since it triggered her demonisation when posited against her messianic husband. The argument could be expanded to say that while Nelson Mandela gets constructed as the soul of the nation, Winnie Mandela becomes a ghost/spectre as the site or embodiment of the uncanny. She emerges in the public as the spectre of the nation through unsuccessful repressions such as banning, restrictions, arrests and demonisation/vilification. I now go on to discuss the multiple identities she represents in the following section of this chapter as shown in Antjie Krog's representation of her appearances at the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Krog's own nonfiction life narrative, *Country of my Skull*.

### **2.3 Imagining Winnie Mandela as Sycorax in Antjie Krog's "Mother Faces the Nation" and the Media**

Antjie Krog, in *Country of My Skull* (1998), recounts the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, using an imaginative and interrogative approach.

She dedicates her twentieth chapter, “Mother Faces the Nation,” to Winnie Mandela, casting a curious gaze at this intriguing figure who appeared before the TRC, and also at the ways she is imagined in the public generally. This South African journalist and poet first wonders, “why is it that a woman, a black woman from a long-isolated country creates such unprecedented media frenzy?” (Krog 244). She goes on to ask whether it is “because Winnie Madikizela-Mandela answers to the archetype: Black and Beautiful? Or because she answers to the stereotype: Black and Evil?” (244). Here, the polarisation as implied may, then, set the tone for Krog’s exploration of what she terms, “the vast gallery of perceptions about Winnie Madikizela-Mandela” (244). This gallery can be summed up as follows: (1) Winnie Mandela as the compromised and muted voice in parliament; (2) Winnie Mandela imagined as the rich site for semiotics, hence she “lives iconic images”; (3) the mother of the nation and the wife of Nelson Mandela; (4) the heroine of the nation fallen from grace; (5) Winnie Mandela the newsmaker; (6) Winnie Mandela as pre- and pro-feminist; (7) Winnie Mandela as a witch (244-45). Most importantly, what these perceptions reveal is nothing more than the public’s fascination at Winnie Mandela’s perceived fall from grace as a political leader. However, this chapter’s depiction of Winnie contributes to the construction of her multiple identities in the public imagination, because the subjective stance of the author in question, adds another image of Winnie to the “vast gallery,” albeit unintentionally. Thus Winnie Mandela emerges as a witch in the narrative.

Krog’s imaginative project depicts Winnie Mandela as a site of contradictions. For Krog, the image of Winnie Mandela as a revolutionary who fought for the freedom of her people is at odds with what she represents in the TRC, where she surfaces as a perpetrator against the people she purportedly fought for. The title of the chapter, “Mother Faces the Nation”, is most telling of this fact. Transcribing the video recording of the “hearings,” Krog describes the following: “the cameras move from her exquisite face, her diamanté-studded

sunglasses, her throngs of delicate bangles and rings, to the faces of the victims – engraved with hardship, pain, poverty” (246). Here, Krog not only describes Winnie in opposition to the victims, but she also presents her as an epitome of the emerging black elite: an embodiment of contradictions prevalent in post-apartheid South Africa where the corruption of the political leaders turns the people they were fighting for into victims of poverty. She then closes this description with a question, “Is this a clash between the black poor and the black elite?” (246) indicating a sense of betrayal presented by the new dispensation in South Africa. However, Krog’s emphasis on the material possessions of Winnie Mandela – as the tokens of wealth and class – in her comparison with the destitution of the victims, not only highlights the apparent social class differences, but also may suggest a clear-cut judgement that categorises Winnie as a perpetrator – and a callous one too – thus oversimplifying the complexity that shapes the nature of the allegations presented in the TRC.

It is worth noting that Winnie Mandela uttered statements which incited in the mid-eighties when Nelson Mandela and the ruling party were considering negotiations, and this might have cast her as a radical activist. Lorenzo Mari suggests that the “construction of Mandela’s cult of personality” (97), when he began to “distance himself from the armed struggle by choosing the path of negotiations with the regime” (98), may have, simultaneously, constructed Winnie Mandela negatively – thus positing her as Mandela’s antithesis. This contributes significantly to the way Winnie Mandela is viewed in the TRC. She becomes a witch in the eyes of the public and one who must be symbolically executed, because of the paradox that she is supposed to be the “mother of the nation” but is a mother who murdered children, namely, Lolo Sono and Stompie Seipei. Thus, the inherent contradiction in her image is that she is a political heroine who is associated with gross violations of human rights. The public, then, fails to reconcile these two iconic images: Winnie Mandela the political heroine and the one who is associated with murder and betrayals. This array of Winnie Mandela’s

figurings, then, reveals a lacuna, because it whitewashes the fact that she is a product of intensive violence of both the ANC and the ruling party of the times. For instance, Frene Ginwala relates how women in the ANC were forced to play an “appendage” role dating back from its precedent, the South African National Natives Congress in 1910. She argues that the treatment of women in the ANC was informed by “patriarchal notions of women’s roles in society” which were “inscribed in the constitutional provision for and duties of a category of ‘auxiliary’ members, automatically without fee and hence with no vote” (80). As a matter of fact, early political formations may have viewed women's struggles as secondary to that of male oriented nationalist ideals, and “may have felt inappropriate to divert their attention and scarce resources to the women’s campaign” (Ginwala 83). This may then be a clear indication of women’s effacement which is still prevalent to this day in the ANC – an organisation that has not had a woman president in its existence of over a century. Therefore, the act of presenting a note containing a threat to Desmond Tutu to leave Winnie alone) by the senior members of the ANC Women’s League in the TRC, and the demonstration outside the hearing, is very suggestive. It is possible that Winnie Mandela’s Women League sympathisers may have interpreted the TRC hearings as a way of compromising her from contesting leadership in the ANC’s 50th National Conference which was a few weeks ahead.

Moreover, Krog provides an account of the members of the Women’s League in the “hearings” supporting Winnie Mandela. By supporting Winnie, Krog suggests that they perpetuate violence and injustice to the victims. She depicts them thus:

Outside the hall a group of followers from the ANC Women’s League are chanting support. They are all old and wrinkled and poor. ‘Winnie didn’t kill alone! They shout. ‘Winnie had a mandate from us to kill!’ I switch off my tape recorder. I don’t want to

hear it. I don't want to broadcast it. I don't want to live in a country where women mandate one another to murder. This hearing will test us beyond ourselves. I know.  
(246)

Krog's sensitive reaction for wanting to "switch off the tape recorder" and refusing to "broadcast it," are quite understandable here. However, she seems to fail to make the reader understand the point of view of the Women's League veterans. By so doing, Krog becomes unintentionally complicit in muting the voice of the subaltern, which in interesting ways brings to light the way in which she figures Winnie Mandela in this chapter. The Women's League veterans' utterances are intriguing and require a close look, particularly the seeming contradictions they entail. The same Women's League members assert, "Winnie didn't kill alone," and they explain that she "had a mandate from us to kill" (246). It may be seductive to interpret this as a mandate by ANC women for Winnie Mandela to kill; however, it is by no means a uniquely Women's League "mandate" to kill those that are viewed as "informers" and "collaborators". Violence as such is an indictment of the ANC patriarchs who felt that the struggle was threatened or compromised by informers who collaborated with the enemy that was penetrating the camps in exile. As a result, the mandate comes from the upper echelons of the underground structures of the ANC and were treated as a form of military tribunal.

It is in this context that the ANC women's claim should be read; they view themselves as militant mothers of the struggle for liberation, hence they can claim to have mandated Winnie Mandela. One could consider them to be suggesting that the ANC, with all its structures, must be held accountable and should take responsibility as an organisation for Winnie's alleged actions. Or, perhaps, they are claiming that she is being victimised or offered as a sacrificial lamb by the male-led ANC. Notwithstanding, Krog's treatment of the Women's League veterans falls prey to limiting binary oppositions in representing Winnie Mandela, because she dichotomises her as a perpetrator against victims, and the elite against poor black

women. Even though the TRC Hearings present no clear-cut judgement on Winnie, due to “layers upon layers of cover ups” (TRC Reports) and inconsistency in the testimonies as reported, Krog seems to suggest the contrary. In her conversation with her colleagues – towards the ending of Winnie Mandela’s hearing – Krog presents what may be an implicit or complex verdict: “Winnie is the monarch of the people for whom the new system does not work. She symbolises their collective honour. She personifies their aspirations and their right to status. She has to cling to that honour. If she admits to wrong doing, she dishonours them all” (260). This suggest that Winnie Mandela seems to realise that that she is getting a raw deal in the new dispensation that seeks to marginalise her like the rest of the disenfranchised people. For Krog, it is such a realisation that Winnie Mandela cannot voluntarily admit to any wrongdoing, because that would be betraying the very honour she embodies.

It is worth noting the Women’s League’s solidarity with, and their stance on, Winnie Mandela, because their confrontational act at the TRC can illuminate the state of affairs in their broader political organisation. It is possible that they may have interpreted the “Winnie Hearing” as instrumental in eliminating her in the race for the presidential post in the ANC, since her hearing preceded the congress where the organisation elects its leadership. In the SABC 3’s “The TRC Report”, dated 27 November 1997, we are shown three members of the Women’s League approaching Desmond Tutu. As these veterans deliver a letter to the chairperson of the Commission, the anchor of the TRC Report narrates: “Friday’s witnesses do not do much to separate fact from fiction; the day began honestly with the delivery of a threatening letter from the veterans of the Women’s League” (“TRC Report” SABC3). We are not shown what was actually written in the letter, but we read it through Tutu’s reaction. The archbishop reprimands, “How could you bring that here! Can you please leave?” They do so without any resistance. What is intriguing about this scene is not necessarily the Women’s League members’ “threatening letter,” rather it is the way they view the TRC in relation to

their leader, Winnie Mandela. They seem to view the TRC as Winnie's political crucifixion. Similarly, towards the end of the SABC 3 TRC Report episode, outside the hall the Women's League members are chanting political songs in support of Winnie.

One of the women is interviewed by an invisible reporter; she is captured saying, "It was war. When there's war, you kill if the person is violating you or violating the principles" ("TRC Report" SABC 3). It is interesting that the speaker here speaks of "war" and "violation" in the same sentence, since the "war" in this context is black on black violence, and the TRC is about the gross violation of human rights. Seemingly, the liberation struggle was at war with itself, if not fellow blacks, who were accused of collaborating with the designated enemy. Even though it is unclear what and whose "principles" are referred to, their message is crystal clear – they support Winnie – whom they perceive as a direct victim of the politically dirty game, even at the expense of the victims of Winnie's alleged actions. Perhaps, their defence of Winnie communicates something beyond the object of their support: maybe theirs is the contestation of their own threatened position, or future, as women in the ANC. In this light, the members of the Women's League depicted in Krog's narrative may also be gesturing in this direction, rather than the perceived blind loyalty and support suggested in the narrative. They are not necessarily "[mandating] one another to murder" (246) – as Krog wants us to believe – but they are, perhaps, taking collective responsibility for their leader's alleged actions. They attempt to write themselves into the story of Winnie Mandela and her position as a woman political activist in the unrepentant patriarchal ANC.

Krog's project, however, does suggest that Winnie Mandela, among the ANC leaders, was treated differently in the TRC, thus affirming my earlier assertion that she was given up as a sacrificial lamb. She goes on to state that in the "middle of Winnie hearing," the Amnesty Committee issued a list of "important ANC names: Thabo Mbeki, former MK Commander Joe Modise, Mac Maharaj – responsible for Operation Vula ... 37 of them in total" (256). In a

conversation with her colleague, Krog, then, asks, “Does this mean there won’t be any public hearing for them?”(256), and John Allen replies: “Yes” (256). Even though Krog does not state her position explicitly on the seeming blanket amnesty of the prominent ANC leaders, she believes that “Something is not right” (256). In many ways, the blanket amnesty of Winnie’s colleagues in comparison with the timing of her hearing justifies her reluctance to participate in the TRC. Her involvement, as a result, contributed to her construction as a “witch” of which Krog too is complicit. This reveals itself in the following concluding remarks of her chapter:

I also have a distinct feeling that for now this hearing has nothing to do with me, with whites. Blacks are deciding among themselves what they regard as right or wrong. They are making that decision here, today. Either a black person may kill because of Apartheid – or none of us may kill, no matter the reason. This hearing has little to do with the past. It has everything to do with the future.

The thought is unbearable in this confined space packed with journalists. I extricate myself from the web of cables and go outside for air. On the pavement a man is selling little white plates with faces on them: Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki, Joe Slovo and Winnie Mandela – all in the same row....” (258)

Apart from accurately capturing the brewing of the culture of impunity, and nepotism, among political leaders – and the futurist orientation of the TRC – Krog appears at odds with the new dispensation. Moreover, she unconsciously constructs Winnie as a pariah figure, one that needs to be jettisoned to the periphery – away from the society of “saints.” By so doing, she falls prey to pathologising Winnie, since, according to her, she does not deserve to be “in the same row” as the listed ANC patriarchy. Also, the construction of Winnie as a Sycorax figure, simultaneously, constructs Nelson Mandela as a saint or the sole hero. Krog goes further to state that “I cannot live in a space where the face of Nelson Mandela or Joe Slovo is



interchangeable with that of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela” (258), so as to unambiguously certify the demonisation of Winnie Mandela. Therefore, in Krog’s narrative, Winnie Mandela is not necessarily given the benefit of the doubt; as a result, this South African poet forces her “to answer to the stereotype: Black and Evil” (244), one that is mostly perpetuated by the media the writer herself forms part of.

