CLOSURE AND SURVIVAL IN SINDIWE MAGONA'S *LIVING, LOVING AND LYING AWAKE AT NIGHT* (1991)

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While South Africa is of specific interest to Portugal on account of historical and migrational links, how that country and its writers have negotiated the great changes the country has undergone should be of concern to everyone. South Africa is of such strategic importance in Africa, and what happens in South Africa is of such symbolic (and thus material) importance in the world that everyone concerned for the development of positive models for the interaction of different ethnicities is watching the country with interest. As Stephen Graubard says in his editorial to a recent issue of *Daedalus* dedicated to the theme of "Why South Africa Matters": "the South African experiment in self-rule, adopting a constitution that extols representative institutions, that seeks to make democracy a reality on a continent where it scarcely exists today, is a matter of the greatest consequence" (GRAUBARD, 2001: v). However, no nation's stories can be resumed as solely the interaction of groups and individuals along the axis of ethnic identity, as has too often been the case both within and outside of South Africa, and it is as well that we are reminded of this. The interpenetration of class, gender and location-specific stories with those of ethnicity mean that South Africa has many types of stories to tell, as does everywhere.

No-one has done more to remind us of these things than noted South African writer, critic and academic, Njabulo Ndebele. In the essays collected in *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* Ndebele is concerned that "the city appears to have taken tyrannical hold on the imagination of the

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average African writer" (NDEBELE, 1994: 26), one of the results of which is that "writers in the cities seem to be clear about one thing: that their writings should show, of themselves and their writers, a commitment to political engagement" (NDEBELE, 1994: 27). While Ndebele is clearly not averse to either stories from the city or political engagement, he feels that it necessary to point out that this is a simplification of a complex reality, to the extent that "one major effect is that the writing's probing into the South African experience has been largely superficial. This superficiality comes from the tendency to produce fiction that is built around the interaction of surface symbols of the South African reality" (NDEBELE, 1994: 28). It is not just that Ndebele feels that this neglects large areas of South African experience, but that even in terms of the ideological work much of such writing wishes to accomplish, it becomes reductive and thus ultimately counterproductive. This is because "moral ideology tends to ossify complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good or evil, instead of leading us towards important necessary insights into the social *processes* leading to those finished forms" (NDEBELE, 1994: 28-29). Ndebele goes on to call for a literature that is more attentive to the daily realities of South Africans, that does not overly privilege the city over the rural experience, one that allows space for everyday hopes and fears, that bears witness to the individual's triumphs and failures in the struggle for survival and dignity, and one that eschews sloganeering and "the hegemony of spectacle" (NDEBELE, 1994: 50).

As writers in South Africa have responded to the new possibilities made available by the end of legalised apartheid (but not by the end of apartheid's resonances or impact), by the end of the need to self-censure, at least in the same ways as before, and by forms of official and unofficial support for writers and types of writing that had not been encouraged or even permitted before, Ndebele's priorities have proven to be highly relevant. In the flowering of a wider range of stories than had hitherto been available, the work of Sindiwe Magona has been one notable result. She echoes Ndebele's concern when she recalls that "My concern was that in the writing that was coming out, the so-called 'protest literature', our lives were being lost" (MAGONA, 1996: 92). Magona's work has also contributed towards altering the truth of Cecily Lockett's summary of the situation as apartheid was drawing to its belated end, when she stated that "one finds that the work of black men has largely been taken up by the establishment

[...] while that of black women, and of white women that cannot be appropriated by the paternal tradition, has not" (LOCKETT, 1996 [1990]: 17; given the importance of dates in this context, I should point out that Lockett's remarks were initially made at a conference in Pretoria in 1989). In her first two autobiographical volumes Magona may be said to have given Ndebele a shrewd and independent vision of quotidian life in not only rural areas but also in the townships (Guguletu, outside of Cape Town in this case) as well as that of a black female worker in the city. As if in support of Ndebele's strictures Magona felt that too many stories would be lost to future generations if they were not quickly told, especially stories concerning the unspectacular, the daily, the details of family and working life, above all the details of the lives of women not directly involved in the political struggle but rather in the more pressing struggle for material survival.

