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'Interpretations in Transition': Literature and Political Transition in Malawi and South Africa in the 1990s

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Interpretations in Transition:

Literature and Political Transition in Malawi and South Africa in the 1990s

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Abstract

In this thesis I explore instances of literary engagement with the major transitions in national political formation in Malawi and South Africa; both countries moved from a totalitarian regime to democratic government, brought in by multi-party elections, in 1994. Most analyses of the wave of democratic transitions in Southern Africa are either historical, political or economic in their approach. The shift of political power from one constituency to another also requires another kind of study, of the impact of the political changes on lived experience through an analysis of people's creative expression. The artistic expressions of the *experience* of change are at times strikingly similar in the two countries, especially how artists imagine newness and simultaneously negotiate a past which was subject to repression.

Literature is important in this political process, for it has a licence to reinterpret conventional representations and dominant narratives, often through fictionalising and creating new imaginative possibilities. I consider whether literary production in Malawi and South Africa is comparable in the light of this idea, despite the obvious differences in political configuration, geographic factors and levels of industrialisation and urbanisation, and ask whether political transition is a legitimate point of departure for interpreting literature. In the process I seek to identify similarities, and even overt influences or alliances between the literary practices in Malawi and South Africa during and since the transition.

I analyse a wide variety of literary forms, some of which may transgress conventional definitions of 'literature'. Examples include the reader-contributions sent in to a newspaper's literary pages by its readers and the two historical accounts of women's experience. I discuss the porous distinction between fiction and history, realism and magic realism, as well as the subjective distinctions between formal and popular literature. The ambiguity of the title of my thesis therefore conveys the fact that the more established modes of literary interpretation are themselves also currently in transition. My intention here is not to argue what kind of literature is good or bad, valuable or trivial, but to discuss and interpret contextually the kinds of literature which *are* being produced and published.

Chapter 1 of my thesis discusses the work of Jack Mapanje and Nadine Gordimer, two 'veterans' of censorship under their respective regimes, suggesting how their writing has changed with freedom of expression. With the transition came experimentation and a wave of writing on fantastical, magical and irrational subjects. The writers discussed in Chapter 2 serve as a contrast to the engaged realism of

Gordimer and to some extent, Mapanje. Steve Chimombo, Lesego Rampolokeng, Seitlhamo Motsapi and Zakes Mda convey a burlesque, transgressive style, which I discuss, drawing on Bakhtin, under the heading 'carnavalesque'. Chapter 3's emphasis on newspaper literature from Malawi reflects the importance of the form in contrast to South Africa where popular writing largely finds its main outlet in literary journals and magazines rather than in daily newspapers. Chapters 4 and 5 are related in their considerations of memory and searches for truth. In Chapter 4 Antjie Krog and Emily Mkamanga challenge the distinction between literary and factual chronicle in their woman-centred accounts of the past. The final chapter discusses two texts that are overtly literary, yet function in a mode of mourning and reflection, returning from the bustle of the present moment to a continuing, necessary reflection of the past which defines the new present. I conclude by suggesting that the comparative analysis is viable and enriching and that this study of literature from societies in transition demonstrates how poetry and fiction tell stories of history.

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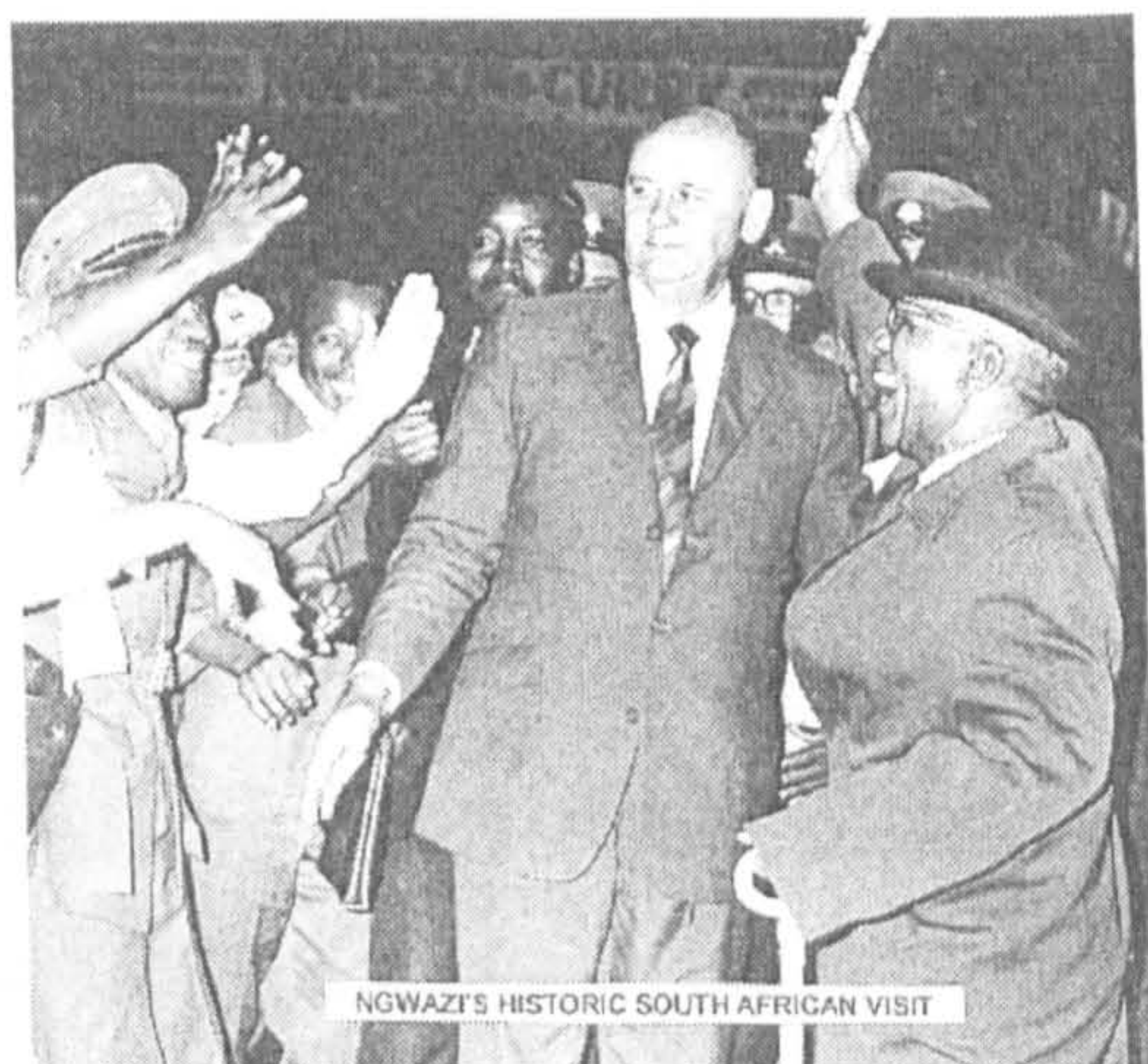
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INTRODUCTION:

Notes on Literature and Political Transition



[W]e got more yesterday than anybody. We need
some kind of tomorrow
*Toni Morrison*¹

The death of the old ideologies takes the forms
of scepticism with regard to all theories and
general formulae
*Antonio Gramsci*²

Clearly, the Malawian situation is only a variant
of other global instances of multi-party politics.
South Africa immediately comes to mind.
Doubtless comparisons ought to be made.
*Jack Mapanje*³

figure i.1 Vorster and Banda in South Africa, 1971

At the age of eleven, the only home I could remember was the airy colonial house on the slopes of Zomba Plateau in Malawi. I grew up hearing Lemmy Special and Miriam Makeba,⁴ driving past Wenela⁵ bus station, eating Royco soya mince seasoned with *knoffelsout* and drinking Nido, Milo and Ricoffy.⁶ Yet I never set foot in South Africa until I was twenty-seven. My first trip to the supermarket in Cape Town created a strange sense of familiarity, an uncanny feeling of fore-knowledge. Only later did I appreciate the appropriateness of the fact that I learned to play monopoly on a set on which you could both 'go to jail' and 'tronk toe', for South Africa was Malawi's main political ally in the region in the 1970s and 80s, and vice versa, and South Africa had a virtual monopoly on imports into Malawi. Hastings Kamuzu Banda famously declared in Faustian terms before his visit to South Africa in 1971 (*see figure i.1*) that he would make an 'alliance with the Devil' if it helped the people of Malawi.⁷ I knew of a number of people who had relatives working in *Jubecki*,⁸ some of the 80,000 Malawian migrant workers who worked mainly in the

¹ Morrison (1987) p.273

² Gramsci (1971) p.276

³ Mapanje (1995b) p.84

⁴ South African musicians

⁵ This is a derivative name from WNLA, the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, which recruited in Malawi and arranged transport for migrant workers.

⁶ These are all products manufactured in South Africa.

⁷ Short (1974) p.290

⁸ A derivation from Jo'burg, i.e. Johannesburg.

mines. I did always realise that Malawi was not my home: I had a vague notion that one day we would 'go back' to a place where I would be allowed to wear trousers.⁹ Such was the extent to which Southern African politics entered one eleven-year-old's consciousness. Nine years later I witnessed the student protests at the University of Malawi in March 1992. Banda's agreement to call a referendum on multipartyism was to me more unbelievable than the fall of the Berlin Wall or the release of Nelson Mandela, which had fascinated me in the previous years. The thought of Malawi without Banda had been unimaginable and literally unspeakable.

Many political interpreters suggest that the wave of transitions from totalitarian rule that took place in Africa in the early 1990s was hastened by the momentous transitions in the Eastern bloc countries.¹⁰ No longer was it necessary for opposing sides of the Iron Curtain to support authoritarian regimes in Africa as players in a global contest of empires. The repressive regimes in Malawi and South Africa, for example, were supported by the West for their vehement anti-communism while Tanzania and Zambia benefited from much Soviet and Chinese aid. With these international political motives underpinning regimes, most analyses of this wave of democratisations in Southern Africa are either historical, political or economic in their approach; they debate what factors contributed in what proportions to the political transformations of the 1990s.

These questions raise other concerns that will be the focus of my attention; the shift of political power from one constituency to another also requires a study of the impact of the political changes on lived experience through an analysis of people's creative expression. My aim in this thesis is to explore instances of literary engagement with the major transitions in national political formation in Malawi and South Africa. Both countries moved from a totalitarian regime to democratic government, brought in by multi-party elections in 1994, inviting the kind of comparison Mapanje encourages in the epigraph. Susan Vanzanten Gallagher suggests that as a result of liberalisation, 'culture has an important role to play in history, but that the role has changed from resistance to reconstruction, from protest to construction, from anger to reconciliation',¹¹ an argument that I will be testing, and at times contesting. I consider whether the literary production in Malawi and South Africa is comparable in the light of this idea, despite the obvious differences in political configuration, geographic factors, and levels of industrialisation, and

⁹ It was illegal for women to wear trousers in Banda's Malawi

¹⁰ This is illustrated in *Index on Censorship* 5/99, Special issue: 'After the Fall: 1989-99'.

¹¹ Vanzanten Gallagher (1997) pp.382-83

ask whether political transition is a legitimate point of departure for interpreting literature. In the process I seek to identify any similarities, or even overt influences or alliances between the literary practices in Malawi and South Africa during and since the transition. The South African transition has been written about in comparison with countries affected by the fall of the Berlin Wall, particularly post-war Germany and the former USSR.¹² However, this piece of work is situated within the tendency that Dorothy Driver identifies, suggesting that 'links are being forged between the south and the rest of Africa ... as connections are waning (psychologically if not economically) between Africa and Europe'.¹³ As a cultural project, this thesis encourages this gesture by seeking to investigate such links. Some more years of hindsight might have made the project more contained and reflective, but it is from its proximity to the circulation of cultural debates and the publication of the texts it discusses that its originality springs.

During the political transition in Malawi I obtained whatever creative writing was available in bookshops and in newspapers, as I knew I was going to do a degree in English Studies. I followed the changing attitudes in terms of literary expression, excited when the newspapers started printing iconoclastic poems such as 'Song of Victory'¹⁴ and 'No More Blood'¹⁵ and political cartoons, a favourite genre of mine. At university I was introduced to certain critical theories, such as New Criticism and formalism; their declaration of the autonomy of the literary text and their analyses of texts in isolation from their contexts of production and interpretation, were baffling to me. These experiences continue to inform my interpretation of literature today.

Until its Independence in 1964 Malawi was a British colony, then protectorate, yet after his vehement protestation against Federation with the Rhodesias, Banda became Prime Minister, then President of the Republic, declaring himself Life President in 1971. However, as a result of an accumulation of factors, including a pastoral letter read out in all Catholic churches in March 1992, which led to civil unrest in urban areas and at the university, Banda called for a referendum to be held in June 1993 to decide on whether to introduce multi-party democracy. 63 per cent of people voted in favour, and the first democratic elections were held in May 1994. Three weeks earlier South Africa had held its first democratic elections after a transition process that had started in the late 1980s. Its key turning-point,

¹² Viljoen and Hentschel (1997) Special issue on German and South African literature and Coetzee (1996) which compares conditions for writing in apartheid South Africa to those in the Stalinist Soviet Union.

¹³ Driver (1998) p.155

¹⁴ Chipanga (1992)

¹⁵ Malunga (1992)

however, was the decision in 1990 to scrap the apartheid laws, many of which had been in place since 1948, allowing for the unbanning of opposition parties and the freeing of Mandela and his colleagues. Both transitions can be defined as movements from external or violent, to internal or ideological social control; in the terminology of Louis Althusser, from states predominantly employing a Repressive State Apparatus to govern, such as the army, police, courts and prisons to those employing Ideological State Apparatuses, including religion, schools, media and culture: "The Repressive State Apparatus functions "by violence", whereas the Ideological State Apparatuses *function by ideology*."¹⁶

Not only did the dates of the transition coincide, but when I started reading material on the transition in Malawi I was struck by how often commentators implicitly and explicitly referred to South Africa as a comparison. The more I read, the more the comparison between the cultural debates in the two countries suggested itself as a viable subject of investigation. So much of what I was reading could apply to either of the countries, despite the obvious differences in political configuration. The discursive expressions of the *experience* of change were at times strikingly similar. A cultural examination of political transition therefore explores representations of how change is experienced and represented, how artists imagine newness and simultaneously re-envision a past which was subject to repression. Profound changes in lived human experience clearly precipitate new artistic responses, especially where the transition to a post-totalitarian state involves a greater freedom of expression, leading to a culture of openness and possibility.

Literature is important in this political process, for it has a licence to reinterpret conventional representations and dominant narratives, often through fictionalising and creating new possibilities. It is able imaginatively to re-write and transform representations of the past by giving voice to repressed human experience. Importantly its medium is also the most important medium of power: the word. Language, as Michel Foucault notes, is central to power: 'if language expresses, it does so not in so far as it is an imitation and duplication of things, but in so far as it manifests and translates the fundamental will of those who speak it'.¹⁷ It forms a dominant discourse which is defined in opposition to the kind of language it excludes. Through this idea of the will to power, Ross Chambers asserts the significance of literary expression:

¹⁶ Althusser (1977) p.138

¹⁷ Foucault (1970) p.290

Power has an interest in keeping the functioning of its authority unexamined, whereas literary discourse ... foregrounds the practice of reading that produces authority, and on which the whole system depends.¹⁸

In his exploration of a definition of 'the literary', Peter Widdowson cites a number of writers who see not only the questioning, responsive role of literature, but also its constructive function, that imagines alternatives. Seamus Heaney, for example, remarks that 'the literary' is 'more dedicated to the world-renewing potential of the imagined response than to the adequacy of the social one',¹⁹ suggesting literature's ability to give expression to a consciousness beyond the limits and frustrations of the current political realities. Widdowson himself notes that literature can

at once give form to flux, if only temporarily and provisionally, shape a (textual) 'community' which we can comprehend, and thus simultaneously proffer as a 'way of knowing' our own culture and how it determines us.²⁰

The validity of both of these arguments is particularly heightened at a time of rapid social and political change, when an articulation of alternative histories and communities is so urgently sought. Transitions have created a need to re-visit theoretical issues of subjectivity, truth, memory and narrative as well as the ethics and definitions of literature, questions which have acquired a particular currency in countries that emerge from totalitarian rule; these debates are also current beyond Africa, in discussions of transition in former Eastern bloc countries.²¹

The state of being in transit involves a trajectory, yet also a condition of in-betweenness, of liminality, in which positive terms are thrown into doubt. In the case of political transitions, these in-between stages constitute interims and interregnums run by governments of national unity or interim leaders. These are characterised by constitutional renegotiation and inconclusiveness, spaces of open potential and possibility. Yet another oft-cited view of transition sees the endless questioning of all positive terms as an agonising space of negativity and *im*possibility. As the oft-cited Antonio Gramsci puts it, when 'the old is dying and the new cannot be born',²² institutions which allow the possibility of action and agency are not in place. The tension between the two views underlies every interpretation of

¹⁸ Chambers (1991) p.xiv

¹⁹ Widdowson (1999) p.106 citing Heaney (1995) p.xvii

²⁰ Widdowson (1999) p.150

²¹ See for example Esbenschade (1995)

²² Gramsci (1971) p.276 This phrase echoes the lines from Matthew Arnold's 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse', 'Wandering between two worlds, one dead,/ The other powerless to be born'. Gramsci does not, however, acknowledge any debt.

transition, explored differently according to subjective experience. Fundamentally, however, both representations involve the same process of breaking down and reconstructing.

The experience of transition is always slower to process than the moment that marks the change. It often involves anticipation and preparation before the determining moment, as well as taking stock and commemoration beyond the transition. The psyches of the witnesses to transition are also inevitably slow to change and it is interesting to note that the vocabulary of transitions in human life is often applied to political transition as a way of understanding the disillusionment at the slowness of material transformation at a time of political upheaval. Metaphors of birth and death, initiation and education abound. Political transition therefore constitutes not only a transferral of authority marked by a precise moment on a specific date, and commemorated as such in the new national narrative (Independence Day, Day of Reconciliation, Freedom Day), but also a gradual process which exists in tension with the extreme emotions and immediate expectations associated with major political change. In a transition involving post-totalitarian liberalisation, there exists an ecstasy of the vision of 'the new' and 'the free' at events marking the change, such as mass celebrations at the announcement of election results and at presidential inaugurations.²³ As the ecstasy of the marked moment subsides to make way for the gradual material processes of change, the transition appears anticlimactic and tediously slow, and disillusionment sets in. Again, metaphors of human life are used, referring to the 'young' or 'immature' democracy which needs time to 'grow up' as the voters' relationship to democratic decision-making 'matures'.

Each official party to political transition, in dismantling one political ideology and its supporting narrative, has to construct and consolidate a new one which signifies change, usually therefore a narrative of salvation and liberation. It is necessary for all political discourse to create, through ideology, such coherent narratives of self-justification to maintain its authority; as Catherine Belsey argues:

Ideology obscures the real conditions of existence by presenting partial truths. It is a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades, and masquerading as coherence in the interests of social relations.²⁴

Narrative, whether political or literary, constitutes an ordering of events, in time, according to a hierarchy of acceptability. In coming into being through language, a narrative forms its own silences, its 'margins', in

²³ See for example the newspaper front pages depicted at the beginning of Chapter 3.

²⁴ Belsey (1980) p.58

the gap between the project and its formulation.²⁵ In the formation of a new narrative, what was unspeakable in the old order may be spoken in the new order, yet in the process of forming an alternative order, a different set of unspeakables comes into place. The atrocities carried out in the name of a liberation struggle, or the new leaders' past affiliations with the old order are marginalised, forming gaps in the new narrative; for as Paul Connerton notes, '[t]he more total the aspirations of the new regime, the more imperiously will it seek to introduce an era of forced forgetting'.²⁶ However, symptoms of repression and contradiction may still be detected and interrogated in the margins of the text through deconstructive readings. In this sense, 'narrative' closely relates to the Foucauldian notion of 'discourse' linking language and power. However, it adds a further dimension of chronology, which is central to the teleology of the dominant discourses of transition.

The master narrative of the nation desires to be singular and authoritative, like its ruler, aiming to constitute its subjects as obedient and unitary. Resonating with this desire to cohere, for example, is the strongly totalitarian rhetoric of Banda's Malawi, constantly repeating calls for 'unity, loyalty, obedience, and discipline', which form the 'four cornerstones of the nation'. Banda's discourse is only an extreme example of the desire of all ruling discourse. Significantly, however, the ruled do not always respond as unified subjects, for as Belsey puts it, 'the individual subject is not a unity, and in this lies the possibility of deliberate change'.²⁷ Every subject thus possesses the potential for change in denying its singular interpellation as obedient subject, not least in subversive or interrogatory interpretations of the imperative narrative. Ruling discourse is often reflected in literature, supporting or undermining it. Many writers see it as their role, always to evade the imperative interpellation, to question it, even in the cases of the emerging narratives of liberation and salvation, for ultimately any narrativisation is allied with power.²⁸ The irony, of course, is that if the demarcation of identity and difference is an authorising, dominating process, it is a process shared by even those writers who resist emerging narratives of liberation with strategic counter-narratives. The resolution of this dilemma according to many theorists, as will be discussed in detail, is to employ a writing style which openly denies a desire for totality, coherence and unified meaning. This is

²⁵ Belsey (1980) p.135 She equates the formation of a narrative with the child's entry into the Symbolic Order, in the Lacanian sense, and its own subsequent conception of a 'lack'.

²⁶ Connerton (1989) p.12

²⁷ Belsey (1980) p.66

²⁸ Bennett and Royle (1999)p.54

however rejected by others for its relativism which, they argue, is inappropriate at a time of post-totalitarian transition when 'definite decisions need to be made'.²⁹

In analysing transition literature, the prefix 're-' is bound to dominate the critical vocabulary as change and *re*-assessment underlie all procedures. Much writing, as noted, involves *re*-addressing the past, for in *re*-imagining the past and *re*-defining memory, the present self is *re*-constituted. The literature I discuss is therefore dominated by *re*-inscriptions of the past in terms of *re*membrance in the forms of mourning, anger and *re*conciliation. My cut-off date for transition literature is 1999,³⁰ not only because I sought only to look at literature from the 1990s in this thesis, but also as 1999 was the year when both Malawi and South Africa had their second round of general elections which consolidated the democratic system. The election campaigns moved away from the discourse of liberation to concentrate on material concerns, so the significance of being the first democratic government is no longer operative in either country. Although creative expression will still for a long time be preoccupied with the past, my aim is to discuss literature which has a greater sense of immediacy and proximity to the transitions.

This leads to the vexed debate on the suitability of national politics as a subject of literature. In the introduction to his study of Malawian literature, Francis Moto notes that 'in all honesty there was no single topic which was not politicised during the thirty-one year reign of Dr Banda'.³¹ It is also an argument that Nadine Gordimer has also defended throughout her writing career. Her response is: 'When overtly or implicitly could writers evade politics?' She argues that all literatures, even those which present themselves as 'pure exploration of language' are in fact revolting against the 'politically-imposed spirit of their respective times',³² or in Belsey's vocabulary, against the dominant narrative or ideology of a ruling order. Gordimer goes on to argue that the arousal of imaginative powers 'can be virtually inescapable in times and places of socially seismic upheaval', where the writer is 'moved to fashion an expression of a new order'.³³ She places the role of the interrogation of the political narrative with the writer. This equates with Chambers' view, and with Belsey's definition of the counter-narrative impulses of the critic who refuses a unified subjectivity: 'The object of the critic, then, is to seek not the unity of the work, but the multiplicity

²⁹ Carusi (1991) p.101

³⁰ Emily Mkamanaga's text is the exception, published in 2000. However, its foreword by D.D. Phiri is dated 1998.

³¹ Moto (2001) p.19

³² Gordimer (1999) p.8

³³ Gordimer (1999) p.9

and diversity of possible meanings, its incompleteness ... and above all its contradictions.³⁴ Of course there are those writers and critics who operate in the interests of the ruling power, accepting the safety of state patronage, for example in 'National Cultural Troupes' and state-commissioned radio dramas. However, ultimately a deconstructive reading would find ruptures of subversion in any text, especially considering that even the *act* of writing and performing is arguably threatening to power, as it challenges the monopoly of address towards its constituency, offering the space for alternative meanings. As J.M. Coetzee argues, the state is always in contestation with the author:

the object of the state's envy is not so much the rival content of the author's word, or even specifically the power he [*sic*] gets from the press to spread that word, as a certain disseminative power of which the power to publish and have read is only the most marked manifestation.³⁵

The boundaries of acceptability to the ruling order have been policed by overt or covert censorship, influencing forms and techniques used by artists as they resist being addressed as docile, unitary subjects and insist on a multiplicity of alternative truths. The use of culture to counter imaginatively the political narrative is often a direct reciprocation of the regime's use of culture to legitimate itself. In Malawi, the mobilisation of neo-traditional leadership and praise forms in political ritual³⁶ is as much a form of cultural manipulation as the Afrikaners' reinterpretation of themselves as the biblical 'chosen people'³⁷ to justify apartheid ideology. Often, therefore, literature and political culture share discourses and motifs as they collude and contest. The idea that literature or other cultural forms are harmless, passive representations is refuted by the argument which recognises the centrality of language and representation in discourse and power, and is denied not least by the regimes themselves when they closely monitor and survey artistic expression at an astounding ratio of censors to artists.³⁸ Often representation emerges as action, as narrative interrogation and symbolic role-play turns into real organisation under censorship, as in the case of the politically conscious Writer's Group in Malawi³⁹ and the Congress of South African Writers.⁴⁰

A number of further questions emerge from this investigation: does literary culture transform completely at transition, or is it possible to detect traces of the former protest culture, whose

³⁴ Belsey (1980) p.109

³⁵ Coetzee (1996) p.43

³⁶ See Vail and White (1991), Forster (1994) and Chirwa (1994)

³⁷ Vanzanten Gallagher (1997) p.385, Brink (1996) p.86

³⁸ See Coetzee (1999) p.34. Coetzee estimates the ratio of bureaucrats monitoring writers at ten bureaucrats per writer in the USSR and, amazingly, in excess of that figure at the peak of South African surveillance of literature.

³⁹ Mphande (1996), Smith (1989)

⁴⁰ Campschreuer and Divendaal (1989) p.121

subversiveness lay in particular discursive techniques? One might further ask whether a crisis is *stated* or *interpreted* in the literature, considering how sophisticated the literature is in its analyses of transformations of power structures. Does it transform and liberalise, or are different exclusions instituted and upheld? In other words, is the process of constructing alternative narratives different from the engineering of a dominant ideology? A further question is how far the new writings challenge inherited power structures, or alternatively, how far they manifest simple inversions of subject-positions within the same structures of dominance. These might include attitudes concerning gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity that remain untransformed, or they may include an evasion of structures of accountability and transparency of power, including censorship laws. Finally, it is necessary to consider how the transformation of individual and collective identities is imagined through literature and whether new groups of identification are formed.

And so in the process of transition itself, subject-positions are in contradiction and transformation, as competing ideologies, narrated in different discourses, contest against each other. In response, the calls for a new unified subjectivity are intensified in the effort for the emerging order to cohere. Calls for unity are often continued from the strategic unity of resistance: 'Let us unite to build a new nation' and 'We are a free and united people' are familiar slogans. However, complete freedom can never be achieved, for any political order exists on the premise of regulation and power of some sort. 'Freedom' thus becomes a signifier of desire, a term negotiated and reinterpreted constantly as transition takes place and a new order takes shape. Yet freedom is an impossible end, and will always therefore constitute a lack, and generate texts of desire.

Postcolonial theory⁴¹ has set a precedent for comparative analyses, drawing some of its most pertinent insights from enquiries across geographical and historical situations. This has, however, on occasions, laid it open to accusations of subsuming historical and local specificity.⁴² Theoretical models of power, hegemony and racial subjectivity are debated within the body of postcolonial theory, gaining legitimacy through their valid applicability to a range of locations. Similarly, literature from countries under authoritarian rule and censorship laws share characteristic tropes of surveillance and resistance. It can be argued that ultimately, the human experience of oppression and liberalisation across countries is

⁴¹ I refer to 'postcolonial' and 'postapartheid' writing without a hyphen to emphasise that the shift is more than temporal, and that apartheid is still incorporated in postapartheid writing, and colonialism in postcolonialism. I would like to do the same for 'post-Banda' writing, but the use of a proper noun prevents me from doing so. However, 'post-Banda' should be read in the same way as 'postapartheid' rather than 'post-apartheid'.

⁴² Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1995) p.2, Young (2001) p.391

similar enough to create comparative models, as long as they remain sensitive to the local and the historical. For example, writers do respond differently, depending on the stringency of the enforcement of censorship laws, where for example there was much less room for manoeuvre in Malawi in the 1980s than in South Africa at the same period, affecting the tone of writing. Similarly, the form of domination inflects the paradigms of resistance and subsequent free expression, with South Africa's apartheid ideology precipitating a largely apocalyptic vision,⁴³ while Malawi's personality-centred rule generated iconoclastic tropes.⁴⁴

As suggested at the opening, Malawi and South Africa were close economic allies, facilitated by Banda's consideration of himself as a mediator and liberal educator. Referring to his supposed 'bridg[ing of] the gulf of disunity between the Africans on the one side and Whites and Indians on the other', he stated, 'Now that I have done that in Malawi, I want to do it outside Malawi ... between Rhodesia and South Africa on the one hand and the African [states] on the other. I am sincere about that.'⁴⁵ This contrasts with a statement he made to an interviewer in the *Johannesburg Star* in 1963 in which he professed that, 'As an African nationalist, I hate the present regime in South Africa and will have nothing to do with it when this country is independent.'⁴⁶ The economic benefits of his change of heart were great. After he signed a trade agreement with South Africa in 1967, trade doubled in the following two years, with South African money paying for a new capital city, a new railway link to Nacala and radio broadcasting equipment.⁴⁷ When John Vorster visited Malawi in 1970, it was the first time in nine years that a South African prime minister had travelled outside of the country,⁴⁸ while Banda discouraged the anti-apartheid movements by complaining that 'do-gooders do more harm than good'.⁴⁹

In 1999 a school history textbook, *Democracy with a Price*, was published, re-writing Malawi's history, naming and picturing dissidents and incidents that were suppressed by Banda's regime. It is co-written, significantly, by Banda's successor, Bakili Muluzi, with an introduction by Nelson Mandela, in which he writes:

⁴³ Thornton (1996)

⁴⁴ An exception might be Frank Chipasula's poetry (1991), which, as Nazombe (1983) puts it 'begins to adopt an apocalyptic view of his country's future development'. p.398

⁴⁵ Short (1974) p.304

⁴⁶ Short (1974) p.284

⁴⁷ Short (1974) pp.305-6

⁴⁸ Short (1974) p.314

⁴⁹ Short (1974) p.311

I have known what suffering in your own country means. I fully understand the reasons behind this book, for we in South Africa are also reflecting on our recent history. But Malawians have a greater reason for valuing this book, for it is about the imprisonment of the Malawian nation by a fellow Malawian.⁵⁰

The gesture of Mandela's foreword is important, especially as it legitimates the new official narrative and yet again makes a correlation between the Malawian and South African transitions. He does, however, make an important distinction which resonates throughout this thesis, that the oppressors in Banda's Malawi could not always be easily identified and thus externalised, whereas the apartheid system, that operated according to a policy of visible demarcation based on an epidermal schema, and thus gave privilege according to race, encouraged reductive politicisation.⁵¹ As a result, a sense of betrayal and deep personal hurt informs Malawian writing in the 1970s and 80s more than the confrontational politics of black South African writing. Those white writers who spoke out against apartheid of course, have elicited accusations of betrayal, as writers such as André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and Antjie Krog demonstrate. These distinctions in political formation must be kept in mind, together with the question of scale when writing about the literature of Malawi and South Africa comparatively.

The forms of literature from Malawi and South Africa that I propose to discuss are varied, yet, rapidly freed from former restrictions, are dominated by explorations of history, memory, mourning and a re-negotiation of subjectivities, as stories are excavated and retold, and new versions of the past written. Sometimes the style is experimental and innovative, and sometimes it imitates inherited forms. Implicitly, the literature always involves a re-identification of the role of the writer, divorced from the intimate relationship with the censor and the subsequent disseminative power of notoriety. Clearly the literature from the two countries has different international profiles, with South Africa boasting a Nobel Prize winner and a double Booker Prize winner, Gordimer and Coetzee respectively, while Malawian writers are far less well known. The exceptions may be Jack Mapanje, the focus of Amnesty International 'prisoner of conscience' publicity as a result of his detention, Frank Chipasula, Tiyambe Zeleza and Steve Chimombo, all of whom have gained international stature through publication with Heinemann and regular

⁵⁰ Muluze et al. (1999) p.iv

⁵¹ It is interesting that Mandela discursively implies an exclusion of former apartheid rulers as 'fellow South Africans' when he contrasts the oppression of Malawians by a 'fellow Malawian' to the system of rule in South Africa. He seems to be conflating 'fellow Malawian' and 'a fellow black person'.

contributions to literary journals. This disparity in international profile is also reflected in the number of special issues of international literary journals dedicated to the transition in South Africa.⁵²

I analyse a wide variety of literary forms, some of which may even transgress conventional definitions of literature. Examples include reader-contributions sent in to newspapers' literary pages by their readers and two woman-centred historical accounts. I discuss the porous distinction between history and fiction, as well as the subjective distinction between formal and popular literature. Popular culture has always functioned alongside formal (or elite/high) culture and interacted with it to a greater degree than is often acknowledged. By bringing the various forms together in the one study, these interactions will be traced. The ambiguity of the title of my thesis conveys the fact that the more established interpretations of literature are themselves also currently in transition. I attempt to avoid aesthetic judgements when I discuss popular writing. My purpose here is not to say what kind of literature is good or bad, valuable or trivial, but to discuss and interpret contextually the kinds of literature which *are* being produced and published. I thus try to avoid the kind of prescriptions that the introduction to at least one essay collection has tended towards. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly's introduction to *Writing South Africa*, for example, expresses the opinion that in response to the 'judgmental writing' arising from a 'paucity of options',⁵³ 'a sense of how subjectivity is exercised in everyday instances, in all its complexity, needs to be conveyed'.⁵⁴

Chapter 1 discusses the work of Jack Mapanje and Nadine Gordimer, two writers who were resistant to the Banda and apartheid regimes, and were thus subject to censorship. They have each written about their experiences, and have contributed to debates on how literature can respond to the easing of censorship laws. I discuss their writing as 'veterans' of censorship before analysing texts written during the transition, suggesting how their writing is concerned with and affected by the changes, for example with a reconsideration of 'home'. With the transition came experimentation with language and form resulting in a wave of writing that was fantastical, magical and carnivalesque. Drawing on Bakhtin's notion of 'carnival', this burlesque, transgressive style, is much more prevalent in South African writing, for Malawian prose is still largely realist. An exception, Steve Chimombo's satirical political fable, serves as an interesting comparison to the transgressive experimentation with language in Lesego Rampolokeng's and Seithamo Motsapi's poetry. The second part of the chapter links the carnivalesque to a form of magic realism in a

⁵² For example, *Ariel* 27(1)1996, *World Literature Today* 4(1996), *Kwanaipi* 8(1/2)1991

⁵³ Attridge and Jolly (1998) p.7

⁵⁴ Attridge and Jolly (1998) p.12

reading of Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*. Set in a South African city just before the elections, it enacts a series of dislocations and transgressions of place, temporality and causality, giving rise to a number of regenerative experiences amid the uncertainty and violence of transition. I find Bakhtin's writings particularly appropriate as a theoretical referent as they too emerged from a political situation not unlike apartheid South Africa and Banda's Malawi. Carnival and dialogism both have their basis in the oppressive circumstances that did not allow the conferral of a degree for Bakhtin's thesis on Rabelais until a decade after he completed it in 1940.⁵⁵

As I recalled above, I started collecting the material for Chapter 3 in Malawi 1992, at the time of the rapid movement of political events. I was always interested in literature, and the poetry available in newspapers was the most visible form of writing, responding immediately to events. I had difficulty finding a vocabulary to write about it until I found the work of Karin Barber, Michael Vaughan and David Maughan Brown, for it demands a suspension of a form of literary aesthetic which I thus only gradually came to realise I possessed. It led me to consider the audience it was addressing and the social gesture it enacted. Whereas the previous chapter is dominated by discussions of South African literature, this chapter's emphasis on newspaper literature from Malawi reflects the importance of the form in contrast to South Africa where popular writing largely finds its outlets in literary journals and magazines rather than in daily newspapers. Chapter 4 explores two texts that challenge the distinction between literature and factual chronicle in a discussion of two women's accounts of the past. Moments of political transition foreground the relationship between the past and present, which are brought into relationship with one another in narratives by memory. In this chapter I address the different approaches to writing the past in the form of non-fictional accounts. Yet simultaneously one can note the remarkable similarities in concern and technique that the two texts share, despite the obvious differences in scale and experience of the writers. Their texts are also striking in highlighting the similarity of the experience of living under a brutal, totalitarian regime. Chapter 5 is deeply grounded in Chapter 4, but as the two texts analysed are overtly literary, it acts more as a further substantiation of ideas about narrative, inquiry and memory. Both novels discussed reflect on politically motivated killings, returning from the bustle of the present moment to a contemplation of the past.

⁵⁵ Bakhtin (1984a) p.xx, Dentith (1995) p.45

The list of writers I do not discuss is far too long to give. In Malawi, the absence in my discussion of Tiyambe Zeleza, James Ng'ombe, Lupenga Mphande, Frank Chipasula and many more might raise questions, as does my lack of discussion of the South African writers Coetzee and Brink's fictions (though I use their critical commentaries), of Zoë Wicomb, Jeremy Cronin, Miriam Tlali, Breyten Breytenbach, Ivan Vladislavic, Mongane Serote to name only a few. I also decided early on not to discuss drama, as it would mean writing even less on poetry and extended prose, and also because I would not have had the chance to see many productions in the two countries. I limit my discussion of fiction to the novel genre, despite the publication of many short stories in formal and informal publication contexts.⁵⁶ As my remit is already broad, I sought to provide some focus and depth of analysis by selecting only four novels and two socio-historical accounts in conjunction with the poetry, rather than trying to discuss a larger number of short stories. Overall, I do not endeavour to provide an exhaustive review of literary production in each country since transition, but have sought out the most interesting comparisons between Malawian and South African writers. The choice of texts hence lies in what I regard as the fruitfulness of a comparative reading.

I choose a historically oriented and particularised engagement with texts, yet seek not to lose the valuable insights that theory can offer, for I ask how texts are situated within the changing power relations, and consider them as sites of social commentary and subversion. I reject the idea of the autonomy of the text, preferring to see literature as a social act that changes with time, partly by discussing the circulation and reception of texts. The texts do not have the same sense of newness about them in 2002 as they did when they were first published, and the resistance writing produced under the repressive regimes fulfils a different function now from what it did at the time of writing. This approach does not therefore imply that texts cannot be appreciated beyond the contexts of their production; indeed readings of Sophocles's *Antigone*, for example, could be extremely subversive and relevant in Banda's Malawi. In a state of heightened political activity, I suggest that referential readings of literature are emphasised. However, I also use as a premise the idea that the past is available to us only in the forms of texts and memory, where history and the social context itself are constructed, though this must be qualified from the dangerous relativity that is possible by denying any external referent, when people are still suffering very tangibly as a result of recent historical events.

⁵⁶ For example Phiri (1999), Rode and Gerwel (1995), Oliphant (1999), de Villiers (1997)

Encouraged by the epigraph from Gramsci above, that the 'death of the old ideologies takes the forms of scepticism with regard to all theories and general formulae', I move away from the search for any totally coherent theoretical paradigms. What Robert Young writes with reference to postcolonial theory usefully politicises this argument: 'there would be a particular irony in assuming that it possesses a uniform theoretical framework given that it is in part characterized by a refusal of totalizing forms'.⁵⁷ My responses are instead shaped by a conviction that I should read the texts as they emerge from their contexts, with particular emphasis, but not exclusively, on previously marginalised voices, that is, on censored, popular and women's voices. Like postcolonial theory itself, I am indebted to an eclectic mix of theorists. I use some of the dominant concepts and vocabulary of postcolonialism, yet also share the concerns of, and refer to some of the theorists that cultural materialists have also used, but none exclusively or completely. I also start to borrow from the insights of reader-reception theories to consider the circulation of particular signifiers in my discussions of popular literature and writing under censorship. I refer to postcolonial theory in ambiguous terms above, indicating both its interrogatory and its homogenising tendencies. However, with the close relationship between political transition from oppressive rule and the postcolonial process of political resistance, the rehabilitation of identities and the re-working of memory and effaced histories, it is inevitable that many of the ideas and concepts of postcolonial theorists will be of great use to me. Postcolonial theory can be a useful body of work for conceptualising complex positions and relations, providing a sophisticated and self-questioning vocabulary for discussing literature in a changing political world. I will use this vocabulary and certain conceptual frameworks at my discretion where I feel they are appropriate, but do not claim implicitly to subscribe to the whole field of theory to which a certain word may point. For example if I use the word 'subaltern', I will not assume any particular position in the debate it implicitly points to, on whether the subaltern does or does not 'speak'⁵⁸ unless it is relevant to the immediate discussion.

One of the key debates in postcolonial theory surrounds the issue of language. I need to address this here, as the texts I have chosen to discuss are all in English. I feel strongly in favour of the argument that urges more work on African language literature, and I regret that I have not been able to integrate this area of literature more into my thesis. This is partly due to my inadequacy in interpreting the finer nuances

⁵⁷ Young (2001) p.64

⁵⁸ Spivak (1988)

of Chichewa and my complete lack of knowledge of any of the other Malawian or South African languages. Yet if I had spoken them all, and had had to choose a *single* language of literature to study, it would have been English for the sheer volume of material from both countries in English. Though I will return to this point in relation to the re-emergence of suppressed languages, I will not attempt to interpret any literature in these vernaculars; there are many other academics who are far better qualified to do so than I.⁵⁹ Due to the already marginal nature of much of my material in relation to the literary canon, I am satisfied with my justification to look at predominantly English-language texts, to discuss and mediate their literary voices in the arena of academic investigation.