It is then worth noting that Winnie Mandela sets herself apart from other husband-wife relationships of major political figures by her conspicuous presence and voice in the public arena. While Albertina Sisulu, Adelaide Tambo, Veronica Sobukwe, Nontsikelelo Biko – to name a few – have been overshadowed by their husbands and do not significantly emerge out of their husbands’ shadows, Winnie Mandela’s power and influence are amplified mostly by the absence of Nelson Mandela as the most famous political icon. Perhaps, this is highlighted by the fact that their lives did not attract biographers who focused solely on their lives. Albertina Sisulu’s life for example, is told in conjunction with that of her husband, Walter Sisulu, by their daughter-in-law, Elinor Sisulu. This is not, however, to suggest that life-writing is the barometer of prominence pertaining to political figures. Winnie Mandela’s public life, then, is not without trials and tribulations because hers is marked by present absence enacted by the deification of her husband. As a result, the construction of Nelson Mandela as a saint and moral giant requires the corresponding vilification of the wife. Krog’s narrative, and the media generally, feed on such dichotomies. Patricia McFadden examines the myth of a democratic media by outlining the characteristics of democracy such as “exclusion, privilege, and maleness” (553). She argues that “[t]he media in Africa isolates and demonises woman who dare to challenge the status quo” (655). For McFadden such demonisation of women presents itself in the “good-woman-bad-woman dichotomy” (655), and the case in point is Winnie Mandela, who “became unacceptable as a black, political woman” (655). Media, according to McFadden, demands that women must be traditional and conform to stereotypes

of femininity, ones that complement patriarchal order, rather than antagonising or challenging it. As a result, the media has polarised Winnie Mandela and Graça Machel, because the latter is viewed as “[conforming] to this public mothering image, and is politically acceptable. She allows Nelson Mandela to be the star, but she is still there – the strong woman behind the great Mandela. She has restructured herself in incredible ways, and the white male press loves it” (McFadden 655-56) Therefore, the media’s focus on stereotypical femininity in its representation of women should be read as the means to silence women’s voices and erase their agency. Seemingly, Winnie Mandela pays a heavy price for standing out from wives of other political figures, and her demonisation contributes to her effacement. However, the effacement of an intriguing figure like Winnie Mandela can never be complete, due to the inherent contradictions in both her life and figuring – an idea which Njabulo Ndebele explores further in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*.

#### **2.4 Poetics of Ambivalence in Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela***

Central to *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003), is the idea of moral ambiguity that Njabulo Ndebele begs us to consider in dealing with Winnie. Moral ambiguity, in this context, connotes indecisiveness in making an ethical or moral decision. It refers to a complex situation or action that requires a moral judgement but eludes any clear-cut judgement. Ndebele, then, dramatises this uncertainty through the form and content of his imaginative project, which eludes categorisation. However, for lack of a better term, I shall refer to it as a novel. This may be a consequence of his writing style. The novel is a form that highlights polyphony and moral ambiguity. Since Ndebele infuses scholarly writing with fiction and biography, he presents a highly complex form and content. The novel has different first person narrators alternately throughout the story (the chief characters and the fictional Winnie herself) and the occasional omniscient narrator. Ndebele fuses literariness of language that is characteristic of fiction writing and alternates it with essayist prose. Different voices telling each character’s tale and

the fusion of both scholarly writing and literary language seem to mimic the complexity of the text's structure and its complex characters. He divides the narrative into parts: in the first part, the omniscient narrator opens the narrative by introducing Homer's story of Penelope and the virtues of waiting. He then introduces four ordinary but fictional women who, like Penelope, share the burden of womanhood and waiting for their husbands, and calls them descendants of Penelope. In the second part, the four women, with the introduction of Winnie, take over the baton and narrate their own stories as monologues.

Ndebele tells the story of four women – Delisiwe S'khosana, Mamello Molete, Marara Baloyi and Mannete Mofolo – who have been left by their husbands and calls them “Descendants of Penelope” for sharing the same burden of waiting even though their husbands, unlike Odysseus, never come back. He juxtaposes their waiting with Winnie's while having his characters acknowledge that the waiting of Winnie is publicly unbearable. Mannete's husband leaves her in a desolate village for Johannesburg only to marry another woman in the city. Mamello's husband disappears for a year only to write her a letter to tell her that he joined the liberation struggle, went to exile in Cuba and comes back married to a white woman in the name of rainbow nation and non-racialism. Dwelisiwe's husband gets a scholarship to study medicine overseas and has an affair there but leaves her upon finding out that she has a child by another man. Marara's husband openly has affairs until he one-day leaves for good, becomes sick and dies to be buried by her. These women decide to have conversations about their pain of waiting for being left by their husbands while addressing the fictional Winnie through her picture on the wall. Their meetings take the form of a support group, and they call it *Ibandla Labafazi* which loosely translates as a congregation of women. They interrogate the character Winnie and her public life while they, simultaneously, reflect on their own lives. Such waiting, according to Dorothy Driver, “is imposed upon women by a patriarchal culture, on Winnie Mandela by the media-orchestrated public made up of both black and white South Africans,

and on black South Africans by white or Europe domination. Africa – in South Africa – is waiting for its return” (209). Driver suggests that through the waiting of the fictional Winnie, Ndebele’s novel gestures to the ways in which South Africa has been forced to wait for its self-imagined sense of nation or identity rather than construction by colonial modernity. For Driver, this also applies to black women, Nelson Mandela and South Africans at large they have been forced, by the tyrannical rule of colonialism and apartheid for their own freedoms.

Notably few criticisms that Ndebele’s novel has acclaimed, but notably the ones that do engage it focus on the issues of reconstruction and re-imaginings of the nation, womanhood, post-apartheid novel. (Driver 209; Van Zyl Smit 402; Krog 261; Medalie 52). Examining the Penelope figure and the notion of faithful woman in what may be termed continental literature, Betine Van Zyl Smit holds that Ndebele re-imagined woman and liberated her from the expectations of traditional European and African patriarchy. She argues that in releasing Penelope from Hellenistic virtues of womanhood, “Ndebele has freed not only Penelope from the confines of unconditional waiting for and subjection to her husband but has made the new Penelope the symbol of hope for women in the twenty-first century, not only South African women, but women everywhere” (404). Even though Van Zyl Smit focuses on Penelope, her critique on virtuous womanhood calls attention to Driver’s reading of *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* as a novel signposting the reconstruction of gender and nation of the woman figure. If “[h]ome functions in Ndebele’s novel as a site of a new kind of gender relation and a metonym for a newly defined country and nation” (Driver 211), then the new South African should rediscover the “ordinariness” – as envisaged by Ndebele’s critical writing – so that it can reflect “a kind of supple or fluid realism which is far from being a naturalistic attempt to imitate or reproduce external reality” (Medalie 53). Clearly, the ways in which we imagine nation building are shown in the novel to rhyme with the country’s cultural identity, which is

still in the process of becoming; it is a process that includes a release of the black South African novel from the shackles of apartheid.

Although such reading echoes Ndebele's stance on what has come to be known as "protest literature", *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* is indicative of the kind of novel he envisages in his critical essays. It is precisely the exploration of interiority and ambivalence in weaving together morally ambiguous characters like the fictional Winnie – rather than the simplified dichotomy of victims and perpetrators produced by novels under the apartheid regime – which suggests the way in which the story of Winnie Mandela should be read. Moreover, the characters of his novel, too, express their ambivalence towards the fictional Winnie Mandela through both critical and sympathetic perceptions about her. Citing Ealy and Strimel, Maja Krakowiak relates that "[l]iterary scholars use the term "ambiguous character" to refer to characters that are "morally complicated" and that possess both good and bad qualities" (4). If ambiguous characters are "morally complicated", then it is fitting to place Winnie Mandela in such a category, because both as a heroine of the liberation struggle and the alleged mastermind behind the Mandela Football Club, notorious for killings, kidnappings and torture, she becomes an interesting figure. I argue then that the form and content of *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* performs and mimics the idea of ambivalence, positing the imaginative Winnie as a subject requiring such tentative treatment, because of her morally ambiguous character.

The idea of ambivalence is quite intriguing here, especially in relation to ambiguous characters like Winnie. It is precisely this contradictory nature that renders it worth engaging in. Bill Ashcroft et al, paraphrasing Robert Young, explain ambivalence as that which refers to "a simultaneous attraction toward and repulsion from an, object, person or action" (10). This better explains the complex feeling the reader has about the imaginative Winnie, one that crosses admiration and condemnation. It seems to be the case with her; she appears to be the embodiment of ambivalence, due the ways she is presented as a character who ironically fights

for justice on the one hand and perpetuates injustice on the other. The violence she suffered at the hands of the security police she turned onto the same people she was fighting for; this made her almost indistinguishable from the oppressor, presenting a case of “mimicry”. To illustrate the point, Mamello, one of the four women addressing the imaginative Winnie, puts it thus: “Major Theunis Swanepoel kept it all going from the secret autonomy of the torture chamber. That chamber made you, Winnie, catapulting you into a public position to challenge the outward symbols of power that it sustained. That was your apprenticeship to violence and power. Did you pass it all too well?” (89).

The suggestion here is that Winnie, having suffered immense violence in the torture chamber, was initiated as a novice of her torturer. Therefore, Winnie’s implication in the plethora of violence in Soweto is suggestive of her ambivalence. It is clear that ambivalence includes emulation of the ways of the coloniser since it “describes the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterises the relation between the coloniser and colonised. The relationship is ambivalent, because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer” (Bhabha 10). Therefore, the violence Winnie suffered in the hands of Major Swanepoel and from the apartheid system, generally, appears to be the kind of violence to which she subjected victims like Stompie Seipei and Lolo Sono – as allegations hold.

However, my focus is not on Winnie’s ambivalence, but on the ambivalent figuring of her in Ndebele’s novel, since the latter seems to be a fertile ground for analysis. *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* can be said to be drawing in the four “ordinary” women as representing the opinion of ordinary South African citizens about Winnie, one that is torn between condemnation and exaltation. We learn this through the complex responses – in speeches and letters – of the *Ibandla labafazi*, the congregation of women, whose uncertainties about their fellow woman-in-waiting are most telling of their inability to judge the fictional Winnie. In

monologue style, Delisiwe, one the four women, recounts Winnie's alleged infidelity with Dali Mpofu (63), linking Winnie's shame with her own for ending up in bed with her son's friend (70). Mamello, in the form of a letter, expresses both her admiration for and fear of Winnie (88), and her love and hate for her (95). Marara goes as far as comparing Winnie to South Africa, suggesting that she is an embodiment of its contradictions (103). However, the fourth woman, Mannete, digresses from the other women of *Ibandla* by not addressing Winnie but herself, expressing her own silences (116). Through these characters, Ndebele seems to be moving away from making public figures demi-gods by humanising one of them, namely, Winnie. For making connections between the four "ordinary" women and Winnie, Ndebele forges points of commonality between "ordinary" people and public figures – and this humanises them. Central to the deliberations of these characters, then, is uncertainty: they sympathise and condemn Winnie at once. Therefore, their complex responses about Winnie resonate with the consciously open-ended form of the novel in question, because they too seem to both affirm and refute the stereotypical representation of Winnie.

Homi K. Bhabha, in the series of essays in his monograph, *The Location of Culture*, offers a deconstruction of colonial discourse by also using the tools of psychoanalysis. He relates the way in which the colonial encounter not only produces hybrid cultures and subjects but also how such a clash makes way for mimicry. In the essay, "The Other Question", Bhabha holds that colonial discourse produces racial profiling and stereotypes in ways that are repetitive to construct its ideological pillars. Not only do such stereotypes construct otherness but they also shape the perception of Europeans about Africans, Indians and other racial groups. Bhabha submits that "the same *old stories* of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish must be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time" (77 original emphasis). This suggests that stereotypes are themselves an ideological construction of otherness, which find signification through

unchanging and repetitive stories. This, for Bhabha, enunciates a space for both pleasure and fear. The fear and pleasure, alluded to, pick up on the Freudian concept of fetishism in the sense of fright of castration or the realisation of the male child with the mother's lack of penis. The argument follows that the interstice or borderline thereof is a space that articulates ambivalence. Although the other, according to such excess of stereotypes, solicits fear; it generates pleasure because as much as the other is feared, s/he is also a site of desire – or that which the racist subject cannot do without, since the suggested dependency. The suggested fetishism here, as Bhabha's interpretation of the stereotype, relates to myths of "racial purity" and "cultural priority" (74). It is at the centre of colonial discourse, one that results in inclusive exclusion. It is precisely such anxiety that comes "as the substitute for the mother's penis" (74).

In his theorisation of colonial discourse, Homi K. Bhabha explicates the idea of stereotypes as that, which is central in colonial discourse. He argues, "[a]n important feature of colonial discourse is its dependence on the concept of 'fixity' in the ideological construction of otherness" (66). Here, Bhabha exposes the pretence of stability in colonial discourse, to say that colonial discourse relies on fixed forms of representation in its grammar of "othering". For Bhabha, "[f]ixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition" (66). He realises that colonial discourse is inconsistent in its representational modes, due to the contradictions it entails in the very construction of otherness. It is the idea of "daemonic repetition," however, that I find intriguing here, due to the suggested reiteration of demonization of the other which is not only amenable to sexist discourse. For instance, the construction of the monstrous and witch-hunt discussed earlier which is akin to the construction of the Sycorax figure. Bhabha is of the view that it is precisely such repetitive modes of representation that breed the stereotype, since the latter is "a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in



place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (66). Therefore, Bhabha suggests that the monotonous and caricatured forms of colonial representation of otherness do not only give weight to racist ideologies through negative stereotypes but they also enact ambivalence. Such ambivalence, for Bhabha, derives from the fact that the colonial discourse relies on the very other – the spectre that haunts it – in order to construct and define itself.

According to Bhabha, ambivalence presents itself as the core of the stereotypes, because it gives value to the latter. He asserts that "[f]or it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotypes its currency" (66), due to the way in which ambivalence enacts the convergence of identification and estrangement prevalent in the construction of otherness. "The stereotype is a complex ambivalent, contradictory mode of representation," writes Bhabha, "as anxious as it is assertive and demands not only that we extend our critical and political objectives but that we change the object of analysis itself" (70). If the stereotype is that which reveals and conceals its inconsistencies, then it is imperative that we employ theoretical tools that enable transcendence of the borderline of identification and negation, because beyond such conjunction may begin the possibility of altering the subject of critical inquiry. However, Bhabha does not tell us what exactly the "object of analysis" might change into. Perhaps, he gestures towards reversing or undoing dehumanization and demonization of the colonial subject. Furthermore, one may argue that ambivalence can be construed as the lacuna and contradiction of the stereotype and, therefore, of "othering", since it signals the possibility of "decentring" the coloniser. This seems to be what is mirrored by *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* in its treatment of its central subject of inquiry.