To My Children's Children (1990) and *Forced to Grow* (1992) provide testimony that ranges from harrowing to stubborn to triumphant of the desperation, frustration, sacrifice and achievements of a particularly capable and feisty woman in agonisingly adverse conditions. Life-writing has been intimately connected to the recuperation and circulation of women's voices, or marginalised voices in general, in widely differing contexts, and Magona is one of the most outstanding examples from South Africa. In her representation of her painful efforts simply to feed and clothe her children against a background of absent fathers, drawn away from the home by the cynical instrumentalisation of black male workers by the South African mining industry above all, politicisation necessarily re-enters Magona's work in any event. At the same time her principal concern is not to indict the system or to claim that she was so oppressed she possessed no options. The systemic oppression of apartheid, or the gendered unconcern of husbands for their wives' problems when they are away, are rightly scorned but they do not become the sum of Magona's being. As contexts they condition much of her life but they do not become all that she is or relieve her of the need to strive to better her situation and that of her family, to push and exert herself until she has changed things for the better, in what might be thought of as the classic pattern of the female bildungsroman crossed with the American rags-to-riches story (America is not a gratuitous reference here given Magona's residence of many years in New York working for the United Nations).

However, it is with Magona's fiction that I am principally concerned here, although it forms a clear continuum with her autobiographical non-fiction in English. Her fiction has so far comprised three books, two of short stories and a novel. Working backwards, the novel *Mother to Mother* (1998) explores some of the resonances of the murder of American aid worker Amy Biehl, the short stories in *Push-Push and other stories* (1996) deal with the complex realities of post-apartheid South Africa, and the volume I wish to examine here, *Living, Loving, and Lying Awake at Night* (1991).

As with Magona's autobiographical volumes, this book attempts to articulate both anger as well as dignity and existential depth. The lives of black women (more specifically Xhosa women for the most part) are rendered in terms that counter the effacement of their daily lives from much South African writing, foregrounding the quotidian battle for material and psychic survival to the exclusion of broad political analysis. In carrying out this project Magona tends to utilise the strategies of literary realism, the speaking voice that does not interrogate its ontological or hermeneutic status, which has always been important for a literature of witness. She also eschews recourse to the supernatural, common in African texts as well as in European texts antedating the rise of Realism. Realism has however been characterised as a conservative strategy, not just in literary terms but socially as well, in that it supposedly doesn't challenge us or our perceptions of reality or its textual representation in any radical way. Catherine Belsey claims that it is characterised by illusionism, by narrative which leads to closure and a discourse that claims an authoritative truth: this is how it happened. Wilson Harris similarly finds realism authoritarian and, in Bart Moore-Gilbert's summary:

> [it] embodies all the unattractive features of what Bhabha would call the 'pedagogical', above all fixity. Harris's model of an experimental style characterised by the play of 'infinite rehearsal' (whether in fiction or criticism) towards closure is interrupted by the liberating instability of the 'sign' (MOORE-GILBERT, 1997: 183).

In realism's putatively pedagogical fixity it is related to History, classically a narrative that hides its speaker as though a story can be told without personal intervention on the part of the author, and one that is attempting to lay out a representation of events that is more convincing than others. Furthermore, what is addressed here

may be Achebe's well-known essay on "The Novelist as Teacher," where he unashamedly proclaims his didactic interest, stating that "here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse—to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education" (ACHEBE, 1988 [1965]: 44).

History retelling, historical novels, autobiography and realism are moreover all linked in the development of post-colonial writing. As in many post-colonial contexts, but also in those of many formerly marginalised groups in Western cultures, such as those of people from minority ethnic groups, feminists, or people professing alternative sexualities, there has been a concern to tell stories that it has been felt had not been attended to widely before. Rita Felski summarises the situation when she points out that:

> Much feminist literature is both popular *and* oppositional; the importance of the women's movement, along with other sites of resistance in contemporary society which have generated a diversity of cultural forms, calls into question the assumption underlying negative aesthetics that a literature which draws on rather than problematizes conventional forms is invariably complicit with a monolithic ruling ideology and serves as an apology for the status quo. (FELSKI, 1989: 181)

In order to assume a position that one feels has been marginalised however it has to be felt that there is a position to assume and not simply a dislocated and mutating zone from which the illusion of a subject position is generated. Furthermore, it is posited by Cecily Lockett that South African women writers don't need poststructuralism and denial of the subject position, they need a certain commitment to "rationality and reason if they are to involve themselves actively and positively in the current debates" circulating about the construction of the new country (LOCKETT, 1996 [1990]: 6). In any event the unified subject that poststructuralism likes to deconstruct has never been considered to be so unified as anyone might think, and we only have to look at a canonically realist writer such as, say, Thomas Hardy to see how aware literary history has been of the instability as well as the fascination of the always already decentred subject. That we are all decentred networks of desires, not rigidly organised patterns of logic, is almost a sine qua non of literary texts. Attacking classic realism is to attack something that

always evades our attempt to pin it down, and moreover to attack something in the name of an anti-conservatism that nonetheless unwittingly in this instance compresses the space in which the formerly marginalised or radical voice has to speak.