⁵⁹ Moto (2001), for example, focuses largely on Malawian literature in vernacular languages.

CHAPTER 1

Censorship and Homecomings

They came back home from bush-haunts
And refugee camps the living and the dead;
They flew back from misery's northern coldness
And humiliation's faithful missionaries abroad
To colours, bunting, pennants and earthborn songs
That awoke History ...

*Musaemura Zimunya*¹

i. Emergence from state censorship in South Africa and Malawi

In 1981, Robert Green, a lecturer at the University of Malawi, presented a staff seminar paper on the banning of Nadine Gordimer's novel *Burger's Daughter*. Amongst the detailed analyses of narrative voices he refers to a volume of documents published by Gordimer, called *What Happened to Burger's Daughter or How South African Censorship Works*,² a collection of legal papers and reports by the censors of the novel and Gordimer's own lengthy refutation of the Director of Publication, E.G. Malan's accusations.

Commenting on the availability of this material, Green writes:

The relative 'openness' of the system there, which does furnish the writer, if she is white and celebrated, with the text of the various documents³ — and for what this is worth, the South African system is more penetrable than the censorship process in certain independent black states — enables us to treat the censorship documents as if they were pieces of literary criticism.⁴

This comment is significant in a number of ways for this chapter. It starts to signify the difference that a writer's location, race and international status might have in relation to the responses of censorship boards. In addition, this extract is highly self-reflexive, for it comments both indirectly and by default on the location of the speaker, Malawi in 1981. Although this is done parenthetically, the *absence* of specific names of countries, but a vague 'certain independent black states', is clearly a device for interpretation under surveillance. Green was probably aware that academic presentations were usually attended by students recruited to act as government spies, and that the printed version that appears in a collection of departmental seminar papers in the library of the University of Malawi, will have been scrutinised for

¹ From 'Arrivants' in Ojaide and Sallah (1999) p.117

² Gordimer (1980a)

³ The Director of Publication's report into the reasons for banning the novel and the Publications Appeal Board's report into the reasons for unbanning it.

⁴ Green (1981)

dissent. Through this remark, Green thus makes a subversive comment about the context in which he is speaking, simultaneously creating a correlation between South Africa and Malawi and specifying differences.

This impulse of correlation and differentiation is one I wish to follow in discussing the emergence from censorship of Nadine Gordimer's and Jack Mapanje's writing through an analysis of their recent transition literature, Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*⁵ and Mapanje's *Skipping Without Ropes*.⁶ In each case I will begin with a brief outline of their writing under censorship, introducing their interactions with the censorship board of their respective countries, before continuing to discuss in detail how their writings have responded to the easing of censorship laws and the end of the particular cultures of resistance through which they made their names. I choose these writers because they are both well-known internationally, both write in English and both have commentated extensively on the problems of the contexts of their creative writing. Both, for example, have been regular contributors to *Index on Censorship*, fulfilling an adversarial and activist role on the international stage. In South Africa, writings in the English language were subject to much greater scrutiny by the authorities, as Margreet de Lange explains:

From 1975 through 1977, for example, roughly 1500 English publications were submitted each year against 25 in Afrikaans and 4 in Bantu languages ... There are some obvious reasons why publications in the English language did receive more attention from the censors. The majority of all publications were in English and they reached a bigger audience. As the goal of censorship is to protect readers from certain ideas, the more potential readers a work has the more necessary a ban will be ... Almost every decision of the Appeal Board mentioned the expected size of the audience.⁷

It should therefore be productive to concentrate in depth on only two English language writers, arguably the most well-known from each country, in anticipation of the newer voices and smaller scale contexts of publication that will be explored in the following chapters.

Censorship is of course only an integral part of a larger mechanism of protection. As the South African writer André Brink writes in 1982:

[censorship] is only one part of an overall strategy which also expresses itself in such forms as detention without trial, arbitrary bannings, job reservations, the Group Areas Act, those clauses of the Immorality Act which prohibit miscegenation.⁸

⁵ Gordimer (1994)

⁶ Mapanje (1999a)

⁷ de Lange (1997) pp.76-77

⁸ Brink (1983) p.236

Edge Kanyongolo makes a similar point about how censorship was a part of a larger strategy to police even the most intimate aspects of citizens' lives in Malawi:

despite their pretensions at democratic credibility, over-prescriptive laws of censorship were a convenient tool for legitimising the passing off of a particular code of morality as a monolithic national culture and morality. In their most extreme forms, overprescriptive laws laid down the maximum length of skirts and hair, as well as the maximum ratio of the circumference of the bottom edge of trouser legs to their narrowest point! ... the anti-establishment which underlay this [hippie] fashion did not particularly endear itself to the conservatism of the Life President.⁹

These examples substantiate Njabulo Ndebele's early observation that Malawi and South Africa had structures of control not shared by all Southern African countries: 'It would be sad the day Lesotho is mentioned in the same breath as South Africa, as is the case with Malawi.'¹⁰

The relationship between censorship and literature in Africa has been little theorised, though a number of case studies have been written, including J.M. Coetzee's *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship*¹¹ and Margreet de Lange's *The Muzzled Muse*,¹² both of which focus on South Africa, Mapanje's 'Censorship and the African Poem'¹³ and James Gibbs' *Singing in the Dark Rain: Essays on Censorship in Malawi*¹⁴ concerning censorship and literature in Malawi. Brink notes the shift in function and style which the culture of censorship produced in South Africa:

At a time when the media were denied the possibility of performing their most basic duty, that of reporting, writers, actors, dancers, musicians, painters, sculptors were forced to assume much of this function — in order to ensure, quite simply, that people were informed about what was happening in the silences surrounding them ... Even in writing that was often reduced to reporting and to sloganeering there was a vital experience of giving and taking, of being enriched by the processes of cultural communication. Critics, especially from the outside, tend to see this as a process only of impoverishment and of reduction.¹⁵

This 'popularisation' of literature, I will suggest in Chapter 3, is not only relevant in times of censorship, but also to the moment of transition, where new media of communication are explored, and new voices emerge into the cultural arena. Brink adds that writers got away with a lot in South Africa 'precisely because the government, composed largely of culturally ignorant individuals, either did not take culture seriously or lacked the manpower effectively to continue controlling the arts'.¹⁶ James Gibbs says the same

⁹ Kanyongolo (1998)

¹⁰ Lindfors (1989) p.62

¹¹ Coetzee (1996)

¹² de Lange (1997)

¹³ Mapanje (1989)

¹⁴ Gibbs (1999)

¹⁵ Brink (1996) p.195

¹⁶ Brink (1996) p.194

about the Malawian censors; speaking from personal experience he states, '[m]y impression is that the Board is ignorant and confused'.¹⁷

Most people would easily relate Malawi under Banda to the paranoid state J.M. Coetzee conceptualises:

Paranoids behave as though the air is filled with coded messages deriding them or plotting their destruction. For decades the South African state lived in a state of paranoia. Paranoia is the pathology of insecure regimes and of dictatorships in particular.¹⁸

Anyone producing anything for public consumption in such a state is coerced, even before they submit their work to the censorship board, into the act of self-censorship: '[b]y forcing the writer to see what he has written through the censor's eyes, the censor forces him to internalize a contaminated reading'.¹⁹ However, there is a marked difference in the effects of censorship in Malawi and South Africa, dependent on the scale and intensity of the surveillance operation, affecting writers' responses in each country. Coetzee identifies only pathological responses of terror, rage, loathing and revulsion at such intrusive intimacy, explaining the excessiveness and vehemence of literary responses.²⁰ An examination of the operations of the censorship board in Malawi as recounted by Gibbs²¹ and Mapanje²² may partly explain why this is not the predominant tone of Malawian writings under Banda. Both of them identify the censors' uninformed readings of material, of which anecdotes abound, and as a result of which *Julius Caesar*, by virtue of the fact that it is by Shakespeare, was approved, whilst *Waiting for Godot* was rejected due, in the words of the censor, to the 'image of human degradation' represented by Lucky with a rope around his neck.²³

This gap in the censors' abilities, as well as the apparent randomness of their approval and rejection, though no less menacing and humiliating, invited Malawian writers to test the board by exploiting its inadequate, surface readings. Writers thus identified a precarious space for their disguised voices which they were not about to cede with counter-discursive excess as Brink and Coetzee suggest South African writers did. Malawian writing, particularly poetry, produced under Banda has therefore variously been

¹⁷ Gibbs (1982) p.72

¹⁸ Coetzee (1996) p.34

¹⁹ Coetzee (1996) p.36

²⁰ Coetzee (1996) p.36

²¹ Gibbs (1982)

²² Mapanje (1989)

²³ Gibbs (1982) p.76

described as cryptic, allusive, obscure, indirect, ironic and subtle.²⁴ Gibbs actually contends that 'although the Malawian writer suffers severely under the Censorship Board the devices it forces him [*sic*] to are not in every way detrimental to the shaping of his [*sic*] work'.²⁵ Angela Smith reinforces this view even more openly: 'Perhaps a country with censorship has the advantage of making metaphor and symbol an essential part of its writers' thought processes.'²⁶ The ironic dilemma of transition, as Mapanje admits, is that unrestricted by censorship, 'the metaphors are released ... the release is good, but perhaps whether it's good for poetry is a different issue'.²⁷ However, in both countries, the written word gained in weight and importance, writers increased circulation through notoriety and censorship created moments of active literary engagement and exhilaration.

Unlike in Malawi, race was a factor central to the political organisation of apartheid South Africa and thus in the organisation of opposition. Although there was a small number of white writers and dissidents in Malawi, they were not implicated in the same power relations with black Malawians as in apartheid South Africa. Collaboration between black and white writers, for example at the Writer's Workshop based at the University of Malawi, was not subversive in itself, in contrast to the inherent insurgence of the collaboration of the different races in the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) in South Africa. Brink, for example states that one of the positive qualities of a joint experience of opposition under censorship was that as a white writer, excluded from the immediate solidarity of blackness, he experienced 'that heady intimation of a new South African identity beginning to announce and define itself behind the official definitions'.²⁸ He implies that inherent in acts of censorship and surveillance was the vision of an egalitarian South Africa. How one member of this imagined community responded to the opportunity to enact and develop a sense of new South African subjectivity, emerging from previous oppositional collaboration, is the subject of the discussion of Gordimer's experience of censorship and the shift in her concerns in her first postapartheid novel, *None to Accompany Me*.

²⁴ Gibbs (1982), Smith (1989), Roscoe and Msiska (1992)

²⁵ Gibbs (1982) p.72

²⁶ Smith (1989) p.109

²⁷ Mapanje (1994) p.55

²⁸ Brink (1996) p.196

ii. Nadine Gordimer and South African censorship

Whereas most literary criticism of Malawian writing under Banda is very conscious of the spectre of the Malawi Censorship Board, De Lange contends that:

[t]o date surprisingly little comparative work has been done in the area of literature and censorship in South Africa. Studies on censorship in general focus almost exclusively on control of the media. Studies on South African literature often avoid the question of censorship altogether.²⁹

She stresses why such a perspective is important, yet also introduces one of its problems:

The risk that censors may cut a work off from its natural readership has a bearing on what and how a writer writes. Self-censorship is hard to expose, but it should be acknowledged as a force in the creation of a work.³⁰

Her point of analysis lies in part in theories of reader-reception, for she distinguishes between the 'literary reader' and the 'censorious reader' who reads a text as a 'statement about the world', that is referentially, largely ignoring the poetic function, and thus ignoring the 'aesthetic conventions for the interpretation of literature'.³¹

She identifies three bodies of literature in South Africa, which each elicited a different level of concern from the censors: Afrikaans, white English and black English literature, acknowledging that this classification leaves some areas undiscussed.³² She argues, perhaps controversially, that white English South African literature, by being more diffuse and less concerned with maintaining a particular tradition, but informed by a general liberal stance, was generally more dissenting than much white Afrikaans literature, though of course not as radical and angry as some of the literature in English and in indigenous languages by black South African writers. She writes:

Inspired by [liberal] notions of compassion and justice, English literature developed into a literature of dissent ...[which] became more and more outspoken, in step with the implementation of discriminatory policies by the government.³³

Gordimer's writing increasingly followed this trajectory of dissent, though she refuses to identify herself with the liberal tradition of Laurens van der Post and Alan Paton preferring to call herself a 'leftist'.³⁴ She

²⁹ de Lange (1997) p.4

³⁰ de Lange (1997) p.80

³¹ de Lange (1997) p.1

³² Brink (1983) uses the same working model in his 'Censorship and Literature' on p.253.

³³ de Lange (1997) p.71

³⁴ See for example the interview Gordimer (1980b) in which she talks about the 'breakdown of my belief in the liberal ideals' p.20.

became more and more critical of apartheid politics, infuriating the authorities, so that by the time she wrote *Burger's Daughter*, Malan's report sent to Gordimer's lawyer suggested that:

[t]he authoress uses Rosa's story as a pad from which to launch a blistering and full-scale attack on the Republic of South Africa: its government's racial policies; white privilege; social and political structure; process of law and prisons; forces for the preservation of law and order; black housing and education; the pass laws etc. The whites are the baddies, the black [*sic*] the goodies.³⁵

The burger of the title is Lionel Burger, a character closely resembling the jailed anti-apartheid activist Bram Fischer, though Fischer is named as a separate character in the novel, thus denying the analogy.³⁶ Transcripts of Fischer's trial on conspiracy charges and belonging to a banned organisation (the Communist Party) are even reproduced verbatim in the novel's courtroom scene.³⁷

As the title suggests, the story is also that of the return of Burger's daughter, Rosa, to South Africa and the ensuing exclusion and alienation that she feels in the wake of the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement. This is represented by her rejection by Baasie, a black childhood friend of hers, now a member of BCM. The novel also quotes from a number of pamphlets and essays that were banned at the time, such as Joe Slovo's 'South Africa — no middle road'.³⁸ The quotations are not attributed and thus seek to evade the censor's eye, making banned texts available within the country and passing the responsibility of the texts on to the characters that quote them. In her rebuttal of the report of the Publications Committee in *What Happened*, Gordimer uses this strategy to deny that her novel advances subversive views, attributing them to her characters. She takes each section of the report and rebuts it with an explanation. In the following example the first passage is from Malan's report, the response Gordimer's:

F Section 47 (2)(e)

The book is prejudicial to the safety of the State, the general welfare and the peace and good order ... The writer uses the characters in her novel to propagate Communism ... - Publications Control Board ...

P. 26 "But what we as Communists black and white working in harmony with others who do not share our political philosophy have set our sights on is the national liberation of the African people."

³⁵ Gordimer (1980a) pp.6-7

³⁶ Gordimer (1979) p.89

³⁷ de Lange (1997) p.84

³⁸ See Clingman (1986) for identification of the sources of numerous quotations.

Lifted from the context of Lionel Burger's statement to the court, at his trial. See F. Section 47(2)(e). Burger is explaining why he became a Communist, and puts the Marxist interpretation on the solution of South Africa's problems of social injustice.³⁹

Gordimer's argument, that it is the character, not she, who is communist, is strengthened by the fact that Rosa's scepticism of her father's philosophy is also picked out by the censors, but wrongly read as an endorsement of communist ideology.⁴⁰ The censors demonstrate their ignorance of the basic tenet of literary analysis that the character's views do not necessarily overlap with the writer's. However, the subversive act, as de Lange suggests, is that Gordimer, through Burger, is making available Bram Fischer's words yet not attributing the source of the text. The irony of Malan's report, that quotes extensively from the censored text is, of course, that it is forced to cite what it wishes to repress, or as Coetzee succinctly puts it, 'the testimony will have to repeat the crime'.⁴¹

Gordimer's disdain for the Publications Committee is clear in her refusal to engage with them directly:

I had the right of appeal on my own behalf, against the original committee's decision to ban, but did not exercise this right because I am opposed to censorship and do not associate myself with any tribunal provided under censorship legislation.⁴²

Despite this professed disengagement from the process, she obtains Malan's report into the banning of the novel by proxy, through her lawyer. Indeed, Gordimer is acutely aware of the preferential treatment that Green above suggests that she receives by virtue of her race and status:

The practice of banning and then having the Director [of Publications] appeal against the ban ... has sinister implications ... No ban on any black writer's work is likely to be challenged by the Director's own application to the Appeal Board.⁴³

She uses this advantage to dissect the report, further dissenting from the censor's reading, though her point by point rebuttal of the committee's report arguably undermines her principle of disassociation. Yet Gordimer is further aware of the fact that the unbanning of her book plays into the government's hands, for her international profile helped the South African government use her as example of the supposed easing of censorship in the early 1980s while the difference in treatment between black and white writers was supposed to divide the solidarity that Brink found so exhilarating.

³⁹ Gordimer (1980a) pp.24, 26-7

⁴⁰ Gordimer (1980a) p.27

⁴¹ Coetzee (1996) p.35

⁴² Gordimer (1980a) p.2

⁴³ Gordimer (1980a) p.2

Not long after *Burger's Daughter* was published Gordimer wrote the apocalyptic *July's People* (1981); two further novels preceded *None to Accompany Me* (1994), the novel that most overtly deals with the shifts in power and subjectivities at the moment of political transition. She has always written prose essays in between novels, including *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places* (1989),⁴⁴ *Writing and Being* (1995),⁴⁵ on which I draw, and *Living in Hope and History* (1999).⁴⁶ Although one radical white academic in South Africa said to me in 2000 that 'no one listens to her any more', her literary contributions over the decades, I suggest, cannot so easily be dismissed, especially as they continue to be inflected by shifts in political moods.

iii. 'In Transit': Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*

There were no gods for them to turn to, either. No new state, not yet;
no Security that was not at the same time part of the threat.
*None to Accompany Me*⁴⁷

Perhaps the passing away of the old regime makes the
abandonment of an old personal life also possible. I'm getting there.
*None to Accompany Me*⁴⁸

None to Accompany Me, published in the year that brought Mandela to power in the first democratic elections, engages more directly in the *realpolitik* of the South African transition than Gordimer's subsequent novels, *The House Gun* (1998) and *The Pickup* (2001) which are concerned with violence and exploring postapartheid relationships in terms of race and sexuality, and focus less on the macro-politics of powerbroking on which *None to Accompany Me* pivots. The novel form, which narrates life-stories and dramatises rising action and resolution (or non-resolution), is an apt genre for exploring at length the emergent complexities of relationships and effects of transition, though I will be suggesting the merits of poetry in these circumstances when discussing Mapanje later on. Yet the novel form responds in kind, through a counter-narrative, to the narratives generated in the political and social worlds. Gordimer has always written realist novels with a political charge, and Vera Stark, in *None to Accompany Me*, succeeds a long line of white leftist heroines in whose lives the intersection between the political and the personal are played out. Her name is of course derived from the Latin 'veritas', meaning 'truth', one of the most

⁴⁴ Gordimer (1989)

⁴⁵ Gordimer (1995)

⁴⁶ Gordimer (1999)

⁴⁷ Gordimer (1994) p.265

⁴⁸ Gordimer (1994) p.315

debated words of transition. Combined with her adjectival surname, Vera Stark's name invites allegorical readings, possibly as a seeker of a truth or truths, however stark or, from the German, powerful or strong.

However, Gordimer is too aware of poststructuralist thought to structure her novels as a teleological journey towards uncovering some final truth. Critics have identified the increasing self-consciousness of Gordimer's writing, her use of unreliable and multiple narrators and her refusal to create worlds in which truth is an objective value, and knowledge consensual and totalising.⁴⁹ Yet Gordimer has not occupied herself with an abstract postmodernist or magic realist style demonstrated by many of André Brink's and J.M. Coetzee's novels or Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*, discussed in the following chapter, though her writing is self-reflexive and metafictional at times. The process of remembering is more important to Gordimer than a claim to truth, for she quotes from Milan Kundera's *Book of Laughter and Forgetting* on a number of occasions in her essays, where his character suggests that the 'struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting'.⁵⁰

None to Accompany Me concerns this struggle with the past in South Africa, particularly the changing constellations of authority in South Africa in the early 1990s, and how the maneuverings of powerbroking impact on human relationships, particularly on the lives of the four main characters, Vera and Bennet Stark, a white leftist couple, and Sibongile and Didymus Maqoma, a black couple recently returned from exile. As Sibongile's public profile rises in the interim dispensation, and Didymus is sidelined in the elections to the new executive, they experience tensions informed by conventional gender-role anxieties. Similarly, Ben exists dependently in the shadow of Vera's high-profile engagement with land reclamation and her participation in drafting the new constitution as director of a legal foundation. This organisation represents a symbolic act of founding, officially revising the land-claims staked by the patriarchal, biblical mythology of the white 'founding fathers'. As the events of the novel unfold, different responses to the transition emerge according to new subject-formations, with a variety of nuances and complexities in the sub-stories; one example is the class tensions which arise within the black community from the relationship between Vera's colleague, Oupa, and the Maqomas' teenage daughter. A further sub-issue concerns the gay rights questions which arise: Vera's daughter, who, together with her lesbian partner, adopts a black baby creates an alternative social unit which revises received sexual and racial conventions,

⁴⁹ Head (1994)

⁵⁰ Gordimer (1996) and Gordimer (1995) p.23

taking advantage of the general radical revision of former social prejudices. The novel also traces the advancement of Zeph Raphulana from a community of squatters' spokesman to shrewd executive, and symbolically, from Vera's client to Vera's landlord.

The novel explores the tension between the two visions of transition set out in the epigraphs from the novel, above. The first epigraph is narrated from the perspective of Sibongile, the returned exile, who is now elected to the executive of the Movement, and whose high profile has earned her a death threat. The second is spoken by Vera, who reassesses and sheds the 'baggage' of her past in the events of the novel, and having herself narrowly escaped death, comes to a form of serene liberation at the end, in the separation from her husband of forty-five years. The first one views it as a time of threat and insecurity, while the other experiences the transition as liberating. In the context of this chapter, the shedding of the 'baggage' of the past and freeing from constraint can clearly be read as a liberation from the constrictions of censorship, a lack of surveillance accompanying the subject.

The title, *None to Accompany Me*, from a seventeenth century Japanese haiku, is thus an open signifier, ambiguously inflecting both interpretations of the transitional moment, as one of isolation or solitude, according to the modulation put on it. Both visions are of course common characteristics of transition epistemology, which contrasts positive experience and possibility with negative experience and impossibility; the two reactions are therefore subjective responses to transition. The epigraphs begin both to illustrate and interrogate the 'morbid symptoms' of interregnum, in Gramsci's words: 'the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear'.⁵¹ This line formed the epigraph of Gordimer's novel of a projected transition, *July's People*, which, in its bleak, wasteland mood, manifests the dominant trope of negative potential and impending apocalypse in South African culture under apartheid.⁵² Implicit in this chapter will be the question of whether *None to Accompany Me* retains or revises the gloom and terror of the teleological vision of previous novels such as *July's People*, and whether the binary inversion between black and white, employer and employee, which gives the earlier novel its force, are complicated. The events of *None to Accompany Me* largely take place in

⁵¹ Gramsci (1971) p.276

⁵² See Thornton (1996) 'For most of its existence, the sense of the end of history, the coming of bloody and final conflict, has characterised South Africa's view of its own history ... It is important to maintain this sense of transition since there can be no end to history in South Africa that is not also apocalyptic.' pp.157-58. This vision of impending apocalypse is often manifest in literature, including J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Mike Nicol's *Horseman*.

the dynamic, unstable phase of negotiation, before the democratic elections, and it is thus a contemporary novel, responding closely to the events of the time at which it was published. By focusing on this period, Gordimer is able to explore and comment on the ethics of negotiation, compromise, principle and reconciliation. Indeed, Brink interprets these maneuverings in the same Gramscian framework:

the obscene pursuit of status symbols, the reliance on autocratic decisions or unilateral resolutions in the name of democratic expediency, the 'softness on violence' in the young generation for fear of losing support, the increasing recourse to political expediency when statesmanship is required, the prevarications and the avoidance of straight answers, the parades of male chauvinism ... In this situation of ambiguities and vacillation — some of the 'morbid symptoms' of Gramsci's concept of the interregnum — the writer has to redefine radically the space available to him or to her.⁵³

This list usefully introduces many of the concerns which Gordimer explores in the novel through her characters, starting with the fine line between constructive compromise and political expediency.

One scene in the novel illustrates well the moral difficulty of compromise within 'the Movement', reminiscent of the ANC, as Didymus witnesses the rousing speech of a member of the new executive, who, as a former government-appointed representative, had apologised to the apartheid government for sitting in a train seat reserved for whites:

What was that man doing up there among the people he had shamed by grovelling before the white man?

Didymus knew: what he could not accept. A constituency. That's what the man was. A community of people we can't do without, in this conglomerate we call unity. But every time he looked at him, disgust rose and had to be suppressed.⁵⁴

Thus the ethics of compromise and reconciliation, when reduced to symbolic and strategic unity, is questioned, and set against the principles of a man who has risked his life repeatedly and uprooted his existence during years of active armed struggle. The tension appears to be public, and provides a fictional space in which to explore a current debate. Yet the new unity is shown to be repressive, evoking a new kind of censorship which manifests itself in the disgust that rises in Didymus, and is suppressed by him.

Gordimer raises a further question which undermines the righteousness of Didymus's stance: there is a strong sense in which his moral outrage is an excuse for voicing a more fallible human emotion:

⁵³ Brink (1996) p.177

⁵⁴ Gordimer (1994) p.233

resentment. He has failed to get on to the executive himself, and his sense of rejection is palpable as he lists the sacrifices he has made, despite his narrative voice convincing himself to the contrary:

He himself was in a mood to believe he felt that all that mattered was that the congress had established conventional political legitimacy for the long-outlawed Movement. You had your role, your missions, you took the risks of your life, you disappeared and reappeared, went into prison or exile, and there was no presenting of the bill for those years to anyone, the benefit did not belong to you and your achievement was that you wanted it that way.⁵⁵

The question arises whether Didymus would have felt the same outrage at the apologist, had he been given the opportunity to stand alongside him on the platform. And so Gordimer foregrounds the ambiguity apparent in public discourse, as narratives of principle compete with narratives of reconciliation and compromise.

The novel's theme of transition is conveyed in its structure, as the titles of the three sections, 'Baggage', 'Transit' and 'Arrivals' indicate. Representing airport signs, they draw attention to the scenes which take place at the airport as the Maqomas and other exiles return:

But there was no tape running between the state of being they had been in when they left for exile or prison and their sudden reappearance back here where they had left: the weight their lives had was the weight of the past, out of storage and delivered to those who had stayed behind.⁵⁶

Casting political transition metonymically as a plane journey invites parallels, and this passage gestures towards the 'baggage' theme of the novel, the past, like baggage, as something which has been 'in storage'. It thus refers to the common idiomatic use of 'baggage' to define a cumbersome history. The metaphor in the passage reveals a certain uneasiness about the disparity between the space of home and the locus of exile and return, as the exiles are likened to the baggage which needs to be reclaimed and readmitted to the lives of those who stayed at home in the intervening years.

A short paragraph, set during their first evening all together again at the Starks', continues the 'baggage' metaphor, providing, through Vera, a hint of self-reflexiveness on the act of writing and 'documenting' people's lives:

It was not nostalgia Vera was experiencing on such occasions, but something different: a sense of confrontation with uninterpreted life kept about her, saddled on her person along with the bulging shoulder bag always on her arm, her briefcase documenting inquiry into other people's lives.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Gordimer (1994) p.97

⁵⁶ Gordimer (1994) p.32

⁵⁷ Gordimer (1994) p.39

Vera feels a discomfort with her personal 'baggage', likened appropriately to her 'bulging shoulder bag', which she has not confronted and reassessed, and which the transitional moment invites her to reinterpret. The implication is that Vera is constantly assessing and documenting other people's lives rather than her own, accumulating rather than shedding contracts. As she suggests in the second epigraph, the connection between her personal life and the political transformation runs throughout the novel as an undercurrent, as she sheds her personal 'baggage': 'I'm getting there'.⁵⁸ In contrast to Ben's belief that their marriage is a failure, Vera 'sees it as a stage along the way, along with others, many and different. Everyone ends up moving alone towards the self.'⁵⁹ This indicates another teleological journey with a particular destination which she arrives at appropriately in the section 'Arrivals'. With all its connotations of beginnings, 'Arrivals' thus creates an open form of closure.

Significantly, Vera's devoted husband, whose love she finds increasingly difficult to deal with, sets up a new enterprise: Promotional Luggage, 'Suitcases and briefcases designed exclusively for executives, to their requirements and incorporating their logos in materials superior to some embossed stamp. Custom made.'⁶⁰ Ben is providing for the continuation of the baggage of the past, in terms of customary class structures by creating luggage for the new executives such as Zeph. It is perhaps unsurprising then, that Vera increasingly distances herself from her husband as she questions the continuation of social disparities.

In the 'Transit' section of the novel, different meanings of in-betweenness and liminality are teased out of the word 'transit' in the same way that Gordimer plays with the associations with the word 'baggage'. In the effusive public ritual celebrating homecoming, for example, transit is a stage towards a form of resurrection: 'Welcome banners were trampled, flowers waved, bull-horns sounded, the hugging, capering procession of transit to repossession, life regained, there outside the airport terminal.'⁶¹ An illustration, for example, of the 'transit to repossession' is given on the previous page: 'Sibongile and Didymus Maqoma regained their names when they came back. In exile they had had code names.'⁶² Their first few nights are spent as 'transients in the to-and-fro now established' in a hotel 'provided for just such

⁵⁸ Gordimer (1994) p.315

⁵⁹ Gordimer (1994) p.306

⁶⁰ Gordimer (1994) p.104

⁶¹ Gordimer (1994) p.44

⁶² Gordimer (1994) p.43

an unavoidable interim'.⁶³ It is difficult not to read this vocabulary allegorically, referring to the transition between homes in terms of the political transit the novel is exploring, and to interpret the writer's sense of hope in the motif of rebirth. In the invitation to read this trajectory allegorical, the reader's perception is drawn to make further connections, and to heighten sensitivity towards further tropes of journeying.

Though Vera and Ben Stark's marriage is arguably the central relationship in the novel, the dominant narrative perspective of the novel being Vera's, Didymus and Sibongile's changing interaction is explored closely as Sibongile gets more involved with the negotiations through her position in the national executive. The moment she is elected, the same moment that Didymus is defeated, the narrative indicates the impending shift with subtlety: 'he was eddied about with some sort of respect among those celebrating her, the husband congratulated by eager hands'.⁶⁴ Didymus, in this throng of people encircling Sibongile, is literally decentred, his position on the outside of the centre of circle, his definition in relation to Sibongile as 'her husband', rather than as the freedom fighter in his own right. Gordimer captures this sense with a typically vivid, nuanced image: 'his presence bounced off the excited glare of her face like the flash of a piece of glass in the sun',⁶⁵ which inverts the feminine 'reflected light' trope of patriarchal discourse. The same positionality, redefining Didymus's subjectivity in relation to Sibongile, is illustrated again at the Patriotic Front Conference through the one-way perspective between the subject and authority: 'He certainly could see Sibongile at her official seat while she could not always have made out where he had found a place for himself'.⁶⁶

Their sexual relations are affected, as their public partnership becomes politically nuanced: 'the hug and hard kiss on the mouth from the comrade-husband'.⁶⁷ After some time, as Sibongile gets into her routine of international trips, she complains to Vera that '[h]e doesn't bring me home any more',⁶⁸ a euphemism for making love as a gesture of welcome. Yet paradoxically, it is Sibongile who is 'disgusted'⁶⁹ by Didymus's lethargy to the extent that she does not dare to say goodnight to him 'in case this provided an opening for him to try to rouse her again'.⁷⁰ Only later does Didymus find a satisfactorily masculine

⁶³ Gordimer (1994) p.44

⁶⁴ Gordimer (1994) p.96

⁶⁵ Gordimer (1994) p.96

⁶⁶ Gordimer (1994) p.232

⁶⁷ Gordimer (1994) p.96

⁶⁸ Gordimer (1994) p.133

⁶⁹ Gordimer (1994) p.132

⁷⁰ Gordimer (1994) p.135

self-image for himself again, as he styles himself as Sibongile's minder in the light of the death threat she receives. A revision of gender roles is thus depicted as at least as challenging as the larger political revision of political roles.

Transitional periods, by offering a place where imagined ends and origins meet, are times dominated by the discourse of beginnings and ends. Yet imagining the future is concomitant with a reassessment of the past desiring closure. 'What shall we teach our children about the past?' is just such a familiar question which demands a model of the past as a premise for designating the future. Histories, biographies and autobiographies are thus common genres at transition, often rewriting the version of the past sanctioned by the previous regime. Yet Gordimer imaginatively illustrates how all-pervasive the white separatist version of history is, seated deep in the economic structures of the country. Even in the leisure space which Vera and Ben visit to launch his new venture selling promotional luggage, white versions of history are apparent:

The restaurant is called the Drommedaris, after the ship that carried the first European to the country; it's fashionable for cartels that own hotels and restaurants to feel they honour history and claim patriotism with such names, history and patriotism implying settler history and patriotism.⁷¹

Ben's colleagues are introduced, and the discourse associated with that history, steeped in the brash, racist, sexist language of white privilege, is magnified in the face of the challenge it perceives:

First thing they are going to do when they get into power, you can only own one property. So bang goes my trout farm, no more invitations for you boys to come down and fish ...- How she sees them laugh it off, their confidence in themselves makes a joke of their fears, they will always find a way to dine on board the Drommedaris no matter what government comes, the power of being white has been extrasensory so long.⁷²

As Ben becomes more associated with these people, putting aside his artistic skill in sculpting, for which Vera originally fell in love with him,⁷³ she yearns to disengage herself from the social contracts she has been bound to all her life, wishing to negotiate new ones, in a microcosmic effect of the negotiations of social contracts all around her. To echo the title of the novel, she desires to leave her past behind as 'unaccompanied baggage'. Yet the narrative itself questions whether this is possible at all, as it reflects that Vera has had a number of 'fresh starts' in her life, none of which seem to have given her the absolute break she desires. However, her current move out of the old house, which is full of artefacts that are

⁷¹ Gordimer (1994) p.105

⁷² Gordimer (1994) p.108

⁷³ Gordimer (1994) p.305

witnesses to her old life, is the most radical shift she has undertaken yet. Her symbolic accommodation of transition is in the annexe of a house belonging to Zeph, the former leader of a squatter community whom she helped with a land reclamation claim, a man from whom she does not desire the usual sexual contract of cohabitation. She has given up ownership of her home and exists as a tenant, a reconfiguration of living space and ownership that reflects not only a material reality, but also accommodates a self-reflexive reading, for as J.U. Jacobs argues, 'living spaces also function, at a metafictional level, as metaphors for narrative spaces Gordimer has had to construct for herself'.⁷⁴ Her tenancy on black-owned land, 'defines her occupation of a transitional space',⁷⁵ Jacobs suggests. It also enacts the same kind of employer/employee power inversion explored in greater depth in the futuristic scenario of *Juby's People*. However, when read in terms of sexual politics, as Karen Lazar points out, the 'room of her own' is under a man's authority, the 'tug of sexist convention'⁷⁶ representing a compromise in the spatial configuration of the ending.

Zeph is implicitly critiqued as he indulges in the trappings of a new black elite. Not only is he a new property entrepreneur, he enters a previously exclusive white domain when he starts to visit the 'pioneer ship' of the Drommedaris, indicating a particular shift in power which is not completely transformational: 'Zeph dines on board the Drommedaris now'.⁷⁷ Vera teases him about this, again using an old, established definition to a new purpose, redefining his position as 'an infiltrator of a new kind',⁷⁸ as a social rather than political infiltrator. Later, he is again defined in relation to the restaurant, compounding its signifying power, and as above, providing a trace of political critique in its insinuation: 'He wore one of his Drommedaris suits, an elegant grey, but they exchanged the usual bobbing embrace of greeting appropriated by the liberation movement from the dictators.'⁷⁹ Zeph is linked to infiltrators and dictators through linguistic connections that invite the reader to consider how far transformations of authoritarian structures of power are underway, or how far these are simple inversions, or position changes within the same old power structures based on class.

⁷⁴ Jacobs (1998) p.332

⁷⁵ Jacobs (1998) p.338

⁷⁶ Lazar (1995) p.116

⁷⁷ Gordimer (1994) p.257

⁷⁸ Gordimer (1994) p.258

⁷⁹ Gordimer (1994) p.280

The macho posturing of Ben's new colleagues on the listing ship of white history is countered by the desire of the Movement to rewrite its own official version of the anti-apartheid struggle. The new executive ask Didymus, with his first-hand experience and knowledge, to write and thus legitimate the history of the Movement, an important symbolic gesture, which he however belittles, interpreting it morosely only as a 'consolation present'.⁸⁰ Vera seems to empathise with him, as she counters Sibongile's annoyance with Didymus for not getting on with writing the commissioned history. To Sibongile's '[h]e's copping out because he is not centre stage any more, he sees himself as history and history stops with him'.⁸¹ Vera picks up on the double-meaning in 'being history', inflecting it not as something monumental, but as signifying irrelevance: 'He's become history rather than a living man. How can anyone be expected to accept that about himself?'⁸² She seems to empathise with Didymus's view, remembering the dangers he went through in his desire to reach this political stage, and understanding how frustrated and betrayed he must feel not to be able to take part in constructing the future at the highest, executive level, but instead having to write about the process of reaching the present, tantalising point. This seems to be one reason why he cannot motivate himself to write. He regards it as a thankless solace which marginalises him as a minor figure in the history books of the future, as the irony at the end of the following lines indicates:

The chroniclers of history are not those who make it; sufficient honour is being done him in being given the task of writing the history of struggle in exile. A university press in the United States would publish it and advertise it in literary journals among other books of specialist interest, black studies, women's studies, homosexual studies, theses on child abuse, drug abuse, holes in the ozone layer.⁸³

Yet there are strong suggestions that there are other reasons for Didymus's reluctance to write, which Sibongile, in her vulnerable, interim political position evades.

Sarah Nuttall has written that in South Africa 'the past, it sometimes seems, is being "remade" for the purposes of current reconciliation ... Past conflict may be repressed in the interest of present togetherness'.⁸⁴ As an 'unspeakable' episode of Didymus's past with the Movement emerges, there are signs of the formation of a new censorship, smoothing over the gaps and tensions in the emerging

⁸⁰ Gordimer (1994) p.125

⁸¹ Gordimer (1994) p.133

⁸² Gordimer (1994) p.133

⁸³ Gordimer (1994) p.231

⁸⁴ Nuttall and Coetzee (1998) p.75

dominant narrative in the name of unity. Didymus asks Sibongile whether the Movement's interrogation camps abroad have been closed, recalling his involvement in them:

Recently there had been released by the Movement a public report of things done there; unspeakable things. When the report was about to come out he had thought he'd better tell her what he had never told her: that for a time, a desperate time when the Freedom Fighters and the Movement itself were in great danger by infiltration, he had been an interrogator — yes — a jailer, there.⁸⁵

Faced in the present with the commission to write a history of exile, here is possibly the real reason why he cannot immerse himself in the task. Not only does it involve either self-censorship or the shame of recalling those atrocities 'where the methods of extracting information by inflicting pain and humiliation learnt from white Security Police were adopted by those who had been its victims';⁸⁶ it also means that Sibongile's position, already a precarious 'interim position', will become untenable if Didymus's code name is released and identified as one of those involved in the torture and interrogations. The implications of having learned repressive measures from Security Police recall the appendix of information at the end of the sentence, describing Vera's and Zeph's bobbing greeting as one appropriated from the dictators.⁸⁷ Again a question about the lack of transformation in the structures of power is posed. The dilemma of Didymus's secret past is resolved in the officially sanctioned commission which hears evidence of the camps in the name of accountability, clearly a fictional representation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC):

It's hardly a matter of justifying his actions in the name of a just cause, the end against the means. It's a matter of fulfilling whatever is needed by the Movement to show its integrity to the truth, its capacity for self-examination and condemnation because it is strong enough to survive these, a capacity others dare not attempt. He tells as much as is needed to demonstrate that the Movement may emerge with a cleansed conscience.⁸⁸

The depiction of accountability is largely favourable, though it is possible to detect in the last sentence a critique of continued concealment and self-protection, a hint that the gaps are not filled, the testimony not complete, but calculated to cover political backs.

Antjie Krog, who reported on the TRC for the South African Broadcasting Corporation, discusses this same issue in her account of the experience of covering the unfolding testimonies in *Country of My*

⁸⁵ Gordimer (1994) p.128

⁸⁶ Gordimer (1994) p.129

⁸⁷ This is a point emphasised in the novel; see also 'the double embrace, first clasped round this side of the neck then that, which everyone in the liberation movement forgot was derived from the embrace of dictators'. p.36

⁸⁸ Gordimer (1994) pp.300-1

Skull, discussed in detail in Chapter 4. She too records the resistance of ANC leaders to the exposure of full witness accounts of the armed resistance wing's camps, such as Quatro in Angola:

Uncomfortable questions remain. To what extent was the submission exercise in political damage control after the [ANC's] blunders about the Truth Commission? Why was it so vague on who did what and who gave the orders? No information was given that really went beyond what is already in the public domain. The burning questions of parents whose sons died in ANC camps were not addressed at all.⁸⁹

Large gaps remain as the past is remade and repressed in the emergent narrative of liberation, marked only by questions indicating an absence of disclosure. Here the issue of a new form of censorship is raised by Gordimer, a writer who, despite her affiliations with the ANC, is prepared to fulfill her self-defined role as someone who critiques the 'politically-imposed spirit of [the] times',⁹⁰ even if they are unstable times of transition and negotiation. To her the protection of the heroic image must not come at the cost of repressing information under the excuse of a 'just war'. She thus counters the emergent dominant narrative by indicating the atrocities carried out in the camps, and remarks through a metaphor of the abject one form of attitude the 'Movement's' contemporary leadership holds towards the history of the detention camps:

Unspeakable: even the subject, for Sibongile ... She had her position to think of. He had the curious remembered image, alone in the kitchen, of her frantically and distastefully scraping from the sole of her shoe all traces of a dog's mess she had stepped into.⁹¹

If the abject, as Julia Kristeva defines it, and its variants, such as blood, filth, excrement and defilement, mark the boundary of the subject, here is a powerful image of the new subject of power, Sibongile, desperately trying to cleanse herself of the abject which threatens her subjectivity: the stories of death, blood and defilement which threaten the emergent narrative of power.⁹²

It is of course significant for a feminist interpretation, that the representative of the new power in the novel is a woman, whose smartness and sophistication are signified in the frequent references to her high heels. By exploring in detail the relationship between Didymus and Sibongile, Gordimer provides a counterpoint to the story of Vera and Ben at the risk, admittedly, of creating a basic four-limbed working model of racial and sexual difference. Both couples experience an inversion in power relations, with the

⁸⁹ Krog (1999) p.189 See also Ellis and Sechaba (1992)pp.129 and 136

⁹⁰ Gordimer (1999) p.8

⁹¹ Gordimer (1994) p.129

⁹² Kristeva (1982) p.3

female emerging as the dominant partner, and both couples experience crises through the lives of their children as the teenage Mpho Maqoma becomes pregnant, the Starks' Ivan divorces and Annick comes out as a lesbian and adopts a black baby. The parents' political repositioning is thus challenged by social shifts, which test the extent of the parents' liberation from former social values. As suggested, their various reformations are shown not to be complete.