The text presents Winnie as one character who is surrounded by complexities in both her private and public life. If the stereotype "is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection", as Bhabha wants us to believe, then Ndebele's imaginative project is a self-

reflexive “play” of such forms of figuring, particularly those forms that are produced by the public discourse that feeds from the colonial stereotypes. In the novel, then, ambivalence is dramatised between what Krog calls “archetype Black and Beautiful” and “stereotype Black and Evil” (244). In this case, the spectre can be read as a metonym for ambivalence. Ndebele seems to be playing and negotiating the virtually irreconcilable dichotomies that define Winnie, presenting her as both Mandela’s shadow who is not necessarily a shadow, a witch who is not a witch and both a heroine and a villain. This South African writer, self-consciously toys with the idea of ambivalence, hence depicting Winnie as an ambiguous character. He, therefore, presents Winnie as a “text” so that we do not judge but “interpret her” (Ndebele 135).

The significance of the workings of colonial discourse, as deconstructed by Bhabha, is that it is akin to sexist discourse, due to its reliance on negative stereotypes. As a social machinery designed to vilify and disenfranchise women, the patriarchal system not only demands women to be in the confines of private spaces (the home) to perform wifely duties, but to be mere appendages of their men and to speak only as their spokespeople. In the context of African patriarchy one finds a mixture of Victorian and Christian values, carried through colonial modernity. Men and women do not necessarily play up the rational-irrational binary as a gender binary, even though gender roles are clearly defined. However, African traditional patriarchy deputises women in the household and beyond, and in matters of social significance men take the lead, thereby forcing women to disappear in the shadow of their husbands. Here, marriage (or old age) for women becomes the entrance by which they enter public discourse, albeit through deputising their men. Gender relations, in this context, are not without ambivalence because while women are expected to be wives, they are also expected to play a motherly role towards their husbands. They are expected to take care of their husbands while they must also obey them. This indicates that African traditional patriarchy is also ambivalent, because its sexist discourse is betrayed by desire. If the colonial discourse is premised on the

oppression of fellow humans and thereby justifies exploitation and effacement of the colonised, then sexist discourse takes a similar stand by rendering gender difference as a liability. Therefore, the fear of black woman's power, expressed in different modes of oppression, is juxtaposed with man's ontological identification with the mother figure, so reminiscent of his own power. In this light, this presents ambivalence as a device which deals with moral ambiguity, one that is suggested by the representation of Winnie Mandela in Ndebele's novel.

Analogous to the monster's body, as theorised by Jeffrey Cohen, the woman's body evokes ambivalence, because it too incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy" (4). Stark similarities, apparent between colonial discourse and patriarchy also reveal themselves in Sylvia Federici's analysis of the history of the witch-hunt in Europe. She puts it thus:

The witch-hunt, then, was a war against women; it was a concentrated attempt to degrade them, demonize them, and destroy their social power. At the same time, it was in the torture chambers and on the stakes on which the witches perished that the bourgeois ideals of womanhood and domesticity were forged. (186)

Since the witch-hunt was the strategy to control and dominate women and, therefore, to eliminate the threat they posed towards men, this means that it engendered a fertile ground for patriarchal order to take flight. Moreover, Federici suggests that the witch-hunt frenzy in early modern Europe made the construction of negative stereotypes of femininity possible, a strategy that would barricade women from a conspicuous public presence and activities of the economy. The allusion, then, to the creation of "bourgeois ideals of womanhood" (186), can be read as the genesis of the notion of the virtuous woman, one that espouses fidelity, "housewifization" and docility. Such a woman is epitomised by Homer's Penelope, a character whom Ndebele overturns in his novel. However, the novel shows that ambivalence does not end in the

relationship between the artistic creation Winnie and her oppressors but it extends to our perception about her, so as to challenge the reader.

The perceptions of the *Ibandla* about Winnie mirror the ways in which her followers view her. Through the letters they read to her, albeit in her absence, the reader becomes aware of contradictions that present themselves. One of the characters, Mamello, appreciates Winnie's aesthetic appeal that she is "Terrifyingly beautiful" but also cautions that the same alluring beauty "can spell serenity and terror at once" (Ndebele 87). The novel suggests that Winnie's appearance is a misleading façade, one that portrays equanimity while hiding the dreadful side of her. The idea put forward here is that good and evil coexist in Winnie, and perhaps in humans generally. Thus Mamello asserts that Winnie needs her "own Scarlet Letter. 'BMB': 'Beware of My Beauty'. Signed: Winnie (Winifred) Nomzamo Zanyiwe Mandela. *Qaphela!*" (87), so as to warn people not to be deceived by her beauty and interpret it as innocence. The letter goes on to express the wish of its author: "There are two last wishes I have in my life, in equal measure: to be close to you, and to be far away from you" (87). This articulates her ambivalent position in relation to Winnie. The above quotation relates particularly to this conflation of Nelson Mandela's image of paternal leadership while Winnie Mandela's is linked with with maternal militancy (75). Such iconography, according to Cheryl-Ann Michael, endorses the view that the auto/biographies of this famous couple tend to endorse, on the one hand, the portrait of Nelson Mandela as complementarily blending fatherhood with leadership. On the other hand, Winnie Mandela's image presents a contradiction of motherhood and militancy, seemingly ill-fitting according to hegemonic standards of femininity, generally, and particularly in Xhosa culture. In the case of the latter, historically, women are not expected to be militant because it is the role of men to protect the household, even though women have unique ways of participating in times of war as traditional healers or intervening to stop the war. Therefore, ambiguity – as illustrated in *The Cry of*

*Winnie Mandela* – has come to define Winnie’s life, and appositely renders her an enigmatic figure.

Drawing from her suffering at the hands of Major Swanepoel in the torture chambers, this novelist reveals the paradox which destabilises the dialectic of victim/perpetrator and resistance/assimilation. Ndebele depicts the ways in which victimhood can paradoxically become the enabler of empowerment. We learn this in Mamello’s own interrogation of the character Winnie: “The antidote to your suffering was the feeling that you were admired and feared. It was also in the growth of your power, which you must have sensed. And pleasure of it! That power! In time, your fear of consequences appears to have evaporated” (88). Ndebele further suggests that Winnie’s excess of power fed off the suffering of the absence of her husband, the torture chamber and banishments – presenting her suffering as, ironically, a source of challenge and, therefore, of power. However, this writer also cautions that the plethora of power is corrupting in public figures like Winnie, because it renders them answerable only to themselves; thus it breeds a culture of impunity. In the text, Winnie Mandela is shown to have metamorphosed into that which she sought to resist. Ndebele, then, wonders whether Swanepoel is responsible for her metamorphosis: “Could this evil incarnate have been your maker?” (88), suggesting that Swanepoel is Dr Frankenstein whose creation is none other than Winnie herself. In other words, Winnie’s character can be read as the apartheid-created a monster in the manner that Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein creates his creature which turns against him. That the fictional Winnie is depicted as the creation of that which she sought to fight against is an indication of the paradox presented by her life. The apprenticeship, then, under which she goes has rather done much damage on her. This may affirm Bezdrob’s postulation that Winnie might have suffered post-traumatic stress disorder, due to her experience in solitary confinement. However, this biographer oversimplifies Winnie’s engagement with structures of power by confining her to victimhood. On the contrary, Ndebele

illustrates her agency by suggesting reciprocity in the relation of Winnie and her perpetrators. The novel shows that the ordeal she underwent amplified her defiance: “The chamber made you, Winnie, catapulting you into public position to challenge the outward symbols of power that it sustained. That was your apprenticeship to violence and power” (89). This, in a way, alludes to the way in which the repressive mechanisms of apartheid, ironically, churned her out to be a powerful symbol of resistance while it also apprenticed her to violence.

A close look at Winnie’s violence shows that hers is internal; it is the kind of violence that is taken out on the people she is fighting for. However, such violence is informed by rumour mongering and suspicions about those who were deemed black collaborators and “*impimpi*” (informers) from Umkhonto we Sizwe camps in exile to black communities in South Africa. In Jihan El-Tahri’s documentary on the ANC, “Behind the Rainbow” the reference to informers who leaked information to apartheid agents is made, we are told – by the former MK cadre – that at times a bomb would explode in the kitchen while they (soldiers) were queuing for rations. Even though Tahri’s interviewee tells us that such explosions were the consequence of the informers in the camp, he does not elaborate and reveal what was done to those who were suspected of collaborating with the enemy. Nevertheless, the “necklacing” to which “the informers” were subjected to is more telling of the kind of violence that the military camps of the ANC dispensed to such suspects. Winnie’s violence, then, is to be read within this framework, since militancy in the townships was shaped by mimicking the military tribunals; hence the formation of kangaroo courts in the townships. The imaginative Winnie’s is a complicated violence that is both justified and unjustified, because in the moral standard of the liberation struggle a collaboration with the enemy is tantamount to being an enemy to the people. This legitimised violence and wounding of its own people as part of the anti-Apartheid struggle. Secondly, it is difficult to justify violence targeted at the same people, the fictional Winnie herself was purportedly fighting for. The character of Winnie’s violence was thus the

uncomfortable internal violence of the ANC itself, which it sought to repress and disown for the benefit of the international audience that would view it as barbaric and morally ambiguous. It is precisely the denial of such violence that made the ANC deny Winnie her rightful place in the party, because her alleged actions were a true reflection of her organisation's image. She became an embodiment of the ANC's aspirations and thereby became a "victimising victim", and this is precisely what makes her a morally ambiguous character.

Moreover, Ndebele does not necessarily suggest that Winnie became, literally, Swanepoel's trainee. The idea put forward here is that violence is a human instinct – that which is innate – but requires the encounter with the body to be enacted. We learn this when the imaginative Winnie addresses her torturer: "You slept with violence against my body to produce me" (148). This connotes the passion and intimacy that Swanepoel had with violence akin to coital engagement, and to the extent that such metaphorical sexual feeling should be released outward and against the body. For the fictional Winnie, she becomes the offspring thereof. If the "logic of oppression becomes indistinguishable to the logic of resistance" since "the latter displays a capacity of its own evil" (171), then the victim is similar but not quite the same as the victimiser. Put differently, the victim of violence is a potential perpetrator. There is, of course, the language of possibility, here, with which Ndebele is grappling, so as to indicate, perhaps, the grain of truth in Winnie's implication in the Mandela United Football Club's atrocities. Similarly, Ralph Goodman points out the "Winnie-Swanepoel paradox" that shapes Winnie's moral ambiguity, which he believes is evident in the novel:

Ndebele manages to represent Winnie as someone both empowered (ironically, by her struggles) and disempowered, by the structures of apartheid – empowered in that she is shown as finding new strengths in response to official harassment, but disempowered

in that the limitations imposed on her life, especially her experience in prison, eventually created unbearable tensions which destroyed her moral stability. (Goodman 6)

The endorsed reading here is that while Winnie's disempowerment, through torture, became a form of empowerment, it significantly compromised her moral fibre. In this light, *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* is a text that engages the historical Winnie Mandela, at the same time critiquing one-dimensional modes of representation through the polyphony of its novelistic form.

Again, Ndebele is ambiguous about whether the fictional Winnie is indeed Mandela's shadow since there is an unequivocal acknowledgement of Nelson Mandela's contribution to Winnie's political identity. Even though the novel does not necessarily say her marriage to Nelson triggered her political activism, it suggests that he is part of the continuum that played a role in her politicisation which she manipulated. We learn, in the text, that she "held on to [her] husband by absorbing his political image to [herself]" (88). On one level, we are presented with Winnie, the shadow of Nelson Mandela, whose source of power emanates from her incarcerated husband. On another level, it is suggested that she manipulated her marital association with the famous political prisoner in order to empower herself, and this is a recognition of her political agency. Furthermore, the ambivalent treatment of Winnie's social position in relation to her husband – and her public image, respectively – are buttressed in the section of the novel where she interrogates her "alter ego":

Nelson's shadow! You've always wanted to get out of it into the light, into your own light. Didn't you? If he was not around you; if he was far away at a remote island prison,



then he couldn't cast a shadow. In a strange way, the oppressors, in sentencing him to Robben Island, became your allies. Here was some space for you to shine. (142)

The absence of Nelson Mandela is interpreted as Winnie's release from his shadow while, at the same time, suggesting that the oppressors may have been unwittingly assisted to enhance her political image. Dirk Klopper contends that "In the 1970s Madikizela-Mandela emerged as the spectral double of Nelson Mandela himself and used this space, supported by international media coverage, to voice the aspirations of the oppressed" (464). Klopper, here, provides a slightly different understanding of Winnie Mandela's spectrality, one that is a more empowering idea. He suggests that this period presented her with split identities: perhaps, in the public she had to present herself as her husband's representative/spokesperson for the power this position accords, but also she exerts herself as an activist in her own right. This, therefore, supports my contention that Ndebele's novel depicts Winnie as Nelson Mandela's shadow who is not quite a shadow – hence his ambivalent treatment of his subject.

To make Winnie account for her actions, as presented in the press, Ndebele depicts her as an agential subject, and thereby, attempts to rescue her from the shadow of her husband. Although Ndebele provides a tentative treatment of the character Winnie in relation to the allegations presented in the TRC hearings, the allusion to exceptionalism suggests that she is not entirely innocent. The narrative unwittingly depicts the very same contradictions that the artistic creation of Winnie reveals. We learn this when Winnie's doppelganger responds to her meditations: "I, the child of Major Theunis Swanepoel, queen of Brandfort, and terror of Soweto, who mastered to perfection the art of technical denial, schooled in the art of justification, was intelligent, articulate, calm and easy, combative, disdainful, reflective, arrogant, and beautiful" (173-174). The implied interpretation is that the character Winnie

appeared as a skilful liar whose defensive posture in the hearings commanded both admiration and contempt. What is intriguing here is the language in the passage which is most telling about the character of imaginative Winnie herself. Not only does Ndebele allow the fictional Winnie to interrogate herself or alter ego and by acknowledging that she is a product of violence, but she makes reference to her contradictory, ambiguous and ironical character. The novel suggests that she embodies all these qualities. In this view, the text acknowledges the possibility of truth in the accusations made against her, and begs for her accountability. Ndebele here illustrates Winnie's defence mechanisms as being unconvincing in the face of damning allegations.