If we look at the first story in *Living, Loving, and Lying Awake at Night*, "Leaving," we can note that it begins with a burst of lyricism, the linking of intense elements of our lives, love and death, and the sort of affective discourse that might characterise an oral story told in front of the fire it refers to: "It was right at the time of night when dreams glue eyelids tight and spirits, good and evil, ride the air; when lovers stir, the fire spent once more rekindled; and the souls of the chosen sigh as they leave the flesh, homeward bound" (MAGONA, 1991: 3). Yet this lyrical opening is immediately denied as we are presented with a picture of a woman doing none of these things, but awake on a grass mat on the floor of a tiny, round, mud hut, her mind and body worn out, too exhausted even to sleep and thus to have access to the realm of dreams. We are brought down to earth with a thump, and the rest of the volume keeps us there. We must be in no doubt that this is a person who is suffering materially and not simply a subject position that interrogates its fixity. There are short sentences, reproducing her tiredness, too tired to generate a longer sentence. After the first two paragraphs we then jump back to the day before, but we already know that something bad happened on the day she is going to remember on account of clues given in the second paragraph. This foreshadowing has the effect of precluding the possibility of optimism, of framing the events of the story to come in terms of as yet unspecified misfortune, of making sure we enter into the melancholy reality of the women's life as a limit situation, of not giving us any space to delude ourselves. The very title of the story marks a point of departure as the volume's beginning, establishing absence and rupture as the book's ground zero. Moreover, it establishes them for the rural woman, to harken back to Ndebele's desire for writing that took into account rural realities more consistently. That is, the rural woman's position is either one of exhaustion, unable even to dream or, by implication, to inhabit story space, or of departure, thus cancelling her status as rural. The difficulties of generating the stories Ndebele wants are thus not simply a matter of political priorities and rhetoric but of the basic conditions, material and psychic, out of which rural women, in this case, might be in a position to produce narratives out of their

experience. In this case it might be said that the rural woman can only begin to become the subject of stories by leaving the rural for the city, a dislocation that enables her to realise her origins through the gap between them and her subsequent situation. This is not then a call for the reinstatement of tradition but an unsentimental realisation that the rural does not contain some essence that needs to be returned to or valorised. In the sober analysis of Mamphela Ramphele: "Many poor people, especially women in rural areas, continue to be subject to tribal laws [...] South Africans today thus adhere ambiguously to conflicting notions of social membership [...] How can women acquire leadership skills in an environment that stipulates that women cannot lead?" (RAMPHELE, 2001: 5-6).

As if to underline the point "Leaving" has at its centre a woman who remains nameless, as if she exists as a personification of many women, a representative of the rural Xhosa woman. The story concentrates on the physicality of the woman's life, on the practical details of survival. For her, the gendered nature of her fate is more immediate than any wider systemic contexts for the conditions under which her exhaustion is produced, for while the nature of family life when separated by the demands of the mines for male workers is a political matter, the story does not speak directly about this. Furthermore, it is not simply the fact of working in another part of the country that determines that "as soon as he leaves he forgets all about us" (MAGONA, 1991: 6). The relation of the husband with his family is a class and gendered relation as well as one subject to the distorting influence of South African capitalism.

In her decision to leave her children however, all the unnatural pressures brought about by male irresponsibility and its links to white South Africa's manipulation of the country's indigenous peoples are made manifest, in the way in which the lyrical language becomes used not in the service of the articulation of matters of love or considerations of the mysteries of mortality but rather in the service of her abandonment of her children—"Light as dandelion seed adrift in April's breeze she walked away from the hut where her children slept" (MAGONA, 1991: 7). Her agility of mind and restless examination of her situation lead to what she feels as a constructive solution and yet what in most contexts would be felt as a highly destructive resolution: "She would fulfil her obligations as she understood them and provide for them. The only way she could be a mother to her children, she saw, would be to leave them"

(MAGONA, 1991: 6). As she walks away from them her language is fragmented, tortured, urgent, the paragraphs brief. Moreover, the whole walk, and the energy carried in the prose as in the determined actions of the woman, use the conventions of the heroic narrative, with its succession of obstacles overcome (thoughts that assail her, potential accusations of others, topographic features that have to be walked over or through, such as the river) leading to triumphant finality at the end, heroic conventions appropriated to the tough love of a woman's leaving her children. This act, coming at the beginning of the book, announces a fracture, a sense of unnatural acts, but also a beginning, all the more strong when in the service of one of the most terrible acts a mother can commit.