A major preoccupation at transition, therefore, is the shifts definitions of subjectivity, and consequent shifts in modes of identification. The recurrent *leitmotifs* of photographs and sculptures explore image and erasure in the processes of narrating and remembering the past. A marked photograph and a curling poster both depict the erasure and recall of figures within personal and political narratives. The photograph, with whose contemplation the novel opens, creates an image of a personal transition in Vera's life, from one husband to another. It is a photo of a group of holidaymakers, including Vera and her new lover, Ben, whose face is circled so that when her first husband receives the photo, he can identify Vera's transfer of loyalty. Finding the photo 45 years later, on the verge of leaving Ben, Vera does not recognise everyone in the photo, causing her to meditate on the selectiveness of memory as it leaves gaps in forming a narrative of life:

on the edge of this focus there's an appendage, might as well turn it off because, in the recognition and specific memory the photograph arouses, the peripheral figure was never present.. But if someone were to come along — wait! — and recognize the one whom nobody remembers, immediately another reading of the photograph would be developed. Something else, some other meaning would be there, the presence of what was taken on, along the way, then. Something secret, perhaps. Caught so insignificantly.⁹³

What is indicated here is that markers of secret histories or unremembered, suppressed stories are present everywhere in our lives, but may not always be recognised. Recognition and meaning therefore exist to a large extent in the eyes of the 'beholder' or reader, and are not inherent in the image or object itself. The potential is always there to uncover, or retell stories, according to who is witnessing the artefact. The repressed story, she indicates, is always hovering in the unconscious, waiting for recognition, ready to rupture the present.

Although the photo represents a personal memory, relating to a private affair, virtually the same motif is used later in the novel to refer to the faces forgotten during years of exile by the larger constituency of South Africans. The two motifs thus form an allegorical relationship: Didymus, who has

⁹³ Gordimer (1994) p.3

been operating secretly, under a code name, has to be re-recognised now, recalled in memory as he is recalled from exile:

Who are the faces arranged in a collage round the great man himself? The posters are curling at the corners and some faded strips where sunlight from a window has barred them day after day, month after month. Crowds who dance their manifesto in the streets are too young to recognize anyone who dates from the era before exile unless he is one of the two or three about whom songs were sung and whose images were kept alive on T-shirts. Didymus went about mostly unrecognized; disguised now, as himself.⁹⁴

Didymus is a representative of the long secret history of apartheid South Africa, whose fading, unrecognised image on the 'welcome home' poster is on the periphery of the alternative new master narrative of 'the great man', Mandela's life.

The question of recall, and the return of the past is posed rhetorically at the opening of the 'Baggage' and 'Transit' sections: 'And who was that?'⁹⁵ and 'You don't know who this is?'⁹⁶ respectively. Only a few resistance figures were canonised during the struggle in songs and T-shirt images to create as narrow a focus of resistance as possible, as unified a narrative, in effect censored to avoid any 'tendency or faction that might be divisive'.⁹⁷ Didymus's visibility in the political arena will depend on his recognition in the present as himself, free from his code name. The process demands a form of resurrection which is constantly enacted in the streets, as Vera renews acquaintance with people she has helped over the years:

Vera and these old acquaintances and friends were giddy with discovery, the past set down on the streets of the present.

You don't remember me?

The past is known to be irretrievable. But here that proposition is overturned. In the euphoria of being back, of presenting themselves alive, resurrected from the anonymity of exile ... [all are] greeted in the same way as returning heroes.⁹⁸

Resurrection is thus presented as a trope for the return and recognition of exiles. Its religious overtones complement the sense of sacrifice which they stand for and the salvation they bring. Didymus experiences the sense of resurrection most intensely, as his expectations rise to their highest at the Movement's

⁹⁴ Gordimer (1994) p.92

⁹⁵ Gordimer (1994) p.3

⁹⁶ Gordimer (1994) p.35

⁹⁷ Gordimer (1994) p.92

⁹⁸ Gordimer (1994) p.37

conference, at which the executive positions are elected. As he reaches a sense of unshakeable Cartesian being, his world suddenly crumbles around him:

Disguised, unrecognized, do you exist? And now they see him; back to life. It was a conviction of pure existence. He sat there; he was. In this state he heard the results of the election announced. His name was not among those voted to the new Executive.⁹⁹

Erasure and recognition are thus read as forms of death and resurrection in the dominant narrative. Didymus's censoring from contemporary memory is potentially temporary, reversible in the future by a possible 'resuscitation', when the weight of the atrocities in the camps fades:

Didymus would be resuscitated from beyond his lifetime as one of the band of Jacobin heroes who had done terrible things to save liberation in a terrible time. But for the present his greatest service was for him to be forgotten.¹⁰⁰

Didymus has in effect died from public memory, and his story will not be reborn for a while. This is the stage of the interregnum at which morbid symptoms appear, according to Gramsci. His is a position of negativity and impossibility. Unsurprisingly, he is accused of becoming morbid by his wife. They discuss the speech of the veteran white communist politician Dave, who is himself dying of 'an incurable disease'. Didymus believes Dave has made an important point, and that the response from the audience was not genuine. Sibongile rebukes him: 'Of course the applause was support for what he said! You're getting morbid.'¹⁰¹ Only when his morbidity is justified, when Sibongile receives the death threat, and he rediscovers a new role in life as her minder, does he lose his sense of morose, self-indulgent disillusionment.

It is interesting to note that, contrary to my consideration of a number of motifs and their symbolic significance, Dominic Head argues, that *None to Accompany Me* is one of Gordimer's most literal novels:

the presiding mode of the novel ... can be characterized as a narrowing focus on the specificities of the life lived, especially where this involves a reconsideration — even an implicit rejection — of symbolic or gestural motifs which seem inapplicable to the new interregnum.¹⁰²

The example he gives is of the issue of land reclamation, and the difference in treatment it gets in the 1974 novel *The Conservationist* and in *None to Accompany Me*. In the former novel, the land claim is represented in a strongly symbolic gesture by the black corpse which surfaces on an Afrikaner's farm. This stands in

⁹⁹ Gordimer (1994) p.95

¹⁰⁰ Gordimer (1994) p.231

¹⁰¹ Gordimer (1994) p.237

¹⁰² Head (1995) p.49

contrast to the literal, bureaucratic land reclamation which Vera pursues throughout the transition period in *None to Accompany Me*. Yet although this novel is less archetypal and mythic in tone, it still makes strong use of extended metaphors and symbolic meaning.

In her Charles Eliot Norton lectures, collected under the title *Writing and Being*, Gordimer explains her perception of the relationship between political events and the fictional representation of those events, considering the transformation and illumination which the fictionalising process allows. Referring to the grounding of her *Burger's Daughter* in the biography of Bram Fischer, she argues, on the basis of Fischer's daughter's reaction, 'I had a critical as well as hagiographical conviction of her father's and her existence strong enough to take on the form of imagined life.'¹⁰³ She insists that she is not speaking of verisimilitude, not a 'working model to be dragged off and wired up to a book', but a 'vision', 'from the ethos those lives give off, a vapour of truth condensed, in which, a finger tracing upon a window pane, the story may be written'.¹⁰⁴ The window on to the world here is opaque, and truth is thus not a testimony of factual experience, but an insubstantial, elusive element which can become visible by being written (on). This recalls the closing sentence of *None to Accompany Me*, in which Vera's breath in the cold night air 'scrolls[s] out, a signature before her'.¹⁰⁵ The intangibility of the ending contrasts with its firm act of closure in the signature that marks and identifies a subject. Yet here the signature that signs off a new subjectivity again takes the form of a vaporous substance. Perhaps this is an acceptance that the self, like truth, is insubstantial and cannot be distilled to gather from it a condensed essence.

iv. 'Returning Home': Jack Mapanje's *Skipping Without Ropes*

In times like these your hedging vociferous chameleons
Are the least you need.

Skipping Without Ropes ¹⁰⁶

Jack Mapanje's third volume of poetry, *Skipping Without Ropes*, shares many of the same themes and concerns as Gordimer's novel on the issues raised by political transition. Like *None to Accompany Me*, Mapanje's poetry is concerned with questions of memory over forgetting, forgiveness versus justice, hope versus caution and the possibilities versus the impossibilities of transition. The return of exiles, too, and

¹⁰³ Gordimer (1995) p.10

¹⁰⁴ Gordimer (1995) p.12

¹⁰⁵ Gordimer (1994) p.324

¹⁰⁶ Mapanje (1999a) p.57

their reception in Malawi is an issue of close personal concern to Mapanje, and is used by him, as in *None to Accompany Me*, as a way of expressing transition as a journey of return to origins, of homecoming. The motifs of birth, re-birth and resurrection feature strongly in the poems, figuring the suspended moment of transition as a liminal moment, where ends meet beginnings. Yet the Gramscian morbid symptoms also appear in the obsessive returns to Mapanje's time in detention, in the constant guilt-ridden anxieties about his having left the country and in his awareness of those who died. Despite his previous volume of poetry *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison*, having dealt with detention, release and exile, *Skipping Without Ropes* goes over the same ground again, the three sections of the volume entitled 'From Mikuyu Prison to Exile', 'Impressions of Exile' and 'The Return of the Rhinoceros'. This return to the past may enact a personal desire, yet it could also have to do with Mapanje's reputation as a poet of resistance and former Amnesty International Prisoner of Conscience. In an interview Mapanje acknowledges the difficulty of this internal and external definition of subjectivity: 'I think once detained, always detained',¹⁰⁷ that is, not only internally through traumatic memories, but also by public reputation as an ex-detainee.

Like Gordimer too, Mapanje is concerned about the extent of real political change, whether there is a real transformation in the previous power structures, or whether the new dispensation posits simple inversions of established power-positions. However, there are also important differences in their subject-matter and subjectivity, not least in terms of gender and race, both of which are foregrounded in the work of Gordimer to a greater degree than in Mapanje's poetry, for obvious reasons. Poetry has always been Mapanje's favoured genre, though interestingly he has written the soon-to-be-published memoirs of his imprisonment and exile in prose, marking a personal transition in style.¹⁰⁸ However, he continues to use the condensed form of poetry to explore the allegories and ambiguities of transition through linguistic ambivalences. Mapanje has always been interested in oral culture, whose practice he was forced to rediscover in detention where he was denied pen and paper for almost four years. His post-Banda poems, though employing a different tone and motifs, still continue the different poetic forms of elegy, praise poem, parable and letter that he refined in his previous two volumes. However, I will also be exploring the

¹⁰⁷ Mapanje (1994) p.57

¹⁰⁸ Extracts that have been published include Mapanje (1997a) and Mapanje (1999a)

implications of the epigraph, in which he marks a shift from the chameleon-like voice for which he is best known.¹⁰⁹

The two writers' very different personal and political histories also affect their literary responses to transition, yet the anxiety and guilt that both expressed in their earlier work is still prevalent, at least in reduced form. Whereas in Gordimer's case this is mainly as a result of her anxious awareness of her background of racial and economic privilege, in Mapanje's case this is due to his own relative privilege through his education, and especially due to the effects of his detention and exile on his family and friends. In Malawi, however, there was no exiled liberation movement on the scale of the ANC, so despite the many shared concerns listed above, Mapanje does not have the same dilemma of 'justified organised violence' to explore. However, both writers have been greatly concerned about the relationship between literature and censorship, both as literary practitioners and in their contributions to *Index on Censorship*.

v. The Malawi Censorship Board and Mapanje's Poetry

Before analysing Mapanje's poetry of transition, I wish to discuss the context of censorship from which his recent writing is emerging by considering the nature of the Malawi Censorship Board and his dealings with it. The Board still exists, based in the same building, but it is seeking a new role, which I discuss in the conclusion to this chapter. However, in July 2000 I tested its transparency as part of the extent of Malawi's relatively new culture of freedom by seeing if I could get access to the old records of the censorship board. As suggested, a few articles have been written about the Malawi Censorship Board and how writers responded through the use of complexity and subtle irony. From these accounts, the Board seemingly operated according to a chain of command based on the fear of dismissal, with all authority leading directly to Banda himself. Yet all these accounts were formed through a process of deduction relating to people's own experience with the Board, or through hearsay and rumour, or through whispered conversations with more open-minded advisers to the Board. A major paper which narrated his own experiences with the Board, was Mapanje's 'Censoring the African Poem', delivered at a conference in Stockholm in 1986 and reprinted in *Index* in 1989 after Mapanje was detained in Malawi. Some people

¹⁰⁹ Most articles on Mapanje allude to the folkloric 'chameleon' in their title, for example Roscoe and Msiska (1992); Vail and White (1990); Chimombo (1988); Gibbs (1982)

contend that the open critique of censorship in the paper was one of the final straws for the Banda regime's tolerance of Mapanje, for it was the year after the conference that Mapanje was picked up.¹¹⁰

As Robert Green suggests in the passage quoted at the opening of this chapter, documents such as those reprinted in *What Happened* were not made available in Malawi, the reasons for censorship remaining unstated. I therefore had to wait till after the transition to see if I could access anything that traced the censorship procedure in Malawi. Even then, full-length reports detailing specific interpretations were 'not available'. However, I was given permission by the current Chief Censoring Officer to look at the minutes of the Censorship Board's meetings from the past three decades, though he was hesitant about allowing me to make photocopies. Pleading the need for academic authentication, proof that I had actually seen the records, I was permitted to photocopy a few pages and make notes on my laptop, sitting in the same boardroom where the meetings took place, overseen only by the soft-focus portrait of President Muluzi. Reading the minutes clearly continues to involve deductions and reading between the lines, yet it is interesting to note how well some of Mapanje's own deductions correspond with the documentary evidence I saw.

The opening page of the minutes dated 17 March, 1982 show that the Board was constituted of males and females, Malawians and non-Malawians, representatives of government and of religious bodies. Indeed, the chairman, Reverend Chunga, gives the meeting a Christian framing by opening it with a prayer:¹¹¹

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CENSORS WHICH WAS HELD ON
17TH MARCH, 1982 AT 10.15 A.M. IN THE BOARD'S CONFERENCE ROOM

PRESENT

Rev. F. A. Chunga	Chairman
Mrs C. Chimwonje	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. B. R. Larouche	Member
Sister Ann Neilsen	Member
Mr. M. S. Mwanamai	Member
Mr. G. O. Sibweza	Member
Mr. A. Gibson	Member
Mr. A. Makalani	Representing Ministry of Education and Culture
Mr. B. Y. C. Gondwe	Representing Ministry of Local Government

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr. B. L. Walker	Representing the Office of the President and Cabinet
Mr. H. S. Vokbiwa	Secretary to the Board

APOLOGIES

Mr. N. G. M. Mkandawire	Member
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Minute 82/2/1 Opening Remarks

- a. The Meeting was opened at 10.15 a.m. with a prayer
said by the Chairman.

[figure 1.1]

¹¹⁰ See Ó Máille (1999) p.100 and Mapanje (1997a)

¹¹¹ For full text of minutes, see Appendix I p.228

These minutes report on a meeting between members of the Board and Banda himself. There are clues in the document as to the relationship of fear between the Board and the president which supports Mapanje's contention that:

[t]he objective of the Censorship Boards is first and foremost to protect the censors from dismissal and to protect the oppression of the governments which establish them; censorship ultimately protects African leadership against truth.¹¹²

The summary of the meeting is subservient in its tone, as is the fact that Banda's advice is given overt recognition or 'noted': 'Members noted the summary and agreed that it be put on record' (82/2/3/1e). Subservience to the aged president is re-stated in the summary as follows: 'Decency — He stressed on the importance of maintaining cultural values in Malawi. e.g. respect for elders.' (82/2/3/1a)

Further on in the summary, when the President turns to films, it is the handwritten marginal marks that are intriguing (82/2/3/1c):

- 2 -

c. On Films - He advised the Board to be strict on censoring films rather than being lenient. ✕✕
 For example, he said that those films that exploit crime and violence could have a bad influence on the society especially the children. On deciding what is good for the society, he advised the Board that when in doubt, it should give itself the benefit of the doubt.

[figure 1.2]

Someone has marked two crosses in the margin next to the word 'lenient', yet it is difficult to tell whether they are simply marks to highlight a spelling error, or whether they are there to remind the owner of the minutes *not* on any account to be lenient in his or her decisions, especially as this is a point the President re-emphasises. We cannot know.

The minutes give an insight into further stratifications within the Censorship Board, through the references to its part-time viewers. These part-time viewers were people who watched films and then wrote reports recommending whether the item should be passed or banned. These recommendations were then discussed by the Board at its quarterly Board meetings, where the final decision would be

¹¹² Mapanje (1989) p.7. This paper was first given at the Second African Writers' Conference in Stockholm, 1986 and also appeared in Holst Petersen (1988).

reached. Minute 82/2/3/3 notes that the total number of part-time viewers employed by the Board is thirty-four. Clearly these viewers are subject to the authority of the members of the Board, and seem to be the source of many of the quirky, incompetent decisions the Board reached. The infantile behaviour of the viewers, for example, elicits a pedagogical response from the Board (82/2/8/1):

The role of viewers was discussed and it was felt that they needed more supervision. They needed to be comprehensive in the completion of their reports so that they should not mislead the Board. It was noted that most viewers copy from each other because they sit together. It may be necessary to separate them from each other. Also the Board should talk to them more often.

Perhaps the tone of the last vague 'talk to them' is more threatening here rather than pedagogical, recalling the fear of being too lenient.

Readers were also co-opted by the Board to pass judgment on books in the same way that part-time viewers reported on films. Mapanje notes in his paper on censorship in Malawi that a number of these part-time readers were academic colleagues of his.¹¹³ At the beginning of 1982 selected part-time readers were asked to consider Mapanje's volume of poetry *Of Chameleons and Gods*, which he had had the 'audacity' to publish with Heinemann when he was in London in 1981, thus bypassing the surveillance of the Malawi Censorship Board. In his paper, Mapanje describes how he did his own research, tracking down the comments made by some of the part-time readers. Some pass the book without reservation, while others have their doubts, identifying clear criticism of Banda's regime in the poems.

Mapanje writes that on 13 April, 1982, while he was still in London completing his PhD, he received a letter from the editor of a Malawian publishing house which proposed the following:

I have been contemplating a Malawian version of *Of Chameleons and Gods* which should give our literary series a blasting send-off ... Should you give us your consent to proceed, it would be necessary to delete certain titles (poems) which to quote one anonymous analyst 'poke at wounds that are still raw in Malawian history'.¹¹⁴

This comment inspired the poem by Mapanje 'On the Banning *Of Chameleons and Gods* (June 1985)' referring to the editor who suggested a censored 'Malawian' version of the volume:

The fragrance of your banning order is not
Pungent enough after four years & one re-
Print dear sister & your brother's threat,
'Your chameleons poke at the raw wounds of
Our nation!' won't rhyme however much you
Try. To ban, burn or to merely withdraw from

¹¹³ Mapanje (1989) p.8

¹¹⁴ Mapanje (1989) p.7

Public engagement, what's the difference? It
Still humiliates our readers, you & me .¹¹⁵

The date of the letter, April 1982, becomes significant when we look at the Board's minutes, which are dated 17 March, 1982. Under consideration at the meeting are publications such as Marthe Watts's *The Men in My Life* and Roald Dahl's *My Uncle Oswald*, which are both banned outright. Sandwiched between these is Mapanje's *Of Chameleons and Gods*. Again it is the handwritten note in the margin, which is of interest (82/2/4/5):

Minute 82/2/4 Consideration of Publications

Members considered the reports about books and made the following remarks:-

1.	<u>Title of the Book</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
1.	Better Is-Your Love Than Wine	Banyolat Jean	Ban
2.	Bethany's Sin	McCammon Robert	Ban
3.	The Act of Marriage	Lattaye Tim and Beverly	Ban
4.	The Men in My Life	Watts Marthe	Ban
✓5.	Of Chameleons and Gods	Mapanje Jack	Deferred - <i>To inform bookshops not to order this book!</i>
6.	My Uncle Oswald	Dahl, Roald	Ban

[figure 1.3]

Next to the Board's recommendation to defer a decision on this publication, someone has, clearly at a later date, scribbled in the words: "To inform bookshops not to order this book." Mapanje was aware of this decision, though it was not implemented until June 1985, a year after Heinemann reprinted the book in 1984.¹¹⁶ Before going to his conference in Stockholm, he challenged Catherine Chimwenje, the vice-chairman of the Board, about this decision:

I suggested to her that we are all trapped. They banned my book because if they didn't they would lose their jobs, especially when somebody discovered the poems and provided his or her own interpretation of the events described there. But the censor insisted that my book had only been withdrawn from circulation.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ 'On Banning *Of Chameleons and Gods* (June 1985)' in Mapanje (1993) p.35

¹¹⁶ Vail and White (1990) p.43

¹¹⁷ Mapanje(1989) p.11

The reason for this was apparently so that no report was necessitated, a report to which Mapanje could have responded as Gordimer does in *What Happened*.

What the handwritten note in the document highlights, is the difficulty the Board had in reaching its decision on Mapanje's poems, demonstrated most clearly in the one word 'deferred'. This hesitancy to act is illustrated not least in the fact that there is a three year time gap between the original proposal to 'inform bookshops not to order this book' (1982) and the public circulation of the official order (1985). The Board had to consider the poems' exceptional status as pieces by a Malawian writer which had already been published abroad by a prestigious international publishing house. Mapanje had already made a name for himself in the UK. Crudely put, the Board was faced with the dilemma of a negative reaction from authority at home if they did not ban the poems, and bad publicity abroad if they did. Somehow the situation had to be defused, and one option was to publish a censored version of the poems, another to withdraw them from circulation. Banning them was not an option, for this would give Mapanje greater power of notoriety, for as Coetzee rightly notes, '[t]he book that is suppressed gets more attention as a ghost than it would alive'.¹¹⁸ Mapanje was not happy with either option and his continued expressions of annoyance with the regime in various forums culminated in his detention in September 1987.

One of the valuable features of Mapanje's poetry written under censorship, is its incessant critical questioning of power and its discourses, countering its distortions and functioning iconoclastically. It does so by acknowledging the concerns of the dispossessed or subaltern, typically the fisherman,¹¹⁹ the old beggar woman¹²⁰ and the prostitute.¹²¹ As such his poetry is often political in the broader sense, engaging its exposition of *realpolitik* through its effects on a variety of vividly recounted localities. For example, prostitutes are demonised after one of them has the tenacity to resist 'the official':

... Touched the official rolled his eyes
To one in style. She said no. Most girls only wanted
A husband to hook or the fruits of Independence to taste
But since then mini-skirts were banned and the girls
Of Smiller's Bar became 'ugly prostitutes to boot!'¹²²

¹¹⁸ Coetzee (1996) p.43

¹¹⁹ 'Elegy for Mangochi Fisherman' in Mapanje (1991) p.69 and 'Kadango Village' in Mapanje (1993) p.6

¹²⁰ 'The Sweet Brew at Chitakale' in Mapanje (1991) p.23, 'The Haggling Old Woman at Balaka' in Mapanje (1993) p.9

¹²¹ 'The Cheerful Girls at Smiller's Bar' in Mapanje (1991) p.22 and 'Smiller's Bar Revisited' in Mapanje (1993) p.20

¹²² 'The Cheerful Girls' in Mapanje (1991) p.22

Political legislation interpellates female subjectivity, so that sexually liberal women are defined as prostitutes within the circumscriptions of new laws on dress. Similarly, 'Kadango Village: Even Milimbo Lagoon Is Dry' written in 1983, a year of intense oppression and cover-up following the 'accidentalising' of four senior politicians,¹²³ is crammed with vivid instances of failure and absence, drought, disease, madness and death in a lakeshore village. The last verses obliquely reveal the cause again as the same source of power, Banda's 'dawn' republic, and demonstrate thus that, as above, the local setting may represent a national allegory:

Even Milimbo lagoon is dead; no oar dips in any more.
Those fishermen who dreamt up better weather
Once, no longer cast their nets here, and their

Delighted bawdy songs to bait the droughts are
Cloaked in the choking fumes of dawn, banned. But
Our fat-necked custodians despatch another tale.¹²⁴

Interestingly, this poem, set in Mapanje's home village, is echoed in a number of poems of transition, compounding the sense of homecoming and return to origins. Self-conscious of the limits of written resistance, which remain inaccessible to the dispossessed figures represented, Mapanje frequently refers to unwritten subversions existing concurrently in the forms of 'bawdy songs', as above; elsewhere he taunts, 'Haven't you/ Heard the children's riddles yet or the jokes/ At the market-place about your chiefs & their/ Concubines?'¹²⁵ He is similarly self-conscious of the limits of a cryptic writing style in his MPhil thesis, in which he admits that such works can only function as self-directed therapy, or when 'directed towards a literary coterie'.¹²⁶

Mapanje's tone varies greatly, according to his subject and the situation of his writing, whether in London, returning to an oppressive Malawi, whether composing in detention, writing as an expatriate and, as I shall focus on, during the transition. However, his tone is mostly characterised by an understated questioning and a controlled irony, resulting from a powerful combination of humour, anxiety and anger, with some moments of lyrical tenderness. In addition his verse frequently indicates vocality, for example

¹²³ Three Cabinet ministers and an MP were killed in 1983, ostensibly in a car crash, though an official inquiry after the transition established that they were clubbed to death by the Special Branch, and their bodies placed in a car and rolled down a slope near the Mozambican border to look like a car crash.

¹²⁴ 'Kadango Village' in Mapanje (1993) p.6

¹²⁵ 'On Banning Of *Chameleons and Gods*' in Mapanje (1993) p.35

¹²⁶ Cited in Vail and White (1991) p.284

in the use of apostrophe, rhetorical question and exclamation. This invokes an oral mode that is so elusive to censorship, suggesting a reading particularly sensitive to double-voices and a disparity between literal and implied meaning. This is frequently exemplified in his praise-poet voice:

I admire the quixotic display of your paramountcy
How you brandish our ancestral shields and spears
Among your warriors dazzled by your loftiness
But I fear the way you spend your golden breath¹²⁷

Literal meaning is further evaded in a riddling use of language, which also serves to evoke the style of vernacular linguistic play. In his academic role as a linguistics scholar, Mapanje has taken a keen interest in theorising the function of riddle, illustrating its aptness for resistance writing, which helps to realise the particular complexities of much Malawian writing previous to 1992. He writes:

[riddles] refuse to be taken superficially. They always push the audience into seeing impossible relations between the verbal word and the world behind it. Through their balanced illogicality, contradiction and ambiguity, etc., riddles subtly appeal to a sense of sanity of the alert listener. Riddles show the audience that the world is not neatly structured as they take it.¹²⁸

Broadly seen, each poem written under censorship may be regarded as a dialogic, riddling utterance in which the active reader seeks alternative dialogic meanings behind individual words and phrases, where the appeal to sanity seems to refer to the particular use of riddle in oppressive circumstances.

The fabular metaphors function similarly to riddle in that they verbally and conceptually re-vision and reorder the empirical world. The complexity of certain metaphors comes about when the signifier does not have a simple one-to-one relationship with a signified in the empirical world, for even within the confines of the work of one poet, metaphors may shift and double their implied meanings in different works, displaying the 'balanced illogicality, contradiction and ambiguity' of riddle cited above. For example, 'chameleon', the central figure in many creation myths in central and southern Africa, may signify the poet, who creates camouflaged messages, yet fears the failure of his task to deliver his message. Mapanje indicates this anxiety in the introduction to his first volume of poetry *Of Chameleons and Gods*: 'one is tempted like the chameleon, who failed to deliver Chiuta's message of life, to bask in one's brilliant camouflage'.¹²⁹ In retrospect it is significant that the chameleon is also a martyr figure in creation myths, for it is in jumping from the top of the fig tree that its stomach bursts open and the world is created. In

¹²⁷ 'On His Royal Blindness' in Mapanje (1991) p.57

¹²⁸ Mapanje, University of Malawi, Staff Seminar Paper 1976, quoted in Gibbs (1987) p.41

¹²⁹ Mapanje (1991)

Mapanje's second volume, *Chattering Wagtails*, however, 'chameleon' appears to shift signification to the failure of authority. Provoking the censors with their inability to silence resistance, the poet persona asks:

What do you see in these senile chameleons,
 These gouty, mythical gods & libertine Mphunzi
 Leopards to warrant all the heat?¹³⁰

Another common example is 'cockroach'; in one poem the creature clearly signifies an oppressive agent: 'At the gates the guardians have set up cockroaches and/ Leeches to protect the shrines from stray iconoclasts'.¹³¹ In an earlier piece, the figure acts as a symbol of the poor and excluded to comment on the degradation of life in London: 'Like smoked cockroaches we sneak out/ Of peeling caches'.¹³² Further connections are thus formed, such as the poverty of the act of oppression, or the creativity of the failure to speak unconstrained. An engaged, questioning, reasoning audience is thus interpellated, since any casual, surface reading can only create the confusion, which was so crucial to the survival of poets like Mapanje.

vi. Mapanje in Transition

Mapanje continues to use this mode of allegorical writing, his transition poems often referring to fabular figures such as lion, buffalo and cockroach, or parables such as the story told in 'The Lies We told About Elephant' in which the ant in the elephant's ear manages, despite its insignificance, to irritate such a huge beast to distraction. This indicates a role for such allegorical writing far beyond that suggested rather dismissively by Coetzee: 'Censors can and often have been outwitted. But the game of slipping Aesopian messages past the censor is ultimately a sterile one, diverting writers from their proper task.'¹³³ As shown, no assumption can be made of a one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified, as assumed perhaps by Coetzee, dismissing Mapanje's complex oral literary hybrid. A piece written by Mapanje reflecting on the role of orality and memory in prison and in exile recalls how when it was his turn to read the bible, which he notes 'was also based on orality',¹³⁴

I often looked for those stories whose meaning involved deductions. I needed to keep the logical faculty of my mind alive in a world which was surrounded by the illogicalities of boots, changing

¹³⁰ 'On Banning' in Mapanje (1993) p.35

¹³¹ 'Re-entering the Shrines of Zomba' in Mapanje (1991) p.43

¹³² 'Sketches of London' in Mapanje (1991) p.32

¹³³ Coetzee (1996) p.viii

¹³⁴ Mapanje (1997a) p.35

keys, locks, and the endless banging of prison doors and gates ... I often had lively debates with the other inmates regarding the different interpretations of the riddle and the parable. This helped to reinvigorate the mind.¹³⁵

Coetzee's view of the Aesopian fable seems rather reductive and unaware of complexities, and his prescription of a writer's 'proper task' is itself rather censorious. David Kerr argues that the use of 'disguised metaphorical language' is an established mode of oral communication that 'functions to obscure the meaning of a text in the process of negotiation without the interactants losing face'.¹³⁶ The case for the continued use of extended metaphor in a period of negotiation is thereby made stronger.

Despite some continuity in techniques over the period of political change, detention and the move abroad on his release elicited a radical shift in style, tone and technique for Mapanje. Yet he was wary about the change in technique demanded, for he was well-practiced and skilled in handling the double-edged voice of irony. The leading paradox of detention is that, in Mapanje's words:

[prison] is the freest part of the country. I mean, you said whatever the hell you wanted to say. So the metaphors are released. All the stifling images disappeared in Mikuyu (sometimes I wonder — the release is good, but whether it's good for poetry is a different issue).¹³⁷

The same 'problem' of the freeing from constraints which have proven to aid creativity, arises on release and then in exile. After Mapanje's detention and release, his poetry expresses an urge to name people, places and events, reinstating repressed versions of the past. It is in this context that the epigraph, 'In times like these your hedging vociferous chameleons/ Are the least you need'¹³⁸ becomes relevant. Mapanje is thus seeking yet another new voice, marking a break from his association in every article written about him with the ambivalent chameleon figure, vociferous paradoxically because it is hedging, able to express dissent because it speaks cryptically.

To discuss Mapanje's search for a new, unfettered voice and new subjects in the changing, freer circumstances, I will focus on four poems from the 'Return of the Rhinoceros' section, 'Beginning Where We Left Off', 'Guilty of Nipping Her Pumpkin Leaves', 'When the Watery Monsters Argued' and the title poem, which all comment on the changes of political transition. Other poems in the 'Return of the Rhinoceros' section consider the evasive re-telling of their resistance by those complicit with the past regime ('Hyenas Playing Political Prisoners'), tell individual stories of courage (Just Another Jehovah's

¹³⁵ Mapanje (1997a) p.35

¹³⁶ Kerr (1998) p.30

¹³⁷ Mapanje (1994) p.55

¹³⁸ Mapanje (1999a) p.57

Witness') and lyricise the long-missed landscape on return ('The Fisheagles of Cape Maclear'). As mentioned, the volume does return to the themes of detention and exile, yet most appropriate for this discussion are Mapanje's poems on his return to Malawi and his poetic commentary on the changing circumstances of transition.

'Beginning Where We Left Off'¹³⁹

The opening lines of this poem, 'So now that the febrile lion has accidentally fallen/ In the chasm of his own digging, let us thank the Lord',¹⁴⁰ have a proverbial and invocational resonance, in which the oppressor could be said to have 'dug his own grave'. As well as undermining the standard 'lion' metaphor of power, the 'chasm' brings to mind the chasm of Chingwe's Hole, an archaeological site that served Mapanje and his fellow poets as a metaphor for oppression while writing under censorship.¹⁴¹ With this act of justice, the country becomes a site of potential, the poet-persona suggesting a rehabilitation of oppressed vernaculars, 'to sing in the native tongues the old/Guards cut under the pretext of building our nation'. The last phrase clearly echoes the rhetoric of Independence which Banda spun out for the thirty years of his rule and which has been co-opted by the new official narrative with the prefix 're-'. The rehabilitation of minority languages manifested itself, for example, in Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) news being broadcast not only in Chichewa, but also in Chitumbuka, Chiyao, Chilomwe and Chitonga on the radio, but also in the founding of various 'language societies' all over the country.¹⁴² It is enacted at the end of this and the preceding two poems in the use of a song refrain in Chiyao, one of Mapanje's mother tongues:

M'bulaje jwine, n'byeje sadaka
(Kill another for you to eat the funeral rice)

The significance of this refrain, though translated, is not referred to in the extensive notes, yet its ironic and critical comment on short-sightedness is implicit: the refrain calls on people to eat excessively now

¹³⁹ For full text of this poem, see Appendix II p.234

¹⁴⁰ The opening lines of this poem were once those of the former version of 'On His Excellency's house arrest', published in *Index on Censorship* 2(1995) p.86. Mapanje constantly revises and re-writes his poems.

¹⁴¹ See for example 'Glory be to Chingwe's Hole' in Mapanje (1991). Carver (1990) notes: 'Expressions such as "leopards of Dedza" and "Chingwe's Hole", which recur in Mapanje's poems, are widely understood and have found their way into popular usage.' p.76

¹⁴² See Kamwendo (2000). He considers whether language associations such as 'Abenguni Revival Association' and 'Society for the Preservation of Chiyao' represent a strategic rehabilitation of identity or dangerous ethnic exclusivity.

even if it means someone will starve later.¹⁴³ Any further meanings and circulations of this saying can only be known by those with access to the particular linguistic culture, thus strategically privileging a formerly repressed constituency of Chiyao speakers.

The poet contrasts this easily identifiable enemy, 'Mbulaje's youth leaguers', referring obviously to the Malawi Youth Pioneers (MYP), with the more diffuse remnants of the regime still functioning within the new structure of power, who need to be addressed before it is possible to 'pour libation on flaming ancestral rocks':

... Should
We begin to roll up another sleeve for more insular

& baneful battles buried by the old legion who are not
Amused by our euphoria & are itching to avenge themselves?

It is interesting of course that the speaking voice addresses both 'the Lord' and the ancestors, demonstrating a simultaneous ease with both epistemologies. The discourse of healing and libation anticipates the same discourse in relation to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, where Archbishop Tutu for example writes that 'balm must be poured on [the wounds of the past] so they can heal'.¹⁴⁴ Mapanje's worry that the new precarious dispensation has strong roots in the old, and could too easily revert to totalitarian practices, is a concern that dominates his thinking at present, and has caused him to be a leading voice in the effort to repeal the 1968 Censorship and Control of Entertainments Act before it may be utilised again. He has noted in articles and public talks, that remembering and re-telling the past must not be subsumed by reconciliation, not only for didactic reasons of not allowing things to happen again but, as the poem suggests, to protest against the presence of former agents of Banda's regime in positions of influence, whether in government, in opposition or outside of party politics:

I discovered an insidious notion of reconciliation which cannot be left unchallenged. I discovered that some people deliberately exploited the new democratic situation in order to ignore and forget what injury the previous political party and government had done to the psyches of its innocent people.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ I am indebted to Nathaniel Chalamanda for clarifying this interpretation.

¹⁴⁴ Tutu et al. (1998) 1(1) paragraph 27

¹⁴⁵ Mapanje (1995) p.13

This correlates with the same trend Nuttall identifies in South Africa, where '[p]ast conflict may be repressed in the interest of present togetherness'.¹⁴⁶ However, in her depiction she sees this as a new manifestation of censorship to protect the discourse of reconciliation and consensus, not to protect individuals, as in Malawi.

And so Mapanje's contribution to the difficult question of justice versus reconciliation counters what he sees as the dominant discourse of the moment which lacks institutional accountability such as the TRC, by pressing towards justice.¹⁴⁷ He thus retains his critical function, even during transition, a position that Gordimer too guards jealously. Interestingly, both Gordimer and Mapanje continue to exercise this right to critique the transition despite their association with the ruling political parties, the South African ANC and the Malawian UDF respectively.

As in previous poems, Mapanje continues to position himself in 'Beginning where we left off' as spokesman for and on behalf of the subjects of power using the first person plural pronoun 'we' in 'We begin to roll up' and distancing authority, old and current, in the third person plural 'they', 'what chaos, what/ Sneer won't they raise for our freedom to requite?' This indicates his position in the debate on the problem of representing the voice of 'the people', demonstrating his retention of the *imbongi* role he first created in his praise poetry of the early 1970s. The poem ends on a note of uncertainty and caution, presenting the strong possibility of transition as a time of chaos, continued repression and self-protective distortion of stories of the past:

... those untold
Cerebral malaras & tuberculoses they loved to cast
Down on rivalry, dressed as AIDS

The open-endedness and uncertainty of the future is figured in the final phrase and punctuation mark before the refrain, 'what/ Sneer won't they raise for our freedom to requite?', which poses the poem as a questioning intervention in the transition process. The title of the poem interpellates the collective 'we' of

¹⁴⁶ Nuttall (1998) p.75

¹⁴⁷ One striking instance of conciliatory discourse surrounds the various newspapers' reporting of Banda's death and funeral in November and December 1997, where unlike the British press, which focused on Banda's quirks and ruthlessness, even the UDF-supporting paper, *The Nation*, owned by a politician formerly detained for much of Banda's rule, shows Muluzi in front of Banda's open coffin, under the headline 'Last Respects, Muluzi bids Banda sad "bye"', *The Nation* 1 Dec 1997 p.1. Another article is headlined 'For in our hearts you'll always live', *The Nation* 27 Nov 1997 whilst a further piece interviews people in the street and reports their comments, for example 'He might have been a dictator, or as others would have it, a tyrant, but Kamuzu was a man of the people.' *The Nation* 1 Dec, 1997 p.5

the 'new Malawi', casting the intervening years as a form of horrific recess, yet one which implies guilt and failure on the part of the 'we' who actively 'left off', expressed not, for example, in the passive form 'were cut off'. The sense of a new beginning is of course central to transition discourse, calling up the liminal moment of potential and chaos discussed where end meets the start of something new, or where the moment 'where we left off' meets 'beginning'.

'Guilty of Nipping Her Pumpkin Leaves'

'Guilty of Nipping Her Pumpkin Leaves' is a poignant poem which narrows its focus from broader generalisations of 'Beginning Where We Left Off' to a particular anecdote about an exile's return and his realisation that people and circumstances have moved on. It is particularly concerned with the one-sidedness of a guilty memory, where the poet-persona is obsessed with returning to one pumpkin seller to repay a debt which he had with her before he was detained and went abroad. The importance of the debt as redress gives it a symbolic meaning, making a further comment about the importance of memory to some people:

... she attests vague memory
Of the pigeon and his story — Oh time, how
Could you be so callous as to sever memories
So precious when all he desires is to redress
The anguish of nipping her pumpkin leaves!¹⁴⁸

The desire to redress an injustice is one which, interestingly, comes from the returnee, the circumstances of whose homecoming closely resemble those of Mapanje himself. It is not demanded by him, as it could so easily have been. This does perhaps indicate the extent of the sense of guilt in the surviving victim of oppression and strongly problematises the boundaries between innocent victim and guilty perpetrator, anticipating the same destabilisation of distinctions in Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*, discussed in Chapter 5. The scene is being filmed by a BBC camera crew making a documentary about the exile's return, and together with his long absence, the scene of return and redress becomes one of alienation:

Could he have returned home to ridicule her
Nudity with his cameras as strange visitors
In the dead monster's regime once did, has he
Got no shame for asserting the resurrection

¹⁴⁸ Mapanje (1999a) p.66

Of the best customer she once boasted about
Now presumed dead ¹⁴⁹

The figure of resurrection returns here, partly to convey the sense of the miraculous which accompanies the transition. The woman is at first an unbeliever in the miracle, thinking that she is being cruelly mocked. The returnee is at first unrecognised and scolded here, in contrast to the representations of exiles by Gordimer: 'In the euphoria of being back, of presenting themselves as alive, resurrected from the anonymity of exile ... [all are] greeted in the same way as returning heroes.'¹⁵⁰ Yet resurrection is used again in terms of the threat of the return to the Banda regime: 'never! "Not today with the beast/ Gone, never if he should decide to resurrect!"'¹⁵¹

After the first two verses, in which forgetting and the returnees' alienation are figured in the meeting, the third verse acts to persuade the woman to remember:

Woman, I hear your passion ...
... but do you not remember
That son-in-law living on Mulungusi Avenue
Whom you buoyantly married your daughters
Every time he visited this stall?