Although *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* admonishes the character Winnie, it is also sympathetic towards her. This is depicted in the form of her seeming intriguing questions: "you want to acknowledge my involvement in 'terrible things'? (...) How can I take responsibility for actions engendered by human folly?" (174). Moral ambiguity, then, arises significantly when she decidedly discarded moral responsibility at the TRC hearings, whereas almost all her life she is engaged in political activism inspired by social conscience and moral responsibility. She then evades moral responsibility when it is needed most, by alleged victims who, ironically, she was supposed to be fighting for. Klopper argues that Winnie "appeared in the townships with raised fist, icon of a revolution that, at street level (...) frequently employed terror to combat terror, thus constituting a double of the inhumanity the revolution sought to oppose" (464). What is suggested here is that Winnie allowed or may have allowed the excessive violence of apartheid to reproduce itself in her, and this may have rendered the oppressed not entirely different from the oppressors.

By portraying Winnie as fully human, thus, Ndebele's text permits ambivalence, so as to undo the demonisation of her. Ambivalence can be attributed to Winnie's relationship with the apartheid government, the press and the public generally. The demonisation of Winnie by the press dehumanises her, and it, unwittingly, renders her unaccountable for her actions but it,

ironically, demands a clear-cut judgement about this duplicity. The reader learns that when the character Winnie is seen in person, people cannot help themselves but to celebrate her. Ndebele's novel illustrates, "[w]hen some of them see the registration number of her Mercedes Benz, 'WINNIE GP', they hoot with the excitement of recognition. Hypocrites! They love her despite themselves" (151). It is particularly the indecision intrinsic in ambivalence that can turn even well-meaning people into "hypocrites". However, Ndebele shows the difficulty of judging Winnie, because she is a tragic figure who disrupted the pride/shame dialectic. In the novel, she is positioned by the narrative outside of the reconciliation discourse, refusing to affirm her figuring, so as to make the character Winnie open-ended:

I will not be an instrument for validating the politics of reconciliation. For me, reconciliation demands my annihilation. No. *You*, all of you, have to reconcile not with me, but with the meaning of me. For my meaning is the endless human search for the right thing to do. I am your pleasure and your pain, your beauty and your ugliness. (182)

The fictional Winnie, in many ways indicated in this section, may embody the contradictions, ambiguity, ironies, and paradoxes of art itself. Winnie knows the reconciliation project wants her as a sacrificial lamb for nation-building. This is what she is not willing to do, because endorsing the reconciliation discourse would undo her public life by compromising her revolutionary legitimacy, while it would have morally enhanced her private life as a heroine. The artistic creation of Winnie, then, settles for "the cloud of moral doubt" (93) through which she is viewed over the vindication of the people she once fought for. In this light, Ndebele deliberately leaves the reader at the crossroads so as to say the character Winnie allows no judgement but an open-ended interpretation like a novel itself. By so doing, he "encourages us to wrestle with these conflicting depictions of Winnie" (Goodman), thus supporting the contention made earlier that *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* represents her as a morally ambiguous character, and as a text that needs interpretation. However, the historical Winnie completely

emerges from Nelson Mandela's shadow when he dies even though figuratively the opposite is truer. At his funeral Winnie Mandela was recognised as a chief mourner (a widow) with Graça, since she never remarried, and his death meant the end of their union, literally, even though in the public imagination her story can never be complete without Nelson Mandela, while the latter's can be complete without her.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter examined the representation of Winnie Mandela from Bezdrob's biography on her, Krog's non-fiction narrative and Ndebele's novel to establish the ambiguous nature of her figuring. The way in which she becomes the Sycorax figure emanates from her demonisation and spectral presence in the history of the liberation struggle and in the ANC. The attempts at Winnie Mandela's effacement are the consequence of the banishments she suffered under the apartheid government, smear campaigns and the allegations of kidnapping Stompie Seipei and his eventual murder – mechanisms that cast her as a witch. The chapter reveals that Winnie Mandela is a complex figure whose power is resilient and, therefore, evident in her spectral presence. While Bezdrob sympathises, and Krog demonises, Ndebele provides a nuanced and complicated Winnie Mandela story that depicts moral ambiguity. Winnie Mandela's power to haunt our history and thereby bewitch the nation floats into view at FNB Stadium as the crowd cheers almost in pandemonium while her daughter delivers a speech at the funeral. Reminiscent to the kind of cheering Winnie Mandela herself enjoyed in her life when she entered the gatherings of the ANC, the crowd responds to Zenani Mandale-Dlamini's speech about her mother with such love and appreciation. Through the speech, the spectre of Winnie Mandela bewitches the beserk crowd as the former cautions us about uncontested history thereby enabling her mother to figuratively emerge out of Nelson Mandela's shadow:

When you read popular history about the liberation struggle as it stands currently, you can be forgiven for thinking that it was a man's struggle and the men's triumph; nothing could be further from the truth. My mother is one of the many women who rose against patriarchy, prejudice and the might of the nuclear arms' state to bring peace and freedom we enjoy today...as she [Winne Mandela] said in her lifetime, "I am a product of my country and the product of my enemy". (SABC Digital News)

## Chapter Three: '(M)othering' and the Mourning of Orality in Selected Works by Sindiwe Magona

### 3.1 Introduction

Central to Sindiwe Magona's autobiography is the coming of cultural consciousness and gendered identity. In *To My Children's Children* (1990) Sindiwe, as a narrator and an imagined subject of the autobiography, shows political understanding of culture and identity as that which cannot uncouple history. Magona situates Sindiwe's understanding of the world she inhabits, through her subjectivity, as that which she negotiates within the continuum of race, class and gender. Her project seeks to re-centre her culture (oral tradition), language and history, dominated by the globalised print culture, English language and culture, and public history. Writing 'her-story' alongside the history of her community from the margins, as a black woman writer located outside the black South African literary canon herself, a denigrated position indeed, Magona instantiates a struggle to find space in a society dominated by white male, white female and black male. Alongside these subjectivities, there comes race, class and gender. Moreover, it is imperative that *To My Children's Children* is published in the wake of apartheid and that *Push-Push! And Other Stories* in the aftermath of the first democratic election in South Africa. Even though these are different genres, as life-writing and short fiction respectively, they can, perhaps, communicate something about the possibility of recurring motifs or shifting of her concerns. In this chapter, I want to argue that while the texts in consideration dramatise the process of the country in transition – in style, form and content – they also mirror the hybridizing process of such, one that inevitably renders orality and the position/presence of the black woman writer rather spectral.

Sindiwe Magona's early foray into life writing, *To My Children's Children*, is divided into sections: it first provides an account of her childhood and how she comes to consciousness

through the culture of storytelling; it then recounts her trials and tribulations experienced in adulthood and of motherhood. I then consider her selected short fiction in *Push-Push!* by privileging it as a text published after the first democratic elections, so as to engage recurring motifs that might emerge. In bildungsroman fashion, moreover, Magona enters her narrative from the point of childhood to womanhood/motherhood, so as to comprehend her journey of coming of age. The bildungsroman foregrounds a narrative of rites of passage and the coming of age that the narrator undergoes. “It is a novel that relates the development of a (male) protagonist who matures through a process of acculturation and ultimately attains harmony with his surrounding society” (63), writes Maria Karafilis. However, the genre has evolved over time as it has been appropriated to accommodate poststructuralist, postcolonial and feminist ideological currents, so as to decentre the male subject. As a result, “[m]any women writers of colour, both ethnic American and postcolonial, use the bildungsroman precisely to ‘affirm and assert’ the complex subjectivities of their characters and, by extension, themselves” (63). Clearly, the bildungsroman has become a flexible genre that is used in both fiction and non-fiction. It is, therefore, no surprise that autobiography would pick up on such characteristics (as revealed in Magona’s narrative), because both genres are works of imagination – even though they by no means can be said to be identical.

Moreover, Tobias Boes defines the bildungsroman as “a novel that portrays all but two or three of a set list of characteristics, among them ‘childhood, the conflict of generations, provinciality, the larger society, self-education, alienation, ordeal by love, the search for a vocation and a working philosophy’” (18). This suggests that this kind of a novel is that which concerns itself with personal and structural development by providing a series of transitions of life as experienced and imagined by the narrator. Autobiography, then, functions along the same lines, because it, too, presents both the subject undergoing some form of development. Central to the bildungsroman, is what Bakhtin calls “the image of man in the process of

becoming”” (cited in Boes 236). It is precisely the process as such that Magona’s autobiography depicts, one that presents her trials and tribulations from rural to urban spaces, and from oral tradition to writing culture through western education at school, to mention a few key points. Magona begins her life story in Gungululu, a Tsolo village, in the former Transkei where she was born, and takes it to Blaauvlei, Cape Town, where she grows into adulthood and then motherhood in Nyanga West (now known as Gugulethu). She takes us to her upbringing in a rural context, one that has communal cohesion. We learn that she was brought up in the absence of her father, who was a migrant labourer in Cape Town, and that she was raised by her matriarchs from both her maternal and paternal families. She portrays her childhood as adventurous while, on the other hand, also being held responsible for domestic chores.

Magona highlights, nostalgically, the tradition of storytelling as central to her upbringing, and notes the pioneers of storytelling in the guise of her maternal grandmother and her paternal uncle (6). She would be told *iintsomi*, riddles and historical narratives as forms of entertainment and for educational purposes. Significantly central to the narrative is the role played by oral tradition in her coming of age and her experiences of motherhood under the difficulties of apartheid laws imposed upon black communities. However, orality is seemingly brought to life because she does not only resurface or re-center the oral tradition— as the tradition is usually confined to private spaces (home) — she also incorporates it to writing. The idea of spectral orality, I refer to in the title of this chapter, alludes to both orality and the process of its transformation since it is now rendered in writing. This act, then, does not necessarily result in a juxtaposition of orality and textuality, a relationship whose intricacies I seek to engage in this chapter, rather in the present absence of orality. I want to argue, in this chapter, that although Magona’s narrative appears as a dramatisation of the hybrid nature of orality, in the transition thereof, it complicates the oral tradition and shows it as a work of



mourning while the black female presence is represented as a ghostly presence in the black male dominated society.

### **3.2 Towards Spectral Orality and Hybrid Textuality in *To My Children's Children***

Sindiwe Magona's writing always features doubleness – particularly her incorporation of oral poetics, Xhosa idioms alongside and within prose writing in English language – where past and present, tradition and modernity and, therefore, orality and textuality are intertwined. This is of course not a unique feature to Magona, because other African writers like Chinua Achebe have successfully employed poetics of orality in their writing. This is also evident in her usage of both Xhosa and English language in her publications. Her texts, in consideration, undertake various thematic strands, ones that extend to the history/fiction, race/gender divide and so forth, which are by no means uncoupled from politics of identity. As a polyglot herself, this South African writer shows in her writing the double bind of a social/historical subject and the nation in transition. Transition, in this case, connotes the process of transforming from one condition to another, a process that is akin to Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity because the transitions depicted in Magona's texts are political, cultural and textual at once.

In his essay, "Cultures In-Between", Homi K. Bhabha defines hybridity as a process of inbetween-ness of cultural identities which reveals the "connective tissue between cultures" (54). This process is enabled by relocation, migration and by the contact of cultures. Bhabha posits hybridisation as that which collapses duality, so as to say it is insufficient as a cognitive system. He, then, relates to what he calls "the third space" – the borderline of cultures – where cultural difference is articulated. Such space, for Bhabha, challenges the notion that history presupposes the present, by suggesting that past (history) is not necessarily a priori of hybridisation, due to the absence of an originary point. Similarly, Jacques Derrida, in *Of*

*Grammatology*, problematises a teleological approach as such in the dialectic of speech and writing. He recounts the discrepancies in general linguistics as found in Ferdinand Saussure who falls prey to the progressionist approach towards speech and writing. He is of the view that they almost always provide ‘a contrast between the theoretical fragility of reconstructions and the historical, archaeological, philosophical wealth of information (2), thereby overlooking the complex and arbitrary nature of the relationship between speech and writing. This is what he then calls “the historico-metaphysical reduction” of writing which seeks to reduce it into “an instrument enslaved to a full and originarily spoken language” (3). It is appropriate then to ascertain that Bhabha argues against a similar form of reduction when he believes that the liberationist and liberalist discourses fall prey thereof, due to their ways that seek to fix cultural representation into historicism. The significance of these theoreticians here is that they both problematise the teleological approach in the difference of cultures and speech and writing, respectively. I find such theoretical tools useful in providing insights into Magona’s relations to her indigenous culture and modernity, and oral tradition and writing, particularly in *To My Children’s Children*.