In classic realism closure is all important. In the short story however the conventions of realism and closure are themselves altered in the often different dynamic of the short story, where the suddenly surprising or open ending is extremely frequent. Magona's stories inhabit this relation to closure expertly, as individual stories, but they do more than this: in the first part of this volume they form a chain with the stories that follow, so that they constitute a frieze (or a sisterhood), a series of representations that in this way do not become depictions of individual cases but representative of the situation of many black South African women whose families live in the townships or the country while they work apart from them as domestic workers in the city. It is important for Magona that her stories do not close situations down but rather open out into new possibilities (although, as will be seen, this cannot always be the case).

Thus it is that in the second story the "Atini" who tells the story is the nameless woman of "Leaving," revealing that the end of the first story has in fact brought the development hoped for at the its end, it has announced a new future for its protagonist and not just the vague promise of the open ending. In "Atini" she announces her name right at the beginning, setting the tone of a new start, now she has an identity, denied her in her previous village life, and the title of the story ensures that this name is her Xhosa name and not that conferred on her by her lazy employer. By leaving she has taken a transgressive step and one towards affirming her identity as an individual and not simply as a mother and woman. In the harsh ironies of South African life however this is immediately taken away from her by her white employer, who cannot cope with her non-

European name; not only does the employer haughtily replace Atini's name with one that is more suitable to her, she does it in the form of a diminutive "Tiny." The lyricism and the connection with Nature in the story's linguistic register has gone, replaced by a matter-of-fact, down-to-earth language, as Magona adopts classic realistic discourse, albeit through the first-person narrator and the centred subject. Despite the unequal relationship between Atini and her employer, this is still characterised as a class relationship as Atini hasn't inserted it into a raced framework. In comparison with Atini's life in the village, the changes she is experiencing are thought-provoking enough that they make her think that "a whole new world is opening right in front of my eyes" (MAGONA, 1991: 15). Once again the story finishes not so much on any moment of closure but rather on one of expectation and futurity. At the same time each of these stories represents moments of development, steps forward that do duty as partial closure with respect to what the women had experienced before, leaving the village or confirming herself in her job. This partial closure is represented as development, as movement forward, despite the conflicts (with her motherly duty, with her fellow domestic workers) this development occasions. As yet however, this is a world of employment and thus centrally of negotiation between two women who occupy different positions in the finely-graded South African hierarchy of power of the period. Not only that, the employment situation means that Atini feels not so much the pressure of her white employer, but rather the competition for jobs and reputation among black women looking for work or to hold on to the position they have. Once Atini has a job her principal opposition comes ironically from others like her, while the wider-focused political reflection Atini's situation might arouse is not entered into.

The political realities of unequal power and lack of freedom tend to be subsumed under the day to day tribulations of working women in these stories. In this sense, what we get is more a discourse of class, of impoverished employees and wealthy employers, but also of the division between the impoverished that helps power to sustain its hold over the largely (because no-one is totally) disempowered. Margaret Daymond sums up Magona's autobiographies as suggesting that "she thinks of herself primarily as an economic unit in society" (DAYMOND, 1995: 561). Rather than any realisation that the inequalities and indignities come from a disgraceful oppression of

people on the simplistic basis of their skin colour, Stella's conversation in the third story, "Stella," is full of the outrage of the worker confronted by the unreasonable behaviour of her boss. Even though her employer's skin colour is mentioned near the end of the piece, it is used as an essentialising characteristic rather than as a metaphor by which one group attempts to classify itself in order to impose its will on another that it alone has the right to specify. "Stella" in fact is not so much a story as a snapshot of a monologue delivered by one maid to another over coffee, presumably by one of the maids in the area where Atini works, one of those who become friendly with her after initial disapproval. Not a narrative it does not possess the possibility of narrative closure, simply the end of the conversation as Stella finishes her coffee and presumably heads back to work with her hypocritical and unfair "medem" (the word used in South Africa to refer to the woman who employs domestic workers). The following stories follow the same pattern of the unnarrated speech of other maids, an accumulation of problems that constitutes a withering charge against the selfishness and inhumanity of white women.