To be remembered is crucial for the returnee, yet, as for Didymus, the continued anonymity and lack of recognition on return after the transition seem to be worse, for the fourth and final verse represents the scene of recognition, yet non-recognition. It opens:

Then rubbing her eyes to weigh the ghost she
Gibes in disbelief, 'They are all returning home
Those buffaloes who left these kraals many dry
Seasons ago, as for you my son, what kept you?
My daughters are too old for you now'

The use of the word 'gibes' indicates a disdainful taunt which stands in stark contrast with the returnee's conciliatory and forthcoming 'Woman, I hear your passion', where 'passion', used in the line after 'resurrect' suggests a biblical connotation of suffering as well as anger. The picture that emerges is of the person who stays behind as the one who suffers, not the detained, exiled returnee. This is further compounded, again in the language of Mapanje's Catholicism, in the discourse of confession, seeking absolution from guilt through repayment:

¹⁴⁹ Mapanje (1999a) p.66

¹⁵⁰ Gordimer (1994) p.37

¹⁵¹ Mapanje (1999a) p.66

'Here, take your money which has tormented
Me in my prison and exile these many years!
Even his London filming crew is unmoved by
His confession under the market's jacarandas —
It's not in the script for their tale of his return!¹⁵²

The last lines indicate not only that stories of transition are constructed and scripted, but that this particular one does not fit the conventional storyline where the returnee should be cast in the manichean role, of innocent victim-hero against the guilty oppressors.

The final part of the poem anticipates the ironic discourse of disillusionment, where the uncertainty of decentralisation as well as economic mismanagement has led to rapid inflation:

... Today, the price of
The pumpkin leaf you knew has more than trebled
It continues to climb though with the lion-for-life
Permanently settled the options in our vegetable
Calling are multiplying ...

The entrepreneurial opportunities accorded by multipartyism are hinted at, with the final lines acting as a devastating realisation to the returnee that the struggle to survive in the new dispensation means a loss of nostalgia and the tenderness Mapanje so often alludes to in his poems:

... Then grasping his
Hand she shoves his money into her camisole
And gazes past him to the next patron!

The poet-persona's idealism of a scene of forgiveness and absolution which he (and the film crew) require from the market seller, who stands as a metonymy of the non-elite, of 'the people', on whose behalf Mapanje aims to speak, is shattered at this point; the everyday meaning of freedom is realised here as an oppressive and de-humanising free market economy.

'When the Watery Monsters Argued'¹⁵³

The final poem in the volume, closes off and sums up, acting as a conclusion to Mapanje's viewpoint. The opening lines of this poem signify another homecoming, told in the third person this time to convey, I suggest, the tone of a parable or narrative tale:

When he revisited the Milimbo Lagoon of
His childhood he found it had rock-dried:

¹⁵² Mapanje (1999a) p.65

¹⁵³ For full text of this poem, see Appendix II p.234

His dugout canoe, the driftwood, fishtraps,
The fishing tackle and the worms for bait
Even the stubborn mudfish had moved on.

Yet the figure returning to the site of origins as closure is subverted, for the return home is *unheimlich*, the familiar has disappeared to be replaced by the uncanny, 'Only ghosts, watery beasts, surged forward/ From the reed bushes of their barren lagoon'. The image of the lagoon is one which echoes a number of Mapanje's previous poems, for example 'An Elegy for Mangochi Fishermen' in *Of Chameleons and Gods*, which opens with a witty pun on 'banning' to comment on the context of its publication:

Today even the fireflies have become
The banners for our night fishermen
The crabs and *dondolos* dare not
Peep out of their crevices.¹⁵⁴

Even more overt is the echo of a poem already cited as an example of figurative writing under transition 'Kadango Village, Even Milimbo Lagoon Is Dry' in *The Chattering Wagtails of Mikuyu Prison* in which images of barrenness, absence, banning, propaganda and a corrupted dawn recur. The homecoming in the same register of loss does not suddenly turn to a hopeful and idealistic scene, but points to a legacy of absence and underdevelopment. Yet the fact that the people and even the static, 'stubborn mudfish' have 'moved on' does point to agency and a forward-looking vision. However, the main theme of this poem is of a historic legacy, for the 'watery monsters' of the title offer their deeply ironic 'wise handshakes':

Do not waste your bitter herbs on our bones,
We were mere messengers of your destiny;
Forget the past, forget whatever we inflicted
On you; people are now riding on the dreams
We denied them decades ago.

The 'nation-building' rhetoric of Independence returns, again in the mouths of the former powers:

'... the exigencies
Of building this glowing nation must precede
Everything and think positive, think future
Without retribution, without malice ...'

It is this inducement to amnesia and the amnesty that 'the silence their beastly transition/ Offered', that Mapanje rejects so strongly. The rousing closing verse of the poem strongly echoes Milan Kundera's

¹⁵⁴ Mapanje (1991) p.69

phrase cited by Gordimer that the 'struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting':

He knew that weathering their weeping scars
Would incite other bitter tears, he then swore:

'Brethren, golden glories are hard to police,
But do not ask us to forget the past, and how
Could poetry forget the past when Africa still
Bleeds from forgetting its past; empower others
To forget your past — my struggle continues!'

This ending is punctuated by rather clichéd slogans such as about 'golden glories', 'Africa still/ Bleeds' and 'my struggle continues', and the rallying speaking voice contrasts in tone with the more subtle imagery of the preceding lines. Yet this vocal ending positions the volume in a strongly activist political framework, especially as the final verse reflects the position Mapanje sets out in his comment cited above about 'an insidious culture of reconciliation' which he found on his return to Malawi. In the notes, this poem is given a dedication: 'For Dennis Brutus, Micere Mugo, Keorapetse Kgositisile, Njabulo Ndebele and others who shared similar encounters.'¹⁵⁵ Three of the dedicatees are South African, indicating that Mapanje draws a strong comparison with the contemporary transition from apartheid rule. The epigraph to the introduction of this thesis, where he writes that '[d]oubtless comparisons ought to be made' further suggests this. Conversely, at least one poem has been dedicated by a South African poet, Sipho Sepamla, to Jack Mapanje.¹⁵⁶

This is not the first time that Mapanje has implied links between the experience of the two countries' political situations. *Of Chameleons and Gods* includes two poems 'Steve Biko is Dead' and 'Messages from Soweto', while *Chattering Wagtails* contains a poem 'Chilling Jan Smuts Airport In-Transito (1984)',¹⁵⁷ which uses the same figure of the airport transit that Gordimer uses for her novel to explore a perception of South Africa as a country in suspense, nervously waiting for impending disaster in 'the musty air of this sudden/ Limbo' that is the Johannesburg airport. Instead of the usual noisy children, 'giddy/ White soldiers crowd the escalators though no ANC threatens to Molotov Jan Smuts airport'. Tanzanians, Zimbabweans and Malawians become the liminals in this place. The woman at the transit

¹⁵⁵ Mapanje (1999a) p.78

¹⁵⁶ Sepamla (1990)

¹⁵⁷ Mapanje (1993) pp.33-34

desk gives the white Americans 'free access to Johannesburg delights but/ she tosses us brown in transito cards to get/ Us into the lounge ... transparent doors lock'. The caution learned in paranoid Malawi proves a useful transferable skill as the poem ends: 'Is it prudent to phone Jaki at Skotaville?/ I rake up Ingoapele's recent arrest in Soweto.' Again, the system of oppression is different and yet its manifestations are easily recognisable to the Malawian. Mapanje is not the only Malawian poet to write about South Africa oppression as a way of writing about Malawian oppression. Frank Chipasula has a number of poems, including 'Soweto Child' and 'Nhazonia' that, from a generally pan-African position, discuss oppressions in South Africa and Malawi in terms of each other.¹⁵⁸

'The Return of the Rhinoceros'

Indeed, Mapanje makes the connection to South Africa further in the poem which lends its title to the section 'The Return of the Rhinoceros'. This poem characterises the dissident exile in a fabular role as rhinoceros, a figure he used in the final poem of his previous volume, *Chattering Wagtails*:

... But there was no
Masauko Chipembere, no Jomo Chikwakwa
This time to spur on these Ndirande

Grassroots beyond the fury of those
Rhinoceros horns of your Clocktower

Riots long ago.¹⁵⁹

In this context the exile as rhino quite clearly puns on the name of Henry Masauko Chipembere,¹⁶⁰ who wrote the letter inviting Banda back to Malawi to lead the nationalist struggle, yet who later fell out of his favour, leaving government during the 1964 Cabinet Crisis. Chipembere was the first to try to overthrow Banda militarily; he failed, however, and, in ill health went into exile in the USA, where he died. The returning rhinos can, as I suggest, be read more generally as all returning exiles who stood up to Banda.

Yet the fabular figure has another empirical source, for Mapanje explains in the notes that the poem is

¹⁵⁸ Chipasula (1991)

¹⁵⁹ 'The Deluge after Our Gweru Prison Dreams' in Mapanje (1993) pp.95-98, p.97 This refers to one rare upsurge of popular unrest against settlers, that took place in Limbe after a speech by Banda in 1958 and was vastly exaggerated by the colonial media the following day. Short (1974) pp.96-8

¹⁶⁰ Chipembere means 'rhino' in Chichewa.

influenced by South African Game Rangers who brought species of rhinoceros to Liwonde Game Reserve in Malawi to replenish its stock which had dwindled; the symbolic implication for the new Malawi after Banda and the new South Africa after apartheid is patent.¹⁶¹

The first verse of the poem uses the game reserve as a metonymy of the country as a whole, introducing the comparison with South Africa:

We all feared their return would be a matter of course
Those petrifying rhinoceros of Liwonde Game Park
Now safely tamed among the elephants and hippos
Of home, it's a shame it took so many innocent snouts
And horns, so much bloodshed of brother kill brother
Take task, shame it took so many sweating armpits
So many bloody festivals, the prayers, warm thoughts
These years, to realise that sooner or later we would
Have to restore this badly jaded Liwonde Game Park,
Giving back the precious rhinoceros' snouts and horns
We foreign exchanged for swollen Swiss Accounts or
Carelessly flung to the drug arenas of Californian exiles
Where other rhinos are bravely rested¹⁶² — are these new
South African game rangers the Mandela syndrome
Once trusted? May their precious gestures multiply.

The signifiers in the poem are often ambiguous, so that the parallel discourses of illegal poaching and killing of innocent victims for material gain and the counter-discourse of restoration, conservation, regeneration and giving back can refer as easily to the poet's vision of Malawi in transition as to its metonymy, Liwonde Game Park. In the light of the pluralisation of party politics and the media, the last line's reference to multiplication can be read in my mind not only as the hopeful multiplication of an endangered species, but also as an allegory of the general multiplications that spring from a move towards multi-party democracy. The syntactical ambiguity of the last question, especially 'the Mandela syndrome/ Once trusted?' is rather baffling, and evokes Mapanje's earlier style of cryptic riddling. 'Syndrome' of course implies disorder or illness, and 'once trusted' similarly has a warning note about it to which the final blessing might be a gesture of hopeful willing.

Mapanje again sets out his strong views on justice in the final lines of the poem, for referring to the literal 'old guards' he warns:

... They too will attempt
To desperately remind new alliances and as the world
Has short memory of our funereal eyes irked by the end-
less wakes our guards have hatched, won't they chime:
'In the name of truces, don't take us to courts'? Watch.

¹⁶¹ Mapanje (1999a) p.78

¹⁶² This is another strong allusion to Chipembere who died in California.

The determination not to see an amnesic amnesty is stated yet again here by the poet, for it is especially in his time in prison that he has come to value the role of memory. Yet as he reiterates on several occasions, 'the rule of law must take its course *without malice or vengeance*',¹⁶³ for otherwise reconciliation is not possible.

Just as the figure of the rhino and Milimbo Lagoon resonates across the volumes of poetry, various titles in *Skipping Without Ropes* strongly echo those from *Of Chameleons and Gods* and *Chattering Wagtails*. In the majority of cases the reference is notably less cryptic. It is almost as if the title from the first volume is a riddle posed, and the title from the most recent is an answer. There are many examples:

The Hounds in Puddles (*Of Chameleons*)
Hyenas Playing Political Prisoners (*Skipping*)

From Florrie Abraham Witness, December 1972 (*Of Chameleons*)
Just Another Jehovah's Witness (*Skipping*)¹⁶⁴

On His Royal Blindness Paramount Chief Kwangwala (*Of Chameleons*)
On His Life Excellency's House Arrest (*Skipping*)

The New Platform Dances (*Of Chameleons*)
The New Rebels at Zalewa Highway Bridge (*Skipping*)

This sense of change in Mapanje's voice is conveyed in these pairings; it is difficult to define except to say that the language is less cryptic, yet still retains its allegorical style. One does indeed get the sense that Mapanje has partly moved on from the role as 'hedging vociferous chameleon' required of him under censorship. Above all, there has been a thematic shift in his poetry, for example in his explorations of a new subjectivity as exile re-visiting home, and as a repository of the memory of oppression to counter the urge to forget, repress and move on.

In an article on the changing role of the writer in Africa, Mapanje sets out his vision of the writer's function in society, which coincides with my discussion of his poetry:

In the case of Malawi, the immediate role of the writer must be to continue to become the memory of the nation. The writer, the musician and the painter must sing the song of reparation of the names of those heroes and heroines that our despotic regime has obliterated from our history.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Mapanje (1995b) p.87 italics in original

¹⁶⁴ Jehova's Witnesses were banned from Malawi by Banda, and even reference to them was dangerous.

¹⁶⁵ Mapanje (1997b) p.230

He is careful about not sounding too prescriptive for this would be 'unbearable in a world which is striving to become democratic'. However he turns to the line from the poem 'Somehow we survive' by the South African poet, Dennis Brutus, to make a plea about the tone of new writing which seeks to rehabilitate past suffering. Citing the 'delicate line', '*somehow tenderness survives*', Mapanje adds that it is his hope that

the cultural and other guises of chaos brought about by colonialism in its numerous manifestations, African dictatorships and apartheid in their abundant semblances, can be repaired, in part, by the writer's tender mode of expression because, in the new dispensation, we cannot afford anything less: somehow the writer's tenderness or sensibility must be allowed to blossom unencumbered.¹⁶⁶

Compassionate and elegiac lines such as those addressed to the woman in 'Nipping her Pumpkin Leaves' or those dedicated to his fellow writer, exile and returnee, David Rubadiri, as they recreate a relationship of belonging in their long-missed home environment, are strong testament to his views:

... Today we've deserted
The salty waters of Europe for the lap-lapping
Breakers of this lake, we've come back home
For the curative waters to cleanse the hurt of
These three decades of despotic desires; we've
Come back home to watch fisheagles swoop
Down and nestle on baobab tree branches as
Cape Maclear fishermen haul ashore twine
Laden with prime *kampango* and *chambo*.¹⁶⁷

While Rubadiri has stayed to become the university's Vice-Chancellor, the homecoming for Mapanje was temporary, and he has returned to live in Yorkshire.

vii. Conclusion: transition and censorship laws

To say that censorship can be a stimulus to writers to think allegorically, is not to minimise the humiliation and contaminating influences it forces upon them, and not one writer I have come across expresses any nostalgia for this repressive mechanism. Both Gordimer and Mapanje have had to redefine their subjectivity as they emerge from a culture of censorship. Brink uses a Hegelian model of lordship and bondage to set out the problem for oppositional writers in transition:

The very openness of this space can be frightening, because it is so indefinite, so undefined. There can be something very reassuring about knowing your enemy very well ... he is visible,

¹⁶⁶ Mapanje (1997b) p.231

¹⁶⁷ From 'The Fisheagles of Cape Maclear' in Mapanje (1999a) p.68

circumscribed, present, known. How disturbingly intimate the relationship between the oppressed and the oppressor, the self and the other. And when that other falls away, or begins to disintegrate and become diffuse, opaque, amorphous, inchoate, one is threatened, suddenly, by the discovery of a loss of something that has become indispensable to one's definition of oneself ... A literature of opposition now becomes a questioning of the *self*.¹⁶⁸

Gordimer's various characters each strive towards a new self as Vera even states at the end of the penultimate chapter: 'Everyone ends up moving alone towards the self.'¹⁶⁹ A major motif is of shedding the 'baggage' of her past, including her husband, ending in a position of solitude, her 'breath scrolling out, a signature before her'.¹⁷⁰ A signature is of course a unique mark of selfhood, often verifying and signalling the end of a document. Gordimer thus almost metafictionally 'signs off', marking an end that coincides with her definition as an anti-apartheid writer, for her role changes from this point forward. As suggested, her subsequent novels are less concerned with *realpolitik* than they are with the conflicts and possibilities of new configurations of human relationships.

Mapanje's work, however, is still very much defined by the memory of his experience as a dissident. As mentioned, much of his third volume of poetry is still engaged with his detention, exile, the arrest of Banda, the role of memory and the need for justice. This is unsurprising considering the extent to which the regime he opposed invaded his life in comparison perhaps with Gordimer. His energies are thus still focused on calling for justice, abolishing censorship and highlighting the situation of subjects of other totalitarian regimes, for as he suggests 'once detained, always detained',¹⁷¹ hinting at the trauma that an ex-detainee lives with. I suggest that he has changed his style of writing, writing more openly and less cryptically, yet his retention of an allegorical style derived from oral culture is significant; however apt and appropriate allegoric discourses of riddle, proverb and fable may have been in writing under oppressive circumstances, their value in poetry cannot be subsumed by their function of political concealment. It has been the inevitable tendency of much literary criticism of Malawian writing to equate the development of complex methods of conceptualisation rooted in oral culture with writing under Banda without envisioning a role for such indigenous modes beyond politically motivated writing.¹⁷² If the role of art is to represent our everyday world in re-ordered, revised, defamiliarised ways, which are simultaneously

¹⁶⁸ Brink (1996) p.200

¹⁶⁹ Gordimer (1994) p.306

¹⁷⁰ Gordimer (1994) p.324

¹⁷¹ Mapanje (1994) p.57

¹⁷² Even the short extract including Mapanje's own reference to riddles' provision of 'sanity' points to a political sub-text at this point in his criticism.

aesthetically pleasing, and often challenging, metaphoric discourses, in dialogue with themselves and with empirical referents, and incorporating riddle, proverb and fable, are surely well-suited literary tools. This may especially be the case for writers like Mapanje, keen to rehabilitate, even in translation, previously suppressed linguistic cultures, each with their own characteristic forms and structures, that were previously suppressed in favour of the dominant language of the regime. In 1989 Angela Smith stated that in Mapanje's poetry '[i]ndirection and metaphor are not decorative but essential';¹⁷³ transition literature such as that by Mapanje and that of Chimombo discussed in the next chapter is retaining and reinventing the use of metaphor and allegory, though happily this is for creative expression's sake, not out of necessity. At least for now.

One test of a government's trust in freedom of expression would be the repeal of censorship laws.

However, de Lange writes in 1997 that:

One would imagine that the censorship rules of apartheid South Africa would be among the first of the old regime's edifices to be dismantled. Surprisingly the censor's centrepiece, the Publications Act, is still not repealed and the proposed new legislation will preserve the Publications Act in certain essentials.¹⁷⁴

However, three so-called 'political' sections were repealed before the 1994 elections: those on ridicule, race relations and state security. A new system of 'classification' rather than 'censorship' was brought in as a bill in 1995 as a result of a Task Group headed by Chief Buthelezi. De Lange carefully unpicks this bill, exposing many loopholes that could be exploited and noting that interestingly three out of twelve of the members of the task group were central figures in administering the 1963 Publications Act including two who had held the position of chair. The task group set out a positive-sounding exemption of art and science publications:

The XX or X18 classification shall not apply to a *bona-fide* technical or professional, educational, scientific, literary or artistic publication, or any part of a publication which judged within the context of the publication is of such a nature.¹⁷⁵

The term 'bona-fide' remains undefined in the bill, its vagueness just one such loophole. As de Lange recalls, when the first censorship law came into place in 1963, writers protested that literature would be adversely affected, '[t]he legislators responsible for the law responded that *good* writers had nothing to

¹⁷³ Smith (1989) p.104

¹⁷⁴ de Lange (1997) p.155

¹⁷⁵ Cited in de Lange (1997) p.164

fear'.¹⁷⁶ Much of the justification for retaining a revised version of the old publications act comes as a response to the increased availability of pornography, so that 'public debate thus far revolves around the subject of pornography. The political ramifications of a new censorship law are hardly being discussed.'¹⁷⁷ It is the issue of pornography that is also breathing life into Malawi's Censorship Board.

The role and function of censorship in Malawi since transition is similarly contested. The very fact that I was able to see the minutes of past board meetings is of course a very positive effect of the political transition to multi-party democracy and would have been unthinkable ten years ago. Yet the 1968 Censorship and Control of Entertainments Act, by which Banda operated, is still in place, and could technically still be enforced at any time. As Edge Kanyongolo, a campaigner against any censorship and himself a Mikuyu ex-detainee, states:

The restrictive laws in question are retained deliberately because they allow the government to monopolise social, economic and political discourse by using the law to criminalise dissent. This is particularly possible because the laws that remain unrepealed are those which, due to the vagueness of their criteria of prohibited self-expression, permit decision-makers enormous discretion in defining that which is impermissible.

The laws in question include the following: the Censorship and Control of Entertainments Act under which publications and other items may still be banned for being 'undesirable'; the Penal Code under which publications may be banned for being contrary to 'public interest' ... The Education Act which empowers a government Minister to prohibit the use of any literature in schools which he or she considers to be 'unsuitable'.

This euphemistic vagueness of the terminology is of course reminiscent of the term 'bona-fide' in South Africa's new law. A further three acts are cited, all of which are inconsistent with the constitutional guarantee of human rights, yet Kanyongolo contends that most Malawians would be 'too overwhelmed by authority to challenge the actions of law enforcement officials'.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, Steve Chimombo reports that 'Freedom of speech has prevailed, although there have been rumblings from the second head of state that dictatorial laws have not been repealed so he can always use them.'¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ de Lange (1997) p.164 original emphasis

¹⁷⁷ de Lange (1997) p.166

¹⁷⁸ Kanyongolo (1998) p.13

¹⁷⁹ Chimombo (1999) p.12 See also the Article 19 (1999) report on freedom of expression in Malawi which lists continuing restrictions.

There is, however, a process underway to modify the Act's details, and I was allowed to see the recommendations of a consultative workshop run to propose some of these revisions. The recommendations, though an improvement on the previous situation, do not make comfortable reading. They clearly demonstrate a dangerous trend which partly goes to show how difficult it is to unlearn a culture of censorship. Although the Chief Censor assured me the main target of his institution was now pornography, the reports from the following excerpts from consultative workshops¹⁸⁰ suggest a strong note of caution in celebrating the end of censorship. All the consultative groups defend censorship, giving different reasons:

CENSORSHIP — DO WE NEED IT OR NOT?
YES WE NEED IT

REASONS:
It acts as a guide in our social cultural behaviours.

It acts as a control measure against outside influences which are not acceptable or are undesirable

It will give Malawi a National Identity...

CENSORING AND CREATIVE WRITING

Creative Literature by local scholars should be encouraged. Books should be classified according to age.

Articles critical to the Government should be banned.

Chimombo questions the whole consultative process on a number of points, including the criteria for selecting participants, the leading questions posed for discussion by a Board which is seeking a *raison d'être* after transition, and the fact that 'the audience was staying at the venues at the board's expense'.¹⁸¹ I further asked the Chief Censor how the Board imagined being able to control what people download over that other 1990s phenomenon, the internet, to which he was at a bit of a loss to respond and mentioned something about 'looking into this problem'.

¹⁸⁰ From GTZ (1998), no page numbers, see Appendix I p.233 for fuller text.

¹⁸¹ Chimombo (1999) p.10

What Ampie Coetzee writes with reference to South Africa has strong relevance to Malawi, as this discussion illustrates, showing that transition cannot mean only an inversion in positions, but a complete rethinking of the structures of power, of which an institution of surveillance is just one example:

Those pernicious methods of control still have a determining influence on the thinking of the present. No new law in this regard can be totally different from the old unless, of course, all forms of censorship are totally abolished. But in a country where censorship has been a powerful discourse since colonialism, new statements within this discourse remain part of it even if the intention may be to 'democratise' control. This is in itself a contradiction because democratisation should be the opposite to enforced control.¹⁸²

As in South Africa there are hints in the excerpts from Malawi's consultative workshops at a move to turn from a discourse of 'censorship' to one of 'classification' which, however, continues a 'bureaucratisation of creativity'.¹⁸³ To some it marks a hope-filled break from the system used by the previous regime, but to others the outlook is not so optimistic for in Christopher Merrett's words 'we should be confident about the power of rational argument and the effectiveness of criminal law in a democratic society'.¹⁸⁴ It is a view I share with him, Ampie Coetzee, Margreet de Lange and many others. A relevant ideal is expressed in another line from Milan Kundera's *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 'We should not try to replace one type of power with another, we should repudiate every *principle* of power and repudiate it everywhere.'¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Ampie Coetzee in de Lange (1997) p.xii

¹⁸³ Ampie Coetzee in de Lange (1997) p.xii

¹⁸⁴ Merrett (1995) p.213

¹⁸⁵ Kundera (1978) p.107

CHAPTER 2

The Carnivalesque in Transition

[A]ll the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities.
*Mikhail Bakhtin*¹

i. Bakhtin's carnivalesque and political transition

A number of critics have referred to the relevance of Bakhtin's theories of carnival, encapsulated in the epigraph, to the period of transition between systems of government.² Johan van Wyk, for example notes: 'The inversion which happens when people take control of the state's functions, and the visibility of the people in mass gatherings on the street evokes the images of carnival.'³ Bakhtin's theories define the carnivalesque as an idiom of change, renewal and suspended power, in which the people emerge as a threat to authority, creating the *enactment of* and thus *potential for* real political change:

The laws, prohibitions and restrictions that determine the structure and order of ordinary, that is noncarnival, life are suspended during carnival: what is suspended first of all is hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety and etiquette connected with it — that is everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality among people ... Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid.⁴

Similarly, in *How Societies Remember*, Paul Connerton makes a clear correlation between political transition and the carnivalesque:

Regicide was a ritual revocation, sartorial licence was a carnival liberation. In both types of action we see people trying to mark out the boundaries of a radical beginning; and in neither case is that beginning, that new image of society's continuity, even thinkable without its element of recollection.⁵

However, in Bakhtin's discussion of carnival, given power structures are reasserted after the moment of carnival passes, and differ somewhat from the moments of political transition under discussion, where power inversions are more permanent, even if more limited than originally envisioned.

¹ Bakhtin (1984a) p.11

² Veit-Wild (1997); van Wyk (1997); Pechey (1989)

³ van Wyk (1997)

⁴ Bakhtin (1984b) pp.122-3

⁵ Connerton (1989) p.13

The carnival idiom reflects the discursive mood in the interim period between regimes in both South Africa and Malawi, where *progressive* possibilities and promises were endless, and inversely and *regressively*, where the collapse of a regime leads to a psychological 'resurgence of repressed instincts', as van Wyk puts it:

The breakdown of the old order is accompanied by a resurgence of repressed instincts embodied in images of violent death, birth and sexuality. This resurgence of the repressed in turn implies regression: a loss to some extent of the reality principle (so that the form of this literature is surrealism, the dream, mysticism and images of infantile omnipotence). Death and rebirth, the apocalyptic and the carnivalesque combine.⁶

Julia Kristeva, who was instrumental in introducing Bakhtin to Western audiences, gives a similarly psychoanalytic inflection to carnival:

The carnival first exteriorizes the structure of the reflective literary productivity, then inevitably brings to light this structure's underlying unconscious: sexuality and death. Out of the dialogue that is established between them, the structural dyads of carnival appear: high and low, birth and agony, food and excrement, praise and curses, laughter and tears.⁷

Bakhtin's definition of such 'profanation', or 'carnivalistic blasphemies' are features of the category he calls the 'grotesque', 'a whole system of carnivalistic debasings and bringings down to earth, carnivalistic obscenities linked with the reproductive power of the earth and the body, carnivalistic parodies on sacred texts and sayings, etc'.⁸ The resultant characteristics are, in Terry Eagleton's words, 'a certain pleasurable grossness, a plebeian crudity, knockabout iconoclasm and orgiastic delight'.⁹ The texts discussed all display elements of these characteristics and enact a 'profanation' in various forms, as will be demonstrated with reference to the grotesque body in transition and the desacrilisation of sacred texts, both biblical and nationalist.

Though he discusses carnival largely with reference to Rabelais and Dostoevsky, that is with reference to French medieval religious authority and Russian tsarist power, Bakhtin's ideas have in part found resonance in postcolonial settings in which the population resists analogous totalitarian political and religious structures, and where the racialised body has always been an important signifier of hierarchy.¹⁰

⁶ van Wyk (1997) unpagged.

⁷ Moi (1986) p.49

⁸ Bakhtin (1984b) pp.123

⁹ Eagleton (1989) p.178

¹⁰ See for example Veit-Wild (1997); Pechey (1998); Mbembe (1992); Cooper (1996) p.212

His concepts appear especially relevant to the liminal moment of suspension, incompleteness and renewal, which the political transitions in Malawi and South Africa represent:

[carnival] marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.¹¹

The body is itself referred to as incomplete and open, unconstrained by the conventional boundaries of subjectivity, often figuring signs of both birth and death. This includes the view of the body as only a part of a greater cycle of birth and renewal, as Bakhtin notes: 'death brings nothing to an end, for it does not concern the ancestral body, which is renewed in the next generation'.¹² This idea is usually criticized for its apparent lack of concern for individual death and suffering, yet the broader sense of his concept is relevant to the idea of a dying regime and the birth of a new dispensation, which looks beyond the birth and death of individual bodies and casts subsequent political dispensations in ancestral relationship to one another.

The figure of the open carnival body manifesting its latent desires creates an emphasis on the grotesque, which includes the perception of the body punctured by orifices and punctuated by protuberances, subject to the flow of various kinds of fluids, gas and solid matter. The grotesque body figures in transition literature as an abject body, as Kristeva defines it, which will be discussed in relation to Bakhtin's grotesque, as elements of the abject challenge the stabilisation or 'ossification' of the subject in transition. It invokes responses of horror because it is both of the subject and not of it. Excrement, mucous, farts and so on are all of the body, yet the subject learns to repel and repress them to sanitise its body. The abject therefore disturbs clear demarcations of boundaries, its liminality, as both 'of' and 'not of', defining threat. One might speculate about the official desire to sanitise and disinfect the past in similar terms, for the abject symptoms in the past that continue to infect the present must be repelled by the incumbent body politic in its redefinition of subjectivity.

Some critics will caution against the all-too-easy transfer of Bakhtin's ideas from the popular-festive culture he discusses in the Middle Ages to the novel form, in particular Dostoevsky's novels. However, Bakhtin scholars such as Simon Dentith argue for a broader conception of the 'carnivalesque':

¹¹ Bakhtin (1984a) p.10

¹² Bakhtin (1984a) p.322

it is possible to go further than this, and talk of carnivalized writing, that is, writing that has taken the carnival spirit into itself and thus reproduces, within its own structures and by its own practice, the characteristic inversions, parodies and discrownings of carnival proper.¹³

The implication here is that the medium of writing allows for the broader conception of Bakhtin's ideas away from the actual street processions of 'carnival proper'. In fact Dentith appears to be reformulating what Bakhtin himself urges when he moves away from the historical specificity of Rabelais to the concept of the 'carnivalization of literature':

As a form [carnival] is very complex and varied, giving rise, on a general carnivalistic base, to diverse variants and nuances depending upon the epoch, the people, the individual festivity. Carnival has worked out an entire language of symbolic concretely sensuous forms — from large and complex mass actions to individualistic carnivalistic gestures ... it is amenable to a certain transposition into a language of artistic images that has something in common with its concretely sensuous nature.¹⁴

He defines this transposition of the figures of 'carnival proper' into language as the 'carnivalization of literature'. Language is central to ideological re-imaginings, and it is thus in and through language that carnival, with its inherent licence to play, invert and parody, manifests itself in various forms in transition literature. Challenges to linguistic structures and practices are concentrated at a time of real political change: writers re-accentuate language in ways that parody and regenerate recognised discourses, creating dialogue between past and present. A whole new discursive vocabulary forms, and formerly suppressed languages re-emerge and are given the status of equal official recognition. Ultimately, language is freed from state censorship, signifying the state's loss of legitimacy, and the inversion of the authority of the popular word over the state word.

This chapter explores the different forms in which the carnivalesque functions as an idiom in transition literature, providing specific symbols, figurations, moods, structures and approaches to language, that correlate interestingly with Bakhtinian tropes of carnival. I begin by discussing Steve Chimombo's *Forest Creatures* trilogy, which satirises the events of transition in a long poem that demonstrates influences from oral culture in its structure and fabular characterisation. Yet it playfully narrates an inversion of power in the style of 'knockabout iconoclasm', using an innovative brokerage of contemporary language and events, invoking carnival in its plot and symbolisms of decrownings and the grotesque, as well as in its linguistic techniques. Though it is written by an internationally published and

¹³ Dentith (1995) p.65

¹⁴ Bakhtin (1984b) pp.122

acclaimed writer, its publication format, as a low-budget self-published pamphlet, places it in the sphere of popular literature, and thus enacts the carnivalesque tenet of disrupting distinctions between high and low, between sacred and profane. Carnival can thus be not only the subject, but also the means of representation in a text. The postapartheid poetry I discuss creates an often volatile carnivalisation of language, and its apocalyptic depictions of a postapartheid abject, which has its correlations with the Bakhtinian sense of the grotesque that emerges from carnival, as van Wyk suggests in his reference to a preoccupation with images of birth, death and sexuality. The chapter closes with a discussion of the many overtly carnivalesque features of Zakes Mda's novel *Ways of Dying*, which are linked to a discussion of magic realism and the challenges which are made in these related modes to notions of singular perspectives and subjectivities, completion, exaggeration, closed bodies, fixed truth and reality.

ii. Steve Chimombo's *Forest Creatures*

Steve Chimombo has, like Jack Mapanje, always demonstrated a commitment to utilising indigenous linguistic forms and reworking local mythology, including fabular creatures. Although some critics maintain that he has steered clear of resistance politics in the Banda era,¹⁵ others have persuasively identified politically subversive sub-texts in Chimombo's works.¹⁶ The choice of his subject-matter, as well as its abstruse working, indicate at least the *effects* of writing in oppressive circumstances. The Mbona legend which he dramatised in *The Rainmaker*¹⁷ and which is partially incorporated in the *Forest Creatures* trilogy, enacts power struggle, and the question of succession. It is of course significant that transition and succession are such early preoccupations of Chimombo's, anticipating his full engagement with them when they were politically realised. Not surprisingly, the political events of 1992-94 are in his literary interpretations, similarly informed by these mythical structures, though the easing of censorship laws allowed a far closer reference to actual events, with less emphasis on mythical abstraction.¹⁸

The *Forest Creatures* trilogy, *The Referendum of the Forest Creatures*¹⁹ and its sequels, *The Return of the Forest Creatures*²⁰ and *The Elections of the Forest Creatures*,²¹ were, up until 2000, when he self-published a

¹⁵ This is implied in Nazombe (1995) p.152

¹⁶ Roscoe and Msiska (1992), Msiska (1995)

¹⁷ Chimombo (1978)

¹⁸ See Nazombe (1996) and Nazombe cited in Mphande (1996) 'you have thinly veiled animal stories through which you can see commentaries on the current political situation. So there is a loosening up of style. It is not as grouty [*sic*] as it used to be'. p.99

¹⁹ Chimombo (1993)

²⁰ Chimombo (1994a)

novel, *The Wrath of Napolo*,²² Chimombo's main engagements with political change, though he has published poems honouring forgotten heroes²³ or satirising the decline in economic standards²⁴ by which the changes also impact on everyday lives. *The Referendum of the Forest Creatures*, on which I focus, was published in the same year as the referendum, and therefore before the election. In its introduction Chimombo writes: 'surrounded by other creatures with a penchant for demonstrating their negative sides turned my worship of the characters to another mode of depicting them: the satirical'.²⁵ The trilogy is a political satire, conceived of as fable drawn from Chewa folklore. Interestingly, Kristeva identifies fable, together with 'folk games' and 'anecdotes', as one of the locations of carnival²⁶ and Bakhtin himself refers to parody as 'the creation of a decrowning double', invoking its carnivalesque qualities,²⁷ deeply implicating the style of the *Forest Creatures* trilogy in the carnivalesque. The three independent, yet sequential narrative poems are each between twenty and thirty pages long, framed by a formulaic opening in *The Referendum of the Forest Creatures*, and a corresponding closing in *The Election of the Forest Creatures*, indicating the voice of a customary story-teller. The prologue introduces the storyteller 'Kalilombe',²⁸ whose tongue self-confessedly 'used to sing/ In impenetrable verbal thickets'.²⁹ However, the current setting is one of greater ease and relaxation, as Kalilombe may sing 'Garlanded by soft stardust/ And loops of translucent rain drops', anticipating a tale of recovery and lucidity.

The mythic setting, 'the olden days of ancient Maravi',³⁰ creates a temporal dislocation from contemporary events and the forest creatures reside in the mythical forest of Nyakalambo, an edenic pre-human idyll. The story tells of the despotic rule of the lion, with his concubine and her nephew, a recognisable figuration in Banda's later rule,³¹ particularly as one of Banda's praise names was *Mkango*, the Lion. The introductory section of *The Referendum of the Forest Creatures*, 'The Forest Republic', gives a potted history of the demented lion's regime, focusing on its oppression, featuring characters such as *ndorokha*

²¹ Chimombo (1994b)

²² Chimombo (2000)

²³ For example 'Pyagusi' in Chimombo (1995), about James Sangala, the founder of the Nyasaland African Congress, which became the Malawi Congress Party.

²⁴ For example 'The Politics of Potholes' in Chimombo (1997)

²⁵ Chimombo (1993) p.viii

²⁶ Moi (1986) p.48

²⁷ Bakhtin (1984b) p.127

²⁸ A large species of chameleon, distinguished by her self-sacrificial act of throwing herself from a sacred tree to create new life — a figure Chimombo frequently identifies with to distinguish himself from 'chameleon'.

²⁹ Chimombo (1993) p.1

³⁰ Chimombo (1993) p.2

³¹ In Banda's latter years, he was widely regarded as being controlled by 'Mama' Kadzamira and her influential politician businessman uncle, John Tembo.

zombies and fat, privileged *nalimvimi* insects, who figure as contrasting subjects of the regime. The latter feed off death, figuring corruption as consumption of the body of the people:

The *nalimvimi* insect grew fat, too,
Feeding on corpses as he supervised
One funeral after another burial.³²

Death feeds and therefore regenerates in a grotesque, causal relationship. In the last verse, it is the songs of *kalilombes* and chameleons all singing in unison, listing an overload of misdemeanours, which force the lion to declare a referendum.

The narrative is interrupted by four laments, just as folk-tale is, in performance, often interspersed with song, focusing on four sites of oppression: the prisons, the roads (where dissidents were 'accidentalised'), the rivers (where dissidents were thrown to crocodiles) and, in a comment on the pervasiveness of oppression, in everyday life. It continues to detail the mechanisms of control such as the enforced carrying of party cards, 'Even pregnant mothers had to buy for the unborn',³³ a new law which became another absurd idiom of oppression and was popularly mocked. Other examples include the activities of 'the dreaded red-headed ants of old', evoking the red-shirted Malawi Young Pioneers, the mass regional repatriation to disable northerners' influence by restricting them to their underdeveloped region, and finally, the infiltrating surveillance of spies, which impeded the development of trust and solidarity. This last example is depicted in a localised setting, with a vivid image of the unmasking of duplicity:

He chattered too much at beer parties ... until
Someone asked a very pointed question:
"Who is that on the other side of you?
Each time I take a sip of the beer

And want to pass the calabash to you
I see another person on the other side... "³⁴

The spy is then expelled from the group for 'bringing shadows even to a party.' It shows the regime masquerading here, rather than its subjects, inverting the Bakhtinian concept of carnival. This is an idea which will be explored further below.

³² Chimombo (1993) p.3

³³ Chimombo (1993) p.10

³⁴ Chimombo (1993) p.10

A number of sections follow, whose subtitles, as Mpalive Msiska notes, 'begin to read like newspaper headlines',³⁵ for example 'A Referendum is Announced', 'A State Banquet', 'A Crop-Inspection Tour'. Msiska's evaluation criticises a loss of 'metaphorical density' and multireferentiality, yet I feel the subtitles playfully enact the increasing expositional role of the independent press they describe, as will be discussed in the following chapter, and thus gesture towards the growing dominance of popular voices and their inversion of the monologue of power that came from the single state newspaper. The enactment of a popular voice is of course a carnivalesque gesture in itself. The first volume closes with a return to a questioning, riddling mode not unlike that adopted in Mapanje's 'Beginning Where We Left Off', which speaks in parables:

Jerk me out of my stupor, my lethargy,
 Taking the easy way out, refusing to think.
 The Tsokonombwe went on a world tour
 Just by hopping from here to there and there.
 It's all a matter of vantage or perspective.
 Those who want to see the telescopic eyes
 Of a snail must learn to be patient.³⁶

This results in a conclusion which poses a conundrum, thus suspending closure, with the effect of interpellating an active thinking, questioning audience.