The entry point of Magona’s narrative is history, positing the oral tradition as a proper entry for self-writing. Invoking the role of a Xhosa grandmother, who is renowned in her cultural background as a storyteller, Magona attempts to comprehend her sense of identity and history by using orality as a trope for self-narration. She does so to educate her descendants in order to know their history. By this, she is engaged in the historiography of a special kind, one that places a black woman’s experiences in the public discourse. Once again, the date of publication of her autobiography is not without significance because the transitional period to a democratic South Africa required that the previously marginalised histories be re-written and re-centred. David Attwell, in *Rewriting Modernity*, succinctly outlines, albeit in the context of the transition to “colonial modernity”, the processes black South Africans underwent during

colonisation. Highlighting the inevitability of the “encounter with modernity” (4), and the effects thereof, he argues that:

In practice, however, people facing this situation make a continual effort to translate modernity’s promises into their own situations and histories, indeed to de-Europeanise them wherever possible. Intellectuals play an important role in this enterprise, and it is one of the key historical functions of black South African writing culture to translate modernity into South African terms. (Attwell 4)

Attwell suggests that black South Africans’ encounter with modernity is a process of negotiation with their past, alongside their colonial present and their intimations of the futures they envisage. Such negotiation entails the modification of the aspirations of modernity by fusing them into their own, so as to bend them to fit the African experience. If modernity is the “governing concept of what it means to be a subject of history” (3), and one that assembles “ideas such as autonomy, personhood, rights, and citizenship” (5), black South Africans were alienated by such since colonial modernity rendered them objects of history – who were forced into a denigrated position. To be fair, Attwell is right to say that black South Africans sought ways to “translate modernity into their own terms, to wrest its promises away from corruption and give them new meanings” (4). Such workings of translation are embedded in the ways in which African subjects imagine the self, which is by no means divorced from history.

The consensus reading of black South African autobiography shows that it is a genre of writing that merges the private, the personal, with social history, thereby showing ways these writers grapple with translations of colonial modernity into their own cultures (Thale 614; Daymond 92; Lewis 42). They suggest that autobiography comes to life through memory

and the workings of self-imaging because in such narratives the “self is imagined” (Dorothy Driver 338). For Carole Boyce Davies, the black South African autobiography enters the public sphere as the “statement on a ‘self’ after a success but an insertion of a ‘self’ within a historical and social framework which accepts her invisibility or silence” (271). In many ways, this rhymes with James Olney’s assertion that autobiography is “a metaphor for the self” (cited in Gallagher 96). Moreover, Margaret Daymond is of the view that black South African autobiography depicts “forms of intercultural translation” (92), a view which echoes Attwell’s. It is precisely translations as such that instantiate the ways which colonial subjects appropriate what is useful from the dominant culture so as to write themselves anew. For instance, early autobiographers, like Es’kia Mphahlele, produced narratives which depicted the coming to consciousness of the narrator and the way the imagined subject negotiates colonial modernity. Most importantly, the recurring or archetypal feature in black South African autobiography is the transition from oral tradition to formal schooling, thereby outlining the achievements in such education systems. This feature, then, is conspicuously present in Magona’s narrative.

For Attwell, the act of translating modernity is defined by the concept of “transculturation” – one that he develops from Ferdinando Ortiz. Transculturation is said to be “the process whereby ‘subordinated or marginalised groups select or invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture’” (Pratt cited in Attwell 17). Such process, though, is self-evidently invested with power dynamics because the minority culture is bound to emerge as an effect, a trace, rather than a cultural sign in itself. This shows in Magona’s text where orality returns like a Derridean spectre, signalling its present absence since it appears in the guise of textuality. However, the invention of the alluded “materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture” is thereby one sided which may suggest that the culture of the coloniser is self-contained – a notion which Bhabha denounces as “absurd” (“Culture’s In-Between” 53). It follows that such a notion is untenable because the

“borderline negotiations of culture’s difference often violate liberalism’s deep commitment to representing cultural diversity as plural choice” (54). Bhabha is of the belief that culture’s meeting point generates “borderline effects” (54) that betray culture’s very heterogeneous interstices. Such “effects” always already fail to signify adequately, due to the temporal nature of culture. This is particularly the case in *To My Children’s Children*; the oral tradition appears as the remains of the (un)dead culture. The evoked oral tradition, instead, functions as a metaphor for a loss culture due to the violence of colonialism which sought to obliterate indigenous cultures. We learn this in the protagonist’s nostalgic recollection of storytelling in her childhood. After they have finished their chores, “[a]lways, however, there was at least one adult, usually grandmama, sitting with us around the fire. To keep us children awake, she would tell us *iinstomi*, the fairy-tales of amaXhosa” (5). The oral tradition is treated as a trope for a perceived lost culture or the essence thereof, due to the encounter with European culture.

There seems to be an on-going rehearsal of history, here, which by no means necessarily constitutes a cultural sign, because what seems to be the end of culture is also the beginning of culture and vice versa (in the spirit of deconstruction). The act of writing the self through the lenses of history is an attempt to legitimise one’s culture in the face of neo-liberal forces and thereby reconciling the personal and the political and the private and public at once. However, the notion of “translating cultures, like translating the personal into the political, is not without risks since the former is risking to be swallowed by the latter. Although Magona’s project may have sought to resuscitate and valorise the depreciated oral tradition, it, instead, emerges as the shadowy form of itself; while on the other hand, her personal history also runs a risk of taking an ornamental backdrop to the cultural and political history of the nation in transition. A similar case to this is the Xhosa untranslatable, “*Kwathi ke kalok ngantsomi ...*, the Xhosa once upon a time” (Magona 13) which gets Anglicised instead of being translated due to its refusal to get translated – albeit Magona attempts to do so. In the case of its English equivalent, this

untranslatable illustrates the impossible possibility of translation and thereby announces its “non presence” or spectrality, haunting not only the textual rendition of such but also its translation: “once upon a time”. If “the words of translation organize themselves” and “disorganize themselves as well through the very effect of the spectre, because of the Cause that is called the original” (Derrida 20), they then transpose themselves into trace and thereby betray their very own possibility of “non meaning”. Such workings are almost evident in Magona’s autobiography, because the translation of orality and Xhosa language into writing and English language, respectively, exposes the virtual impossibility of the translation as such. It then presents something that resembles a ghostly orality or spirit of its source ‘text’. However, it is worth noting that orality and oral effects are greatly reduced in the later works, and the idea of spectral orality is necessarily rendered superfluous but orality itself becomes that which in African literature becomes its spectre.

While black South African writing almost always shows the effects of orality or takes thematic trajectories, similarly Magona does so, albeit in a progressivist approach. Craig McKenzie is of the view that “oral culture manifests itself as a trope in South African written literature” (347), but for black South African writing orality was invoked during the political ideological miasma of the Black Consciousness Movement (348). Magona’s autobiography, then, is rather suggestive of such cultural resistance. She presents orality as a metonym for a disrupted culture due to colonialism/apartheid. This is evident in the shift in narration when Sindiwe recounts her nostalgic moment of not recalling a day “ever being desperately hungry as a child” (10) and of having food in abundance; alas, the encounter with Europeans:

Like comets, strange people from another world occasionally ruffled our even-keeled existence.

*'Nab' abelungu! Nab' abelungu!'* (Here are white people!) The shout is followed by a flurry of activity as each one of us abruptly abandons whatever activity we have been engrossed in only a minute ago before. (10-11)

Hers and the villagers' first encounter with the colonial settlers is described as that which is in many ways responsible for the undoing of the foundation of a social set-up based on African humanist values – communally orientated, that is. Noteworthy, here, is the imagery amassed which suggests the derangement of all that is mundane and familiar, amongst residents of Gungululu. The articulated disruption implies an unexpected change and the de-familiarisation of all that is familiar. Moreover, figurative language employed by Magona is an attempt to enunciate the inexplicable. The structural pathway that this narrative takes, in this instance, makes it an open secret that the colonial encounter is responsible for the repression and suppression of oral tradition and the culture of autochthons in the larger social context.

Although the concept of “transculturation” betrays its own insufficiency in articulating the complex process of a nation in transition, some aspect of it is responsive to the ways in which black South African writers attempt to assert themselves as subjects of history. “With the democratic transition,” writes Atwell, “South Africa makes peace with the eighteenth century” (34). The point driven home is that the democratic transition required the disenfranchised groups to simultaneously engage in the history of colonialism and apartheid while they are still in process of negotiating and articulating their transitional present. However, Attwell himself acknowledges the limitations of “transculturation” by reminding us that “[t]here would be some modes of oral culture, for example, that would be less transculturated than others, given the stronger links with oral culture to the autochthonous presence (although that presence could not be found in an entirely unmediated form either)” (20). Once again, this is depicted by the seemingly untranslatable modes such as “*intsomi*”

which Magona loosely translates as “the fairly-tales of amaXhosa” (5) where she offers an equivalent rather than a translation. The noun *intsomi*, to check its morphology or the possible origins of the word indicates that it stems from the verb stem, “soma”, to encode, even though the meaning has been extended to mean “to speak a foreign language” like English. The struggle, then, to translate such words into English language mirrors the self-concealment of some indigenous ways of expression – a predicament that can also be found in most of the transmuted *iintsomi* into English versions where they are rendered with child-like simplicity. Such modes of expression – in the face of translation – inevitably render the “virtualities of the original” (Derrida (21), whether on a textual or cultural level.

It is precisely from this point that I propose that Magona’s autobiography cannot avoid this paradox, particularly in the employment of orality in her writing. This paradox is already at work due to the oral poetics employed; they are presented in writing – a contradiction difficult to avoid even in this study. Thus, Magona’s text can be said to be that which is haunted by the past, by which it is informed, and thereby eluded by that which she tries to bring into light. The desire to ensure the continuity of oral tradition, albeit in writing, is illustrated in her recalling of childhood songs such as

<i>‘Nqaphela, ndikhule!</i>	Be stunted, that I grow!
<i>‘Nqabphela, ndikhule!</i>	Be stunted, that I grow!
<i>‘Nqaphela, ndikhule!</i>	Be stunted, that I grow! (8)

Such songs, it appears, are almost at risk of disappearing due to the threatening globalisation which technologises almost every aspect of life. As a result, Magona’s attempts at translation – for lack of a better word – become the conservation of orality, and, however, this is not to



say that she promotes a conservative agenda. The narrative, moreover, buttresses my contention, further, thus: “Rhymes such as this one, as also the tales, have been handed down, by word of mouth, from generation to generation” (8). The (un)broken chain of orality, alluded to, is implicitly lamented upon; and in defence of oral tradition, Magona seeks to pass on the baton even in a rather different form: in this case, writing. By so doing, then, the dichotomous presentation of orality and writing is duly undermined. Put differently; the duality of the oral and print culture is disrupted due to the plethora of oral poetics in the writing itself – hence the haunting present absence of orality in the text. This is precisely what enacts “the spectrality effect” [which] “consist(s) in undoing [the binarist opposition of past and present], or even this dialectic, between actual, effect presence and its other” (Derrida 40). This can be said to be a hallucinatory sight generated by the spectre which is both there and not there, one that is amenable to the ways in which the oral/writing dialectic is disrupted in Magona’s life-writing. Albeit in a different context, James Ogude makes similar remarks about orality in African literature by arguing that “narrative strategies” employed by writers like Ngũgĩ are not necessarily “peculiar to oral narrative”, rather “they are a hybrid form that creates the illusion of orality” (94). It is such spectre of tradition that promises to denaturalise the dichotomy of orality and writing; thus orality is not a lesser form of literature, neither is it progressively moving towards literature. Spectral orality is that which destabilises the assumptions of literature and the dichotomies of oral – script. In the text, then, what is history (past) is taken for what is oral, the same way what is present is taken for writing and thereby disturbing such duality.

Growing up in a communal environment – with safety, security and fulfilment of childhood outwardness – Magona’s life is also full of interruptions, relocations and transitions. She happily grows up in the village of Tsolo and her grandmother, MaMkwayi, dies just before the apartheid laws – which police the mobility of black people – get effected. This forces her

to join her parents in Cape Town. She, then, completes her teachers' certificate and teaches a little but stays mostly without a professional job; she gets pregnant only to be left by the father of her child. Magona sums this all up in one sentence: "I am the result of a series of losses, lacks, and lapses" (16). If these few phrases are truly definitive of her experiences, and therefore her identity, it is precisely apparent that her narrative's form and content are marked by such. The text is also engaged in issues of loss: the lost culture, history and tradition; the lack of meaningful presence of black females in the predominantly male African society and in the economic production. Therefore, *To My Children's Children* seeks to reverse and revise such predicaments. By so doing, Magona is already engaged in the work of mourning, since the latter is that which "consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by identifying the bodily remains and by localizing the dead" (Derrida 9). What is, then, mourned in this South African writer's text is oral tradition, history and culture of amaXhosa and, most significantly, the black woman's empowering position as a storyteller. Since the work of mourning involves identity reconstitution and the recognition of that which is lost, it is imperative to acknowledge the impossible possibility of such an act. Moreover, Magona's narrative attempts to give form and identity to what has apparently been lost in the wounding history of colonisation by appropriating and situating the remains of oral tradition into (present) writing. For instance, riddles such as

<i>Qashi, qashi. Ndinahashe lam</i>	'Guess, guess, I have this horse of mine
<i>aliphali lingenamsila!</i>	that will not gallop without a tail! (13)

Riddles like this one are evoked and rendered in their original form (in isiXhosa), so as to make them not only available for next generations but also to preserve them or the memory thereof. One could argue that this is a strategy to negotiate power relations prevalent between English language and indigenous languages; it could also be a way of self-assertion that re-

centers her first language and thereby asserts the oral tradition which haunts even her own writing.

*To My Children's Children*, then, complicates the dialectic of orality and writing, one that is illustrated as rather inadequate in signifying her identity. In so doing, Magona instantiates the intricate ways in which her consciousness comes into being. Although the structure of her autobiography may suggest that orality presupposes writing – by highlighting oral tradition in the earlier sections of the text and later getting less emphatic when she commences her schooling, church and work – what presents itself is the hybrid nature of the text and her identity. For instance, as a child who was brought up in a community deeply embedded in oral tradition, she also had “contact with the world of English books and comics” (26). Moreover, we learn that she read “books, granted mostly with limited comprehension. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Cry the Beloved Country*, *Great Expectations*, *Lorna Doone*, *The Mad Hunter*, *Treasure Island*” (26). Similar to the manner in which other black South African writers<sup>6</sup> come into consciousness, Magona’s process of educating her imagination is that which is indebted both in oral tradition and writing. Daymond believes that Magona’s relation with African and European cultures is “complementary rather than oppositional” (332). She goes further to argue that

In drawing on the oral tale-teller repertoire, Magona’s story-telling is not harking back to ancestral voices but a demonstration that ancient modes and motifs can, in certain circumstances and with certain constraints, be used to represent the modern world. (346)

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, the importance of oral tradition and the ways it plays a significant role in black South African writers is evident in these two memoirs: Es’kia Mphahlele’s *Down 2nd Avenue* (1971) and Zakes Mda’s *Sometimes there’s a Void* (2011).