Although the maids do not reflect upon the wider historical or social contexts of their oppression, and for them to do so would have been somewhat unrealistic given the difficulty of access to education for black people under apartheid, they are in no doubt that white women are pretty uniformly despicable. Without the contexts to explain this power imbalance however, their despicableness remains linked only to their whiteness, leaving black and white where they started, with a polarised frame of reference based atavistically on chromatic characteristics. These stories are not so much stories as vignettes, with a marginal investment in closure. As a linked series, however, closure is brought after a fashion by the terminal piece, "Atini's reflections." There she closes the circle begun by her leaving in the first piece, justifying her action by claiming that it has enabled her, as she had hoped and believed, to be a better mother.

Magona is crucially interested in the role of women as carers, those who are left with the children, those whose heroism is practical, pragmatic and concerned with daily survival and not with the macho heroics of armed struggle. The notion of what control a black woman can ever have in such a world absorbs her. Especially as in the world of work that concerns her, black women are usually the most disempowered. Despite this lack of power it was actually women who had the role of maintaining the family and by extension

the community and thus implicitly a whole people's sense of self at a time when it was supposedly that self that was being fought for. Magona shows how implicated this was in the gender situation and the class situation as well as the racial situation (race being understood as a social category ascribed by sections of society in differing ways). In this context it was not surprising that a woman might want to escape, for there was no scope for a meaningful politics of change crushed at the bottom. A mother thus has to deny herself in order to establish the conditions by which later she can assume her role as mother again. Magona rewrites the maternal voice not as a preserver but as a transgressor, one who steps outside boundaries and challenges them, not one that simply accepts and perpetuates them or even that wants to return to a putatively essential Xhosa motherhood denied by colonialism.

The maternal voice is one that can easily slip towards a symbolic function, as Meg Samuelson points out (SAMUELSON, 2000:241), and even with Magona's efforts this is inevitable to some extent. Nonetheless, she attempts to destabilise the maternal voice as a conventional point of reference, especially that point in which women are the keepers of tradition, the link to the past, the continuity with their culture, something she resists at the same time as she desires it. It is a conflicted position in her various mothers as in her autobiographical voice. It also relates to the idea that women have had to accept a low valuation of themselves, deriving their value from their supposedly natural functions, leaving the management of society to men. Atini steps outside this to construct a different value for herself but it is something that is not done easily, that requires sacrifice and a challenge to convention. For along with the maternal have gone such qualities as passivity, sacrifice, dependence, vulnerability. From where in such a world of layers of power can women's strength come? As it happens, while there are those who believe in the multiple oppressions black women have suffered, and suffer, there are others who hold, as South African writer Gcina Mhlophe, that "African women have been the pillars of the Struggle in South Africa and they don't have to shout about it. They have to work. They have to make sure their children are taken care of, that the families don't break down" (MHLOPHE, 1996: 31), something that Magona is clearly insisting on in her work.

This is where post-structural notions of the subject actually help for, as anthropologist Henrietta Moore synthesises: "the basic

premise of post-structuralist thought on the subject is that discourses and discursive practices provide subject positions, and that individuals take up a variety of subject positions within different discourses" (MOORE, 1994: 55). Not so much denying the possibility of responsibility or agency, "the subject in post-structuralist thinking is composed of, or exists as, a set of multiple and contradictory positionings and subjectivities" (MOORE, 1994: 55). Having to act or believing one has to act in contradiction to one's perceived role or responsibilities thus becomes not so much a fissure in one's being, a sign of incoherence, as a sign rather that we inhabit differing social sites whose demands on us are opposed. In responding to these pressures we have to realign ourselves athwart what we might take to be our central subject position, but these realignments are factors not of our fragmentation or dishonesty as of the clashing vectors of the forces acting upon us. The more these clash, the more disarticulated will our subject positions become; the more they do not, the fewer subject positions will we need to adopt. Atini's leaving of her children thus becomes a metaphor for the radically oppositional pressures acting upon black, rural women in South Africa under apartheid.

In the second part of *Living, Loving, and Lying Awake at Night* the stories comprise a less integrated series of voices although their general concerns are all related to the daily struggle of black women in a world that severely restricts their agency. In "Flight" the use of isiXhosa on the first page deliberately includes those who are bilingual and weakens the reading positions of those who only have English, dilutes their power over discourse and by implication their power to write it, but at the same time if it were only in isiXhosa, it would lose its authority as well. The reader of English has to be drawn into the tale in the first place in order to experience the dislocation of being outside the multiplicity of South Africa's languages. The title echoes what happened at the beginning of the first section: Leaving. The location is a valley, a village, spatially suggesting security, but Magona uses the sympathetic background to activate the emotions of the watcher in the tale, who is doing duty as the reader. The observation jumps back and forward between the location of observation and the action and in the end the new wife escapes, gets out of a valley, an enclosing space, and the observer is lifted by watching her escape. Women's escape is built into the emotional geography of the short tale as of the book as a whole. As

we are going to see women don't always escape, they become entrapped not simply by the valley and by rural custom but by the restrictions imposed by lack of education and opportunity, as well as by the appetites and violence of men.