There is a remarkable variety of discourses in the poem, which in the eyes of formal criticism may be considered uneven and unintegrated, yet could also be described as displaying the lively exuberance, earthiness and brokerage of a popular, carnivalesque aesthetic, or 'heteroglossia', to use Bakhtin's own term. Heteroglossia, he writes:

represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth, all given a bodily form.³⁷

Although this term refers to the different kinds of voices that operate in texts, from sociolects, dialects to discourses or speech genres, the implication on further reading is that since languages are socially unequal, they compete within the text in a dialogic relationship. Subordinated, 'unofficial' languages seek to subvert the control that privileged, 'official' languages hold. In *The Referendum of the Forest Creatures* we find the co-existence of a vast range of languages, each representing a different set of values. Alongside proverbial

³⁵ Msiska (1995) p.97

³⁶ Chimombo (1993) p.32

³⁷ Bakhtin (1981) p.291

language, one finds colloquialisms, legal terminology, biblical and Shakespearean English, tabloid sensationalism, song lyric, echoes of T.S. Eliot in the 'Lament of the Living', and recycling of the rhetoric of Banda supporters, all contributing to an exciting, if at times chaotic and starkly juxtaposed cacophony of active voices that disrupt official, monologic language and instead evoke the carnivalesque.

I focus on those sections that depict carnivalesque scenes most overtly though, as suggested, language is carnivalised throughout the poem. These scenes revel in the novelty of 'decrowning' and the depiction of Banda's performative rituals of power, which he enacted increasingly frequently during the referendum campaign. Performance sites include a banquet, a crop inspection and a ceremonious gift reception, the depictions of which all mercilessly mock the various kinds of followers of Banda and their motives. In 'The Crop-Inspection Tour' the lion swishes his tail, evoking Banda's flywhisk, as he is accompanied by dancing wasps, whose 'protruding hips shuddered that way/ And the waists flew into space this way',³⁸ finding an ingenious parallel in the animal kingdom for the *mlamba* praise dancers. The sexual dialogue of this ceremony is thus foregrounded by Chimombo in the figure of the gendered thin-waisted, large-hipped wasp, debasing the leader by invoking his bodily functions, and so mocking his authority.

In 'The Gift-Giving Ceremony', *Ng'ona*, the crocodile, presents a barrel of tears, subverting a show of loyalty with witty wordplay, converting the sinister associations in Malawi with crocodiles, to whom political prisoners were allegedly fed, with the insubstantiality of the gift of 'crocodile tears' he produces. Death is trivialised, and instead tears are proffered to provoke laughter. The presentation of gifts configures a version of ritual crowning, which in the carnival mode constitutes 'the primary carnivalistic act' according to Bakhtin, for '[c]rowning already contains the idea of immanent decrowning: it is ambivalent from the very start'.³⁹ Chimombo's depiction of the demise of the lion-king and the rise of the popular leader, Finye, leads the poem into just that narrative. Again Bakhtin is remarkably pertinent: 'precisely in this ritual of decrowning does there emerge with special clarity the carnival pathos of shifts and renewals, the image of constructive death.'⁴⁰ In the descent into a carnivalesque preoccupation with baseness and bodily functions, the polecat offers up some bottled fart gas:

³⁸ Chimombo (1993) p.18

³⁹ Bakhtin (1984b) p.124

⁴⁰ Bakhtin (1984b) p.125

Kanyimbi, that industrious gas manufacturer,
 Brought a whole bottlefull [*sic*] of homemade scent ...
 The master of ceremonies took a whiff
 And nearly passed out with ecstasy

However, dung beetle wins the most gratitude with his more substantial offering, of a 'sizable [*sic*] shit', 'Verily, verily, I say unto you all/ This is the biggest gift of the lot'.⁴¹

The earthy humour, subverting officialdom's humourlessness, and mocking the sycophants with crude relish, comes to a head in 'The Contest' in which participants compete to dissolve the shit by urinating on it. Competitors variously lift their legs to it, fly around it, sending 'yellowish greenish jets', while the tigresses pee picturesquely, 'streams curved in mid-air/ Making colourful rainbows in transit' with the result that the shit peels off 'revealing lumps of pressurised turds'.⁴² One way to interpret this image is as the sum of the suppressed rotten excess of the ruling regime, whose exfoliation is revealing, as suggested. Its dissolution in a game, by grotesquely beautiful 'rainbows in transit', prepares the government for a new image before the referendum. The sacred symbol of the rainbow, referring to the promise of the arc of the covenant and circulated even more widely in South Africa in the symbol of the 'rainbow nation', is made profane in the extreme here in its depiction as a jet of urine emanating from a tigress. Texts of both national and religious significance are thus desacrilised. Again, it is the carnival idiom which licences the display of the state's faeces in a ritual act of debasing and renewal.

The preoccupation with satire and desacrilisation, with the body, the grotesque and with consumption and expellation debases representations of power. In fact Chimombo seems to be fulfilling the role of the clown, as defined by Bakhtin, one of whose main attributes was 'the transfer of very high ceremonial gesture or ritual to the material sphere'.⁴³ Achille Mbembe, however, offers a re-reading of Bakhtin in the African postcolony in which the leader *and* the oppressed people complicitly and hegemonically revel in the overtly material, obscene and grotesque. He writes:

Bakhtin claims that the grotesque and the obscene are above all the province of ordinary people (*la plébe*) ... Though this view is not entirely invalid, we need to shift our perspective ... to uncover the use made of the grotesque and the obscene not just in ordinary people's lives but (1) in the timing and location of these occasions which state power organises to dramatise its own magnificence (2) in the actual materials used in the ceremonial displays through which it makes

⁴¹ Chimombo (1993) p.20

⁴² Chimombo (1993) p.21

⁴³ Bakhtin (1984a) p.20

manifest its majesty, and (3) the specific manner in which it offers these, as spectacles, for its 'subjects' (*cibles*) to watch.⁴⁴

Mbembe notes, with illustrations from African dictatorships, how the symptomatic concern with the mouth, belly, phallus and anus in fact point to the ruling body as 'the principal locale of the idioms and the fantasies used in depicting power'.⁴⁵ This would suggest that *Referendum* is simply an allegory, rather than an inversion of power relations. In fact one of Mapanje's early poems suggests a similar location of carnival within power:

When this frothful carnival finally closes, brother
When your drumming veins dry, these very officers
Will burn the scripts of praises we sang to you
And shatter the calabashes you drank from.⁴⁶

The grotesque enactments of power's splendour is demonstrated in the contest, the gift-giving ceremony and the banquet, to which some are welcomed and grow corpulent whilst others are excluded. Pertinent in relation to Chimombo's dramatisations of 'magnificence' is a section in which Mbembe notes:

If ... it is the festivities and celebrations that are the vehicles *par excellence*, for giving expression to the *commandement* and for staging its displays of magnificence and prodigality, then the body in question is firstly a body that eats and drinks, and secondly a body that is open — in both ways ... The flow of shit which results from such a physique [appeals] to a people who can enjoy themselves with mockery and laughter, and, sometimes, even join in the feast.⁴⁷

Although the shit does not, in the contest, issue directly from the lion, it does allegorically in my interpretation, above, where it can be read as the sum of the regime's abject. In addition, the lion's hegemonic participation in the revelry is evident. In lines which reproduce, virtually *verbatim*, Banda's rhetorical style, he expresses his immense gratitude at the game of peeing on the dungball:

"Kwacha! Kwacha! Kwacha!⁴⁸
Bwanas and Donnas [*sic*], me and my lioness
Are very happy, very very happy indeed
At this demonstration of what unity can do... "⁴⁹

If power is the locale of the carnivalesque, a lack of a clear distinction between the rulers and ruled is central to Mbembe's reinterpretation of Bakhtin:

⁴⁴ Mbembe (1992) p.4

⁴⁵ Mbembe (1992) p.7

⁴⁶ Mapanje (1991) p.61

⁴⁷ Mbembe (1992) p.7

⁴⁸ Literally: 'dawn'. It is the independence rallying cry Banda continued to use throughout his rule.

⁴⁹ Chimombo (1993) p.22

Bakhtin's error was to attribute these practices to the dominated. But the production of the burlesque is not specific to them. The real inversion takes place when ... power in its own violent quest for grandeur makes vulgarity and wrongdoing its main mode of existence.⁵⁰

His argument is persuasive and offers an alternative reading for *The Referendum of the Forest Creatures*, whose focus in these scenes is on the enactment of power before its imminent decrowning. However, Mbembe's argument does not provide for the kind of agency that 'crowd power' provides historically, including the ability to effect change, for he suggests that 'the practices of those who command and of those who are assumed to obey are so entangled as to render them powerless'.⁵¹ It also does not acknowledge Bakhtin's own recognition that in some cases 'the state encroached upon festive life and turned it into a parade'.⁵² I will therefore, for the rest of this chapter, return to the Bakhtinian reading of carnival located in the popular, especially as the texts are concerned with the lives of ordinary people as they affect and are affected by the transition. In this Bakhtinian reading, *The Referendum of the Forest Creatures*, in mocking the rulers, is itself located outside of power, amongst the popular, taking pleasure in the decrowning, *not* revelling in power, as Mbembe's reading would suggest.

The great value of Chimombo's *Forest Creatures* trilogy is its immediacy to the popular, and his 'on the ground' engagement; his work was in effect autonomously self-published, by WASI publications, in a somewhat crude and rather roughly edited form, as the spelling errors testify. Yet importantly, it was available in an inexpensive format, each volume approximately only three times the price of a newspaper, therefore vastly more accessible to the local audience than an internationally published book or academic journal. Its more immediate participation in the transition and its availability to the people on the streets define not only the language, symbolism and plot of the poems as carnivalesque, but the social gesture of the text itself, as a carnivalesque interjection in the turmoil of transition. Chimombo demonstrates a kind of iconoclasm enacting what Kristeva suggests is inherent in carnival, for it 'challenges God, authority and social law; in so far as it is dialogical, it is rebellious'.⁵³

⁵⁰ Mbembe (1992) p.29

⁵¹ Mbembe (1992) p.29

⁵² Bakhtin (1984a) p.33

⁵³ Moi (1986) p.49

iii. Revelling and rebelling: postapartheid poetry

no reveller jollier than the worm
in columbus' boiling head
*Seitlhamo Motsapi*⁵⁴

While Chimombo challenges the God-like figure of Banda, poets such as Lesego Rampolokeng are deeply critical of the theological narrative of postapartheid South Africa. In his review of trends in South African poetry, Kelwyn Sole, writing in 1996, notes that poets are dealing with a curious dilemma, that often results in a double vision:

Since 1990 South Africans have lived in a society they know the rest of the world holds up as an example of how peace and concordance can be achieved between people with the most irreconcilable differences. Along with the pride that is felt in this is a knowledge that endemic violence, crime and distrust have not significantly abated around them. This phenomenon has caused a further dislocation of consciousness. A concomitant double vision therefore exists in the poetry: a need to analyze and try to come to terms with death and destruction, alongside an urge to keep faith in the promises and gains of the new society which is struggling toward birth.⁵⁵

All the poems discussed in this section share this double-vision, simultaneously using idioms of mourning and of celebration so that the relations between birth and death often create carnivalesque juxtapositions. Lesego Rampolokeng and Seitlhamo Motsapi are both relatively youthful, with less investment in the success of the anti-apartheid struggle than the 'veteran' poets such as Mongane Serote and are therefore freer from the need to justify their achievements.

The poems discussed below demonstrate a more oblique manifestation of the carnival than *The Referendum of the Forest Creatures*. They carnivalise language and mobilise an aesthetic that emphasises the oppositional, anarchic, grotesque and apocalyptic as idioms of incompleteness and becoming in popular literary culture, thus representing the carnivalesque more as a signifier than as a signified.⁵⁶ However, the assumption that all carnival laughter is cheerful and 'gay' will be questioned, indicating perhaps a more sardonic and cynical tenor to the parody involved.

⁵⁴ Motsapi (1997b) p.299

⁵⁵ Sole (1996) p.28

⁵⁶ Vice (1997) p.149

Lesego Rampolokeng

it's an arty-farty-party
 riding the back of genocide
 somewhere a head cracks a wise aside
 it's all a fart in the wind
 we leave behind
 & run and hide with pride
 at every stride
 in transition
 Lesego Rampolokeng⁵⁷

As the language in the extract from the poem 'In Transition' suggests, Lesego Rampolokeng's poetry is powerful and controversial, exciting opposing opinions about its value and quality. Flora Veit-Wild, for example, sees his poetry as 'new, exciting and liberating'. She continues, 'Rampolokeng very clearly uses a playful, parodic infiltration and reinterpretation of the master-language: a carnivalisation.'⁵⁸ Others, such as the poet Lionel Abrahams, refer to 'the over-exposed Rampolokeng whose undeniable wit and skills are not enough to offset the tedium produced by more than a page or two of his loud-voiced, wilfully offensive ranting'.⁵⁹

I focus on his most recent volume of written poetry *The Bavino Sermons*,⁶⁰ that collects the texts of some of his already established performance works, placing them alongside new poetry and fragments of prose. The pieces invariably express the ironies of a fractured postapartheid South Africa from the position of the underprivileged. Rampolokeng's urge to remain in the locale of Bakhtinian carnival is indicated in this title, where 'bavino' is a township term for 'everyman'.⁶¹ A curious play of meaning arises between the title's subject and the generic description given to the poems, as 'sermons', for a sermon usually connotes privileged, monologic speech associated with religious authority. Yet this is just the kind of discourse that Rampolokeng constantly subverts. The title thus could indicate an inverted privileging of the township 'everyman' voice, transferring to it the legitimacy and authority of a sermon, yet simultaneously parodying and undermining the very genre by which he is empowering the underprivileged voice. This kind of dissonance between carefully juxtaposed words is typical of Rampolokeng's style as he evokes a fractured and dissonant society.

⁵⁷ Rampolokeng, 'In Transition' in Hirson (1997) pp.290-292

⁵⁸ Veit-Wild (1997) p.562

⁵⁹ Abrahams (1998) p.94

⁶⁰ Rampolokeng (1999)

⁶¹ See back cover of *Bavino Sermons*

The term 'sermon' also conveys the orality of the pieces, a distinguishing feature which all critics comment on (including the critical Abrahams, above), not least as Rampolokeng often performs his pieces, sometimes with a backing band, sometimes without. Yet he refuses the titles 'dub' or 'performance' poet, rejecting the idea of labels, which have resonances of apartheid rule in South Africa.⁶² The fragments of voices range from Sotho orature to Jamaican dub, from American rap styles to Johannesburg township creole 'Isicamtho' or 'Tsotsitaal', which is itself a *mélange* of Xhosa, Zulu, Afrikaans and English. Indeed, on the question of language, and on the basis of the two languages he speaks, English and Isicamtho, Rampolokeng states 'so for me, English is an African language'.⁶³ The insistent internal rhythms, rhyming couplets and witty puns are prominent features of dub and rap, and pay sarcastic homage, in the views of both Sole and Veit-Wild,⁶⁴ to an English literary canon; Rampolokeng's own references seem to indicate this in the poem 'For the Oral':

it's got yeats on heat fat sweat keats bubbling to the beat
 rock the rhythm of this poem of the year shakespeare
 your bigotry begets my poetry
 it is lkj speaking in voices of the living & the dead
 it is checking it out muta style
 it is rasta ranting in benjamin
 it is grandma's rocking chair rap from a broken lap⁶⁵

The debt is not only to a white British culture: Rampolokeng's syncretic style seems to derive also from black British culture here, from performance poets Linton Kwesi Johnson and Benjamin Zephaniah, who reinvent their own form of oral culture by looking beyond national boundaries to pan-africanist connections.⁶⁶

Many of Rampolokeng's poems, which were previously published or performed as 'raps', have been renamed 'rants', which to me indicates a new syncretic form possibly alluding to 'rap' and 'chant'. The pejorative sense of 'rant', as used by Abrahams above, is perhaps touched with self-parodying comment by Rampolokeng. Such ironic, mimicking, transgressive voices that in turn parody official discourses

⁶² 'I don't refer to myself as a performance poet, oral poet, dumb poet, deaf poet — I think all those are just unfortunate labels. I'm either a poet or I'm not. But then of course, there seems to be a definite need for labels in this country.' Rampolokeng (1993) p 28

⁶³ Quoted in Veit-Wild (1997) p.562

⁶⁴ Sole (1996) and Veit-Wild (1997)

⁶⁵ 'For the Oral' in Hirson (1997) p.293

⁶⁶ In fact the concert 'Rhythms and Routes: Dub Poetry in Concert' organised by Bheki Peterson included a joint performance by Rampolokeng and Zephaniah, Mega Music Warehouse, 21 April 1995

(whether apartheid or postapartheid), are a dominant feature of the poetry; the opening of the lengthy poem 'Habari Gani Africa Ranting'⁶⁷ demonstrates this:

(eureka europe gathers the dust of a fallen berlin wall
africa rolls in the mud of its tropical brain-fall)

habari gani africa
so free & unconscious where you sit
drowning in complacence's shit
a national situation its universal station top of the pops
pulled off the shelf where the rand drops
it takes self-exultation
struggle ticket to ride the train
fortune-wheels in cranial rotation
slaves of example now masters of spectacle

Through the verbal barrage, destabilised by syntactic ambiguity and a freedom from punctuation, Rampolokeng conveys potent anger at the process of transition in which the oppressed succeed as oppressors, upholding the Hegelian binary master/slave, or lordship/bondage paradigm, as indicated in the last line quoted. Individual words that have multiple signifieds, whether in isolation or in context, are foregrounded. The poet plays disturbingly with these possibilities, connecting the play on meaning to a play on sound. In the sixth line, for example, 'a national situation' to me ironically voices official discourse that is trying to mask a security issue, using vague euphemisms to do so. The geographical locator 'national' indicates the field of reference, which coincides with the field of political transition. This is echoed semantically, structurally and aurally in the term 'universal station', where 'universal' parallels the term 'national' as geographic signifier. Yet as an idiom, the term 'universal station' signifies social position. However, a further meaning of 'station' is teased out with the juxtaposition of 'top of the pops', suggesting a radio station, where 'universal' thus becomes a negative, hegemonic term to define the commodification of media culture, and its economic consequences, 'pulled off the shelf where the rand drops'. This connection is also implied in the strong rhyme between the 'pops', etymologically linked to 'popular' and the people, and 'drops', denoting a negative trajectory of failure for the masses.

A number of voices are already apparent in this poem, creating an effect, as in Chimombo's poem, comparable to Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia. And so in the poem, an official voice, referring to a 'national situation' jostles with the popular media idiom of 'top of the pops'. A discourse of struggle,

⁶⁷ For full text of the poem, see Appendix II p.235-37

including 'riding the train' which the staffrider youths are known for, envelopes the phrase 'ticket to ride', a snatch from a Beatles song, perhaps using this intertext to place the text in a wider tradition of social rebellion. The Swahili 'habari gani', similarly acts as a pan-africanist term for 'what's new?' or 'what's up?', a popular phrase signalling the solidarity of unofficial groups across national boundaries. The voices identified signal a multi-ethnic, crowded space in which languages and discourses jostle for legitimacy in the present. They transform words from their apartheid currency and transgress conventional meanings through new juxtapositions, and thus transform language in the way Dentith's broad definition of carnival suggests.

Terms from the discourse of struggle lose and change their currency, almost literally, as Rampolokeng's disruptive playfulness with one particular slogan, 'winds of change', explores. In a later verse, this ubiquitous signifier of political transition appears in metamorphic form:

habari gani africa
for everything the media sells
foul winds of small change fanning both flag waving & burning
on both sides clogged-up brain cells
commerce's judas coins always spinning
tails or head of state turning

Here the media and commerce are again seen to be in control of the polarised 'both sides', even over the authority of the president, whose metonymic headship emerges in a smooth gesture from the 'head' of a spinning coin, carrying its implications of random choice. The 'change' of the slogan becomes, by association with the adjective 'small', leftovers of money, again undermining the significance of the transition with negative connotations. The 'foul winds' transform the mythical metaphoric carrier, 'wind', into an abject, grotesque bodily function, as it gives contaminated life-air to the flag-waving crowds. Rampolokeng's numerous references to farting and flatulence in other poems, such as in the epigraph from 'In Transition', above, compound this image. The sacred status of 'winds of change' is radically made profane through a minor sleight of hand, playing with the idea of the proximity of the two.

The references to 'brain cells', as they wittily and tellingly rhyme with 'sell', return us, through the reference to 'brain', to the parenthetical opening lines of the poem, which also close the poem; 'eureka europe's' 'fallen berlin wall' is juxtaposed to africa's 'tropical brain-fall' (or 'brainfall' in the case of the closing lines). Again, it is the juxtaposition of the modifier 'tropical' which foregrounds the pun contained in 'brainfall' when the initial letter is removed. We see Rampolokeng thus enacting the Derridean notion

of *différance*, obtained from Saussurean linguistics, where meaning is not inherent in words, but is formed in a relationship of difference to those it is situated against. This foregrounds the instability and duplicity of language, as the *différand* shifts either side of the signifier. 'Change', when placed in relationship with 'small' metamorphoses completely from the grand potential it signifies in relation to 'winds', deflating it, almost literally, by turning it into petty money. This is a carnivalistic technique of Rampolokeng's which, as well as decentring and inverting essential meaning in language, arguably also serves to play with a subversive unconscious of language. To take Lacanian theory of the unconscious 'other', which desires to rupture official discourse, it could be proposed that Rampolokeng is, in his use of word play, seeking out the subversive 'other' in language, finding alternative, repressed meanings. These versions see that the 'universal station' is a situation of banality, and that 'winds of change' are in the world of grotesque realism, really about celebratory over-feasting and economic jostling.

This interpretation, which reads the numerous references to bodily functions and the processes of feasting, including 'shit' and 'wind', returns us to the notion of carnival and the display of the body as grotesque, or abject. Again, this framework fits Rampolokeng's poems more generally, as in these further lines from 'Habari Gani African Ranting':

nation's birth's midwife's face upon currency
 wrath's head stamping the image-making of democracy
 historical revamping drumbeating politicking
 upon a slime bomb's ticking
 bent-backing for international mother fucking
 epiloguing your orifices puckering to nuclear waste puking

The body here is not an individual body, but a body politic, specifically a national, abused or prostituting body. It is anything but a contained and containing body, but one subject to 'birth', 'fucking', 'puking' through 'orifices' and 'slime'. Kristeva's concept of the abject, so closely related to the Bakhtinian grotesque, seems especially appropriate here; representations of a perforated and defiled body destabilise the coherent 'new' subject of the dominant discourse; in Kristeva's words, 'refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live'.⁶⁸ Both Bakhtin and Kristeva see the grotesque and abject, respectively, in transgressions of the secure boundaries of the classical body, particularly through the maternal, in food, death and in the text. Their aims are only slightly different: whereas Bakhtin interprets a regenerative power in the grotesque, Kristeva seeks to explain, through psychoanalytic theory, why these

⁶⁸ Kristeva (1982) p.3 italics in original

transgressions are seen as repulsive and obscene by official discourse, or what she terms the Symbolic Order, suggesting a subversive power in this horror, as it is related to repressed desires.⁶⁹ Rampolokeng's poems with their many figures of the abject could therefore be read as deliberate lapses, or transgressions of the symbolic code of the new official order, which is precariously maintained through the suppression of the abject. However, the references in the poem to birth and the maternal as something horrifying support Kristeva's thesis further, that the mother is, in the process of abjection by the male, conceived of as both sublime and terrifying. The horror associated with the maternal in Rampolokeng's imagery contrasts with the images of the sublime mother, motherland or Mama Africa circulated in popular discourse, such as in the newspaper poems discussed in Chapter 3. The maternal therefore acts as a continuing patriarchal signifier of infection and disinfection in Rampolokeng's poetry. I suggest that these poems are written in a genre of protest, and that abject images are invoked to threaten the official, sanitised versions of cultural and national identity, to counteract the hegemonic sense of cleansing in official discourse that represses continuing conflict and deprivation, though the limits of their politics is evident in their gender politics.

The threat to the subject of pollutants and perforation is usually considered as purely metaphoric. Yet the references in Rampolokeng's poems to rapes, diarrhoea, gunshot wounds and filthy waste and sewage that flow down the open drains of deprived townships, can be read as socially referential instances of the abject which literalise the psychoanalytic metaphor. The introduction to a 1999 bibliography of South African literature states:

Rape looms particularly large in the national psyche during 1999, both as a horrific and frighteningly common reality for large number of women and children and considerable numbers of men (South Africa's rape statistics are among the highest in the world), and as a charged symbol of past and present oppression, a national disgrace. Shocking images of sexual violence run through Lesego Rampolokeng's rants against corruption in his latest poetry collection *Barino Sermons*, while *Disgrace* is the title of J.M. Coetzee's celebrated novel, in which rape is thematically central.⁷⁰

I argue that Rampolokeng's images, as above in 'Habari Gani', have a function beyond simple shock tactics and social referentiality. They transgressively signify in violent eruptions what the official New South Africa seeks to repress, encoding refusal of the act of suppression by using stark images of the abject to appeal to the reader's deepest sense of revulsion. This too can be read as an illustration of van

⁶⁹ Bakhtin thus adheres to a humanist view, while Kristeva depends on a theory of the human subject.

⁷⁰ Coetzee and Warren (2000) p.126

Wyk's assertion that with the breakdown of a regime a 'resurgence of repressed instincts' is 'embodied in images of violent death, birth and sexuality'.

Rampolokeng's poetry is certainly satiric in a violent and grotesque way, as Veit-Wild suggests in her reference to its carnivalesque qualities. The heteroglossic crowds of voices jostle dialogically to subvert and ironise dominant discourses by using angry wit and parody, though the tenor of the laughter here is not of the lightness usually referred to in interpretations of carnival, such as in Eagleton's characterisation, and manifested in Chimombo and Mda. The laughter provoked by Rampolokeng's wit is a more cynical reaction. In an interview with Robert Berold in *New Coin*, Rampolokeng makes a direct statement of referentiality between the social conditions in which he lives, his psychological state and the aesthetic act:

RB: I've found people very divided about your poetry. Some love its musicality, its directness and its candour, while some say it's an assault, a total barrage, with no space for the reader.

LR: Where I live [Soweto] there is no space. My entire existence is itself an assault on the senses. We're a nation in the grip of psychosis and mass hysteria. I don't think I could come to terms with it by writing poetry fit for lounges and studies.⁷¹

The cover illustration of the book, a painting by Helen Sebidi also captures this mood with an expressionistic depiction of a feasting crowd, in which grotesquely shaped and coloured figures merge and emerge:

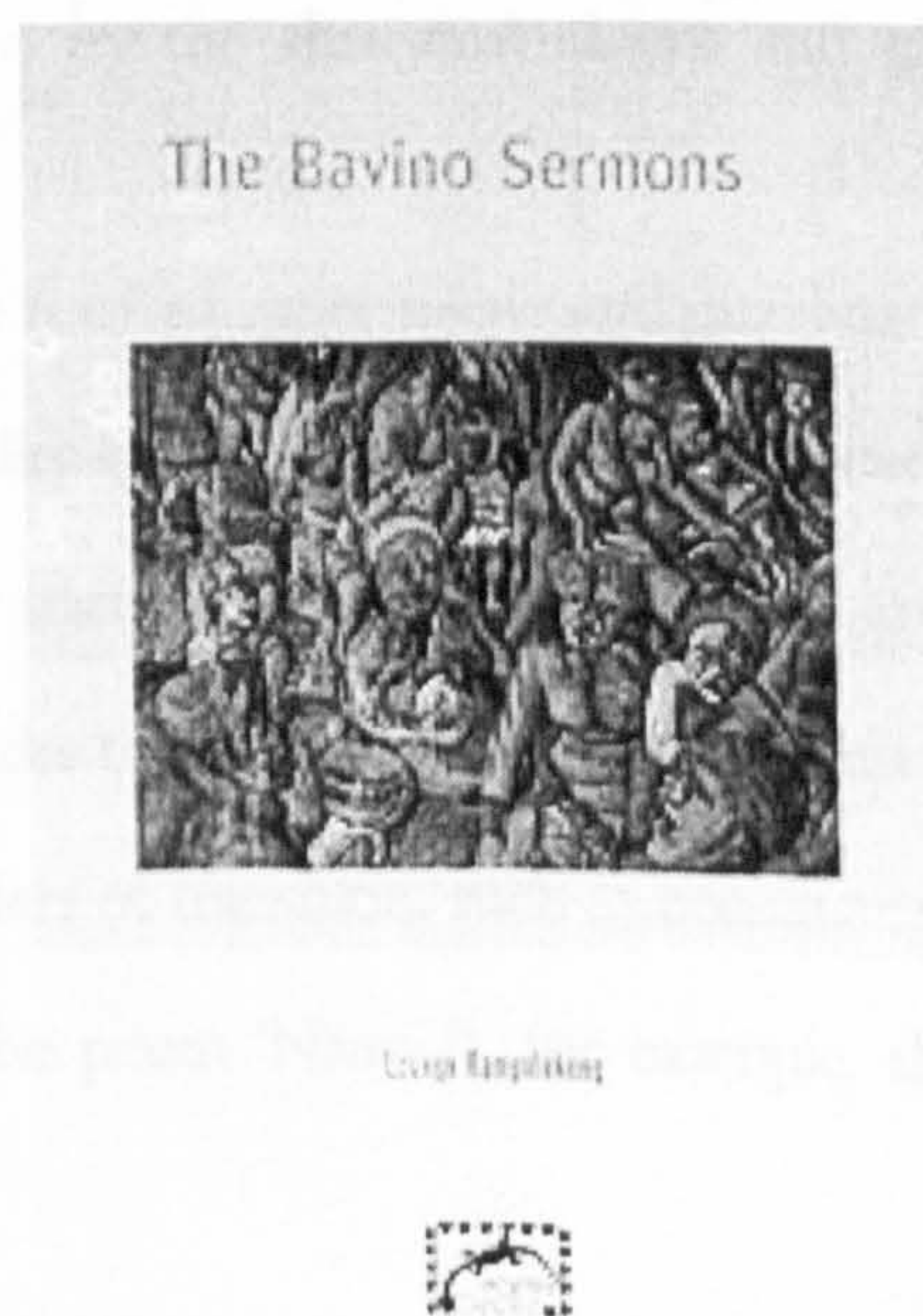


figure2.1 Front cover of *Bavino Sermons*

⁷¹ Rampolokeng (1993) p.27

If we take the wider resonances of Bakhtinian carnival as the disruption of sacred authority by the profane and grotesquely realistic, then Rampolokeng's poetry serves well as an example of the carnivalesque. The abject imagery does perform a sacrilegious or iconoclastic duty. This is a feature of much protest poetry insofar as it makes profane the sacred text of apartheid. Whether the result is regenerative is dependent on whether one regards iconoclasm as inherently empowering or not.

Seithamo Motsapi

Seithamo Motsapi is often cited together with Lesego Rampolokeng as one of the new, innovative poetic voices of postapartheid South Africa. Laura Chrisman, reviews his volume *earthstepper/the ocean is very shallow*⁷² in *New Coin*, the poetry journal that aided both Motsapi's and Rampolokeng's careers. She writes:

A very far cry from new South African pietistic discourses of reconciliation, this collection brilliantly fuses pan-Africanist militancy, romantic spirituality, and scathing attack on neo-colonialism in its global and local forms. The political urgency is never, here, compromised by empty rhetorical posturing, aesthetic banality: this is a rich, experimental poetry, raining down fresh imagery, complex conceits, carefully patterned to produce a volume of striking originality and stylistic rigour.⁷³

Kelwyn Sole compares the two poets:

Both are poets who rely on a verse of compression and energy, and use wordplay and puns to create multiple layers of meaning filled with political irony ... Both draw attention to the vulnerability of ordinary people to an official language that appears to espouse democracy, but can become overburdened by the rhetorical claims and glib phraseology of smooth-talking politicians and intellectuals.⁷⁴

I would argue that Motsapi's verse is often more subtle and puzzling than Rampolokeng's. Tenderness is more often interwoven with brutality in Motsapi's poetry, as lacerated bodies experience compassion, an emotion which Rampolokeng only starts to point to in the tortured love poems of *Bavino Semons*. Motsapi is, compared to Rampolokeng, harder to pin down ideologically in his relationship to the transition, where for example he reworks key signifiers of transition, such as conciliatory handshakes and rainbows in both positive and negative lights. In the poem 'Nandi'⁷⁵, for example, the trite tropes of reconciliation are portrayed quite positively:

⁷² Motsapi (1995b)

⁷³ Chrisman (1996) p.60

⁷⁴ Sole (1996) p.28

⁷⁵ Motsapi (1995a)

the hills called out our names
in ancient languages
the smiling scripture
of children rainbowed into messages

Later in the poem, the biblical inference is used to create a topical pun: 'sing handshakes & bridges/ to the promised mend'. These signifiers and rhetorical discourses of 'a promised land' are however, subordinated by tenderness and a re-activation of feeling over intellectual rhetoric, in the extraordinary closing lines:

songs hum from under our feet
miracles plant pillows across the road
anthems of angels oil every handshake
love muffles our philosophies

& nothing ends

It is difficult to decide how to read the last line, whether to read it with hope for the continuity of human relationships, or whether there is a note of irony in its comment on an untransformed past continuing into the present. Its literal detachment from the humming joyfulness of the previous lines does suggest another voice perhaps, a detached, cynical voice, that seeks to ironise the prevailing impulse in the way some of Motsapi's poems interrupt South Africa's pietistic discourse. For as both Sole and Chrisman suggest, Motsapi overridingly takes as his cohering theme the continuing injustices of postcolonialism, of which the new elite in South Africa form one manifestation. There are indeed lines referring to the same images of reconciliation, which are unequivocal about his view of the new elite:

my love is a forty headed fist
sated on the innards of mediocrities
that smile like overdressed rainbows⁷⁶

In a reading of the anthologised poem 'sol/o'⁷⁷ it becomes apparent how Motsapi searches in his political critique of the postapartheid situation, for a renewal of feeling:

my love
there are no accidents
in war — no kisses
on the belligerent lips of the crocodiles
no loves greener than
the dancing hearts of children
no reveller jollier than the worm
in columbus' boiling head

⁷⁶ Motsapi (1994)

⁷⁷ Motsapi (1997b) p.299

The title is intriguing as it immediately suggests a form of word-play that disrupts the English language, seeking its inherent ironies in much the same way that Rampolokeng's poetry does. Reading the title as a complete word, it suggests solitary state, though whether this is a lonely, destitute solo, a comforting solace, or one that involves heroism and stardom, remains ambiguous. The word is interrupted, fractured visually into two parts. It is intriguing to surmise why the poet has placed the forward slash in the position he has, rather than in the more obvious, symmetrical so/lo, which evokes a form of depressive critique (so low). Does Motsapi consciously wish to avoid the equal weighting that so/lo suggests? What are the possibilities of a reading of sol/o? My response was shaped when I arrived at the line 'as the sun recedes', for at this point the sol took on the reference to the sun, which was placed in a binary relationship with emptiness and nothingness, signified by the lone 'o'. The trajectory of the poem moves from an edenic regenerative post-conflict condition populated by the possibilities of hope in the dancing hearts of children, flowers and beautiful songs to a grim and disturbing vision of postcolonial corruption and greed. This trajectory appears to be enacted in the fragmented sol/o, from light and hope to zero and the despairing ejaculative 'o!'. Yet read in conjunction with the poem 'shak-shak', which I discuss next, with its repeated references to the 'soul', the connotations of 'sol/o' multiply further and elude any singular definition. New meanings thus emerge from the crevice of the fractured word.

The poem's anxious tenderness is conveyed more immediately by the use of a lyrical, speaking voice, a technique common to Motsapi's poetry. Its result is a form of anxious love song, addressed at the opening to 'my love', though the focus of this apostrophe is diffused by the lack of punctuation in the run-on lines. The suspensions of rules of grammar and spelling, and the playful yet constructive results can again invite a Bakhtinian analysis. The temporary suspension of dominant rules and the witty puns and telling distortions that arise can clearly be interpreted as a carnivalisation of English, from which a serious concern about the oppressiveness of dominant rules emerges. Instead a heteroglossic space is allocated in this poem, giving room for different voices to jostle, blur and come into focus. Puns and reconstructed words unfix their meanings, so that they oscillate continuously between emphases, forming language that is carnivalesquely 'hostile to all that [is] immortalized and completed'.

One is drawn to the carnivalesque figure in the poem: 'no reveller jollier than the worm/ in columbus' boiling head'. The image is simultaneously droll and grotesque, the worm feasting parasitically on the corpse of a colonial metaphor, 'columbus', whose authority is inverted by refusing him his rightful

proper noun status. In this case there is a shift in the function, from the carnivalesque as the mode of signification to the becoming the signified itself. Carnival is thus not only the style, but the subject of Motsapi's poetry, especially in the poem 'shak-shak' in which figures revel in the suspension of colonial domination:⁷⁸

& the carnival entered the last streets
of the shantytown of

my soul // lightning speed rhythm
light moving heavy swinging hip

& so the poor wd throw pots of paint
curdled in the heart to the drowsy skies

so the portraits wd sprout, paint
of our joy colouring the clouds

riotous multicolour, righteous marching
shak-shak prophet majaja in front ...

& so the merry madmen of my soul

had the season's last stomp
after the chafe & bruise
of the 8 to 5 tortures

& while the electrick carnival
kicked the weals off
for the redeemer

already there's a sign
in the sky
for those who see

already the graffiti's up
the walls of my soul:

HISTRYS ON DE SIDE
OF DE OPRES

⁷⁸ Motsapi (1997a) pp.297-98 for full text, see Appendix II p.237-38

The carnival setting of this poem celebrating liberation is of course convenient for the interpretative framework used in this chapter. Indeed, the scene is extraordinarily reminiscent of street scenes in Mda's *Ways of Dying*, as the epigraph to the next section demonstrates. Rules of standard orthography and grammar are again broken; at the end, for example, the graffiti is written in the accent of a street-based West Indian resistance culture. 'Would' is abbreviated phonetically to 'wd' throughout, and symbols such as '&', '8', '5' and '//' further disrupt the conventions of language. The addition of a 'k' at the end of 'electrick' is reminiscent of 1960s 'black power' language, which inserts a 'k' for 'c', for example, as in 'Amerika' and 'Afrika'. Yet at the same time this spelling forms a witty and revealing pun, constructing the word 'trick', thus apparently damning the illusive euphoria which forgets the scars of the past in the light of present messianism: 'the electrick carnival/ kicked the weals off/ for the redeemer'.

Motsapi's tone is perhaps also indebted to the bible's Revelations, presenting himself as an alternative visionary, who warns about the ending of the current condition, combining the roles of the carnival reveller and the visionary revealer. This is emphasised by the repeated 'already': 'already there's a sign/ in the sky/ for those who see'. The exterior landscape is in fact one of interiority from the beginning in the poem, exploring 'the shantytown of/ my soul', inhabited by the 'merry madmen of my soul' who write 'the graffiti [...]/ up the walls of my souls'. The implications that cluster around 'my soul' are interesting: on the one hand its repeated use suggests the isolation of interiority. Yet the fact that this soul is a 'shantytown' peopled by 'merry madmen' suggests a commonality of human experience, and a rehabilitation of emotion and spirituality that are signified by 'soul'.

The image of the graffiti on walls is relevant to the themes of revelation and succession in its intertextual reference to the biblical story of Belshazzar's vision of the writing that appears on the walls at a feast, announcing the end of his rule.⁷⁹ Motsapi's interiorisation of carnival has a useful explanation in Bakhtin's writings, where he suggests that the carnival spirit, through its liberating impulses, frees people 'not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor'.⁸⁰ Motsapi's poem raises this important sense of carnival as a state of mind, whose interior rebellion is perhaps analogous to the Freudian 'resurgence of repressed instincts' that Johan van Wyk sees operating in Mda's novel.