Clearly, Magona's use of orality that undergoes transformation – suggests that her work is that of intertextuality, rendering not only her text as hybrid but also her own identity.

It is precisely this “twoness” which marks orality and what is seemingly “pastness” in Magona's writing thereby gesturing toward a hybrid text. Magona's autobiography demonstrates the “hybridizing effects” of the colonial encounter. Growing up in a community rooted in autochthonous belief systems, she shows us that the encounter with colonial modernity never meant that all that is indigenous has been left frozen in the past. She then exemplifies the ways in which amaXhosa struggle to reconcile their culture and religion with the European's through her family. Even though her father ensured that “[a]s soon as a child could speak .... That child was taught the lord's prayer” (55), Sindiwe's family continued practising African forms of religion. We learn that “Incision was said to be the most potent weapon against witchcraft. *Igqirha*, a witchdoctor, or *ixhwele*, a medicine man, having been invited by father, would appear at a doorstep, unexpectedly for us children” (57). The continuity of an indigenous belief system, while having been Christianised, mirrors the very fusion of orality and writing, Xhosa and English language, in the text. This evidential negotiation of the African belief system with the Western invokes Bhabha's notion of liminality” – the “third space” from which cultural difference is articulated. He argues that “the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal” (“Culture's In-Between” 58). amaXhosa's polyglot nature and culturally split identity instantiate appositely such power dynamics which render Xhosa culture as dominated by the western; however, this does not necessarily leave the majority culture secured and devoid of ambiguities. As a result, *To My Children's Children* depicts the ways in which hybridity proves to be inescapable:

Belonging as we believed we did, in the group of westernized and Christianized people, we were supposed to have left behind all things of darkness: *imibhaco*, (the traditional skirt), red ochre used for cosmetic purposes, and the practice and belief in witchcraft, to mention a few. The practice of ancestral worship was a different matter. The missionaries realized that, if they continued to condemn it, they would empty the Christian church of its African adherents. We are not easily divorced from our ancestors. (59)

As this shows here, it could be reiterated that the repression of African traditions by the colonial forces could never be entirely achieved; instead, they return – like a spectre – albeit in hybridised forms. In fact, this indicates, in general, the present absence of the culture’s older (precolonial) self or the “visibility of the invisible” (Derrida 101) and, in particular, orality as the effects of the textualised oral tradition: a spectre (thereof).

### **3.3 Between Womanhood, Race and Class: A Space for ‘*Idikazi*’ and Self-Narration**

*To My Children’s Children* juxtaposes the space of oral culture and of the black woman, one that enunciates their denigrated positions, respectively. While the culture of amaXhosa is evoked through the incorporation of oral poetics, the subjectivity of the black woman is articulated in the negotiated intersection of race and gender. This position, moreover, can be said to be amenable to that of a pariah figure, a term that equates with what amaXhosa call “*idikazi*” (a derogatory label for single mothers). Toni Morrison, in an interview with Danille Kathleen Taylor-Guthrie (1994), refers to the variations of the pariah figure in society by asserting that “[t]here are several levels of the pariah figure working in my writing. The black community is a pariah community. Black people are pariahs .... But a community contains pariahs within it that are useful for the conscience of that community” (168). It is therefore

significant that society keeps pariahs within it, because it needs a pariah to construct and define itself through negation thereof. Such self-definition relies heavily on the economy of difference, since the sense of community, and the identity thereof, needs the maintenance of the dialectics of self/other, white/black and men/women in order to have currency. The construction of the pariah, and the inclusion of the pariah figure, then is premised on the exclusion of such, due to the fact that the Same or the sense of community is unattainable without the defined Other.

The idea of the pariah figure, in this regard, sheds light on “*idikazi*” and can be extended further so as to say that the black woman, too, is an internal other. In this light, I argue that Magona’s *To My Children’s Children* represents “*idikazi*”<sup>7</sup> as a pariah figure in the context of Xhosa culture, due to the apparent failure to abide by the set social and cultural rules. Such depiction, I propose, is suggestive of the space of black woman in society and, most importantly, in the black South African literary canon –synecdochically representing the absent-presence of spectral orality. Therefore, the black woman writer, as a pariah of the canon, is treated as an appendage, if not the afterthought in black and white South African literary trajectories. Particularly, Magona is one of the black women writers who is forced to be a literary and cultural “*idikazi*”. On the one hand, she is forced to be a failed economic messiah for her impoverished family – as a girl child who is co-opted for education. On the other hand, she becomes ‘*idikazi*’ and suffers discrimination in employment prospects as a black woman under the apartheid regime. Such double denigration is again mirrored by her spectral presence in the South African literary canon, defined by what has become known as the ‘trinity’: J.M.

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that Magona does not use or mention the term “*idikazi*” throughout this autobiography. However, she uses it in the early section of her sequel, *Forced to Grow* (1992). For this reason, J.U. Jacobs argues that “[o]ne of the most significant discursive choices Magona makes is when at the beginning of *Forced to Grow* she rejects the harsh Xhosa term for a husbandless woman, ‘*idikazi*’ in favour of the cold comfort of what she perceives as the kinder English epithet, ‘a has-been’” (52).

Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer and Zakes Mda. “[A]s a ‘*idikazi*’”, writes Gugu Hlongwane, “Magona is perceived as a woman of dubious repute, who cannot be a role model for her children. In this regard, her hard earned success also defies traditional black patriarchy which underestimates the abilities and moral strengths of single mothers” (27). Hlongwane alludes to the negative perception the African patriarchy has about single mothers, one that results in the naming and shaming of women who fall outside the set moral and values of society. In most cases, however, social rules are never favourable to women because they tend to serve the patriarchal order; for instance, the customs such as mourning rites, pregnancy and *lobola* procedures are reflective of the way they are centred around the patriarchs. Magona, then, as a conscious ‘*idikazi*’ attempts to negotiate her way around such gender-based contradictions.

In the narrative, Magona recounts the shift of time through her rite of passage, one that she articulates with the cultural ethos of her people. Her coming into womanhood is signposted through ‘*intonjane*’ – a rite of passage for Xhosa girls who are deemed ready for womanhood. Magona illustrates Sindiwe’s rite of passage thus: “‘This weekend,’ said my father, ‘we are going to celebrate your becoming a woman. Therefore, you are here to choose the little piece of meat we will offer our relatives, our friends and neighbours whom we have invited for these rites’” (67). It, then, becomes apparent that Sindiwe is no longer an adolescent. However, what is significant, here, is her self-assertion as a woman in the guise of African customs. As a self-conscious hybrid, a polyglot indeed, she acknowledges the difficulties enacted by the conflict of these two worlds: “the world of school and ‘civilization’ and the world of ancestor worship, witchdoctors, and traditional rites, [that] often created disagreements in [her] home” (59). Clearly, Magona’s text demonstrates this dialogic position from which she speaks and she thereby extends it to the racial and gendered worlds she simultaneously inhabits.

The conflicting position of Sindiwe's newly acquired status as a woman is depicted in her father's words when he outlines the expected or required roles of womanhood to her. He expresses these, in African patriarchal fashion, thus:

My child, a good daughter pleases the parents. Your parents are very proud of you. Mind never to disgrace the Magona name. Mind never to disgrace the Tolo clan. Remember, a good wife is like a good daughter to her husband. She is also like a loving mother to him. (70)

The family pride, here, is vested on the obedient daughter who must be burdened with the task of honouring the family name through her conduct as a woman. Such conduct involves self-effacing and motherly nurturing, at once, to the prospective husband. To be a "good wife", so says the criterion, she must simultaneously act like a child or subordinate and mother to the husband while the latter becomes the proxy of patriarchal order. Such relations reveal the ambivalence that Xhosa men in this regard have towards Xhosa women. In other words, Sindiwe must enter marriage on unequal terms. The role of wife, then, is an "ambiguous status" – to use Mamphela Ramphele's words (101) – because to fit the requirements of the ideal wife, she must be torn between being a daughter and mother to her husband, a position which signals 'wifehood' a liminal zone if not an empty signifier.

The complex and complicating space from which black women writers speak is laboriously explored by Mae Henderson in her essay, "Speaking in Tongues" (1989). Explicating Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, Henderson bases her theorisation on what she calls "simultaneity of discourse" – a term she borrows from Barbara Smith – a notion that is suggestive of the assemblage of both heterogeneity and diversity of discursive positions from which black women writers speak. For Henderson, this approach seeks "to account for racial difference within gender identity and gender difference within racial identity" (n. pag.). This



model of critical inquiry promises to illuminate the ambiguous and complex positionality which black women writers assume, a space where they find themselves torn between allegiances and solidarity with gender politics (with white women) and race politics (with black men). Henderson argues further that the intersection of race and gender, a point from which black women's subjectivities develop, is a space that also enacts their discursive trajectories. If "[t]he complex situatedness of the black woman as not only the 'other' of the same, but also the 'other' of the other(s) implies, as well as, a relationship of difference and identification with the 'other(s)'" (n. pag.), Magona ushers herself in this ambivalent dialectic as a double other by being racialised in a gendered community and sexualised in the racialised community. However, in her autobiography, this goes further than that, due to the class factor. She then negotiates her way into the discourse through race, gender and class.

Clearly, the space of the black woman is that which enunciates difference of the difference, one that registers her double bind. Such position, according to Henderson, engenders the black woman a "'subject 'racialized' in the experiencing of gender'" (n. pag.) which thereby constitutes her as a double other. This Afro-American critic goes on to assert that "[w]hat distinguishes black women's writing, then, is the privileging (rather than repressing) of the other in ourselves" (n. pag.). In what may seem to be an allusion to the internalisation of otherness among black women writers, Henderson, however, suggests that these writers appreciate the other within themselves by articulating themselves with the language of others – a dialogic act, indeed. This aspect is evident in Magona's autobiography when she refers to herself as "the fallen maiden" (107), the '*idikazi*' in the crudest sense of the term. We learn this when she falls pregnant outside wedlock, an event which forces her to follow the custom of her people when male delegates have to be sent to the 'offender' to report the "damage" in order to seek for reparations. Magona explains, this, thus:

She it is who is spoiled. Therefore, since she had reported no rape, she must lead those who would seek redress or vengeance on behalf of her disgraced and cheated family. A voluntary accessory during the act, she now leads these men of her family to the rogue, her accomplice, for she is the instrument of the downfall of her family. She has to be willing to give the evidence that will lead to the restoration of its good name and fallen fortunes. To redeem herself, in their eyes, she must be a willing instrument of the family's redemption in the eyes of the community. (107)

This kind of restoration, then, is the form of compensation for the 'disgraced and cheated family', an act which does not necessarily serve her but the patriarchal order of which she is a subordinate. Such practice is, therefore, similar to *lobola* which is facilitated by men whom it benefits. Becoming an auxiliary of the venture she seeks to police – objectify and commodify her body – means that Sindiwe is aware of her denigrated position as a woman in African patriarchal society. Magona romanticises orature, but does not romanticise Xhosa patriarchy. Even though she romanticises orature, as a thing lost in the past, despite her intentions, orature acts to destabilise the oral-literate dichotomy. She, then, does not romanticise this aspect of her people's tradition, like she does to the seemingly vanishing oral culture. As a result, Magona's representation of patriarchy comes out as a critique of an oppressive system within the Xhosa culture, one that puts her in an untenable position as a woman.

Furthermore, disruption is a recurring motif in Magona's life-narrative. She is undoubtedly aware that the effects of colonial modernity are detrimental to the social fabric of African families. The foreign values imposed on amaXhosa, in particular, as a result, also disrupted, and interfered with, her upbringing. Similar to the manner in which orality gets disrupted, she outlines the discontinuities enacted by colonial forces when sex suddenly becomes a taboo subject:

In 1962 very little was known in my part of the world about contraception. Certainly, what little African women my age group knew was positively dangerous. We are a group which, as young people, was caught up in transition, with sex having been reduced to a small 'gold' band minus apprenticeship and spontaneity. Previously, sex education for adolescents had been a fact of life. Both boys and girls were taught sex play that satisfied their urges with no risk of their being plunged into roles of parenthood prematurely. Then came the missionaries; and sex disappeared from the agenda of educating the young. All very well; except that the natural urges refused to succumb to civilization or Christianity and go away. (106)

Magona, here, is of the belief that colonisation is to blame for taking away the responsibility of African families to educate their children about sex. Clearly, the restrictive laws of Christianity, most telling, for instance, in the tone of Ten Commandments in the Bible which William Blake critiques in one of the poems in *Songs of Innocence*, are viewed as poisonous to the social life of her people. Missionaries, in this case, are seen as agents of puritanical European values. For what has been treated as a 'fact of life' by the autochthons has been disavowed by such and then returned to Africans in a grotesque form, preying on young women by turning them into "amadikazi" – pariahs. The Christian's ambivalent treatment of sex, according to Magona, has subjected African young adults to early parenthood, and unfairly so, hence Sindiwe herself becomes a living testimony thereof. It is precisely through the encounter with European civilisation that colonial subjects' lives, such as Sindiwe, get disrupted. Consequently, 'idikazi' gets constructed because were it not for this kind of disruption, her labelling would have been avoided.