Yet Magona structures her tales so that some balance is achieved. After "Flight," we have one that is positive, "The Most Exciting Day of the Week," one that finds the positive in custom, in regularity, in continuity, all those things challenged by the flight of the first story. These things have their positive aspects and cannot be condemned in toto, only in terms of the contexts of individuals. This may be seen as a substantiation of the rural and the domestic such as Njabulo Ndebele enjoins, and a rendering to the future so that it will not be forgotten, in the same spirit as her autobiographical volumes. In having to be written down however it bears witness to the very destabilisation of the continuity that it chronicles, for if these things really continued alive there would be no need to write them down, they would live on in the acts and oral intercourse of the community. Many of her stories thus deal with memory and the need to manage memory, all the more necessary in a society in which there is such fierce contention for the establishment of the new myths and paradigms by which its cultural life will be structured. "The Most Exciting Day of the Week" is a representation of the activity of and the stimulation provided by Fridays in the village, told from the wide-eyed, sense-oriented perspective of the child. The details accumulate a value through being recalled, their density and profusion establishing links with the past that make both the past and the present more solid. Moreover, in the story's naturalistic focus on such activities as the production and consumption of beer, the hurly-burly of fights at school, the cleaning of the house, or following lovers into the woods, it valorises Xhosa life without overt reference to ethnicity or to political and thus material oppression (referenced implicitly in the poverty of the village and its infrastructure). In the conclusion of the child that "money made the world go round" (MAGONA, 1991: 71) we have after all an unspectacular observation that is certainly not restricted to South African villages. More positive is the fact that it has a power, even within the constricted economy of the village, so that "it changed people who were normal and ordinary all week long so that on Friday, on Friday [sic] they assumed an otherness that was astounding to behold" (MAGONA, 1991: 71). In allowing the operation of memory to be controlled from

the recalled perspective of a child the story can exclude the bitterness and politicisation of the adult, reclaiming the past as something worthwhile, a basis for identity formation and not simply for regret and frustration.

Yet "The Most Exciting Day of the Week," which ends with "It is a day on which I not only count my blessings but see them" (MAGONA, 1991: 71) can scarcely serve as a totalising vision of the past in South Africa, and it is immediately followed by "Nosisa," in which an intelligent girl who seems to have many blessings to count ends up burning herself to death. A story of childhood like the previous one it contrasts the domestic density of that story with the twisted promise of western education in which enough is offered to stimulate but not enough to provide any meaningful hope. As usual Magona signals the emotional atmospheres of her tales in their opening sentences, so that when "Nosisa" begins with the barbed wire around the school in Guguletu it is establishing violence and enclosure at the outset. As the story progresses the enclosing spaces accumulate as does the sense of entrapment, both a physical restriction but also a mental one; the possibilities for Nosisa are limited. So that even though she has potential her only escape is to destroy herself, doing the system's work for it before it gets to her as it were.

In this story the first direct attacks on the systemic inequalities of South African society are made, as opposed to the personalised criticism of white "medems" in the first section. We read of "inadequate space [...] cement floors, broken desks, weak lighting, poor ventilation, low teachers' salaries, no feeding scheme, no government grants to translate into books, laboratory equipment, recreational and other resources" (MAGONA, 1991: 73). That Magona places high value on western education nonetheless is apparent in her autobiographies, but also here where she is withering in her depiction of "the African child trained to be a human bonsai; dwarfed in mind and soul in complete accord with his or her shrunken body and evaporated aspirations for any future worth the name" (MAGONA, 1991: 74). Nosisa thus serves as a metaphor for the self-destructiveness and self-oppression that inequality can occasion in its most oppressed, as she feels herself to carry the suffering of the world within her. Unable to see a way to end suffering she puts an end to her life. The unsurprising tale told in this form is rendered a little askew from expectations in that Nosisa is considered lucky by everyone; she is the only one with a complete

uniform and all the books, she is good at schoolwork and already knows English through living with her mother at her medem's house. What counts as luck is relative however, for ironically it only gives Nosisa a more complete picture of the darkness of her situation and that of all the people in the world trapped by constraints over which personal ability has no influence. Closure really does mean closing off, end-stopping, en-closure here.