⁷⁹ Daniel 5:5 24-8

⁸⁰ Bakhtin (1984a) p.94

iv. Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying*

[Toloki] alights and walks in the familiar streets. They are decorated with lights of different colours, and with banners and bunting ... The traffic police are already clearing the streets for the carnival. This is one of the highlights of the year, when we are all carefree and forget about the problems that live with us the whole year round.
*Ways of Dying*⁸¹

In the field of prose writing, there has been an increase in forms of overtly non-realist writing, coinciding with the transition in South Africa, in contrast to the kind of realist novels such as Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*. Zakes Mda's *Ways of Dying* represents such a move beyond realist representation into a multi-dimensional and shifting, liminal world. I use 'liminal' here in the sense that the novel explores the transition as a form of liminality, defined by Bhabha as an 'interstitial passage between fixed identifications',⁸² a concept that I use to link the carnivalesque to magic realist representation. In transition, given subjectivities are disturbed and renegotiated before a new order of authority emerges. This enacts a process where old social formations have died, and new ones have not yet been born, to paraphrase Gramsci. This state of unformed in-betweenness, between death and birth, is clearly a liminal state which some writers relate to the liminal worlds of magic realism and Bakhtinian carnival that celebrate 'the temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order' in a process of 'becoming, change and renewal'.⁸³

The transition appears to have released a repressed urge in Mda himself to make a personal transition in style, in which to redefine the changing world around him. For Mda, the transition coincides with his first break from writing plays, as if he had the etymology of the 'novel' in mind when switching genres to explore new means of perception in postapartheid South Africa. In an interview he notes that '[f]or the past twenty years or so I have always wanted to write a novel. But I never thought I would be able to do it'.⁸⁴ According to his publishing editor, Zakes Mda wrote *Ways of Dying* and his other novel *She Plays with the Darkness*, 'with astonishing ease and speed' when he returned to South Africa from his time in exile.⁸⁵

Instances of the outrageous and the astonishing and absurd, the uncanny and the unexpected, the miraculous and the magical inform *Ways of Dying*, representing the bewildering and astounding experience

⁸¹ Mda (1997) p.195

⁸² Bhabha (1994) p.4

⁸³ Bakhtin (1984a) p.10

⁸⁴ Naidoo (1997) p.250

⁸⁵ Moffett (1996) p.14 *Ways of Dying* was shortlisted for the Noma and the CNA prizes in 1996 and went on to win the Olive Schreiner Prize for literature in South Africa in 1997.

of change. The novel illustrates beautifully van Wyk's point above, that 'a loss to some extent of the reality principle' results in surreal, dream-like and mystical literature. During the transition, the most commonplace human interaction could take on the form of the miraculous, and every day brought about unrecognisable and unexpected scenes that defamiliarised the old norms of everyday living in apartheid South Africa. The familiar became strange before the strange could become familiar, leading to a general situation of estrangement. Kristeva too states that the 'carnivalesque cosmogony has persisted in the form of an anti-theological (but not anti-mystical) and deeply popular movement',⁸⁶ revealing in the parentheses, as if in passing, a link between carnival, anti-authoritarian politics and mystical imaginative forms, even calling the carnivalesque 'anti-rationalist'.⁸⁷

Situated in the period of negotiation between 1990 and 1994, the novel tells the story of Toloki, a destitute tramp whose 'home' is a waiting room at the quayside in an unnamed city. Through a simple act of imagination and a costume comprised of a 'shiny top hat' and a 'knee-length velvety black cape buckled with a hand-sized gold-coloured brooch with tassels of yellow, red and green',⁸⁸ which he acquires from a fancy-dress shop, he styles himself as an eccentric, yet dignified Professional Mourner, attending the funerals of 'clients', most of whom have died in political violence in the surrounding townships. Margaret Mervis pertinently identifies this inventive, improvisational element in Toloki's character, which has a particular relevance to the lack of a script in transition, again relating political events to a carnivalesque space.⁸⁹ By chance Toloki is reunited with a childhood friend, Noria, when he attends the funeral of her son, and their relationship develops contrapuntally to the violence of the transitional moment. The novel is constructed around a series of funerals, each illustrating a different way of dying. Funerals also serve as mass meetings and social events involving eating, gossiping, mocking and laughing. The costumed, jester-like Toloki participates with grotesquely raucous vigour at these funerals, strongly evoking the Bakhtinian carnival feast.

Toloki and Noria, as a destitute and a prostitute, represent figures stripped of all material possession, living on the margins of society, who nevertheless have great resources of imagination and inspiration. Noria acts as a muse to Toloki, uncannily releasing a creative energy in him when she sings,

⁸⁶ Moi (1986) p.48

⁸⁷ Moi (1986) p.50

⁸⁸ Mda (1997) p.26

⁸⁹ Mervis (1998) p.43

thus offering a dynamic trope for the release from psychological repression. Toloki has always been good at drawing flowers, mountains and huts, yet, quite irrationally, 'he never drew people. Once he was asked to draw a picture of a person, but his hand refused to move'.⁹⁰ However, in partnership with Noria, who projects a kind of spiritual vitality on to her environment, an ejaculation of Toloki's repressed sensitivities occurs through his possession by her spirit:

Noria sings her meaningless song of old. All of a sudden, Toloki finds himself drawing pictures of the children playing ... of children playing merry-go-round in the clouds ... The drawing becomes frenzied as Noria's voice rises ... It is as though Toloki is possessed by this new ability to create human figures ... His whole body tingles as he furiously gives shape to the lines on the paper. His breathing reaches a crescendo that is broken by an orgasmic scream. This leaves him utterly exhausted.⁹¹

Creativity and procreativity are interdependent partners of death in *Ways of Dying*, relating of course, to the archaic and colloquial 'dying' meaning an orgasm; the novel title thus contains its own inversion. In an instance that demonstrates features of possession and purging as well as sexual release, both bodily and spiritual regeneration are enacted in the passage.

The novel is interrupted by further miraculous visions and visitations from beyond the realist dimensions of time and space. Noria becomes pregnant by her deceased husband, for example, when incarnating the spirit-child whose funeral takes place at the opening of the novel. The returning child thus serves as a disturbance of fixed time, space and corporeality. Similarly, Toloki can transport himself into the world of a two-dimensional picture by an act of concentrated imagination, and both he and his father transgress their condition of rational existence when they are possessed by the creative muse of Noria.

Noria's ability to facilitate repressed creativity in Toloki demonstrates her powers akin to those of a spirit medium, as a vehicle for spiritual procreation. Even as a young child she had this mediating power, as Toloki's father, Jwara accidentally discovered: 'Noria sang her childish song again. Her song had no meaning at all. But it had such great power in Jwara that he found himself creating the figurine again.'⁹² The scene in which Toloki is similarly influenced by Noria to draw figures offers a recurrence of Jwara's compulsive creativity, a structural feature which reflects the general theme of recurrence in the novel. Again it links Noria mystically as the agent of life and astonishing creativity in a relationship with Toloki, the subject of death. This forms a carnivalesque interrelationship:

⁹⁰ Mda (1997) p.32

⁹¹ Mda (1997) p.199

⁹² Mda (1997) p.31

What power does this woman have, who has dragged him into communion with live human beings, when he had vowed to dedicate all his life to the dead? What is the secret of her strength? Only four days ago she was burying her child.⁹³

This is arguably a standard gendered configuration of interrelated birth and death. However, in the figure of Noria, Mda does challenge the conventional reification of femininity into the symbols of the whore, the witch, the virgin, the mother and the widow by allowing Noria to display characteristics of all five at once: after the death of her husband, she resorts to prostitution to educate her son who is born as a result of an immaculate conception, through communication with the spirits. On a rather basic level, Mda thus complicates these classifications and implies their reductiveness. Toloki too discovers gender inequality in the course of the novel as he moves through the squatter camp observing people in their homes. The naïve poetic tone of Toloki as the implied narrator mirrors the somewhat naïve discovery:

Toloki notices that in every shack they visit, the women are never still. They are always doing something with their hands. They are cooking. They are sewing. They are outside scolding the children. They are at the tap drawing the water ... Men on the other hand, tend to cloud their heads with pettiness and vain pride ... With great authority in their voices, they come up with wise theories on how to put the world right. Then at night they demand to be given food ... Toloki hesitantly mentions these observations to Noria. He attributes his keen sense of observation to the fact that he has not lived with other human beings for many years. He therefore sees things with a fresh eye.⁹⁴

He then observes the fact that, despite the empirical evidence showing that women do most of the work, all the national and regional leaders he sees are men. In this simple observation another note of caution is sounded about the emerging dispensation and the limited extent of its transformation of old power structures.

Despite the disturbances of time and space, the narrative present is located in a transitional South Africa, as the frequent flashbacks to the past, and references to 'those days' and 'these days' indicate: 'In those days, they did not allow people of his colour onto any of the beaches of the city, so he could not carry out his ablutions there, as he does today.'⁹⁵ It also takes note of the social changes: of middle-class blacks moving into former 'white areas', of the development of squatter camps and the increasing numbers of vigilante groups inciting 'black on black' violence recalling the conflict between ANC and Inkhata Freedom Party supporters: 'The situation is even more complicated these days, what with the

⁹³ Mda (1997) p.148

⁹⁴ Mda (1997) pp.175-6

⁹⁵ Mda (1997) p.112

tribal chief wreaking havoc with his hostel-dwelling migrants.⁹⁶ At a rally a strike is justified as 'a strong statement to the government that it is high time that they took the negotiations for freedom seriously'.⁹⁷

The problem with seeking a generic definition for *Ways of Dying*, is that critical terms are loaded with debates, and few more so than 'magic realism'. The use of terms to define this generic 'other', or inversion of realism, has been particularly fluid, contested and contradictory. Texts such as Mda's have been defined variously as postmodern, surreal, sublime, as fantasy, as magic realist, as fabular realist, as supernaturalist, or even simply as analogous to poststructuralist play and experimentation. However, I use the term 'magic realism' as a generic definition in agreement with Brenda Cooper⁹⁸ and André Brink,⁹⁹ despite their acceptance that it has a distinctive history in Latin American criticism. The distinction between realism and magic realism is one riddled with slippages, yet Ato Quayson's distinction serves well to outline the fields of the two ontologies. He notes that realism 'is a mode of fictional representation that gives the illusion of the real world as experienced by the reader'¹⁰⁰ whereas in magic realism:

[m]ythical causality, for its part ensures that narrative progress does not depend solely on real-world sequentiality or sets of expectations. There is often an allowance for the intrusion of the supernatural or extra-natural in the progression of events or in the resolution of conflict.¹⁰¹

In other words, the main differences between the two ontologies are 'the nature of causality, and the relationship between the natural setting and the characters'.¹⁰² The irrational coexists in a different relationship with the rational in the two worldviews: in magic realism the irrational is not subservient to the rational, whereas in realism irrational events are 'explained to the reader in order to locate it within the patterns of a real-world causality'.¹⁰³ However, I would reinforce the fact that magic realism does have some referential elements to it, able to reflect particular, local realities. Brink is further cautious about the colonial abuse of the term 'magic' in Africa in defining all that was perceived as exotic and evil. Citing writers such as Amos Tutuola and Ben Okri both Cooper and Brink contest the idea that magic realism should only be associated with South America, noting very similar social conditions and cultural forms both in indigenous Southern African orature and, according to Brink, in the fantastic 'ghost stories first

⁹⁶ Mda (1997) p.138

⁹⁷ Mda (1997) p.173

⁹⁸ Cooper (1996)

⁹⁹ Brink (1998a)

¹⁰⁰ Quayson (1997) p.141

¹⁰¹ Quayson (1997) p.141

¹⁰² Quayson (1997) p.141

¹⁰³ Quayson (1997) p.144

told by the trekkers or itinerant traders at the camp fire, before electricity put an end to visitations from other worlds'.¹⁰⁴ The political edge to magic realism is stated also by Slemon: 'magic realism as a literary practice seems to be closely linked with a perception of "living on the margins", encoding within it, perhaps, a concept of resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems'.¹⁰⁵ Whereas others have critiqued it as potentially escapist,¹⁰⁶ I aim to demonstrate through the discussion of the text that *Ways of Dying* is no less engaged with the political transition than, for example, Gordimer's more realist novel. One of the ways of exploring this is through the connection between magic realism and carnival, which has been shown to be a deeply political idiom.

Referring to the rational and the irrational as 'discursive systems' which are in constant dialogue, Slemon notes that in 'magic realism this battle is represented in the language of narration by the foregrounding of two opposing discursive systems, with neither managing to subordinate or contain the other'.¹⁰⁷ Like Quayson, he suggests that two different sets of logic, or ontologies operate within a text, yet do not form a hierarchical relationship through narratorial intervention. Neither the realist logic of rationalism, nor the magical logic of the irrational gains authority in a magic realist text; they coexist in constant dialogue. Kristeva, in her discussion of carnivalesque language makes a fascinatingly similar correlation, referring to the 'non-exclusive opposition' of its structural dyads such as the sacred and the profane, 'which function as empty sets or disjunctive additions, produc[ing] a more flagrant dialogism than any other discourse'.¹⁰⁸ It might be suggested that such a dialogic form is appealing to a writing space such as South Africa, which is itself trying to reconcile different ontologies without one dominating or subsuming the others; that is, the postapartheid condition ideally desires the non-hierarchical dialogue and innovative linkages between (at least) two different discursive systems.

Ways of Dying can thus be discussed with reference to the transformative qualities of the magic realist elements it displays. Yet referring to qualities such as transformation, inversion, liminality and distortion in relation to magic realism brings to mind the Bakhtinian sense of the carnivalesque, where

¹⁰⁴ Brink (1998a) p.26 The translator of Jacques Stephen Alexis's 'Of the marvellous realism of the Haitians', Alexis (1995), coins the term 'marvellous realism' rather than 'magical realism' yet it is generally accepted that the terms are comfortably interchangeable. See Slemon (1988) p.9 and p.132; Cooper (1996) p.211

¹⁰⁵ Slemon (1988) p.10

¹⁰⁶ See Cooper (1996) for her discussion of Jean Franco's views that 'magical realist writers reinforce this imperialism by peddling the exoticism and otherness of indigenous cultures to a metropole greedy for escapism'. p.214

¹⁰⁷ Slemon (1988) p.12

¹⁰⁸ Moi (1986) p.49

carnival is linked to 'change and renewal' with a sense of 'the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities'. Like magic realism, carnival seeks to disturb established hierarchies, and can thus effectively parody and disturb the worldview of the dominant political authority it resists from a threshold position. Through the carnivalesque features of magic realism, such as absurd and grotesque representations, bizarre linkages and an ambivalence about life and death, critical commentaries on social and political issues can be enacted. In the complex utterance that is carnival laughter, the realist world is distorted, as Cooper discusses in relation to other African writers:

Powerful images of ambivalent festivity and laughter, of paradoxical bodily revulsion and celebration, of reconstructions of human shapes and forms, normality and aberration, recur fundamentally and very significantly in the magical narratives of Syl Cheney-Coker and especially Ben Okri.¹⁰⁹

I thus seek to identify similar carnivalesque features in *Ways of Dying*, which are integral to the distortive, magic real world of absurd inversions, threshold positions and disparate linkages, particularly the disturbance of the binary relation between birth and death by a sense of liminality that links carnival, magic realism and transition. Tropes of hauntings and visitations from ancestral worlds occur, including the familiar spirit-child trope which surfaces in *Ways of Dying*. The novel, in sustaining an ongoing dialogic relationship between fixed poles, of which birth and death are only one example, in the 'joyful relativity of evolving existence', offers a sense of *permanent becoming* rather than the linear structure of departure, transit and arrival that shapes Gordimer's *None to Accompany Me*. In other words, in both carnival and the magic real, death is figured as a point of return and renewal, and in the novel the exalted status of death is demystified through carnival laughter.

Structurally, *Ways of Dying* is framed by two festivals usually associated with joy and merriment: it opens on a hot Christmas Day at the distressing funeral of the young boy killed in political violence. It closes on the following New Year's Eve, itself a threshold festival, a time of ending and beginning which can be read allegorically as a time of transition. As the epigraph above suggests, this moment is a ritual one, a 'highlight of the year' when 'we are all carefree and forget about the problems that live with us the whole year round', and thus would have been a feature of township life even under apartheid. However, this carefree moment of suspension is a suitable one by which to read the transition allegorically, as suggested. Groups of drunken revellers, remnants of the carnival's clowns, cross-dressers, pickpockets and

¹⁰⁹ Cooper (1996) p.213

marching bands, weave through the township streets cheering drunkenly while Noria and Toloki's peaceful shack glows fluorescently in the moonlight. In the setting alone, an element of the festive is allied to death, for as the township people revel in seasonal festivities, scattered groups bury corpses. This juxtaposition clearly serves to sound a note of caution in the general euphoria of the period of transition, by placing death within earshot of the festivities. The child buried at the opening turns out to be Noria's second son, Vutha, whose death facilitates Toloki and Noria's reunion. The resonances of a child's funeral on Christmas Day are poignant and disturbing in their inversion of the Christmas story and can be read through Bakhtin as a 'carnivalistic parod[y] on sacred texts'.¹¹⁰ The carnivalesque inversion of the biblical story is continued later in the novel when a flashback narrates how Vutha's was an 'immaculate conception'. The Christmas Day funeral is one of the first funerals that Toloki visits as a Professional Mourner and marks the beginning of his reinvention, which signifies his own process of transition.

Toloki, dressed in his costume and with his entrancingly mournful and comic howling at the funerals, represents the kind of possessed mask figure that relates through laughter to parody and transformation. In his grotesque appearance, he parodies the act of mourning in a twofold gesture that simultaneously enacts the mourning in all sincerity. The mask figure is clearly a liminal figure familiar to the magic realist genre, as it enacts forms of disguise, transformation and possession, destabilising the boundaries of identity. Yet such a subversive figure is also central to Bakhtin's carnival, by which parody and laughter both enact *and* mock official discourse in the same way that a mask both enacts and subverts. Referring to the medieval carnival mask, he notes: 'The mask is related to transition, metamorphosis, the violation of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames.' In sum, he argues, it reveals the 'essence of the grotesque'.¹¹¹ Toloki, masquerading in his costume, displays a number of features of such a central carnival figure. He is a rather ugly character, whose bodily grotesqueness is emphasised, for example in his first appearance in the novel:

Toloki thought he would need to elbow his way through the crowd but people willingly move away from him. Why do people give way? he wonders. Is it perhaps out of respect for his black costume and top hat, which he wears at every funeral as a hallmark of his profession? But then why do they cover their noses and mouths with their hands as they retreat in blind panic, pushing those behind them? Maybe it is the beans he ate for breakfast. They say it helps if you put some

¹¹⁰ Bakhtin (1984b) p.123

¹¹¹ Bakhtin (1984a) p.40

sugar in them, and he had no sugar. Or maybe it is the fact that he has not bathed for a whole week, and the December sun has not been gentle. He has been too busy attending funerals.¹¹²

This representation introduces the medium of carnival laughter by which official conventions are debased and demystified. Much of this debasement is regenerative in its assumption and, as Bakhtin notes, is concerned with 'the lower stratum of the body, the life of the belly and the reproductive organs; it therefore relates to acts of defecation and copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth. Degradation digs a bodily grave for new birth.'¹¹³ Toloki's farting and reference to food at the Christmas Day funeral take on a new meaning in the carnivalesque view, playfully transforming a ritual of mourning, yet within the licence of carnival, not trivialising it. Indeed, his own socio-economic marginalisation is referred to in the comment that he lacks sugar. Similarly the multi-faceted connection between food, sex and death is treated carnivalesquely through their seamless connection at a later funeral: 'They eat standing and gossiping about how great and impressive the funeral was, and what inspiring speeches were made, and who has secretly been sleeping with whose wife.'¹¹⁴

These references to the body's 'lower stratum' are echoed in Toloki's carnivalesque facial features, particularly his prominent nose, which, as Bakhtin (and Freud) would note, refers phallically to procreative powers. Toloki's face is visualised in greater detail a few pages on, displaying the exaggerated features of the caricature or grotesque mask:

His yellow face is broad and almost flat, his pointed nose hovers over and dwarfs his small child-like mouth. His eyes are small, and have a permanently sorrowful look that is most effective when he musters up his famous graveside manner. Above his eyes rest thick eyebrows, like the hairy thithiboya caterpillar.¹¹⁵

At funerals, he is as grotesquely prominent aurally as he is visually:

At the cemetery Toloki sits on one of the five mounds, and groans, and wails, and produces other new sounds that he has recently invented especially for mass funerals with political overtones. These sounds are loosely based on the chants that youths utter during political rallies. But Toloki has modified them, and added to them whines and moans that are meant to invoke sorrow and pain.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Mda (1997) p.8

¹¹³ Bakhtin (1984a) p.21

¹¹⁴ Mda (1997) p.161

¹¹⁵ Mda (1997) p.11

¹¹⁶ Mda (1997) p.108

He cuts a distinguishing figure: 'The fact that he has become some kind of spectacle does not bother him. It is his venerable costume, he knows, and is rather proud.'¹¹⁷ As a spectacle he displays a costumed visual presence in the same way that a masked figure does, representative of the people, yet also feared and rejected by them. His tendency towards possession, as illustrated in the figure-drawing episode and the frenzy of his wails, further compounds the parallel. Toloki, multiply associated with death and dying (also in the sexual sense), appears to fulfil the function of a death masquerader who both represents and subverts death through carnival.

Noria gives birth twice in the novel, and with Toloki's funereal occupation, the couple represent a somewhat gendered cycle of interdependent birth and death. Toloki's act of imagination, by which he invents his profession, is itself a creative act which gives birth to a new self in typical ambiguity to his association as a figure of death. Yet this new self paradoxically feeds off death, as Noria's telling comment to him implies: 'I did not know of your profession, Toloki. Homeboys and homegirls say you work as a beggar in the city, and you go to funerals to mooch food off the bereaved.'¹¹⁸ Death and consumption are similarly linked in a comment of Toloki's after he has taken a form of 'career break': 'Tomorrow I must find a funeral. My body needs to mourn ... I am an addict, Noria.'¹¹⁹ Yet here the compulsion for corporeal consumption is ephemeral and sustaining, unlike the parasitic greed of Chimombo's forest creature *Nalimvini* who 'grew fat, too,/ Feeding on corpses' or the Chiyao saying in Mapanje's poem encouraging greed at the cost of later death. A number of times the reader is invited to read Toloki as an allegorical figure for collective mourning; Toloki is described as having shoulders 'wide enough to bear all the woes of bereavement',¹²⁰ suggesting he is a carrier, shouldering the grief of others. More overtly: 'He was a Professional Mourner who mourned for the nation, and was paid in return.'¹²¹ In this figure he is again depicted as a representative of the people, yet also as a carrier who sanitises their lives by shouldering their mourning.

On numerous occasions Mda allies laughter with death, as if he is fascinated by the juxtaposition. He returns a number of times in the novel to an incident where a funeral 'gives birth' to another funeral. A schoolgirl friend of Noria's is shot at a funeral after an uncanny premonition: 'There is nothing we can do

¹¹⁷ Mda (1997) p.48

¹¹⁸ Mda (1997) p.54

¹¹⁹ Mda (1997) p.150

¹²⁰ Mda (1997) p.11

¹²¹ Mda (1997) p.166

about it, Noria. When one is called no one can prevent it. I am going to die laughing.'¹²² A man opens fire at the funeral and 'Noria's friend was hit in the chest. She died laughing.'¹²³ The novel returns to this difficult juxtaposition, which disturbs the sacred (the funeral/death) with the profane (laughter), commenting on it much later in a comic scene in which Toloki is trying to teach Noria some new 'funeral sounds':

Noria says she is beginning to get the hang of this mourning business ... They try a few sounds together, especially the new goatly sounds. Noria's first attempts are quite amateurish, and they both burst out laughing

'I am sorry, Toloki, to laugh about such serious matters.'

'Don't be sorry, Noria. In death we laugh as well. Don't you remember that when you were a little girl, your own friend died laughing?'

'You are such a wise man, Toloki.'

Toloki continues to tell her of an occasion, when the whole graveyard broke into laughter as four funerals were being held simultaneously within one graveyard. The 'Nurse' figure at the one funeral makes a 'naughty joke' about the deceased, just as the priest at another one is at the most serious part of the ritual, praying for the reception of the soul of the deceased to be 'happily received into the portals of heaven by none other than St Peter himself.' Yet on hearing the dirty joke, '[e]ven the priest couldn't help laughing'.¹²⁴ Here liberatory carnival laughter is again directed at the exalted: the sacred is brought down to the level of the profane body. The carnivalesque elements of these funerals are very clear, as they demystify death. Toloki is the eccentric figure at the centre of this carnivalisation, well aware of the demystifying properties of laughter:

'In our language there is a proverb which says that the greatest death is laughter.'
'You see! I was right, Toloki, when I said you knew how to live.'¹²⁵

Appropriately, Bakhtin defines laughter, the determining feature of carnival, as the means of understanding change. He writes that it is:

¹²² Mda (1997) p.44

¹²³ Mda (1997) p.44

¹²⁴ Mda (1997) p.163

¹²⁵ Mda (1997) p.164

a specific means for artistically visualizing and comprehending reality and, consequently, a specific means for structuring artistic image, plot and genre. Enormous creative, and therefore genre-shaping, power was possessed by ambivalent carnivalesque laughter. This laughter could grasp and comprehend a phenomenon in the process of change and transition: ... in death birth is foreseen and in birth death, in victory defeat and in defeat victory, in crowning a decrowning. Carnival laughter does not permit a single one of these aspects to change to be absolutized or to congeal in one-sided seriousness.¹²⁶

The challenge to power of liberatory laughter, therefore, is its parodic, destabilising quality, directed at exalted bodies of authority such as politicians and the church. Laughter is a form for comprehending change and transition, resisting absolutes and finalities. This is clearly an appealing theory of becoming for transition literature that takes shape in a context of emergence and renewal. Through laughter a fluidity and flexibility are initiated by which carnival becomes not only the signified but the signifier, the means as well as the subject of representation. We can say, therefore, that the novel not only depicts carnivalesque scenes, it also places itself in a carnivalesque relationship with the prevailing authorities that the novel parodies.

Yet Mda's juxtaposition of laughter and death is not always necessarily carnivalesque, and it is important to maintain that distinction. He depicts the awful empirical reality to the symbiotic relationship between birth and death in a number of stories recounted in the novel, where people are killed while attending funerals, leading to further funerals, or as the narrator puts it: 'Funerals acquire a life of their own, and *give birth* to other funerals.'¹²⁷ Mda's originality lies in his confidence to portray not only the horror of the violence of transition, but unfatalistically, through carnivalesque laughter and grotesque comedy, to renew well-worn rhetoric and tropes of representing this violence. The absurdity and horror of the novel's violent context are counteracted by the tender and joyful depiction of a growing human relationship between Toloki and Noria. In other words, within the licence of the carnivalesque worldview which the novel creates, mass funerals, township violence and corruption can be parodied without being trivialised, and social relations can be represented in a new, reinvigorating and non-hierarchical way from the point of view of the tramp and the prostitute. There are many harrowing representations of the more literal forms of death, which harshly sustain the element of noncarnival referentiality in the text. Detailed stories of death are recounted at each funeral visited by the narrative, thus conveying the many ways of dying in the violence leading up to the elections. These include necklacings among rival township youth

¹²⁶ Bakhtin (1984b) p.164

¹²⁷ Mda (1997) p.160, my italics.

groups and racially-motivated petrol dousings. The father of one victim asks why the white man who set alight his son laughed at him as he was dying, but he only receives a grotesque excuse:

The crony was adamant that the white colleague was merely laughing because it was a game. To him the flames were a joke. When the man screamed and ran around in pain, he thought he was dancing.¹²⁸

This excuse is typical of the logic of extremist apartheid perceptions, which sees certain killings as permissible, as sporting acts of gamesmanship. Here death is placed in a sinister and oppressive relationship with laughter and festivity, where the laughter comes from the seat of privilege and involves a 'laughing at', rather than a 'laughing with', and thus cannot be defined as carnival laughter.

Bakhtin makes an interesting connection through the idea of eccentricity, which Toloki clearly represents, to a magic epistemology. He describes eccentricity as 'a special category of the carnival sense of the world ... it permits — in concretely sensuous form — the latent side of human nature to reveal itself'.¹²⁹ I perceive in this statement a strong resonance with the definitions of magic realism, that foreground its expression of a culture's imaginative life, expressing the deepest, most latent forms of a culture's dreams, myths, legends and symbols. One of the first formulators of the magic or 'marvellous' realism, for example, Jacques Stephen Aléxis, writing in 1956, sees the site of 'marvellous realism', in a culture's 'treasury of tales and legends, all the musical, choreographic and plastic symbolism' which creates a 'hold upon [people's] feelings'.¹³⁰ Carnival and magic realism thus both provide expressive vehicles for giving form to people's individual and collective unconscious experience. Eccentricity is clearly manifested in the character of Toloki, suggesting that he is a character figuring the latent side of the human psyche in both the carnival and magic real epistemologies. Michael Dash makes another connection between carnival and magic realism, arguing that they both defy finality, but prefer to celebrate incompleteness, fluidity, dialogue and the disruption of closed systems, including sanitised 'classical' representations of the closed human body. While there is a need for a 'psychic "re-memberment"',¹³¹ this is counteracted by a 'horror of stasis'.¹³² In both Aimé Césaire's and Frantz Fanon's views, he notes, 'the ideal of revolutionary self-assertiveness is expressed through corporeal imagery'.¹³³

¹²⁸ Mda (1997) p.65

¹²⁹ Bakhtin (1984b) p.123

¹³⁰ Aléxis (1995) p.197

¹³¹ Dash (1995) p.332

¹³² Dash (1995) p.333

¹³³ Dash (1995) p.333

In the carnival view, the body is an open body which overtly eats, defecates, farts, ejaculates, gives birth and so on. In the magic real view, the body too extends beyond the conventional boundaries, becoming repeatable, as in the case of the returning spirit-child in the novel, born each time with identical birth marks, and open to physical transformation by an act of resilient imagination, as in the case of Toloki's self-reinvention. In neither epistemology is the body fixed by a contour. Instead its transgression is representative of resistance and perpetual transformation. In carnival this is expressed through the location of the body as subject to consumption, defecation, giving birth and dying, while in magic realism, corporeality is destabilised by dreams, possession, haunting and reincarnation.

States of possession and dream, experiences of supernatural visitations and otherworldly control figure in the novel are represented objectively by the narrator. This accords with the conventions of magic realism introduced by Quayson above, repeated by Mda himself in the interview: 'In my novels ... the unreal happens as part of reality. It is not a matter of conjecture or discussion ... this is in contrast to fantasy, or the fantastic type of writing, where the supernatural or the magical is disconcerting.'¹³⁴ A further example, which also displays a carnivalesque linkage between birth and death is when Noria becomes pregnant by her dead husband Napu:

Then one day, seven years ago, she discovered that she was pregnant ... She explains that she had not slept with any man, except for the strangers that visited her in her dreams, and made love to her. Some of these dream figures began their existence on top of her as strangers, but by the time they reached their fourth ejaculation, they looked and acted like a youthful Napu.¹³⁵

So far the explanation is cast through the narrative consciousness as Noria's version of events, that is, it is not given narratorial authority as anything but a subjective hallucination. However, a shift takes place, whereby this strange occurrence is validated as objectively real: 'Just as with her first child, Noria was pregnant for fifteen months. When the child was born, he looked exactly like the original Vutha. He even had the same birth marks.'¹³⁶ The trope of the returning spirit-child, which lives a cycle of death and return, emerges, figuring a recognisable local belief which the narrative embraces. Like the first child killed by police bullets, the second one dies a violent death, necklaced by a playmate.

The spirit-child trope can be read as a metaphor of the nation in transformation, as the following lines from the end of Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* indicate:

¹³⁴ Naidoo (1997) p.256

¹³⁵ Mda (1997) p.149

¹³⁶ Mda (1997) p.150

The spirit-child is an unwilling adventurer into chaos and sunlight, into dreams of the living and the dead. Things that are not ready, not willing to be born or to become, things for which adequate preparations have not been made to sustain their momentous births, things that are not resolved, things bound up with failure and with fear of being, they all keep recurring, keep coming back, and in themselves partake in the spirit-child's condition. They keep coming and going till their time is right. History itself fully demonstrates how things of the world partake of the condition of the spirit-child.¹³⁷

The magical returning figure of the indigenous belief system is directly linked here to the cyclical nature of certain political trajectories and the Freudian tenet of the return of the repressed and incomplete that van Wyk addresses.

Miraculous and astonishing creation is manifested again in another example, in which Toloki and Noria live beyond the constraints of their material environment:

Then on two walls, he plasters pictures of ideal gardens and houses and swimming pools, all from *Home and Garden* magazines. By the time he has finished, every inch of the walls is covered with bright pictures — a wallpaper of sheer luxury.

Then Toloki takes Noria's hand, and strolls with her through the grandeur. First they go to the bedroom, and she runs and throws herself on the comfortable king-size bed. Toloki hesitates, but she says, 'C'mon Toloki. Don't be afraid. Come and sit next to me.' He sits, and the soft bedding seems to swallow them.¹³⁸

On first reading this may appear to be an enactment of a consumer fantasy which drives the desire for material acquisitions, here framed by a medium of the bourgeois ideal, the *Home and Garden* magazine. An element of this is indeed present, yet I suggest that the scene does more to foreground the difference between Toloki's and Noria's real-life circumstances and the ideal envisioned by the magazine. Social disparity is highlighted, as is the fact that this lifestyle continues to be unavailable to the majority of citizens of the new South Africa. Yet in the act of imagination, in the seamless movement from an empirical world to an imagined world, a magical element of the novel's narrative emerges. Without the narrator's interpretation or distancing, the rational boundaries of the real are transgressed.

Yet an incident later on demonstrates that the couple require peace of mind and a form of psychological equilibrium to facilitate this shift, for when Noria experiences an instance of momentous disillusionment, she is so disturbed that she cannot enter the alternative world:

'Yes, let us walk in the garden.'

¹³⁷ Okri (1992) p.487

¹³⁸ Mda (1997) pp.111-12

However, they do not walk in the garden. They stare at the pictures on the wall, but are unable to evoke the enchantment. They concentrate very hard, but without success. Noria bursts out crying, and apologises to Toloki. She says it is her fault. Her mind is full of too many things that are not pleasant. Toloki is certain that these are the first real tears he has seen from Noria. At the funeral on Christmas Day she did break down into sobs, but he did not see her tears.¹³⁹

There is a reason why she is so disturbed, relating to the death of her second son. It is recounted in a scene by which Mda makes his most biting criticism of the emerging ruling class:

the man who arrived in the big black car and his wife are both members of the national executive of the political movement ... They express their heartfelt sorrow at the death of her son. They say it was a regrettable mistake. But they warn Noria very strongly that she must not speak to anyone about it, especially the newspaper people, because this would take the struggle for freedom a step backwards.¹⁴⁰

I suggest therefore that Noria's imaginative capability is disabled by this act of betrayal of her hopes; her idealistic dreams and fantasies for the new dispensation are shattered by the response of its new official representatives. They disturb her equilibrium to the extent that she is incapable of the act of imagination which she has previously defined as another 'way of living'.¹⁴¹ The betrayal of her vision for the new South Africa, for which she was prepared sacrificially to accept the death of her son, thus implicitly leads to another 'way of dying', a death of vision. Her illusion-world is disturbed by her disillusionment. The fact that this incident overshadows even the death of Vutha is indicated by the reference to her tears as an index of her sorrow, more in evidence now than at Vutha's funeral. The recurrence of this theme of betrayal and continued repression by the official representatives of the new dispensation in *Ways of Dying* points to a general concern and preoccupation with the issues, including a cautious fear that a repetitious cycle of unresolved claims, rather than a full transformation, is being entered into.

Yet *Ways of Dying* ends on a tender, contemplative and hopeful note, that meditates on the power of artistic creations. The scene is imbued with magical, unreal, dream-like qualities. As indicated, the story closes on New Year's Eve, just a week after the Christmas Day funeral. This threshold festival clearly holds symbolic significance in a novel written and set in the period of negotiation between the unbanning of the ANC and other opposition parties, and their accession to power. In the ending of a novel, an indication is given of a novel's relationship to the transition. Indeed, *Ways of Dying* contrasts strongly with the late apartheid novel-endings of arrested births and imminent deaths, which signify, as Elleke Boehmer

¹³⁹ Mda (1997) p.177

¹⁴⁰ Mda (1997) p.172

¹⁴¹ Mda (1997) p.114

puts it, a disabling 'foreclosure of the frozen penultimate'.¹⁴² It is worth quoting the novel's closing section at length, as the boxes of Jwara's figurines emanate a tangibly magical quality:

Two hours after midnight, we are still shouting 'Happe-e-eel' We revel staggeringly past Noria's shack. All is still. There is no movement. No light can be seen through the cracks of the door. The children have gone back to their homes. We look at the mountain of boxes that dwarfs the shack. We do not touch. We just look and marvel. Our children have told us about the monsters that make people happy. Maybe it is the drink, but it seems we can see them through the boxes, shimmering like fool's gold. Not even the most habitual of thieves among us lift a finger towards the boxes.

Somehow the shack seems to glow in the light of the moon, as if the plastic colours are fluorescent ... The smell of burning rubber fills the air. But this time it is not mingled with the sickly stench of roasting human flesh. Just pure wholesome rubber.¹⁴³

This liminal scene two hours into a new year mixes a sense of the 'rediscovered ordinary', to paraphrase Njabulo Ndebele, in which tyres smell 'only' of rubber, and the extraordinary, in which material objects are given a fluorescent, hallucinatory and transparent quality, as if lit up in a different light. It also stages exactly the kind of world of the magic real, which Jacques Stephen Alexis writes about when he notes that it involves a presentation of 'the real, with its accompaniment of the strange and the fantastic, of dreams and half-light, of the mysterious and the marvellous'.¹⁴⁴ As a dramatist, Mda is clearly aware of the transformative effects of lighting, and this scene of a returning calm and peace, protected from intrusion in some strange way by the spirit forms of Toloki's father is, in my view, a scene of mixed hope and mourning, as the reference to the roasting human flesh testifies. To use Boehmer's phrase, it embodies a sense of the post-apocalyptic moment, and a moment of 'gestative mystery'¹⁴⁵ which contains the possibility of new birth. Yet, the sinister is never far from festivities and joy, one of the techniques by which the novel thus resists the rhetoric of uncritical euphoria and hope.

The closing scene of the story zooms in on Noria's shack as it lies calmly in the night. It is presented as aesthetically beautiful in a gesture that I suggest is both literal and ironic. The narrative implies the attractiveness of the construction at the same time as commenting ironically on this view. Earlier in *Ways of Dying* the shack is described as follows: 'Noria's house is going to be beautiful, because the canvas and plastic come in all colours of the rainbow',¹⁴⁶ and a few pages later 'the structure is a

¹⁴² Boehmer (1998) p.51

¹⁴³ Mda (1997) p.212

¹⁴⁴ Alexis (1995) p.201

¹⁴⁵ Boehmer (1998) p.51

¹⁴⁶ Mda (1997) p.58

collage of bright sunny colours. And of bits of iron sheets, some of which shimmer in the morning rays, while others are rust-laden. It would certainly be at home in any museum of modern art.¹⁴⁷ It takes extreme confidence in the South African political context so racked by material inequality, to describe the shack in these terms. Yet Zoë Wicomb makes a similar point in her discussion of an 'informal' South African artist, that 'the non-literate and poorly educated [...] produce artforms that curiously coincide with postmodernist practices in the over-developed west'.¹⁴⁸ Mda's text self-reflexively comments on this relativity of interpretative paradigms when professional critics are called in to evaluate the piles of metal figurines Jwara creates compulsively under the trance of Noria's singing:

the art dealer said the figurines looked kitschy, but added that kitsch was the 'in' thing for collectors with taste this season. It was likely that this trend would continue for the next two years or so. The museum man disagreed. He said the work was folksy rather than kitsch. And folksy works were always in demand with trendy collectors. Although the two men disagreed on how to define Jwara's works, they both agreed that it had some value.¹⁴⁹

An almost identical point is made in the novel a few pages earlier, as Toloki's neighbours comment upon the drawings he orgasmically creates also under inspiration from Noria:

In the same way that they read meaning in the shack he and Noria built, they say the work has profound meaning. As usual, they cannot say what the meaning is. It is not even necessary to say, or even to know, what the meaning is. It is enough to know that there is a meaning, and it is a profound one.¹⁵⁰

This passage indicates, I think, that a significant concern of the novel, is to comment upon the contemporary desire to read the cultural 'other' non-hierarchically, that is, to acknowledge the relativity of interpretative paradigms and aesthetics. This is an issue foregrounded during the transition in South Africa, where, in a gesture to level previous hierarchies of value, there is a more widespread desire to accept the equal value of different ontologies.¹⁵¹

This brings us appropriately back to the inherent desire of magic realism discussed above, to bring opposing ontologies into equal dialogue, which I indicated might be usefully applied to the contemporary

¹⁴⁷ Mda (1997) p.67

¹⁴⁸ Wicomb (1995) p.3

¹⁴⁹ Mda (1997) p.209

¹⁵⁰ Mda (1997) p.200

¹⁵¹ Gavin Hood's film 'A Reasonable Man' (1999) discusses the problem of how different ontologies need to be regarded by the judiciary, where a young African man is put on trial for the murder of a neighbour's toddler who gets caught up in a tablecloth and is thus unrecognisable to the youth. He therefore thinks it is a *tokoloshe* spirit come to harm the child which he was babysitting, so by beating it he assumes he is protecting the child. The question for the jury is whether it was *reasonable* for the boy to assume that he was fighting an evil spirit.

South African context. In addition, in the world of the magic real, meanings cannot be *known* rationally and intellectually, even if the cultural references are familiar to the reader. As the 'readers' of the shack, the drawings and the figurines demonstrate, meanings can only be glimpsed before they elude the reader's desire to know. In the shifting, fluid world the magic real creates, one can only fleetingly make out the artistic transformations that Toloki facilitates, of ever-changing worlds and meanings which healthily defy ossification in a constant process of carnivalesque renewal.

v. Conclusion

In conclusion, the three sections of this chapter have aimed to demonstrate how a Bakhtinian carnival idiom, in its broadest sense as an aesthetic of change and subversion of official languages and discourse, can be detected operating in a variety of ways in literature at transition. I have demonstrated the pertinence of this aesthetic of suspension and incompleteness to moments of major political transformations suggesting why a number of writers appear to mobilise its most significant ideas, whether in overt representations of the carnivalesque, whether revelry resides in the locale of the privileged or non-privileged, or whether the carnivalesque is itself masked and embedded more obliquely in the structure of their texts as signifying practices. The texts discussed in this chapter all display elements of the popular cultural forms surrounding them, mobilising these idioms against the seriousness of official culture by reference to the anarchic, the bodily and the grotesque. All the depictions of the open and incomplete body that eats, becomes pregnant, evacuates, that has protruberances and orifices, are central to the depiction of a body in process, a changing, renewing body. Chimombo's poetry clearly replicates the idioms of carnival, with the inversion of the official body as an eating, defecating, copulating, festive body that serves the regeneration of the popular. The postapartheid poets similarly use idioms of carnival, whether to locate agency in marching crowds, or to invert officialdom's piety by exposing flesh, blood, sewage, all aspects of the material underside of the official image of the new nation. By the use of puns, semantic and syntactical ambiguity and heteroglossia, language too is opened up to constantly deferred and incomplete meaning, subverting closed meanings and instead suggesting process and regeneration. Mda's novel, similarly steeped in idioms of the carnivalesque, moves from revelry in relation to the material world to revelations of the immaterial. This undermines authority's aspirations to rationality with

the regenerative, anarchic irrational of carnival, but also through the marvellous irrational of magic realism, providing idioms of liberation in carnival chanting and in magical enchantment.