If colonisation is responsible for the cultural decay or the erosion of African philosophies of life, it means then that Sindiwe's untimely motherhood is the consequence of such. In the narrative, the forced decline of sex education in African families' rhymes with Sindiwe's "personal tragedy" (106) for becoming a mother outside wedlock. She buttresses this point thus:

The sun took flight, forsaking the sky. My personal tragedy was a family disaster. Father had suffered scorn and ridicule for educating a girl child. I had done exactly what his tormentors had predicted. My parents had borrowed money; they had done without so I could get an education and not suffer the way they did; they had even dabbled in the not altogether legal. And now had I repaid them? Had I worked for them even a year? One year? (106)

Clearly, the darkness that falls upon her for being pregnant as though it is not enough to live under the rule of African patriarchy seems unbearable, especially in a society that deems a girl's education a waste. She is expected to get married and ensure the continuity of the legacy of her husband's family by bearing children but this is expected to happen within strict cultural rules. Sindiwe finds herself in a predicament for 'disgracing' and disappointing her family as a fortunate girl child to be considered worthy of education. Her demise, however, is a result of her gender, on the one hand, in a society that privileges a boy child's education over a girl's. On the other hand, the gender factor is coupled with the class factor, because for a disenfranchised society, education is not confined to self-centred empowerment but in the way the family is supposed to escape poverty collectively. Therefore, Sindiwe's is one of the few cases when a girl child's education is prioritised in her childhood; she is empowered by being given the role of an economic messiah to her family but only to fall prey to untimely motherhood and to suffer the subjugation of apartheid. Although Sindiwe eventually triumphs

in the narrative, what is then apparent is the entanglement of agency and victimhood. While the former illustrates an agential woman for becoming an unwedded mother, the latter reveals that she is victim of both racist and sexist ideologies governing the social space she inhabits.

Moreover, motherhood puts Sindiwe in an intricate position because her motherhood is only accepted through marriage, hence the traditional procedures to restore the family name are followed; secondly, her motherhood is not accepted not only because she ‘disgraced’ her family by becoming a mother outside marriage but it also relegates her into a pariah – ‘*idikazi*’ indeed. In this case, becoming a mother, for Sindiwe, proves to be an ambiguous experience, due to the ways it brings both advantages and disadvantages in her life. It is precisely the experience of motherhood that Siphokazi Koyana sees as “burdensome” because it is that which “stifles her creativity, exploits her labour, and makes her a partner in her oppression” (20). Koyana goes on to assert, on the contrary, that motherhood also has “its liberatory capacity” since it “eventually becomes the rite of passage where she expresses and learns the power of self-definition” (20). While this view, initially, depicts the oppressive side of motherhood, Koyana also believes that it entails an empowering aspect. It is precisely such complexity of motherhood that Magona herself is ambivalent about, her identity as a mother, because she seems to suggest that her trials and tribulation as a single mother do not only define her strength and success but also her identity as a woman.

Motherhood, for Magona, becomes an ontological identification with her gendered identity. It is also the way in which she experiences womanhood and the world, because what seems to be the defining factor, in the autobiography, is the complex and complicating experience of motherhood. Unlike her European counterparts, who view motherhood as oppressive or limiting, Magona does not frown upon motherhood. Instead, she embraces it without discrimination, both the difficulties and rewards of being a mother. She seems to have

found meaning and purpose in life in her mothering her children. This, then, becomes evident in the mother wolf metaphor where she recounts times when she had to fend for her family:

Many a time, I recall, did I see myself as the mother wolf who had to leave her cubs with a jackal to go and search for food during a particular long and hard-hitting drought. The tale ends with the mother wolf having her children eaten by the jackal. My very endeavours to maintain my family contained the seeds for its destruction. Later, I was to learn of the white South African woman's anguish upon becoming a working mother. Mine was not the choice of being a working mother or a not working mother. No. I could choose between no children left. Whose mother would I have been had my children died from starvation. (146)

Reflecting on her years as a domestic servant in white households, in order to save her children from dying of hunger, Magona recounts the sacrifice that comes from being a mother. She identifies with the mother's instincts in the mother wolf who unfortunately loses her children while she was hunting for food in order to feed them. The mother wolf tale, here, appears to be functioning as a metaphor for not only the dilemma the mothers face – especially when they find themselves torn between the desire to protect by keeping a watchful eye over their children or go and work to support them – but also the sacrifices she has to make to keep the children alive. However, Magona's sacrifice is to act beyond herself or her social status as a qualified teacher who has to work as a domestic worker. She is aware, though, that the means in which she tries to provide for her family are not without their own risks. She knows that she has to work if she does not wish her children to die like the jackal's cubs because they have come to give meaning to her sense of Self.

In this light, motherhood is not only an ambivalent experience but is also that which enacts self-determination. Magona, then, assembles both negative and positive aspects of

being a mother and puts them as the complete experience that defines motherhood. This is demonstrated in the recollection of her search for Matshangisa, her distant relative in Langa: “I remembered her daughter’s name” because “[c]hildren’s names are more important in the African townships than those of their parents. The children are better known because most adults are addressed by their children’s names – so-and-so’s mother, so-and-so’s father” (174-5). Significant, here, is the way a child’s name becomes the bearer of its mother’s identity. To African women, it is apparent that this is not seen as problematic but fulfilling. Obioma Nnaemeka believes that while African women’s writing depicts motherhood as complex, “feminist discourse on motherhood” (5) tellingly fails to view it beyond oppression:

African women writers attempt most of the time to delink motherhood and victimhood the way they separate wifedom and motherhood .... The arguments that are made for motherhood in the African texts are based not on motherhood as a patriarchal institution but motherhood as an experience (“mothering”) with its pains and rewards. (175)

Critiquing critics of feminist tradition who view motherhood as an institution, Nnaemeka, here, highlights the clashing views that present themselves between theorists and African women writers. She is of the belief that African women writers have a different way of looking at motherhood and it is that which views motherhood as an ambiguous experience rather than an institution. By so doing, these African writers seek to overturn the seemingly dominant narrative that portrays motherhood as oppressive.

Magona, too, is one of the women writers who divorces motherhood from ‘wifedom’, due to her awareness that ‘wifedom’ emanates from the institutionalisation of gender inequality in the same way black women are forced into effacement by anti-black racism and African patriarchy at once. This gets more telling when it dawns on her that writing letters to her unsupportive husband “[is] a waste of time and money” when she comes back from her

relative who gives her “a whole rand” and “some foodstuffs” (175), especially when she needed them most:

Although I did not know it then, by the time I reached home I had joined the invisible league of women, world-wide – the bearers and nurturers of the human race whom no government or institution recognizes or rewards, and no statistician captures and classifies. (175)

Magona critiques the construction of wifehood and home as a private space in which women are imprisoned in order to limit them from being equal protagonists in social and economic production. She alludes to the way women are barely acknowledged for their significant contribution in society by the status quo that upholds patriarchal values. Therefore, “motherism”, then, relates precisely to the primary role, if not identity, of African women as mothers and thereby rendering wifehood as secondary, because the former is more compensating than the later.

*To My Children's Children* mirrors women's struggle in general and black women's in particular. By so doing, the autobiography depicts the difficulties of being ‘*idikazi*’ in a society that is not so supportive to single mothers and thereby showing their strength and resilience. For Magona, most of women's problems are brought by men who neglect their fatherly responsibilities. She reiterates this towards the ending of the narrative thus:

So many women's lives are hindered, hampered, and ruined by husbands who will not leave long after they have ceased to be husbands or fathers to their families. Dead wearing a hat, these men actively and energetically visit untold woe on those they once had loved. I was not thus afflicted, I saw. (182)



While women, here, suffer in a society defined by systemic oppression, in the larger context, they also struggle in their private spheres (homes) where their partners subject them to insurmountable anguish and single parenthood. Seemingly, their male counterparts are almost always leaving them to provide and nurture their children. Such husbands, therefore, are signified by their deliberate present absence – unless they are coerced into migrant labour, to be fair – hence they are ‘dead wearing a hat’. However, the imagined Sindiwe comes to a realisation that she is not a special case in this quagmire, since there are also other women whose lives are brought to a standstill because of the departures of their partners. Similarly, such feelings of betrayal and disappointment are registered in her tone when her husband forbids her to go to the nursing college in Durban: “Where I had seen a friend and a lover, stood an adversary and a rapist. The man on whom I had planned to lean became the cruel current sweeping away the seeds of hope, a nightmare squashing and crushing my dreams” (153). Sindiwe relates the ways in which her husband’s chauvinism and the restrictive laws of apartheid have conspired to reduce her from a wife into a minor whose husband has custody and parental guardianship over her. Also, she seems stunned by how her lover and husband can abruptly change, through actions and behaviour, into an enemy, whose abusive ways have brought her a life of despair by barring her from pursuing a nursing career.

However, self-reliance as one of the pillars of black consciousness is thus espoused and posited as an integral feature among black women, one that is epitomised by women such as herself, in this case, rather than her male counterparts. As a result, black women’s troubles could also be said to emanate from men. It, then, appears that Magona’s major concerns, in this narrative, are the ways black women are victimised by both white supremacy and African patriarchy. These systems do not only seek to denigrate black women but they also force them to the margins of economic activity. It is precisely for this reason that Koyana is of the view that motherhood and her instincts of working to feed the family come naturally to Magona,

because her inclinations of self-reliance and independence are informed by her cultural background (23). This, in more ways than one, resonates with the history of labour migration in South Africa – since the ‘discovery’ of mines and the subsequent events of industrialisation – which can further illustrate the point that black men have always been on the go, leaving even on their own accord, and thereby abandoning women to work the land and feed their children, hence motherhood, in this case, rhymes with work (labour).

Magona’s autobiography may, after all, be engaging the history of South Africa which tends to valorise the nationalist narrative while, on the other hand, trivialising black women’s experiences under the apartheid regime. Positioning the oral culture and ‘*idikazi*’ figure almost in juxtaposition, the text brings into light the position of the black woman in black patriarchal society – and of the black woman writer in South African literary canon. This is juxtaposed with the position of orality under forces of globalisation in the guise of modernity. If “the objective of [black women] writers is not, as some critics suggest, to move from margin to center, but to remain on the borders of discourse, speaking from the vantage point of the insider/outsider” (Henderson n. pag), then Magona’s project, too, is to enunciate her spectral presence in a society dominated by white men and women and black men. Therefore, *To My Children’s Children* presents the dilemma about her seemingly disparate identities as a black woman from a working class background and ‘*idikazi*’ due to her present absence in her immediate community, which is patriarchal in nature, and that of the writers in South Africa.

### **3.4 ‘Kraalification’ and Black Mother’s Effacement in “Drowning in Cala”**

Sindiwe Magona’s second collection of short stories, *Push-Push! and Other Stories*, assumes quite a different take on issues or themes as compared to her life-writing. For instance, her short fiction, deals with a specific issue and period in nuanced and complicated ways not so foreign to fiction rather than the straight-forwardness found in autobiography. As we have

seen in the character of Sindiwe her plight is depicted in a journalistic fashion which is not alien in life writing. However, the predicament of the characters of Nobuntu in “Drowning in Cala” and the unnamed woman in “The Widow” is presented in subtle ways that evoke ambivalence to the reader: critical distance and critical intimacy at once. Magona’s collection, then, does not necessarily diverge from the thematic strand set by black South African short fiction writers before her. While black woman’s life-writing “exists in a political statement conundrum” (Davies 287), short fiction presents so many different possible meanings thereby collapsing the personal and political divide.

Short fiction might be different in handling even the same issues as the novel due to the difference of length and kind of specificity and immediacy that the former may purportedly portray. For example, Martin Trump is of the belief that black South African short fiction almost always highlights communal life and human conditions. Trump argues that “the manifest abuse of the black people in the country has done much to bolster black writers’ sense of themselves as the community’s spokesmen, critical voice, and collective conscience” (36). Similarly, Magona in these stories shows this kind of commitment by portraying complicated lives in both rural and urban community. I argue that through the genre of the short story, Magona extends the spectral figure of the mother who is seemingly barred from public discourse. Andries Walter Oliphant is of the view that the South African short story has always been a genre that keeps up with the changing times as dictated by socio-political circumstances. Such view, according to Oliphant, emanates from the “conception of the short story as a form of narrative which enables the articulation of the specific” (59). While both non-fiction and novel length fiction are guided by the whole range themes, the short story follows a particular and directed theme, perhaps, due to its length. It is precisely such commitment to the specific that is apparent in Magona’s short stories, because she explores a singular theme amenable to the oral storyteller’s style.

It would not be presumptuous to assert that the short story is, appositely, a bridge to the writing of the novel for African writers like Magona. Eileen Julien provides a study of African short fiction which draws similarities and narrative features of the oral tale. Her comparative analysis seems to suggest that African prose writing is more suitable for short fiction than novels, due to the rootedness of the African writer to oral tradition. However, this does not offer answers as to why some African writers seem to discard oral poetics when they continue writing novels. Nonetheless, both the oral storyteller and the short story writer “offer glimpses of the nature of life and the human condition” (149). Julien goes on to assert that “[i]t is my firm belief that the short story is destined to be long-lived in Africa (for better or worse) it reflects the discontinuous and disconcerting reality of African life and because it is a flexible, unpretentious and sound literary form” (163). Although there’s some merit in the contention that short fiction effectively captures experience with almost immediacy and that African writers are comfortable with short story writing, due to similarities in length or form, but the entire argument undermines the symbiotic nature of orality and writing and represents the misguided view that African writers are destined to writing short stories. Moreover, Sue Marais, in offering a reading of Zoë Wicomb’s short story collections, avers that the South African short fiction is characteristically marked by its focus on the spirit of the place, if not localisation. “The strongly defined sense of place”, she writes, “is frequently attributable to a recognisable locale, neighbourhood or region” (29). For Marais, the identification with place may not be the only way to depict “geographical features, social customs, speech and thought patterns” (30), but may, perhaps, function as identity markers, thereby attempting to render an “authentic” representation. For instance, Magona’s short stories occasionally feature markers of oral tradition by incorporating idioms, Xhosa language and proverbs and similarly as she does in autobiography, as is shown in the preceding sections.