Magona's signalling of the emotional atmosphere of her tales is clear in "It was Easter Sunday the day I went to Netreg", where the story begins with "brakes grinding in protest, the blood-red Volkswagen lurched to an uncertain, shuddering stop" (MAGONA, 1991: 95), a rhetoric of violence and anguish. The verb "grinding" suggests a noise that assails the ears as well as an action that is inimical to the smooth working of the machinery involved; "protest" is the result of this action; the car is not simply red but "blood-red"; while "lurched" and "shuddered" both suggest movements that are uncoordinated and uncontrolled. Magona's language frequently reiterates the systemic violence that she is dealing with through its surface linguistic resources. In addition to this level of emotional reverberation Magona also insistently writes about events and experiences that may also serve as metaphors for the violence of South African society with special emphasis on that perpetrated on women. In this story we have the abortion which the girl is forced to have as a metaphor for the perversion of the theoretically natural relation between men and women, as well as of women's maternity and the creative principle in general. These all here end in the violence of the forced abortion, pointedly occurring on the day consecrated to the Resurrection in the Christian calendar.

This violence is however intensified by the melodramatic ending of the story, and it is a violence that makes the abortion not simply a personal matter, nor one that occurs within the asymmetrical power relations of men and women, but one that demonstrates the intimate ways in which apartheid impacted upon personal lives, ultimately because "the white, highly specialised and learned officials had yet to grasp the simple fact of these men's being human too" (MAGONA, 1991: 101). The herding of men into zones, known as Single Men's Quarters, where they were unable to take their wives or to live with their families, exerted unnatural pressures on the men, their families and the townships near where these quarters were sited. This would be banal were it simply the story of a man satisfying himself with a

young girl he had no intention of marrying, for this is hardly a scenario that requires apartheid as a conditioning factor. Indeed, the man in the story would have married Linda, and the teenage pregnancy ending in marriage could have countered the negative forces acting upon personal relationships, but Magona intensifies the evil of the system at the end of the story by revealing both its cyclic repetition (it is not just a matter of individuals but of repeated patterns) and its subsequent denaturalisation of family bonds: the man who had made Linda pregnant was the same man who, fifteen years previously, had made his mother pregnant with her and disappeared. Not only has the prolonged grouping together of men without women been destructive of family bonds, but even the attempt by Mteteleli to redeem his past irresponsibility by marrying Linda is denied by the perversion the system has facilitated and which it thus represents. The story's closure here is the closing down of healthy human development by the alliance between capitalism and apartheid, its melodramatic nature forcefully metaphorical of the alliance's destructiveness. Survival here means no more than that: Linda survives but can scarcely be said to be alive, a witness to the living death the constrictions and the effects of the system allow.

Following this story Magona has another strongly melodramatic ending in "MaDlomo," but as if contrapuntally to the previous story, this one is focused on the relation between a man and his wife with little reference to any putatively distorting effects of the wider national context. Implicitly, the poverty of the township can be linked with MaDlomo's alcoholism, although this would be a weak explanation given that taking refuge in alcohol is scarcely limited to circumstances of poverty. Moreover, internal evidence from the story also dilutes such an explanation, given that MaDlomo's husband, unfortunately for a Portuguese readership named Tolo, is abstemious, doesn't smoke, doesn't raise his voice and his tolerant of MaDlomo's wayward habits. More a story in the terms of Ndebele's comments, the tale chronicles the developments and pressures in a family where drink takes over one of the partners, creating distorting tensions leading to the situation of Tolo's taking a second woman to live in the same house. A familiar circumstance in fiction from other parts of Africa, here it is transgressive and ends up destroying the relationship between husband and wife. This is hardly surprising, but Magona's staged and melodramatic closure in which Tolo dies one year to the day after the death of his wife, worn down with

sadness over her death, may suggest in its artificiality a tidy point about the destructiveness of drink, but may also be Magona's way of giving a symbolic depth to this tale of domestic actions and emotions, of dignifying the daily lives of people in the townships, their opportunities limited and limiting.

The story that most readers tend to remember as the strongest is also the longest, "Two little girls and a city." A story that contains its own narratorial comment on its central events, it chronicles the rape and murder of two little girls on the same day in different parts of the city, and the acts' aftermath in terms of the media and the police. One is white and wealthy and the other black and poor. Predictably, one is more important than the other, although Magona does not cheapen the story by lessening the grief of the white parents or in any way suggesting that the white girl deserves less sympathy and outrage than the black girl. To write thus of white grief is a healing act in itself even though the story is a clear critique of the circulation of discourse in a society having trouble dealing with the alterations in relative weight between the differently-identified ethnic communities. To be able to empathise with white people, to humanise them at the same time as critiquing the asymmetrical hierarchies for which they are to blame is a delicate achievement despite the story's impact.