The significance of the carnivalesque framework for interpretation becomes clear when one comes across criticism of the novel which reads the carnivalesque text literally, without irony or parody. Grant Farred, for example, criticises the novel exactly for its tendency toward exaggerated spectacle: '*Ways of Dying* is, along with the demise of radical politics, the victim of its own propensity for spectacle: in staging grief and conflict, it upstages itself.'¹⁵² He critiques its absurdity and grotesqueness, demonstrating his insensitivity to its parodic and carnivalesque qualities. Instead he remains nostalgic for a familiar 'radical politics', suggesting a lack of effective agency in the carnivalesque.

André Brink, in his 'Rediscovery of the Extraordinary', indebted to Njabulo Ndebele, suggests that the use of the unreal or extraordinary that defamiliarises the familiar in any way is regenerative, not only in the South African transitional context:

For too long we have concentrated, in South Africa and elsewhere, simply in order to survive, on the *possible*: this is what has made our lives impossible. Only by dreaming and writing the *impossible* can life be made possible once again.¹⁵³

In other words, both carnival and magic realism can represent threshold genres for a threshold moment. Peter Widdowson, on the other hand reminds us that defamiliarisation is the effect of all literary writing: 'It is one of the principal uses of "the literary" that its imaginative or "magical" properties can transgress the quotidian and the naturalised.'¹⁵⁴ This suggests that in its widest sense the extent of transgression in carnivalesque and magic realist writing is perhaps only a condensed sense of what all literary texts achieve.

¹⁵² Farred (2000) p.204

¹⁵³ Brink (1996) p.203

¹⁵⁴ Widdowson (1999) p.184

CHAPTER 3

Newspapers, Poetry and Political Transition



figure 3.1 Malawi Financial Post, 19-27 June 1993



figure 3.2 The Sowetan, 27 April 1994

Russia became a garden of nightingales. Poets sprang up as never before —
 People barely had the strength to live but they were all singing.
 Andrey Bely¹

i. The press in Africa

Studies of the press in Africa are deeply ambivalent in their perception of the role of the print media. On the one hand, the press, a product of technology imported into nineteenth century Africa, and addressing a progressive literate class, stands as a currency of modernity, and constituent broker of the nation-state. This link between the modern nation-state and the press is persuasively argued in a wider context by Benedict Anderson, who proposes that newspapers provide 'the technical means for re-presenting the kind

¹ Andrey Bely on the early days of the Russian Revolution quoted in Gordimer (1999) p.9

of imagined community that is the nation'.² Referring exclusively to the African media, William A. Hachten imbues them with the progressive ideal characterising modernity, that 'mass communications are important to Africans because they can help speed the processes of development and national integration and bring the continent into a fuller participation in the modern world'.³

In contrast to this perception, and similarly reductively, the press in Africa is often interpreted in terms of the local and 'traditional'. An association is frequently drawn between the press and oral culture, by which the newspaper forum is likened to the 'talking-space' occupied by a village committee, or by a representative spokesperson. The liberal missionary educator, T. Cullen Young, writing in 1938 about Northern Nyasaland, justifies his project to set up a local 'native newspaper' in a new 'non-tribal' industrial settlement, as an extension of traditional practice:

It is the complete absence of this central ['talking-space'] in African life, which makes an emptiness for the African in our townships and labour centres. And it is this empty place which the newspaper fills, provided that it throws its columns open to the African contributor.⁴

This early proposal to provide a dialogic forum for discussion anticipates the continuing importance placed on reader contributions, including of course the literary contributions discussed in this chapter.

Cullen Young's view represents an inversion of Ruth Finnegan's proposed link between the press and oral culture, 'oral poetry takes the place of newspapers among non-literate peoples'; she goes on to identify the role of lyric and praise poetry in commenting on current affairs and moulding public opinion.⁵ This motif is evoked in a rather picturesque, if condescending, way by George Nurse, an ethnographer working in Malawi at Independence: 'The gossip-column is the woman who sings as she pounds or winnows the grain, the news-headline the man on a journey who croons a few words over the jingling of his *mbira*'.⁶ However, I argue that the function of newspaper stories is far more complex than a simple step along a continuum from oral to literary culture, for this relies on an imperial teleology of progress. Yet the fact that many newspapers in Africa continue to devote a space in their pages to creative writing suggests a strong value placed on the kind of artistic interpretation of events that one can also see in oral culture.

² Anderson (1991) p.25

³ Hachten (1971) pp.xiv-v

⁴ Cullen Young (1938) p.64

⁵ Finnegan (1970) p.272

⁶ Nurse (1964) p.102

The popularity of creative writing in newspapers thus remains a contextual point of interest in this chapter.

The conflicting interpretations of the press in terms of 'modernity' and 'tradition' comment upon the theoretical polarisation of the 'nation' into simultaneously a progressive, modern nation-state and a community of heritage and tradition. Thus the same logic of polarisation informs both the contesting interpretations of the press's roles and the contesting narratives of modernity and tradition within a nation's meta-narrative. Anderson, for example, explains the immense popularity of the trope of 'awakening from sleep' in modern nationalism in Europe, as it 'opened up an immense antiquity behind the epochal sleep', which allowed for the 'rediscovery' of 'something deep-down always known'.⁷ Frantz Fanon observes the same imaginative process in anti-colonial African nationalism:

it was with the greatest delight that [the native intellectual] discovered that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather dignity, glory and solemnity. The claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture. In the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native.⁸

The main weaknesses of Fanon's argument here are his lack of acknowledgement of the fact that the boundaries of the nations he refers to are in fact, paradoxically, demarcations of a colonial cartography, and the envisaged national culture therefore is a constructed 'authenticity'.

Yet how this mythic rehabilitation may actually facilitate national identification within colonial demarcations is stated by Roger Tangri, in an article, published in 1968, on the rise of nationalism in Malawi, which interestingly anticipates Anderson's key concept of the 'imagined community':

When we talk about nations, we mean that men identify themselves with a group or national '*image*', and through it with other men for whom they come to feel a common solidarity and mutual sympathy that is not extended to outsiders ... Africans gradually became self-consciously Nigerians or Nyasalanders — groups seized with a 'passion of nationalism' and a *community* of feeling and will — functioning within the physical and political framework established by European colonialists.⁹

⁷ Anderson (1991) pp.195-6

⁸ Fanon (1990) p.169

⁹ Tangri (1968) pp.144-6, my italics.

It is worth taking note of his use of the gendered term 'men' which is meant to signify a gender-neutral 'people', yet in fact tellingly exposes the latent assumptions of the masculine constituency of national identification.¹⁰ Again I suggest, after Anderson, that the press is central to this process of identification.

The nation has become a contested concept in much modern theory, where it is considered as a site of control whose borders are often violently imposed, and is therefore actually inherently volatile and unstable.¹¹ Homi Bhabha suggests that these ambivalences emerge in narratives of the nation: 'As an apparatus of symbolic power, it produces a continual slippage of categories, like sexuality, class affiliation, territorial paranoia, or "cultural difference" in the act of writing the nation.'¹² However, I see the validity in the argument that a strategic solidarity in the name of the nation is necessary to effect change, that a deconstruction of the former narrative is not always enough. In other words at times of transition, a strategic national narrative recalling a former collective oppression can be necessary. At an official level there is a desire to rename the nation, as was seen in the wave of name changes at Independence. Where a name change is ruled out, for example from 'South Africa' to 'Azania', the modifier 'new' is attached, as in the cases of 'the new South Africa', echoed also in the 1990s in 'the new Malawi' to demarcate the difference of the present from the past nation. Other national symbols are often changed, for example flags and national anthems, the new South African flag being a ubiquitous symbol of newness and peaceful change. In Malawi too there was a long national and parliamentary debate in the 1990s about whether the flag should be changed as it had been used by the Malawi Congress Party as its party flag for the previous thirty years and was not seen as a non-partisan national symbol behind which everyone could rally. Any national government seeks these cohesive symbols to counter the kind of fracturing into smaller constituencies along regional, ethnic and language group lines that inevitably follows liberalisation, threatening the central power. The usefulness or oppressiveness of such measures will be further discussed in Chapter 4 in relation to collective, national memories.

In an article on democratisation and the production of a new national identity in Mozambique, Yonah Seleti suggests that recent transitions have led to an overt fragmentation along the faultlines already

¹⁰In Malawi, Banda returned in 1958 from over 40 years abroad with a carefully constructed vision of modern Malawi based on the ancient Maravi kingdom. He had 'recovered' this past whilst assisting a researcher of the Chewa language at the University of Chicago in the 1930s. Here he forged an 'unadulterated', 'authentic' Malawian language and grammar, which he would later forcibly impose on the country through the Chichewa Board, though never himself speaking publicly in any language but English, interspersed with the occasional Latin and Greek.

¹¹ Bhabha (1990) p.9

¹² Bhabha (1994) p.140

inherent in a monologic national narrative. Seleti thus distinguishes the wave of democratisations in 1990s Africa from the wave of Independence around thirty years earlier:

A further fragmentation of national identities has been a feature of the transition from authoritarian rule to a democratic dispensation. The process differs from the forging of a national unity through the liberation struggles that led to independence.¹³

Although one has to be careful to consider South Africa's postcolonialism as a 'special type', as the phrase goes, in relation to many of the surrounding African countries,¹⁴ I think one can see an overt decentralisation and fragmentation of a singular national identity and instead a pluralisation of identities not least through the 'official language' policy that recognises eleven different languages.

Newspapers always play a significant role in political transitions. Invariably, the rise of the national parties in colonial Africa or opposition parties in autocratic states accompanied by a partisan newspaper, providing the textual narrativisation of the collection of oral and performative impulses towards political transition, including reports and rhetorical reproductions of meetings and speeches. Seleti adds that '[i]n looking at nations in transition, it is crucial to examine the emerging patterns of how people talk about the nation and to examine how nationhood is being reproduced daily in social habits and public discourses'.¹⁵ I suggest that newspapers are an important place to look for such emerging patterns, that is, not simply *what* is being discussed, but *how* this is being communicated. The press has a complex, interdependent relationship with political transition, influencing its development, whilst also being dependent on the liberalisations or restrictions determined by the transition.

I wish to limit my focus to the results of the relationship between the press, creative writing and three different political transitions, with reference to newspaper poetry and its newly enfranchised, politically interested readership. I look at newspapers from the South African and Malawian transitions in the 1990s, but have also found fascinating material that works comparatively with both transitions in the 1963 editions of the anti-colonial *Malawi News*. These pieces from the time of Independence focus on colonial and racial politics in ways that resonate with the motifs in the South African press. It is particularly appropriate to look at the pieces of creative writing in the press at the time of transition, when

¹³ Seleti (1997) p.60

¹⁴ Visser (1997) The phrase 'Colonialism of a Special Type' (CST) was used by the Communist party and endorsed by the ANC in the 1960s. Visser suggests that its focus on 'nations' and 'peoples' leads to an assumed 'convergence of interests and aspirations' based on race, obscuring, for example, issues of class. He argues that this is an error repeated in some postcolonial theory. pp.79-80

¹⁵ Seleti (1997) p.47

a nation and its key figures are being re-imagined, as they are positioned deep within the intricate web of associations between the nation, narration, official press and creative writing. I focus on poetry, as this is the favoured genre for contributions because its concise form uses little valuable newspaper space, and can be written rapidly as an imaginative expression of the writers' often pressing concerns. It also demands great ingenuity with language due to its condensed form. However, in many of the newspapers I discuss, short stories are published alongside the poems, providing a chance to expand in narrative upon events in stories with titles such as 'The Defector',¹⁶ 'Voice of the Voiceless'¹⁷ and, more allegorically, 'Sun Set at Dawn'.¹⁸ Clearly not all poems and short stories are topical and overtly political in their concerns, yet due to their publication in newspapers, many do respond directly to current concerns.

I will be using Karin Barber's writings on the popular arts in Africa to interpret the newspaper poems,¹⁹ which may need brief justification. Firstly, I suggest that the poems display characteristics inherent in the popular arts, including, to use Barber's terms, an 'emotional "obviousness"'²⁰ and an 'aesthetic of immediate impact'.²¹ They are not concerned with dominant literary conventions and juxtapose diverse and unrelated styles, discourses, genres and motifs within a piece. They re-use, or recycle motifs and idioms, revelling in a kind of 'cultural brokerage' between styles, celebrating 'indeterminacy and fluctuation'.²² These concepts will be discussed further in relation to individual poems. Secondly, they are forms of literature that can be defined as neither 'traditional' nor 'elite', and therefore fall, according to Barber's definition, into the in-between category of the 'popular'; that is they are not conventional subjects of study and are considered by funding or educational institutions as marginal, crude, amateurish, and generally 'bad' quality. A sense of indeterminacy, fluctuation, subversiveness and vividness connects the newspaper poetry interestingly, through Bakhtin, with the previous chapter, for as Barber writes: "The tendency to define popular art in terms of what it is not — in terms of absences and deviations from established categories — is therefore a true reflection of its fundamental character. In Bakhtin's words, it

¹⁶ Kadzitché (1997)

¹⁷ Mangaka (1997)

¹⁸ Mwakigonja (1994). Any references to sunset implicitly invert the 'Kwacha!' slogan of Independence which literally translates as 'dawn'.

¹⁹ Barber (1987)

²⁰ Barber (1987) p.48

²¹ Barber (1987) p.43

²² Barber (1987) p.64

is unofficial art.²³ Although the categories from which the texts in the previous chapter deviate are different, as they cannot all be characterised as crude and amateurish, the sense of deviation from fixed, established norms, and a playfulness and vividness, revelling in newness and experimentation links the newspaper poems with the carnivalesque texts. Thirdly, they are often part of a small market economy that seeks to gain economic profit from the artistic output. Although I was not able to find out the policy of each newspaper I refer to, the *Malawi News* certainly paid its reader-contributors at one point, for in the 11-17 December, 1993 issue, there is a notice which asks two previous contributors to 'send us their addresses or come in person if they are within Blantyre to collect their money'. The notice continues: 'We are also calling on all creative writers to continue contributing short stories on topical issues to the *Malawi News*. The stories should be written in a matured [sic] manner'. Indeed, topicality and relevance are further characteristics that are features of the kind of the popular arts that Barber discusses; their reach is local rather than international, and therefore needs to be responsive to immediate concerns.

In their introduction to a special edition of the *Journal of Southern African Studies* on popular culture and democracy, Preben Kaarsholm and Deborah James provide an important overview of the issues and debates that have emerged from a number of studies:

[popular culture] can be seen as contributing to public spheres-in-the-making and to a world of civic culture which may initially be transitory and evasive, but which represents an image of a civil society rooted in local needs and interactions. It is from this perspective that [it is possible] to represent popular culture in the South as being of crucial importance to the development of consolidated forms of democracy.²⁴

They conclude that there are 'strikingly similar themes in their accounts of the complex ways popular culture interacts with democracy',²⁵ suggesting the viability of a comparative discussion of political transition and popular culture. They further define my discussion of popular literature as implicitly postcolonial:

In the context of the poorer southern countries, where colonial and more recent histories have left legacies of stark inequality and violent intolerance, the building of a democratic culture has often necessitated more informal means of expression.²⁶

²³ Barber (1987) p.11 She does point out differences, particularly popular arts' commercial function and its often conservative prudishness that *appears* to uphold the 'existing order of things'. However, she does maintain a correlation between African popular arts and Bakhtin's 'unofficial'. p.64

²⁴ Kaarsholm and James (2000) p.208

²⁵ Kaarsholm and James (2000) p.190

²⁶ Kaarsholm and James (2000) p.193-4

This is an opinion which I too reached through my reading of the newspaper poetry in relation to Barber's theories, that consider the historical, economic and political gesture of artistic expressions. Studies by Samuel Kasule on 'Popular Performance and the Construction of Social Reality in Post-Amin Uganda'²⁷ and by Randal Johnson on 'Popular Culture and Political Transition in Brazil'²⁸ come to similar conclusions.

However, some of the poems supportive of autocratic rule, complicit in moulding a heroic narrative of salvation and liberation, do not fit this model. Kaarsholm and James note that popular culture is inherently ambivalent, and does not inhabit a particular political position itself:

Popular culture may stand out as the 'heroic' expression of resistance by marginalized people without access to official channels of power, but can also be seen as a manifestation of the passive acceptance of colonialist, or even fascist ideologies: it is either celebrated as the creative and imaginative product of communities expressing their needs or dismissed as *ersatz* pulp forced upon an unperceptive mass audience.²⁹

The propagandist poems hailing messianic leaders of movements could claim to be interpellating a passive audience. Yet Kaarsholm and James quote Stuart Hall's perception of popular culture which usefully subverts this binary definition:

the 'resistance' role might seem to be quintessentially democratic while the 'hegemonic' role appears as its opposite ... A way out the impasse is suggested by Hall's statement that popular culture is neither pure resistance nor pure domination but rather 'the ground on which transformations are worked'.³⁰

This correlation of the popular with transformation is of course doubly useful to this discussion of popular writing in a time of social and political transformation. It also creates an interesting link with the previous chapter in which transformation was, in the carnivalesque, also located in the realm of the popular.

The following sections will discuss the poetry sent in by readers to Malawian newspapers during the transition to democracy in the 1990s, before travelling back three decades to compare the poems sent in to newspapers during the transition to Independence, closing with a discussion of the reader-contributions to the poetry pages of South African newspapers during the transition period of the 1990s. I will discuss the political and aesthetic gestures the poems enact, and the participatory theoretical figures they represent

²⁷ Kasule (1998)

²⁸ Johnson (1988)

²⁹ Kaarsholm and James (2000) p.195

³⁰ Kaarsholm and James (2000) p.200

as contributions produced by consumers of the newspapers. The specific historical context of each set of poems will be delineated to locate and specify the many characteristics that they all share.

ii. Newspaper poetry and the transition to democracy in Malawi

Malawi Eye Opener

If you are holding a high post
And your business is corruption and bribery
Brother, mind you, brother
Janet Karim and her
Independent are not idle
...

Michiru is
the paper, brother
look at the fine poems
the Arts
A good paper for creative writers
Fine short stories, fine poems
the menu for Michiru
Indeed the eye openers are here.³¹

This poem, published in a newspaper in Malawi in the early 1990s, is a self-conscious reflection of its own expressive act, as it praises the function and the forum of newspaper poetry. It is easy to jump to a critical literary evaluation on a simple reading of the text, throwing into question the poem's own declaration of creative writing in newspapers as 'fine', yet to do so would be to uphold a particular literary aesthetic which ignores the dynamics of such literature's production. The process and the terrain of this poem's publication and the historical context in which it occurs are quite specific and central to an understanding of the poem. It is important, for example, to know that it was published at a time of increasing liberalisation, as Malawi was emerging from Banda's iron rule and the restrictions on personal expression incurred by dictatorship were being relaxed. It is also important to know how the field of communications was changing in the country in the early 1990s. A critical understanding of the newspaper poetry therefore requires a consideration of the social and historical dynamics in which it operates, and the resultant shifting fields of aesthetics and ideology, which give shape to the texts.

³¹ Newspaper poem by Mathews Chione (1996) pp.102-3.

One of the most immediate effects of the political transition from Kamuzu Banda's dictatorship to multi-party democracy was the rapid pluralisation of the press. Press freedom, as a result of which the press was no longer accountable to Banda or the ruling party, was granted on 20 August, 1992. This move proved a potent combination with the new right to free speech, igniting the public forum for debate; in a very short space of time, the number of newspapers available increased from the Banda-owned *Daily Times*, its weekend edition, *Malawi News*, and a regular free party pamphlet *Boma Lathu*, to over twenty different newspapers under diverse ownerships.³² The pluralisation of the press meant a change in the power relations between editors and writers, with authorities more diffuse and, significantly, in competition with each other, a situation which developed also with regard to other publishing outlets outside of the press industry.³³ So while centralised establishments such as international publishing houses or the British Council, who organise writing competitions, still determine a particular standard, which suggests prestige, the demand for more smaller-scale forums for expression, facilitated by a relaxation of the implementation of censorship, has multiplied and localised publishing outlets, with an increase in the number of entrepreneurial self-publishers. The magazine *WASI*, for writers and artists, launched in 1990, a welcome, if rather personality-centred production managed and edited by Steve Chimombo, performs a number of functions, similar to the literary journals in South Africa available throughout the 1970s and 1980s, publishing poems, short stories, paintings, cartoons, reviews, competitions and articles.³⁴

It was fascinating to find that almost every new newspaper which appeared on the market in Malawi between 1992 and the election year, 1994, carried some form of creative writing. In some cases this consisted of a modest poetry slot on the entertainment page alongside the standard puzzles and cartoon strips; in others, a full page was dedicated to a poem and a short story. Importantly, contributions to these pages are largely sent in by readers. As the poem above suggests, in both participating in, and self-consciously commenting on, the function of poetry in the press, it represents a popular form of artistic expression, which readers and writers alike value, especially at moments of political significance, as acts of

³² Cullen (1994) p.98

³³ These include a new publishing house, Jhango, founded by former Writers' Group member James Ng'ombe, a project for the formation of a University Press, and the Kachere publishing programme co-ordinated by the staff in the Department of Theology at Chancellor College. Phiri (1997) p.2

³⁴ *WASI* also demonstrates that it has not yet quite unlearned the culture of concealment itself, as many of the articles and reviews of new books are published anonymously. In these, and specifically in the 'How to write a ...' articles, the magazine demonstrates its envisioned role to improve the standard of writing in Malawi.

self-realisation. Intermittently one will find a call for contributions, as for example the one cited above or one, in *The Weekly News* of 29 April - 5 May, 1997, here restricting its call to younger contributors:

SHORT STORIES/POEMS/CARTOONS

The Weekly News invites short stories and poems from Malawian children.

The contributions be on any subject. Editors are looking for creativity and good command of English Language ...

These calls give a strong clue about editorial policy, valuing 'creativity' and 'good' English, while 'topicality' and 'maturity' were the criteria sought in the earlier example. Chimombo and Chimombo's study of poetry in the press during the transition is valuable for providing a general overview of literary styles and preoccupations in a contextual study accounting for the contestational flourishing of the press. They hold the view that the independent press encouraged poets:

[the press] made them come out into the open, made them bold, confident, able to publish political poetry openly for the first time. New writers sprang from nowhere, almost overnight, and old writers extended their themes. Political visibility was also apparent: your stance was measured by the paper you published in: neutral, single-party or multiparty. You could not afford not to publish in one or the other. Even your inability to publish indicated which side you were on.³⁵

The implications are that even poetry with non-political themes could be placed and interpreted politically according to the context of its publication, stressing the political gesture inherent in the act of publication in the press.

The issues arising from creative writings in the press, including those sent in by readers, are multiple and complex, crossing a number of disciplinary boundaries, so very little critical writing or academic study on the subject has been produced.³⁶ Yet especially in countries which have no tradition of entrepreneurial 'market pamphlets' such as those produced in Onitsha, creative writing in newspapers, which is disseminated to all main urban centres, is to some people, the only form of literature which they may regularly read. Anderson is more correct than he perhaps realises when he appropriately draws a connection between literature and the press, naming newspapers 'one-day best-sellers'.³⁷ Newspapers in Malawi are often shared between three, four or more readers, in schools and offices, or are read aloud round street stalls and on buses. Reading patterns replicate employment hierarchies in official institutions, as the newspaper is handed down from chief executive, who receives it first, via middle rank managers,

³⁵ Chimombo and Chimombo (1996) p.102. I assume that they are referring in the last sentence to previously published poets.

³⁶ For exceptions see Maugham Brown (1991), Osundare (1998), Driver (1996)

³⁷ Anderson (1991) p.35

clerks, secretaries and messengers, to arrive in the cleaners' room on maybe the third or fourth day after its publication. Only the elite can afford to turn newspaper reading into a private, individual experience.

On this point, if the press is instrumental in imagining the community, as Anderson argues, its horizons can not be truly national, for access to newspapers creates another hierarchy based on language, literacy, newspaper distribution and affordability. This is particularly true of Malawi, where literacy rates are still shamefully low, with a large gender imbalance.³⁸ Such social facts and the attitudes which give rise to the statistics, also shape the language of the poetry. This is demonstrated by the opening poem whose male writer addresses fellow citizens of a 'new Malawi' as 'brothers'; other poems, for example, bemoan the nation's past 'emasculatation', thus assuming a male citizenship and readership. This is particularly ironic here, considering the poet's invocation of the influential female media figure, Janet Karim. The implications for the small female reading public are perhaps a further sense of exclusion from such masculinist discourse, compounding the material statistics of exclusion.

In other words, the reach of these poems, most of them in English, and therefore adding another stratum to a hierarchy of exclusion, is limited and delineated along lines of literacy, knowledge of English, gender, income and distribution. Thus newspaper literature reaches a more restricted, elite audience than the short stories, poems and plays broadcast on the radio, for access to a radio is much more widespread in Malawi than to newspapers.³⁹ However, as several commentators have noted, the press still plays a very important part in constructing a sense of national awareness among the literate population.⁴⁰ Those who can read are by definition Malawi's elite minority, in positions of varying influence. Thus the material which they read is bound to influence the dominant ruling discourse and emerging language of power, which takes a new shape with changes to a political system.

Each newspaper issue is a publication that defies closure. It is always part of a whole entity called *The Nation* or *The Daily Times* and so on. Each issue is partly transient, dialogic, unfinished, an open, responsive, locally nuanced forum which, one is assured, will produce the next issue the following day or week. There is dialogue between past, present and future issues of the newspaper, yet within this dynamic there is a dialogic relationship between production and reception. The theoretical figure of the newspaper

³⁸ The UK's Department for International Development quote UN figures that state: 'Though literacy rates have improved from 12% in 1966 to 39% in the 1987 census, absolute numbers of illiterates doubled in the same period and the gender gap widened with 63% of males and only 29% of females literate.' Swainson et al. (1998) section 3.1.4

³⁹ Kerr (1998) p.200

⁴⁰ Hachten (1971) p.26; Obiechina (1973) p.89; Nyirenda (1973) p.54-6

literature as a specifically local, participatory literary genre goes some way to dissolving the formal binary distinction between newspaper reader and newspaper writer. The writer is a reader, just as the reader is always a potential writer in a future issue. Starting with this dialogic figure, I wish to explore its implications in terms of newspaper poetry as a genre of reception, especially as reception theories are central to discussions of popular culture. I identify readers' choice of subject matter in response to their changing environment, then examine this creative writing's innovative re-productions and re-presentations of readings of topical issues in the newspapers. This latter part of the analysis will be presented through an examination of what styles and vocabulary the reader-poets select or 'receive', and creatively recycle and incorporate into their poems. Public discourse is constantly being reported, regenerated and reshaped into local forms in the press, and therefore the creative contributions to the newspaper's pages by its readers overtly take part in this self-perpetuating process.

In their overview of political poetry, Chimombo and Chimombo identify some key themes and signifiers, many of which are immediately related to the iconography of the prevalent political discourse. Key examples include the black cockerel, originally the Malawi Congress Party logo, and the lamp, the icon of the combined opposition movements, representing the contesting ideologies of single-partyism and multi-partyism respectively. These logos were widely disseminated and emphasised in campaign discourse to create an instant association between signifier and signified, especially since, for the sake of the large illiterate section of the population, the political choices were represented pictorially on the referendum ballot papers. The Chimombos finds most examples of these logos in Chichewa poetry, with extended metaphoric battles between light (the lamp) and dark (the black cockerel), which echo the independence struggle's metaphoric 'dawn' and Christian discourse's 'bringing of light'. This teleology is noticeable in a 'political psalm' in *The Independent* sent in by Neli Chamasowa, and published three days after the referendum of 14 June, 1993:

Salimo ya voti
 (June '93 vesi 14)
 Chakuda ... Choyera
 Kubetcha kulowa
 Kusankha Kuponya
 Iyo inali voti
 Iribe Kulota

Psalm of the vote
(June '93 verse 14)
Dark ... Light
Place your bets
Choose Cast (your vote)
That was a vote
There is no guessing (the outcome)

Chakuda ... Choyera
 Kuwina Kuluza
 Kufa kulipo
 Iyo inali Betchi
 Chakuda ... Chowala

Dark ... Light
Win or lose
You could die
That was the bet (gamble)
Darkness ... Shining⁴¹

An example more often found in English is the figurative birth, again echoing independence rhetoric's birth of a nation and Christian discourse's birth of a saviour, as in the titles 'Birth of a Son'⁴² and 'A Child is Born'.⁴³ The latter demonstrates a playful brokerage of a biblical passage,

To us a child is born
 His name is sweeter than honey
 Human rights is his ultimate goal
 Freedom of press his daily food
 ...
 Democracy they call him
 Freedom of association his surname

'Bongololo', meaning 'millipede', was another word taken from political rhetoric, where it was used pejoratively to define multi-party supporters.⁴⁴ It was imaginatively reinterpreted by poets, as in the following lines from 'Bongololo, Train of Democracy', conveying a sense of agency through solidarity:

... we are millipedes, and our numerous legs
 Are wheeling the body of democracy

Let us still forge ahead
 Even when the enemies pluck one of our legs⁴⁵

As the Chimombos suggest, newspapers selected the overtly political poetry for publication on the basis of its expressed ideology, so that multi-partyism/UDF supporting newspapers such as *The Nation* or *UDF*

⁴¹ Chamasowa (1993) translated by Nathaniel Chalamanda

⁴² Chipala (1993)

⁴³ Chimombo and Chimombo (1996) p.94 The verse is identified as an echo of a passage from Isaiah.

⁴⁴ Chirwa (1994) explains that 'In Malawian folklore a millipede is a cowardly creature that coils every time it sense danger.' p.18

⁴⁵ Mulanda (1993)

News, would publish a celebratory piece like 'Bongololo', or 'Malawi Eye-Opener'. Poems expressing disillusionment and highlighting, or cautioning against the negative effects of the transition, would mainly appear in pro-Banda/MCP newspapers. An example of the latter is a poem called 'Memories of Yesterday',⁴⁶ published on Independence Day, 6 July, 1996, by the *Daily Times'* weekend edition, *Malawi News*. The piece constructs Banda's role as a victorious banisher of 'encroachers of western origin', returning the country to an authentic, harmonious and stable state:

Elders would vividly recall
Those historic moments
At the dawn of patriotism
And of nationalism
When the white man froze
At the sight of the African Lion.

In response to the elders' memories, the youth sing and 'dance the cultural dances', which are learned from their 'wise and patriotic fathers'. However, the poem ends with a return to the present, 'But alas/ Such moments are but/ Memories of yesterday', having been 'put to sleep' by 'some curable errors'. The hope is still there that they may 'wake on the sixth day' referring probably to the date of publication, 6 July, Independence Day, and its inherent commemoration of Banda's leadership role. The whole poem refers nostalgically to a loss of Anderson's grand 'epochal past' that nationalist discourse depends on.

Use of the more indirectly associative metaphors developed by the academic poets such as Felix Mnthali, Steve Chimombo and Jack Mapanje is less evident in newspaper poetry. Examples exist though, as in the following lines, which insinuate the growing irrelevance of an obscure, camouflaging mode, 'Chameleon tactics complexities intensified,/ while campaign dances ignored its style'.⁴⁷ This comment actually echoes Mapanje's own statement in his last volume of poetry that 'in times like these your hedging vociferous chameleons/ Are the least you need'.⁴⁸ I would suggest that one disincentive for these particular metaphors' cryptic use in the excitement of the transitional moment was their complex multi-layered levels of meaning. Although the symbols were instantly recognisable, they are inherently ambivalent, where chameleon signifies both failure and creation. The urge of the poems in the rapidly burgeoning press was to convey messages obviously, by being instantly interpretable beyond elite circles, in recording and evaluating particular events and persons. The up-front tone and style of the poems is also

⁴⁶ Chisi (1996)

⁴⁷ Changaya (1997)

⁴⁸ Mapanje (1999a) p.57

determined by the nature of newspaper reading, where they exist only transiently, before being thrown out with the rest of the out-of-date material surrounding it.

Despite what could be defined as their technical weaknesses one cannot ignore how successful the press poems were, for as Chimombo and Chimombo recognise in *The Culture of Democracy*, 'The themes were topical and urgent. That's what the people wanted to hear about.'⁴⁹ In an interview the publisher James Ng'ombe expresses the same evaluative standards as the Chimombos, yet he too recognises the social function of the writing:

A great danger is to rush to write and sail on the newly found freedom with little regard for style and quality. Good writing is mostly created by constraint. The role of Malawian writing after the transition has necessarily tended to be corrective in the sense that most authors feel they have a duty to perform in putting records right. There is [*sic*] bound to be the usual dangers of monotony and repetitiveness, but it is necessary that we go through this therapeutic stage. Not all of it will score high marks.⁵⁰

This is reminiscent of Mapanje's concerns about the effect of a sudden removal of discursive constraint, 'you said whatever the hell you wanted to say. So the metaphors are released ... (sometimes I wonder — the release is good, but perhaps whether it's good for poetry is a different issue)'.⁵¹ These value-judgments indicate how one has to shift one's parameters of interpretation and see these poems as social acts. Barber's theories are useful in this regard. Of the popular arts in general, of which literature constitutes only a part, she notes their

preoccupation with social change which is in effect their determining characteristic. They do not merely allude to innovation or make use of novelties: they derive their energies from change, are constituted out of it, and are also, often quite consciously, about it.⁵²

Citing vocabulary often used to describe popular arts, including innovation, topicality, fashion and exuberance, she sees these all as the 'effects of newness positively embraced',⁵³ facilitated by the popular arts' ability to operate more freely from establishment constraints. Again, the resonances with Bakhtin's carnivalesque are strong here. The predominance of popular styles at times of rapid political change is perhaps therefore inevitable, as Kaarsholm and James suggest.

⁴⁹ Chimombo and Chimombo (1996) p.101

⁵⁰ Ng'ombe (1997)

⁵¹ Mapanje (1994) p.54

⁵² Barber (1987) p.13

⁵³ Barber (1987) p.12

Another hallmark of popular culture Barber identifies is its ability to recycle and substitute, so that in the same way as a musician may make a bass out of a tea chest, writers may recycle themes, symbols and forms.⁵⁴ This feature has already been noted with regard to the poetry: how, with varying elusive motives, it lifts, reuses and reinterprets motifs from political discourse such as the symbols crocodile and millipede and the party logos and slogans, and in the way it partially imports forms such as the psalm, above. Yet the problem with actually identifying a stable model of popular culture is 'because it is, precisely, an aesthetic of change, variety and novel conjuncture'.⁵⁵ The two most stable notions which provide a germ of a model for Barber are 'the unofficial' and an emphasis on 'cultural brokerage'. The 'unofficial' has been discussed with regard to popular culture's relationship to establishments, with the conclusion that most of the poets published in the suddenly freely operating, market-oriented press would not qualify for official status by appearing on school syllabuses or winning prestigious literary prizes.

Barber further contends that because of their transient, changing nature, popular arts tend to be assertive and demonstrative, proclaiming their importance often with moralistic appeals to the audience's emotion, which partly explains popular literature's tendency to broker stereotypes, slogans and clichés. A vital concept which Barber here formulates is an 'aesthetic of immediate impact', which incorporates an explanation for the frequent instantly interpretable moments in popular culture, which to formal criticism represents tedious repetitiveness:

It would be a condescension typical of elite criticism to suggest that the accessibility of these works is facile or simple-minded. Their kind of accessibility seems to me rather to be an art in itself. Many popular forms seem to achieve what might be called an aesthetic of immediate impact. Each moment or possibility within the aesthetic construct is exploited for its maximum effect, its most powerful appeal.⁵⁶

The kind of condescension she refers to is typified by Gordimer in an article in *Index on Censorship* where she assumes a universal literary aesthetic:

The word is free at last. From the point of view of legislation, literature is freed at last, not only from the grasp of censorship but also from the distortion of literary values which meant that no matter how badly and carelessly some writers used the treasure of the word, wrote his or her language, the work would be praised because it was published in opposition to tyranny.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Barber (1987) p.33

⁵⁵ Barber (1987) p.12

⁵⁶ Barber (1987) p.43

⁵⁷ Gordimer (1997) p.32

Barber, in contrast, proposes the reasons and positive effects of this aesthetic for the audience in her conceptions of a 'technique of immediacy' and 'emotional obviousness' with the result that '[t]hrough popular art, expression is given to what people may not have known they have in common.⁵⁸ With respect to the press poetry, its value, as Barber would propose, is to have found a form, in a time of rapid change, in which to express, often emotively, a consciousness of a former collective oppression, a common experience of political change including euphoric hope and frequently, a continuing, disheartening subjectivity to political malpractices and economic hardships.

I end this section with a poem which will be used to compare the previous discussion with poetry written in Malawi in the 1960s. Poetry from both moments arises from political transition and consolidation of new government in Malawi. At these times newspaper circulation is high, and public opinion particularly strident as political stakeholders are renegotiated. The poems' style is *elaborate*, in two senses arising from the word. Firstly, they use a lavish expressive, elaborate style, yet secondly they also elaborate vocally on the political condition in which they are produced.

'Democracy' was published in the new newspaper, the *Saturday Nation*, in 1997, three years after the first multi-party elections, so it is not among the first wave of euphoric poems. However, it still elaborates enthusiastically on the changes, comparing the present to the recent past:⁵⁹

Democracy
by Hankie Uluko

What lovely things
Thy scene hath made
The beautiful bird
In its emerald shade
Freedom of speech, association and religion
Which was absent before
In your beloved region
As the spirit wills
To write of your achievements
Sitting on thy success hills
Fit would the ages
On sounding lines
To reach up to Z
And still would remain
My wit to try
My pencil broken
The blue ink dry
All words forgotten

⁵⁸ Barber (1987) p.48

⁵⁹ Uluko (1997)

Long Live Democracy! Says I
Autocracy is rotten.

The writer of 'Democracy' loftily and elaborately celebrates the transition, embellishing his expression with an archaic style he has possibly read in the mandatory Shakespeare text set at secondary school. It revels in vocabulary and syntax that indicate and advertise the writer's standard of education. The poem also acts as an innovative interjection into the forum of public debate, as a gesture of active participation in democracy. It affirms the new political dispensation, which is unsurprising, considering that the newspaper is owned by the then Finance Minister, and former political detainee, Aleke Banda. Against the background of a long legacy of silencing and censorship incurred by Kamuzu Banda's regime, such bold language as in the last lines was still relatively novel at the time of the poem's publication and buzzed, through the memory of subversion, with a sense of radicalism.

Of course, if one approaches the poem through a more conventional academic literary aesthetic, the reading may be less satisfying. The poem displays a stylistic 'roughness', including deviant grammar, spelling and punctuation and an inconsistency of form and metre. Its priority is to rhyme on alternate lines above consideration of rhythm or sense. It imports unrelated discourses, as diverse as archaic literary English to political rallying calls, and uses idiosyncratic expression and symbolism. Indeed, literary critics of Malawi's post-Banda poetry, the vast majority of which was published in newspapers and magazines, have been led to evaluate it rather disparagingly. The Chimombos, for example, subsume the dynamics of the poems' readings in a universal literary evaluation:

[H]as the independent press produced successful poets? Commercially, yes. Like the newspapers, they sold fast because of the political message ... Quantitatively, yes there has never been such a great number of poets in so short a period in the country before. Qualitatively, no. The poetry was too facile, ready-made, and uneven. Not much care went into crafting the poems.⁶⁰

Ng'ombe too echoes his concern for, lack of 'style and quality'.⁶¹ I feel that these evaluations do not fully address the dynamics of the publication space, and thus rely on an inappropriate and undefined universal literary aesthetic. They do not consider the process of their production which I argue is so crucial to one's appreciation of the poems. What Emmanuel Obiechina writes in 1973, regarding newspaper reading, resonates well in 1990s Malawi:

⁶⁰ Chimombo and Chimombo (1996) p.101

⁶¹ Ng'ombe (1997)

The tendency of newspapers to popularize certain ideas and expressions and to 'demote' them to clichés everywhere has been recognised; but in Africa this tendency is even more pronounced because the scope of the people's reading is so narrow. For a large number of people, newspapers remain the only reading matter. They pore over newspaper pages as if they contained the rarest word of wisdom. That means that new ideas thrown up in newspapers are soon picked up, committed to memory and sometimes put to new use by avid newspaper readers.⁶²

He continues to note the reading of newspapers as an important factor influencing the language and styles of popular literature, thus incorporating into his literary argument the valuable sociological knowledge of reading patterns and behaviour. The example he gives of a phrase, reported, then through repetition 'demoted' to cliché, is the familiar expression 'winds of change', recycled from reports of a famous speech by Harold Macmillan in South Africa in 1960 on the wave of Independence movements. Appropriately, this phrase also occurs frequently in contemporary Malawian newspapers, for example in the editorial of the 15 June, 1961 issue, and in the 18 January, 1963 issue of *Malawi News*, where a letter to the editor refers to 'this age of "Wind of Change"'. The phrase is current in postapartheid poetry, as has been shown, and also occurs in one of the South African newspaper poems from the 1990s to be discussed. Such key phrases can thus travel across borders and retain their resonance through time, demonstrating their power to capture imaginations.⁶³

In the poem 'Democracy' we find the prominent quotation of a familiar phrase, 'Freedom of speech, association and religion'. This phrase puts into authoritative legal terms a basic human right denied to Malawians under Banda, and therefore the very act of its expression and repetition signifies an important state of change. The phrase had great currency, and was quoted with variation in countless articles, editorials and political speeches reported by newspapers. *The Nation* even has as its motto, 'Freedom of expression the birthright of all', which appears under the paper's name on every front page. The insistent reproduction and reinterpretation of 'freedom' is of course characteristic of political transition everywhere, headlining the moment of change in the two newspaper front pages depicted above. It is a signifier of a desire, which, because it can never be fully fulfilled, always remains a site of negotiation and space for imagination.

At the end of 'Democracy', the familiar mantra praising Banda, 'Long live Kamuzu', is emptied of its original content, and recycled, again to record the decrowning of transition in 'Long live Democracy!