Magona's short fiction, then, reflects her relocations from the rural villages in the Eastern Cape, to the Cape Flats townships in Cape Town and to New York in the United States of America – places she herself has lived in. The recurring motifs are evident, in *To My Children's Children* and in the short stories where women's struggles, subjectivities and experiences are highlighted. The stories cover the post-apartheid South African township and rural life ("Push-Push!" 27; "A Drowning in Cala" 1), exiles ("The Sacrificial Lamb" 140), and returnees ("Comrade, Heal Yourself" 39) and their relationship with their liberated home country. However, I focus on three women characters from two stories – "A Drowning in Cala" and "The Widow", due to the ways in which their lives form part of Magona's main themes and concerns. I propose that Magona's stories extend her critique on black women's voice, or lack thereof, and their space in society. Although she focuses on black women, mostly, Magona does seem to acknowledge white women's struggles, albeit in complex ways.

In "A Drowning in Cala", Magona tells a tragic story about a young man, Zama, who drowns in the River Tsomo while swimming with his friends. Right at the opening of the narrative, the reader is alerted about the tragic news: "There has been an accident!" (1). We later learn that the carrier of the message is Jonguhlanga. The news is welcomed by the patriarchs of the family: Zama's father, Sandile, and the Old Man Zangele. Due to the belief the villagers believe that River Tsomo cannot drown anyone because it is not deep, the patriarchs of the family decide to seek wisdom from a sangoma – a seer. It is from the sangoma that they learn that the drowned boy is called by his ancestors for divinity and that they must perform a sacrifice to appease them in order for the boy to return from the spirit lands alive. It becomes apparent in the story that the whole prophecy invokes the prophecies of Nongqawuse – the mid-nineteenth century Xhosa prophetess who instructed that the Xhosa people to kill their cattle and burn their crops in order for the dead to rise – which is pointed out and ridiculed by a "young man" identified as "an activist" (13). In the same passage, Magona seems to be

conscious herself about the intertextuality at play because the allusion to Nongqawuse by the ‘young man’ is explained and dated to 1857 of the cattle killing by amaXhosa. The whole business of consulting a sangoma and performing a sacrifice excludes the mother of the drowned child; she does not have a say in the unfolding events. Instead, she is left to prepare the fermented beer that will accompany the sacrifice. It is precisely here that the questions of what I would term ‘kraalification’ occurs – a traditionally culture-based male dominance in the Xhosa society – where effacement and silencing surface, which thereby forces Nobuntu, as a mother, to the sharp end of the knife.

In the story, Magona depicts a black woman’s anguish that the men in her life do not take into consideration. Upon receiving news that Zama has drowned, the patriarchs of Nobuntu’s family deliberately exclude her from matters relating to her child. They seem to suggest that it is only men who can handle matters of tragedy thereby buttressing the negative gender stereotype that posit women as irrational. This is particularly how ‘kraalification’ plays itself out, and maintains that serious matters of the family should only be discussed and resolved in the kraal to make decisions on behalf of everyone. We learn this when the Old Man Zangele, Nobuntu’s father-in-law, chases women and children away from the kraal in the reception of the tragic news, since the African patriarchs believe that the kraal is the sacred place for all matters ‘manly’. In the story, Magona depicts this thus:

Then, noticing the women and children, [Old Man Zangele] shouted:

‘Is your work not waiting for you? Did anyone call your names, asking you to come to the men’s kraal? Hunh?’ More than words, however, the glint in the cold, narrowed eyes pitched the children and their mothers back inside. (2)

Clearly, the kraal becomes the sanctuary for the Xhosa patriarchs, a safeguarded space which harbours their values and discourse. It is a place from which the patriarchal order spirals out of

the kraal to every aspect of society, and thereby discursively ‘kraalify’ public spheres. Magona, then, is engaged in precisely what Bettina Weiss call “voice-throwing”, an act of “airing one’s opinion” (20), what in this context counteracts ventriloquism – when one voices values ideas not of her own.

Such an act, then, is an attempt at de-kraalifying the narrative denigrates and, therefore, silences women. If South African women writers “[describe] their oppression and denigration as well as their passion and their skill to deconstruct prevailing notions on women’s so-called Other”, as Weiss suggests, then Magona is one such writer who exposes the injustices women suffer. Nobuntu is one of the characters that instantiates such. Even though, at first, Nobuntu is not told that her child might have died, her gut feeling tells her that something is terribly wrong with Zama, because she knows her child would have “come to tell his father of a drowned animal” (4). As a result, the seemingly unnecessary suspense she is subjected to, as the men leave for the sangoma, enacts doubts and fears that evoke *inimba* – birth pains. We learn that “There was a flailing frog where her heart had been” (4), because her instincts tell her that Zama might be dead.

Then a voice whispered in that heart, a voice that had lived there from the morning, long, long ago it seemed now, she had put a squalling, wrinkly-skinned bundle to her breast, and stilled it. Now, that voice stilled fears. Wouldn’t something tell her, a mother, were her only child in trouble? A flash of pain cut across her lower abdomen, reminding her of that other, years ago. (4)

The pain Nobuntu undergoes, here, illustrates difficulties of motherhood experiences, although motherhood is at times compensating and empowering, Magona, here, takes us through the trials and tribulations of motherhood, aspects that show it as burdensome.

Moreover, Magona highlights the continuity of pain that dates back to giving birth. She compares this pain to that of losing a child to death. Magona illustrates such inexplicable anguish in Nobuntu's lamentation in learning that the men of her house are returning without Zama. The mother's instincts drive her to conclude that her child is dead without having to be told so:

The women saw them coming and Zama's mother, Nobuntu, started wailing. Sandile's wife wailed. Although no one had told her of any death at all. She wailed, 'Uph' uZama?' 'Where is my son?' She asked; tears marring her sight. She saw his friends. She saw his friends who made his absence loud. So loud she did not hear the words her mouth threw out: Ndixeleleni, bethunana! Uphi umntan' am? Uphi na umntan' am? (5)

The cry of Nobuntu, here, is shown as that which announces sorrow and unimaginable emotional torment for her loss. The grief, through which Nobuntu is going, is informed by her cultural knowledge in the event of death. It is usually the patriarchs that take it upon themselves to take charge; hence they 'kraalify' anything that matters most in the household, and this kind of discrimination is both gender and age based. As a result, Nobuntu's effacement becomes most telling, because the treatment she receives suggests that her being the mother of Zama does not qualify her to be included and have a say on the death of her own child. Thus, Magona reveals the oppressive aspects of Xhosa culture, especially those that are paternalistic towards women. This South African writer is by no means uncritical about the position of black women in society generally.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter has shown that not only does Magona demonstrate the present absence of orality in the age of capitalism which valorises print culture, she also contests for the space of the black woman in public discourse by taking what used to be a private activity into the public



space: print culture. She seems to suggest that the struggle of oral tradition under dominance of print culture equates to the position of black women, and the mother in particular, in a predominantly male society. This view can be extended further by saying that black women writers in black and white South African literary trajectories are forced into this spectral presence. Orality and motherhood, then, suffer considerably in the polarities of writing and patriarchy, respectively, since authorship itself has historically been associated with the male figure. However, Magona seeks to disrupt such dichotomies by invoking the grandmother's authorial role as the storyteller; the subject of knowledge, an empowering role, indeed.

Moreover, Magona, then, depicts the present absence of the mother in society and thereby exposes the lacunae in the African patriarchal discourse on motherhood. One view glorifies her for ensuring the continuity of her man's family name and for being nurturers to both their men and children at home. Another view undermines and disregards women as social actors. The apparent ambivalence, here, already announces the impossible possibility of a complete effacement, even though capitalism and patriarchy seem only to accept mothers as reproductive agents. Such colonisation of women's bodies is shown, in *To My Children's Children*, in the figure of 'idikazi' when the woman gets socially disowned for getting pregnant without being married. Magona seems to suggest that 'idikazi' figure best illustrates the ghostly presence of black women in society, due to the ways in which Sindiwe is kept as an internal outcast by her community for failing to comply by the social rules set by patriarchy. Similarly, in "A Drowning in Cala" as selected in the study, Magona's use of spectral orality is greatly reduced. Instead, she emphasises the effacement of black women. The reduction of spectral orality in the stories suggests that orality itself has been treated, on the ideological level, as a trope for a greater purpose in her project: a space of black woman in society.

## Conclusion

The study has shown through the reading of life-writing, fiction and the popular media that the space of the black woman in society is instantiated by the spectral presence of Shakespeare's female character, Sycorax. The notion of the Derridean spectre as that which disrupts the dialects of presence/absence, life/death and past/present, not only suggests the power of haunting as a consequence of the present absence of black women in the South African political and literary imagination, but signals towards the call for justice. The study has demonstrated through an exploration of the figure of the black woman as storyteller, that the effacement of orality is systematic, due to capitalism, racism and patriarchy. This is shown through the analysis of the representations of two iconic figures: Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona. Moreover, these Sycorax figures haunt not only the very nationalist discourse which seeks to erase them as women but also African traditional patriarchy. It is precisely the spectre as such that imaginatively multiplies in the form of these historical women and, in turn, haunts the racist regime, the African National Congress, and the black literary canon.

Chapter One interrogated the representation of Sycorax in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Césaire's anti-colonial adaptation of the play, *A Tempest*, and examined the ways in which he instantiates the subaltern figure. In Shakespeare's play, Sycorax is represented, retrospectively, by male characters, as a character who has died of old age. I contend that one of the reasons she suffers epistemic violence is that she is represented as a witch – a figure whose demonisation is legitimated by witchcraft allegations. Such demonisation forces her outside language and discourse and ultimately renders her invisible. The chapter has demonstrated that Sycorax is one character who epitomises the subaltern, and whose symbolic revolt comes in the form of haunting both the imaginative island and Shakespeare's text. This is clearly highlighted by Césaire's adaptation of the play where Caliban goes as far as rejecting his own

the name with its negative connotations of ‘cannibal’. The chapter suggested that Césaire in the play incorporates the ideological currents of Negritude so as to decolonise the source text. By so doing, he not only clothes Caliban with substance and the human dignity he is deprived of by Shakespeare’s drama, but he also gives him narrative power to rewrite the history of the island. The chapter has shown that, while Césaire depicts Caliban as an embodiment of African nationalism, he unwittingly perpetuates Sycorax’s effacement because the play fails to challenge her representation in Shakespeare’s play and thereby bring her to life.

Chapter Two has shown the ways in which Winnie Mandela is forced into effacement, which may be related to her liminal position enacted by race and gender, in three closely read texts: Bezdrob’s *Winnie Mandela: A Life*, Krog’s “Mother Faces the Nation” and Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*. However, silencing and effacement are never fully achieved, due to her seeming resilience. Like Sycorax, she haunts the public by writing herself back into history. It is precisely her contradictions in both her representations – evident in the discussed biography, selected media representations and novel, which make it difficult to judge her. Such contradictions could not be avoided even in my analysis, and any clear-cut judgement would be disingenuous. Even though Bezdrob depicts Winnie Mandela’s political agency, she paradoxically erases the very same agency by presenting her as a victim of post-traumatic stress disorder and the suggested defamation of character meant to bar her from prospects of leading the ANC and South Africa. The figuring of Winnie Mandela in the media and in Krog’s narrative, respectively, seem to affirm each other, since they highlight demonisation. It is Ndebele’s text that collapses the apparent dichotomous modes of representation. By so doing, this South African writer brings to the fore the idea of ambivalence, depicting the fictional Winnie as an ambiguous text that requires interpretation rather than judgement. Like a true Sycorax figure, Winnie Mandela bewitches not only the nation to elude judgement but also

history that denies black women their stake in public discourse. This, moreover, signals the impossible possibility of her effacement and, therefore, the silenced silencing of her story.

To rehearse the argument in Chapter Three, Magona's *To My Children's Children* invokes oral tradition in a crucial moment in South African history: the transition to a democratic dispensation. The significance of bringing orality to the public discourse is that South Africa was in the process of redefining itself to the world as a nation that suffered multiple forms of dispossession. Magona, then, situates her writing in the context of South African transition by suggesting that the oral tradition is not only the essential aspect of the autochthons' identity, but also an example which shows mothers' centrality in culture and society. It is precisely the history of colonial modernity and apartheid which informs this South African writer's thematic strands in which the suppression of the tradition comes to signify or highlight the denigrated position of black women in society. Although Magona incorporates oral poetics in her writing to collapse the orality/writing dialectic, the former becomes the spectre that haunts colonial modernity.

It is the liminal position of both orality and of the position of a single mother in an African patriarchal order which enacts spectrality. For example, the way '*idikazi*' is looked down upon can be closely linked to oral tradition in the face of colonial modernity, and print culture, in particular. In the opening story of her collection, issues of silence and marginality surface, and this is depicted through the character Nobuntu, for instance. While Magona deals with black women's silence under African patriarchy in "A Drowning in Cala", it is through such quandaries that she invites us to reconsider and revise black women's space in society. This South African writer, then, may after all be suggesting that orality and the incorporation thereof in writing can teach us the ways in which black women can equally play a meaningful role in public discourse. Although the mother in Xhosa culture plays a crucial role in society,

and is entrusted as the nurturer and pillar of the family, she is barred by African patriarchy from any meaningful participation in nationalist discourse, due to the ways in which African men 'kraalify' the public spheres. Therefore, it is such spectral presences of orality in script cultures with which the mother figure shares thematic lineage in Magona's writing.

The metaphor of the spectre has shed light on the impossible possibility of effacing the figure of the black woman entirely and thereby revealing her power to command justice. To be haunted by spectres is to be haunted by the ghost of that which is hidden. The notion of the spectre suggests that black woman as a storyteller collapses the private, public divide, because both Winnie Mandela and Sindiwe Magona are mothers whose storytelling spirals out of the private confines of the home to contest space in the public discourse, in the same sense that orality haunts writing. As much as the scope of the research has been limited to carefully selected texts, the study has shown that orality in black South African writing, like that of Magona, emerges as spectral; Winnie Mandela appears to be a double of her husband albeit that she is equally a political activist of note; and Magona has a spectral presence in the black South African literary canon, which shows or dramatises itself in her writing (hence its double status for self-consciously incorporating oral poetics and Xhosa idioms in her textuality).

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