In managing the adjustments in the circulation of discourse that the new South Africa will require what needs to be specially managed is the operation of memory. The narrator speaks of the necessity of both not forgetting and forgetting at the same time; there is a need to "tuck it all away and go on with my life" (MAGONA, 1991: 117), even though there is also a need to tell the stories so that the right type of forgetting can take place. The right type of forgetting is when "for the briefest moment, the two men forgot *their place* and became just ordinary men, human beings: no more and no less" (MAGONA, 1991: 138). The wrong type of forgetting would be that that overlooked the inequality of treatment meted out to black people as suspects of the murder of the white girl, that overlooked the rape and murder of the black girl, and, implicitly, that didn't tell the story. What is left are sorrow and anger, the last word in the tale. The closure of this story is thus a metatextual one that underscores the need for it to have been told in the first place, and, by extension, this is open to the need for all stories to be told, for memory to be kept alive even as South African society changes.

In the last story, "Now that the pass has gone," we also see talk about escape, as in the first story of the book as well as this second part. However it is made clear that after all "none of us escaped" (MAGONA, 1991: 155). Things have changed in South Africa (now post-apartheid, unlike in the first part) but the emotional landscape has been left so damaged that new strategies of escape need to be found, among which writing is one of the most powerful. There is an optimism in the last paragraph after all: in being able to tell and to walk (by walking, we can walk away, so important in the first story) there is not simply an optimism but a strategic optimism after the darkness of the previous story showing the depth of the terrible divisions in South African society, despite the fact that the pass has gone. That doesn't represent the end of the problems but the beginning of new ones, principally the rebuilding and the retelling, for history remains: "The pass has gone; the pass will never die" (MAGONA, 1991: 155). Thus it is that closure is compromised in the individual stories as well as in the volume as a whole. By writing a volume of short stories or vignettes Magona allows herself to produce repeated structures in which closure is opened out, but also occasional structures in which it is terminal and destructive. In this way she is able to make a series of points about the realities of Xhosa women without being limited to the metaphorical restriction of the closure of a novel, especially one written by means of the strategies of realism. For no matter how many interposed narratives a novel may contain, its final pages articulate a type of authority that overshadows that of the other stories that have preceded this ending.

Wole Soyinka is one observer who has trouble accepting the operations and function of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. For while he accepts that "even the dismal recital or publication of these records would bring a measure of consolation that attaches to the recognition of past suffering" (SOYINKA, 1999: 30), he feels that this is ultimately not enough, that "this could never substitute for, nor indeed induce, the sense of closure, the catharsis that only the presence of the inculpated, now pressed into service in a reversal of roles, would provide" (SOYINKA, 1999: 30). Closure, ultimately, is about survival. Given that no human reality other than death can be said to constitute absolute closure, the idea that there could be such a thing is a metaphor, and moreover a metaphor in which narrative is the principal generating origin. In narrative closure is not experienced as inevitable but as constructed, as

serving the ends of the narrative. Penny Boumelha points out, opposing those critics who see realism as a false and smug illusionism, that "the necessity of an ending, after all, is one of the ways in which any fiction, however involuntarily, flaunts its textuality" (BOUMELHA, 1992 [1988]: 327).

Soyinka feels the narrative of recent South African history would be better served by a certain type of ending. However, Magona believes that "what is coming out of the TRC will help the writers in South Africa" (MAGONA, 1999: 86) for varying reasons: it will confirm some of what writers write as being realistic and not fanciful, while it will also free writers to write about other things if they wish given that these stories are on record now in the TRC transcripts. In Magona's sense it doesn't mean that the stories are over, but only that told in this way they are useful, they are aids to going forward, to survival. In this function a volume of short stories with its multiple variations of closure may provide a more useful metaphor of survival than would a novel. Furthermore these multiple strategies of closure illustrate Boumelha's belief that "the endings of the realist text often push to the point of stark visibility the struggle of a self-styled truthful representation to reduce into some form of textual closure those 'truths' of women's desire or aspiration or articulateness that it has itself displayed" (BOUMELHA, 1992 [1988]: 327). In this manoeuvre Magona may be said to productively inhabit the possibilities of realism as well as to articulate much of what Ndebele wished for in his call for a literature that denied the political spectacle and concentrated on the daily life of South Africans.

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