⁶² Obiechina (1973) p.89

⁶³ 'Winds of change' is a popular title for texts of transition, for example Dene Coetzee novel *Winds of Change* (1995), of Wilhelm Verwoerd's autobiography *My Winds of Change* (1997) and 'Winds of change - The Election Process in Malawi' in *The Human Rights Observer Afronet* (2000)

Says I/ Autocracy is rotten!' The words, 'Says I', are interesting for their inclusion as they imply Uluko's individual voice, his urge to express his opinion, not simply as an extra decibel in an anonymous chorus of rallying chants. The ease with which a heroic narrative of salvation could be constructed had been seen thirty years earlier, and the pronouncement of individual agency and formal praise for a system that allows this, makes a reading of the Independence poems all the more poignant in hindsight.

ii. Newspaper poetry in Malawi at Independence

The press had its own significant role to play at Nyasaland's independence from British colonial and federal rule, and its emergence as the new nation, Malawi. By the time of Independence, in 1964, Banda had five years' experience as the country's Prime Minister behind him, and as John McCracken's study shows, had already built up a close loyal network which condoned his autocratic tendencies.⁶⁴ Among these was the youthful Aleke Banda, who started up the cyclo-styled news-sheet, the *Malawi News*, which rapidly expanded into a sleek newspaper. In parallel with the party's domination of the political scene, the newspaper dominated the press marketplace. An understanding of this monopoly makes an important distinction between the Independence readership and the readership of post-Banda Malawi, when there was a large selection of newspapers to choose from.

The *Malawi News* was crucial to the centralised setting of a political, even moral norm, which support for the MCP came to represent. In this fast-growing newspaper, founded in 1959, poetry regularly started to be published in 1963. At this time, as the MCP's mouthpiece, it was considered a radical nationalist agitator, orchestrating solidarity against colonial rule and federation with the Rhodesias. Interestingly, the convention of readers contributing to a regular newspaper poetry corner was initiated in the 12 April, 1963 edition of the *Malawi News*, precisely two weeks after the break-up of the Central African Federation and Nyasaland's declaration of self-rule on 29 March, 1963. These poems' discourse of anti-colonialism, racial pride and pan-Africanist identification comes closer to that in some of the South African newspaper poetry discussed later. The poems, as a body of creative writing, are perhaps particularly apt texts by which to study the linguistic forms which aimed to appeal to, and mobilise, the public imagination as a discourse of national imagination and identification. The poems foreground the creative process involved in constructing a collective memory of national origin and belonging, and close

⁶⁴ McCracken (1998)

readings can highlight their duality, as they write, or are written into, the anti-colonial nationalist narrative. The young activist mentioned by Mapanje, Henry Masauko Chipembere, who was in close correspondence with Banda in the late 1950s, and persuaded him to return, wrote a revealing letter to Banda, making him aware of the narrative into which he would be placed: 'human nature is such that it needs a kind of hero to be hero-worshipped if a political struggle is to succeed'.⁶⁵

A poem which exemplifies such a heroic narrative, headlining its political message in its (mis-punctuated) rallying title, is 'This, Malawi Kamuzu Made It Free'.⁶⁶ The opening couplet, 'This is our land, this Malawi/ This land of liberty' enunciates the nation using the first person plural possessive 'our' to form a sense of affinity, or what Kerr calls 'pan-Malawianism'.⁶⁷ It is furthermore rooted in the ideal of 'liberty', a term central to the texts of democratic constitutions, disseminated in political rhetoric to signify progressiveness and modernity. In other words, 'our land', a 'land of liberty' form a rhetorical unit which calls into being an autonomous, equal and united people. The next two lines instate the leader, 'This bastion of Africa/ Kamuzu made it free', placing the country within a privileged position in the wider ideological concept of 'Africa', recycling imperial rhetoric's 'bastions of empire'. The climactic invocation of the leader's name closes the first section of the poem, reproducing the official history, crediting him solely for Independence. There follows a narrative of his actions in a further succession of rhetorical motifs, again couched in the vocabulary of progressiveness and modernity: 'He carved out a new nation/ From vast sporadic states/ And preached emancipation'. The theme and its echoes of the contemporary discourse of American black civil rights continues in the lines: 'New Nations have arisen,/ While others, yet, take form!' This is set in an ambivalent relationship with the depictions of an archaic 'Africa', resting upon a mythic, authentic past, though again couched in twentieth century terminology: 'Central Africa found its ego,/ And its inheritance!' The poem is scattered with verbs signifying emergence, 'shaping', 'awakening', 'breaking', 'emerging', 'approaching', 'arisen', 'take form'; this emergence is rooted in the epochal sleep, which allows for the rediscovery of an antiquity:

There is a great awakening,
Throughout a Continent,
And a new dawn is breaking
All shed of discontent

⁶⁵ Devlin et. al. (1959) p.12

⁶⁶ Anon. (1963b)

⁶⁷ Kerr (1998) p.36

The repeated use of the present participle creates an effect of continuing activity, of an unstoppable momentum of change.

The last verse reads like a blessing, invoking spiritual guardianship through its rhetorical techniques of parallelism and formulaic repetition, yet still narrowly averting the proclamation of Banda as the Messiah:

This is our own, our Malawi!
 Dear land of liberty;
 Proud bastion of Africa,
 Kamuzu made it free —
 Free for all generations;
 Man's glory on earth;
 Blest be our dedications,
 And joys of priceless worth!
 This is our land, this Malawi;
 This is our land of Liberty;
 O, bastion of Africa;
 Kamuzu made it free!

Exclamation marks emphasise the poem's promotive, rallying mode, yet also signal a tone of voice, even when read silently. They act as markers, denoting, ironically, the *lack* of clear boundary between a literary and an oral genre, indicating a dialogue with other performative modes.

The poem 'This, Malawi Kamuzu Made It Free' serves well to exemplify the duality manifested in the simultaneous appeals at this moment of political transition to progressive modernity and remembered, valorised antiquity. Yet modes of counter-identification compete amongst themselves for political stakeholders in the new dispensation. Colonialism was opposed by movements whose ultimate end-motives contrasted, particularly, nationalism and pan-Africanism. Crudely put, anti-colonial nationalism's proclaimed emphasis was more generally on forming a sense of pride in a national identity by constructing a national culture within national boundaries, yet often justifying political links with Europe. On the other hand, pan-Africanism, with its appeals to an essential 'African personality', developed as a mobilising idea by the negritude movement, was, as the name suggests, exclusively continental in its vision.⁶⁸ Yet at transition to Independence, both vocabularies could sit alongside each other in public discourse, including creative writing, to appeal to and incorporate diverse popular sentiment. In Malawi, the ideology of pan-Africanism, characteristic of negritude, was relegated in the conflict between national and continental vision by a different kind of ideology which leaders like Banda formed, of distinctly national identities,

⁶⁸ Childs and Williams (1997) p.32

based on ancient kingdoms such as Maravi. Writing two years before the poems were published, in 1961, Fanon, in his chapter 'On National Culture' does not in fact see a conflict, but a progression, with pan-Africanist thinking as an initial stage of the rehabilitation of national culture:

Colonialism did not dream of wasting its time in denying the existence of one national culture after another. Therefore the reply of the colonized peoples will be straight away continental in its breadth.⁶⁹

Malawian newspaper poetry at times articulates a pan-Africanist response to colonialism rather than one bounded by the nation, for example in titles like 'To-morrow Africa To-morrow', 'I am Black and Great' and 'Whither Bound O Africa?'. The latter contains the following lines which echo negritude's reinstatements of classical civilisations within Africa:

O Africa,
Land of great Pharaohs,
And the vast pyramids
With strange architectural laws
My father land⁷⁰

Where both vocabularies of nationalism and pan-Africanism, with their different priorities are juxtaposed in the same text, the effect is again one of ambivalence. Such a dual vision is apparent in 'This, Malawi Kamuzu Made It Free', with its eulogy to the 'new nation', yet also set in a discourse whose reach is 'beyond the far horizon', in a territory named 'Mother Africa', in contrast to 'My father land', above. The feminisation of Africa comes up in the South African poetry later, where I discuss the problematic of the gendered nation.

Not surprisingly, then, the poem in the *Malawi News* from the year before Independence, 'Our National Paean' is an elaborate poem of praise of Kamuzu Banda. It is sent in by the reader Lusekelo Katoki:⁷¹

⁶⁹ Fanon (1990) p.171

⁷⁰ Anon. (1963c)

⁷¹ Katoki (1963)

POET'S CORNER
Africa Speaks

OUR NATIONAL PAEAN

Kamuzu, Upright, sincere,
Adonis, Star of Victory,
Who lovest all,
Plant in us thy immortal wisdom.

Kamuzu, Sweetheart of Africa,
Enlightened, sublime, omniscient,
Unquestionably super,
We pledge to Thee our Love, loyalty.

Hark, Ngwazi, the living, the dead,
And all neuter genders are thine;
Thou art the author of a brave Nation,
The Fountain of Liberty,
Thy people promise Thee toil.


Kamuzu, to Thee we likewise owe
The venerable names
Of Freedom, Equality,
Justice and Fraternity.

In short it's due to Thee, Kamuzu,
Thou Omnipotent Malawi Star,
That we have come to be
Precisely what and who we now are.

Precious and winsome is thy name,
Thy one word a full Ordinance,
Thy gait is magnetic,
Oh, ye Harbinger of Peace,
Prince of Calm, the Nation adores Thee!

By Luskelo Katoki

BUY BONDS TO HELP DEVELOP MALAWI



OUR NATIONAL PAEAN

Kamuzu, Upright, sincere,
Adonis, Star of Victory,
Who lovest all,
Plant in us thy immortal wisdom.

Kamuzu, Sweetheart of Africa,
Enlightened, sublime, omniscient,
Unquestionably super,
We pledge to Thee our Love, loyalty.

Hark Ngwazi, the living, the dead,
And all neuter genders are thine;
Thou art the author of a brave Nation,
The Fountain of Liberty,
Thy people promise Thee toil.

Kamuzu, to Thee we likewise owe
The venerable names
Of Freedom, Equality,
Justice and Fraternity.

In short It's due to Thee Kamuzu,
Thou Omnipotent Malawi Star,
That we have come to be
Precisely what and who we now are.

Precious and Winsome is thy name,
Thy one word a full Ordinance,
Thy gait is magnetic.
Oh, ye Harbinger of Peace,
Prince of Calm, the Nation adores Thee!

[figure 3.4]

The poem is quite clearly structured on the kind praise verse conventionally addressed to leadership figures in this region of Africa.⁷² It thus places contemporary vocabulary into a familiar local genre, recognisable as a distinct convention to the localised readership, expressing a particular form of pact between ruler and ruled. Further intertexts in the poem range from the bible, classical mythology, and liberationist discourse, idiosyncratically mixed with militaristic and romantic vocabulary. Dominant, in relation to the discussion above, are the lines in the fourth stanza, 'Freedom, Equality, Justice and Fraternity'. They appear to be dedicated to Kamuzu within the poetic convention of praise, as praise names. Although clearly an Independence corollary of 'freedom of speech, association and religion', the phrase has a more archaic sound to my ears, invoking less the discourse of a UN declarations of rights, than the libertarian discourse of the Enlightenment, particularly the French Revolution. Again one can establish the currency of words like 'freedom', 'justice', 'fraternity' and 'equality' by reading the contemporary newspapers with their countless reproductions and reinterpretations of liberation from colonial rule, with its manifestos of racial equality, national independence and pride. By combining convention and quotation with innovation, Katoki has created a topical, local style, quirkily juxtaposing mixed discourses and contemporary vocabulary with an older, established local cultural form.

I approach the poem in detail from three different sources of intertext which generate potential productions of meaning that resist a unified narrative: the bible and its attendant prayer-book missionary discourse, imperial rhetoric and finally indigenous aesthetic forms from oral culture. Clearly it is artificial surgically to isolate these separate discourses which are themselves entangled in their evolution, for example where imperial motives are legitimised rhetorically through biblical vocabulary, or where missionary discourse adopts indigenous motifs into its translations of the bible. Ironically, of course, these discourses have all, in some context, been in conflict with one another, fearing the substantial threat from each other's power bases to their own existence.

As the final two lines, quoted above, indicate, one of the most overt influences on the vocabulary and epistemology of this poem, is the bible. There has been a long tradition of Christian influences on literature in Malawi as has been seen in poems such as 'Salimo ya Voti' and 'A Child is Born'. Steve Chimombo's research shows that poetry by missionaries was the first form of published poetry in Malawi.

⁷² See Finnegan (1970) pp.111-46 for a discussion of panegyric including Ngoni praise verse which presents remarkable parallels to the structure, style and conventions of 'Our National Paean'.

He has uncovered poetry published in a number of early newspapers and periodicals such as *Central Africa*, *Nyasa News* and *Aurora* between 1893 and 1901 in which Christian epistemology is still firmly a colonising one, for example:

We passed a lonely place, a few stray huts,
A krall [*sic*] in darkest heathen kaffirland
I said, 'How desolate! Who tends these souls?'⁷³

Several decades later, the bible becomes a source for anti-colonial resistance. Finnegan, notes a series of instances where hymns have been used as protest songs, famously 'Nkosi Sikelel i'Afrika' by the ANC. In Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta was cast in the role of the 'great leader and saviour, the focus of unity and loyalty',⁷⁴ as a translated extract from a Mau Mau hymn demonstrates:

[God] told Kenyatta in a vision 'You shall multiply as the stars of heaven, nations will be blessed because of you'. And Kenyatta believed him and God swore to it by his mighty power.⁷⁵

In Malawi too, the metaphoric base of the iconography of Banda as the Messiah, instituted, as noted, by Chipembere, was imaginatively embellished in cultural expressions.⁷⁶ As in other parts of Africa, hymn tunes were lifted wholesale from church psalters, and sung at the time of Independence to adapted texts.⁷⁷ In the same way, redemptive metaphors and idioms of salvation were lifted and recycled in texts of Independence, most obviously the metaphor of 'dawn', whose translation, 'Kwacha!', became Malawi's Independence slogan, and which adapts neatly to the popular trope of awakening. Quotations from the bible must therefore not simply be read as unqualified acceptance of missionary ideology, but as enacting the subversive element of mimicry which Bhabha has defined, by which emulation of authority incorporates its subversion, for the 'civilizing mission is threatened by the displacing gaze of its disciplinary double.'⁷⁸ This applies to the biblical rhetoric in 'Our National Paean', informed by this legacy of anti-colonial protest in the name of Christianity. Yet as noted, even anti-colonial discourse was itself, by

⁷³ Chimombo (1994/95) p.21 He discusses, for example, missions' connections with literacy, and with the earliest literature bureaux, which authorised publications, writing competitions etc. See also Msiska (1987) p.13. Its subject-matter generally justifies the missionary presence in Africa, yet he notes that missionary periodicals were also vehicles for criticising the Protectorate's colonial administration, illustrating the conflicts of power-bases between the missionaries and colonial administrators. Chimombo (1994/5) pp.13-41

⁷⁴ Finnegan (1970) p.286

⁷⁵ Finnegan (1970) p.286

⁷⁶ It incorporated into its epistemology the violent, yet unsuccessful rebellion of Rev John Chilembwe in 1915, pointing to the minister's first name and casting him as the figure of John the Baptist, preparing the way for the Messiah who was to come after him. John McCracken recalls an old man detained for his part in the Chilembwe rising using this metaphor when speaking at a conference in Limbe, Malawi in 1970.

⁷⁷ Nurse (1964) p.105

⁷⁸ Bhabha (1994) p.86

1963, imbued with authoritarian, hegemonic tendencies. This is evident in the poem, in which biblical discourse, though its legacy here is in resistance, inspires tropes promising obedient subjectivity in phrases such as, 'We pledge to Thee our Love, loyalty', 'Thy people promise Thee toil' and most explicitly, in an acceptance of a unified text of authority, 'Thy one word a full Ordinance'.

The main linguistic influences of the bible are the selective use of quotation, and a stylistic mimicry of an archaic language as it is preserved in some English versions of the bible, including vocabulary such as 'Hark', and a consistent use of the second person singular pronoun 'thee', 'Kamuzu, to Thee we likewise owe', 'the Nation adores Thee!' The capitalisation of the pronoun referring to Banda in the Christian tradition when referring to God or Christ, is of course most telling. Katoki takes obvious pleasure in the use of biblical discourse, referring to Banda as 'sublime', 'omniscient', 'omnipotent', the possessor of 'immortal wisdom'. He utilises the figure of mutual Christian love first in the idiomatic: 'Kamuzu... Who lovest all', and secondly: 'We pledge to Thee our Love, loyalty', capitalising it to lend it a particular significance. The final couplet of the poem quotes names of the Messiah which refer to him as 'ye Harbinger of Peace, Prince of Calm', marking a lull in turmoil, and commencement of a state of stability, thus expressing the common hope of transition. The phrase is clearly a quotation of the passage from the prophecies of Isaiah:

and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called,
"Wonderful Counsellor, the Mighty God,
the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace".⁷⁹

Anyone who has spent any length of time in Banda's Malawi will instantly recognise the appeal to 'peace and calm, law and order', which was one of Banda's favourite pieces of rhetoric. It is evident from the pages of the *Malawi News* in the 1960s that 'peace and calm' was a current rhetorical device even then. For example, in a letter to the editor in the 13 July, 1961 issue, a reader writes:

It is, indeed, hard to thank this man — our Messiah. Since we cannot ably thank him in words, we should do so in deeds. We should help him. He calls upon us to keep "Peace and Calm" during the coming elections. Let us, therefore, be peaceful and calm.

At the climactic invocation of Banda at the end of Katoki's poem, he is lauded as 'ye Harbinger of Peace, Prince of Calm'. One can see that Katoki has recycled the biblical quotation from Isaiah, which refers to

⁷⁹ Isaiah 9.v.6

the Christian Messiah as, 'the everlasting Father, Prince of Peace' to tune to the key of Banda's rhetorical appeal. Thus 'ye Harbinger of Peace, Prince of Calm' strongly recalls the rhetorical unit, 'peace and calm'. And so in this poem too, one can see a creatively embellished re-production of Katoki's reading of the content of the *Malawi News* at the time.

Comment on this increasingly hegemonic use of biblical discourse in consolidations of power leads me to the next field of intertextuality in 'Our National Paean': imperial discourse.⁸⁰ Like the missionary poetry Chimombo discusses, imperialism too legitimises its colonising project in carefully selected motifs and quotations from the bible. Such imperial discourse resonates throughout the poem in partnership with the biblical language, combining, for example, the aesthetics of leader-worship with praise of progress towards liberal constitutional ideals: 'Thou art the author of a brave Nation,/ The Fountain of Liberty'. Leader-worship in the poem is again combined with a listing of ideals of modernity, this time echoing the constitutional trinity of another imperial power, that is, *liberté, égalité, fraternité*:

Kamuzu, to Thee we likewise owe,
The venerable names
Of Freedom, Equality,
Justice and Fraternity.

One could, in the poem, tease out a vague conflated reference to other, more removed imperial powers, which Banda himself famously admired, Rome and Athens. The choice of 'Paean' in the title is a first indication, its etymology in Latin, from Greek, originally meaning a hymn to the Greek and Roman god Apollo. He is often depicted in statue form as the Greek ideal of male beauty, which links rather amusingly with Banda's depiction on a classical pedestal, homburg and flywhisk in hand, in the sketch accompanying the poem. The opening lines too, refer to Greek mythology: 'Kamuzu, Upright, sincere,/ Adonis, Star of Victory', where Adonis, rather ironically, is an attractive youth, associated with a kind of sexuality the prudish Banda did all he could to suppress. Yet the name has an etymological root, through Latin and Greek, in the Phoenician *adon*, meaning 'lord'. It is an ironic indication of the power of a colonial education that a Malawian reader sends in a poem to the newspaper expressing his praise for an anti-colonial leader in terms of classical European mythology. The term 'Star of Victory', ringing with imperial martial glory, which follows the 'Adonis' reference, is echoed later in the poem in the line, 'Thou

⁸⁰ I use the term 'imperial' rather than 'colonial' to emphasise those Western moral and political ideals, which in turn served the process of colonisation and colonial administration. It is a slight differentiation based on emphasis, lending more weight to the ideology rather than its political implementation.

omnipotent Malawi Star', imbuing also an aesthetic of heroism, and literally, 'stardom'. Again it is more difficult to identify an intertextual source here, than to establish the prevalence of this leadership motif, whether in the context of Christian or imperial discourse.

In an article, 'Bard of the Tabloid Platform', Niyi Osundare discusses his role as a regular newspaper poet, or 'verse journalist' in Nigeria in reaction to the masterful, yet relatively inaccessible poetry of his literary forerunners:

The first generation of Nigerian poets were poets of the ivory tower, literary cultists who monologued to each other. The people wanted to see their image; the poets' mirrors were too high above their heads.⁸¹

He raises many debates in this statement on the fraught relationship between creative and journalistic writing, suggesting that the literature that he writes for the newspaper requires an aesthetic of relevance and topicality. His practice was to write poetry, much of it satirical, based on its topicality and 'newsiness'⁸² with the aim of raising issues which newspaper readers instantly recognise. Importantly here, he notes: 'Prominent at the back of my mind are the traditional roles of the oral poet to whom I owe a lot: to entertain, to inform, to satirize and to warn.'⁸³ Topicality, relevance, communication and artistic pleasure are thus characteristics which Osundare's newspaper poetry shares with his vision of oral poetry. We see here two interconnected fields of debate, firstly the discussion on theme, stylistic features, and a poem's *aesthetic* gesture and secondly on the structures of performance or publication of the poetry, that is, its *social* gesture. Both of these interrelated fields of discussion are central to an exploration of the intertextual relationship between the *Malawi News* poetry, and oral cultural forms. This clearly also brings to mind the discussion on the ambivalence of the newspaper as a form that connotes both 'tradition' and 'modernity', Osundare identifying with the 'traditional' function that Cullen Young and Finnegan perceive.

It is most extraordinary to read Finnegan's extensive analyses of panegyric or the praise poetry form in her *Oral Literature in Africa* alongside 'Our National Paean', and to realise the strong resemblance between this genre and the poem⁸⁴ in terms of its themes and structure, its stylistics and artistic

⁸¹ Osundare (1996) p.80

⁸² Osundare (1996) p.83

⁸³ Osundare (1996) p.83

⁸⁴ Most of her information about this, 'one of the most developed and elaborate poetic genres in Africa' (Finnegan, (1970) p.111), comes from a large body of documentation and scholarly work on the form, most of it focusing on Southern Bantu areas, particularly Nguni speakers, whose offshoot Ngoni people form a large ethnic grouping in northern Malawi (p.122 See also Mphande (1996), Vail and White (1991), Chapter 7). It can be assumed that Lusekelo Katoki, whose names indicate his northern Malawian origins, was quite familiar with the form.

conventions, its aesthetics and social gestures.⁸⁵ Panegyric, or praise poetry can be defined as an adaptable genre of 'laudatory apostrophizing',⁸⁶ addressing a personality, an object, or even on occasions, the self. A 'paean', in ancient Greek culture was of course just such a sung or chanted hymn. Finnegan identifies the significance in African praise poetry, of formal names, and lays stress on the importance of naming within praise poetry, concluding that 'the use of "praise names" is almost universal'.⁸⁷ 'Our National Paean', contains a plethora of praise names, ranging from 'Adonis', 'Star of Victory', 'Ngwazi', 'author of a brave Nation', 'Omnipotent Malawi Star' to the final 'Harbinger of Peace, Prince of Calm'.

With regard to the social gesture of praise verse, Finnegan writes that it often plays a significant role at transitional rites of passage, marking a new status.⁸⁸ Even more appropriately, she notes that '[a]ccession to office is another common context for praise poetry, usually in public and in the presence of those who take this opportunity to express their loyalty'.⁸⁹ In this context, and at any subsequent appearances, 'the ruler's position is commented on and recognized by the stress laid both on the dignity of the office and, more explicitly, on the achievements of its present incumbent'.⁹⁰ The lines: 'to Thee we likewise owe ...' and '[i]t's due to Thee, Kamuzu ... That we have come to be/ Precisely what and who we now are' clearly celebrate such achievement. A related function of praise verse is to preserve authorised versions of history,⁹¹ which the poem fulfils in allocating all agency in the Independence struggle and credit for its achievement to Banda. The act of reciting praise thus validates and legitimises rule by formal enunciation, or invocation.

Finnegan gives an extensive picture of the common stylistics of praise verse, which must be met for general approval. The language must be 'archaic and lofty'⁹² to establish the formality of the occasion, for '[p]raise of a person (or thing) is not something to be expressed in bald or straightforward language'.⁹³ I established the archaic nature of the poem's language earlier with reference to its biblical overtones, and its loftiness in its expression of both imperial and religious ideals. Respectful distance and universalisation is

⁸⁵ Importantly, in the context of this discussion, she indicates the form's adaptation in modern political contexts, emphasising the need to discuss the literary quality and form of modern political songs, and how far they relate to older artistic conventions of praise.

⁸⁶ Finnegan (1970) p.121

⁸⁷ Finnegan (1970) p.111

⁸⁸ Finnegan (1970) p.119

⁸⁹ Finnegan (1970) p.119

⁹⁰ Finnegan (1970) p.120

⁹¹ Finnegan (1970) p.121

⁹² Finnegan (1970) p.117

⁹³ Finnegan (1970) p.118

achieved through the use of figurative language, including extended metaphors, which in the poem, are produced by the various metaphoric praise names.⁹⁴ According to Finnegan, foreign words are sometimes introduced to praise poetry to 'add colour' to the poem,⁹⁵ of which the unusual title 'paean' and reference to 'Adonis' might qualify. She notes that the display of knowledge of such 'exotic' vocabulary, together with elaborate words, deliberately advertise the poet's high level of educational achievement, and thus, most importantly, in turn reflect praise and admiration on to him or her. Sound also plays an important role in the recitation of praise verse, with a strong stress on rhythm, compounded by repetition and parallelism.⁹⁶ The metre in the poem is quite regular and scans comfortably, whilst the first lines of each stanza reinforce a rhythm with the repetition of 'Kamuzu' and parallel names such as 'Ngwazi'. Finally, Finnegan identifies interjections and ideophones as devices to enhance poetic quality in praise poetry, devices which we find in the forms of 'Hark' and 'Oh'. I would add that the final exclamation mark too raises the tone, and level of emotion, indicating oral exclamation, as discussed in the poem 'This, Malawi Kamuzu Made It Free'.⁹⁷

'Our National Paean' stands at the threshold of a number of loci of transition, imbuing it with a particularly syncretic quality. Most obviously, it stands at a threshold moment of a transition from colonial to indigenous government, and in response, it utilises the indigenous genre of praise performed at ritual transitions in a person's status. In doing so, it uses a formal poetic convention which is itself in transit between modes of performance, that is, in transit between written and oral expression. Indeed, Finnegan appropriately notes the adaptation of the praise genre into written form in newspapers:

In some areas praise poetry may no longer be so popular as in earlier years, but local newspapers still abound with written praise poems on important occasions, on the installation of a new paramount chief, for instance.⁹⁸

To reiterate, I do not mean to evoke a simplistic evolutionary transition from 'traditional oral' to 'modern literary' poetic expression, more an ongoing relationship between oral and written modes of communication, developing in response to the audience. This dynamic is also evident in the easy

⁹⁴ Finnegan (1970) p.117

⁹⁵ Finnegan (1970) p.131

⁹⁶ Finnegan (1970) p.130

⁹⁷ Finnegan's and Nurse's transcriptions of oral verse notably tend to insert the punctuation mark at climactic points.

⁹⁸ Finnegan (1970) p.144

adaptation and translation of cultural conventions between the *Malawi News* poetry, and its adapted modern oral corollary in the forms of political songs of Independence.

George Nurse's discussion of political songs at the transition to Independence in his contemporary article, 'Popular Songs and National Identity in Malawi',⁹⁹ provides song texts and performance contexts which serve as a useful point of comparison with the *Malawi News* poems. Thematic concerns are shared, expressed in a common vocabulary and grammar of symbols, as the following song text, strongly recalling the praise in 'Our National Paeon' and 'This, Malawi Kamuzu Made it Free', demonstrates:

There is no other chief
Who surpasses Kamuzu,
Oh, yes, he has gained the country
By his words alone¹⁰⁰

The function of praise is the same, although in comparison with the song, the poem is much more formal and lofty in tone, indicating perhaps its leading voice, rather than choral, role. In song, the praise is transacted in a performance of mass solidarity, whose anonymity stands in contrast to the originally authored, signed poems in the newspaper. Banda's performance of power through the authority of the word, as celebrated in the phrase 'he has gained the country by his words alone', recalls in 'Our National Paeon' the line 'Thy word is full Ordinance', documenting Banda's famous oratorical skills. Such correspondences clearly form a dialogic relationship with certain popular symbols and motifs in circulation, usually presenting embellished versions of empirical facts. As Nurse himself notes, concerning political transitions to Independence: '[f]ew territorial autonomies have been established without a struggle of some sort, and each such struggle breeds its own symbols'.¹⁰¹ Many of these characteristics of Malawian newspaper poetry from the 1960s and 1990s occur, despite the obvious differences, also in South African newspaper poetry.

iv. Poetry in South African newspapers at the end of apartheid

Newspaper literature sits differently in the South African cultural arena because of the vastly greater range of cultural outlets available. The poems and short stories published in the press play a far more minor role in comparison to the newspaper literature in Malawi, as other avenues for publications were always

⁹⁹ Nurse (1964)

¹⁰⁰ Nurse's translation, Nurse (1964) p.103

¹⁰¹ Nurse (1964) p.101

available. Literary journals such as *Staffrider* and even whole publishing houses such as Ravan and Taurus were dedicated to publishing anti-apartheid material. I exclude from my discussion newspapers aimed primarily at the white community, firstly for lack of evidence of literary pages in recent decades, and secondly as I am looking at the poetry as a genre of writing open to the non-privileged, as a gesture towards a participatory, democratic space. The South African newspapers' ideology and relationship to the academy has been discussed in similar terms to those above, as David Maughan Brown's work on newspaper poems demonstrates. Again, contributions were sent in to these publications, that is, non-canonical writers had a prominent forum.

However, the fact that newspapers did provide a forum for reader contributions arguably even less discerning about technical merits than the literary journals to which readers could contribute, makes the comparison between Malawian and South African newspapers valid. I even suggest that as much newspaper literature has been largely ignored in favour of discussions of *Staffrider*, *New Coin* and others, the study of this form is even more justified. *Drum* is difficult to place as it straddles both functions, though most of the journalists from its early days, such as Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba, Es'kia Mphahlele and later Bessie Head, who contributed creative writing themselves, became renowned writers. Yet these are all magazines emphasising the arts, whose closest equivalent in Malawi beyond student magazines, *WASI*, did not come into being until 1990.

As in Malawi, both poems and short stories were published in South African newspapers, for example in the *City Press*, but as I have focused on poetry in the section on Malawi, and because some newspapers only published poetry, I will restrict my discussion again to poems in the South African press. Some important considerations of the difference in context need to be taken into account: firstly, there was never a monopoly of the national press by one ruling party newspaper, partly also because the newspapers in South Africa that I discuss are provincial in their scope, published in and for a particular urban area and its immediate surroundings, as the names *Natal Witness* or *City Press* indicate. One of the questions, therefore, is whether the political situation is seen in national terms, as in the Malawian newspapers, or whether a local subjectivity is addressed in South African newspapers. Yet interestingly more poems in South African newspapers were published in indigenous African languages, for example in the *Natal Witness*, where only 10 per cent of the poems published in the late 1980s were in English,¹⁰²

¹⁰² Maughan Brown (1991) p.48 Unfortunately I do not have correlating figures on postapartheid newspaper poems.

whereas in Malawian newspapers the figure is approximately the inverse.¹⁰³ It is difficult to speculate why this might be the case; unlike those writers addressing an international audience, and therefore using English, the newspaper writers in South Africa possibly regarded English more as a language of negative authority than the contributors in Malawi who often strive to demonstrate their knowledge of the language to signal their level of education. Another important difference is that unlike in Malawi, one will not find any pieces nostalgic for the past among the South African press poems. There are of course those that are critical of the way the transition is going, yet none will reminisce fondly about the leaders of the former regime as 'Memories of yesterday' does about the moment of Independence and Banda's rule.

Despite the fact that very little has been written on newspaper poetry in South Africa, much of what Michael Vaughan writes, when discussing the ideology and reception of *Staffrider*, is remarkably similar to my conclusions about Malawian newspaper poetry. There are of course differences; for example, *Staffrider*, which faded out soon after the transition, an interesting point in itself, contained many debates, from academic prose to emotive literary protest, much more organised and openly defiant than was possible in Malawi. However, the reception that *Staffrider* received from the academy is very similar to that introduced above, upholding an aesthetic value distinct from the context from which a piece emerges:

[T]he polemicism which has been so prominent in the literature of *Staffrider* has been criticized, as leading to a compromise of aesthetic quality ... [this] is based on the idea that aesthetic quality is somehow independent of social determination, and thus mystifies the processes by which aesthetic criteria are actually established.¹⁰⁴

He quotes a *Staffrider* contributor, Mthobisi Mutloatse, who rather carnivalesquely announces his disregard for dominant aesthetic criteria:

We are going to pee, spit and shit on literary convention before we are through; we are going to kick and pull and push and drag literature into the form we prefer and not give a damn about what the critics say. Because we are in search of our true selves — undergoing self-discovery as a people.¹⁰⁵

Typically for struggle discourse, he poses a unity in the term 'a people' which itself elides difference.

Mutloatse interestingly anticipates Brink's idea that a literature of protest must move on to a literature of the self once the Other of identification is removed. By concentrating on the self, the significance of the Other is diminished. He also defines the writing as a search, a process of looking. This

¹⁰³ This is an approximation based on my scanning through several decades of the *Malawi News*.

¹⁰⁴ Vaughan (1985) p.195

¹⁰⁵ Vaughan (1985) p.197

is reminiscent of Barber's idea of the popular aesthetic as one of self-realisation and innovation 'the effect of newness positively embraced'¹⁰⁶ in which 'the engagement with experimentation in the quest of novelty is intense'.¹⁰⁷ Vaughan makes a similar point:

The emphasis of the magazine is not upon *finished* literary skills, but upon *developing* skills, employed polemically in illuminating the conditions of racial oppression and of the popular resistance to them.¹⁰⁸

In a very close analogy to my discussion of the dialogic figure of the Malawian newspaper reader-writer, Vaughan sees in *Staffrider* a challenge to the capitalist distinction between producer and consumer:

[I]n its populist polemicism *Staffrider* literature goes as far as to challenge the distinction between the creator and the consumer that is intrinsic to the literature of the market. There is no reason in principle why any reader of *Staffrider* should not become a contributor.¹⁰⁹

He too defines contributory pages as a space that enacts a political ideal: 'It would seem, then, that the emergence of *Staffrider* has been associated with a certain "democratization" of imaginative literature, and of the image of the writer or artist.'¹¹⁰ This is a space in which writing 'focuses on the way in which *individuals* experience conditions of oppression: the way in which individuals encounter imaginatively these conditions'.¹¹¹

The poems published in *Echo*, the weekly supplement of the Pietermaritzburg daily *Natal Witness*, present a space generically more analogous to the Malawian newspaper poems than *Staffrider*, inserting literary expression into a 'news' context, and thus inviting an overtly topical, social reading of the poems. There were contributions in both English and Zulu published in its 'poetry corner'. However, this poetry corner was suspended in 1989 at the height of the politically-motivated violence in Natal, in which stakes in the anticipated new dispensation were being contested and a state of emergency was in full force. Maughan Brown makes a comparison with the literary journal, reinforcing the question of aesthetic criteria:

In affording a weekly platform to aspirant and often very inexperienced poets from Natal's townships, *Echo* performed a function comparable, if on a smaller scale, to that performed by

¹⁰⁶ Barber (1987) p.12

¹⁰⁷ Barber (1987) p.14

¹⁰⁸ Vaughan (1985) p.202

¹⁰⁹ Vaughan (1985) p.197

¹¹⁰ Vaughan (1985) p.202

¹¹¹ Vaughan (1985) p.196

Staffrider magazine in the early years of its existence. Consequently it posed many of the same problems for literary criticism with regard to evaluative criteria.¹¹²

He defines a number of functions for the poems, including didactic pieces, as expressions of grief, morale-boosters, calls for unity and to show 'what really happens'. Many of them turn to God for a solution, which Maughan Brown does not see as an escape from close political analysis. Instead he sees this as a device for political commentary comparable to the discussion of Mau Mau hymns and Nkosi Sikelel i'Africa above. Rather than evading the need for political organisation, he writes, it is 'in some instances clearly being used as a device whereby political commentary can assume the guise of piety or prayer'.¹¹³

One of the poems he reproduces and discusses is 'Viva Pen of Culture' by Bonginkosi Ndlovu Bafanyana, an ode to writers addressed metonymically in praise of the pen.¹¹⁴ It opens:

What is happening in my land?
My land is a desert of truth,
The emergency swallows every drop of reality.
Inequality is reality; reality is abnormality;
Like howling dogs
Ignorance haunts the voice of the people,
Pregnant with the voice of my people
Exploding with squeezed-in voices of my people —
Viva pen of culture, viva!

The poem is structured according to verse and chorus, yet without line breaks, where the chorus is introduced with variations on the refrain: 'Viva pen of culture!' Although Maughan Brown does not make this correlation, I suggest that it emulates the oral verse of the region, not only generically, with the poet taking on the *imbongi* role, but also stylistically. The chorus is not simply repeated, but developed each time, signalling the kind of aesthetic pleasure from apparent improvisation on a theme. The poem opens by posing a rhetorical question and launches through the opening metaphor into a whole series of repetitions, parallelisms and inversions (cited in italics) which are similarly central to the genre, as discussed in relation to Ngoni praise verse above:

What is happening in *my land*?
My land is a desert of truth,
The emergency swallows every drop of *reality*.
Inequality is reality; reality is abnormality;

¹¹² Maughan Brown (1991) p.49

¹¹³ Maughan Brown (1991) p.56

¹¹⁴ For full text of the poem, see Appendix II p.239

The last line not only contains a double repetition of the preceding 'reality', it also contains an inverted repetition within it, where 'reality is abnormality' inverts and parallels 'inequality is reality'. The unitary form of 'people' is used, again typically of protest expression, setting up the binary between the evil system, signified by lions, jails and graves, and the suffering 'people':

Like ravenous lions, jails devouring my people,
Graves voraciously devouring the people, and yet
Accumulated emotions
Burst the breasts of the survivalists —

The poet uses the kind of long vocabulary that reflects well on himself, advertising his literacy, recalling Katoki's use of this device in 'Our National Paean'. Yet the poem is also thematically self-reflexive, as the final shift to respectful address suggests:

Pen of resistance:
Your extreme silent voice
Will remove the stubborn lids
Of the garbage bins of parliament;
The hands of your voice
Will remove the shroud of lies —
Viva pen of culture, viva
For you have nothing to lose!

In a textual trick, the poet is clearly addressing the kind of writing he produces, projecting the self-evaluation on to the instrument with which he writes. The phrase 'Viva pen of culture' can also be read as a celebration of cultural expression, which again the poem itself enacts. This self-reflexive playfulness is reminiscent of the opening lines of 'Malawi Eye Opener' which refer to the 'fine' poetry published in the newspaper, the poem itself of course appearing within the same pages it praises.

Orality is invoked not only generically, but through the use of multiple voices and shifts in tone, exclamation marks, and slogans such as the performative 'vivas', which, Maughan Brown writes, 'convey something of the fervour of a black South African political meeting'.¹¹⁵ The slogans and familiar clichés such as the 'voicing the voice of the voiceless' further create an aesthetic of immediate impact, to use Barber's term. Bafanyana's political stance is compounded in the line 'What is happening in Azania?', which parallels the opening line, yet develops in radicalism, invoking in the name the signifier of absolute change. The poem thus plays complex tricks between oral and literary expression, posing as spoken through its rhetorical techniques and generic and stylistic references to an indigenous oral culture, yet

¹¹⁵ Maughan Brown (1991) p.55

simultaneously lauding the written word that the pen facilitates, which in contrast has an 'extreme silent voice'.

The issue of literary value is discussed by the editor of a collection of poems published in the poetry corner of the Johannesburg newspaper *City Press* between 1982 and 1992. In his introduction to the anthology *Something for Everyone*, which already indicates a broad, inclusive policy in its title, Qedusizi Buthelezi writes:

All contributions are presented in their original form. That is to say, the works have not been edited for grammatical or stylistic errors or any of the criteria traditionally used to judge a 'work of art'. Instead, creativity, innovativeness and the topicality of the subject have been the chief criteria for inclusion.¹¹⁶

The editorial policy is to reflect the popular aesthetic, of 'newness positively embraced', in which innovativeness and topicality are criteria for inclusion. It is important to state that this is of course the policy of the collected volume, which presents a selection procedure much narrower than that of the original context of the poems' publication in the newspaper itself. The gestural and temporal politics of an anthologised poem is clearly different from that of its original appearance.

There are several poems that engage with the political transition, written in the interim period before the general elections of 1994, yet after the repeal of apartheid laws and the release of Mandela, where newness determines the political reality. These poems have titles that reflect change, novelty, emergence, such as 'Good Morning South Africa!', 'Mr Freedom', 'A Decade of Change', 'Boeresun Changed his Mind' and 'Motherland Welcome Your Son'. However, as with the Malawian newspaper poems, others mourn the continuing suffering of the past in the present, for example 'The pain of going into exile', 'Racism still alive and well' and 'Victims of a backlash'. It is these more reserved poems which accept the impossibility of absolute change, rather that the past will continue to determine the present, while the celebratory poems read as impulses of hope towards a positive vision of newness.

One such poem that modifies its euphoria with its concentration on the negative reverberations of change, or the 'backlash', as it calls it, is 'Victims of a Backlash'. As the opening stanza makes clear, race politics still dominate the transition, as white supremacist anxiety is given expression:

Saying that this is the beginning of
white resistance

¹¹⁶ Buthelezi (1997)

They also realise that now is the end
Of white domination and exploitation

The poem speaks of and as the white population which, he contends 'realise that now is the end'. The poet persona not only temporarily adopts their perspective, but also reproduces their vocabulary, though ideological distance is demarcated by quotation marks:

They rampage every 'darkie' they come
across in the night
EINA! Askies my baas
It is not me
The wind of change is blowing
Over the land south of the Limpopo.

The voice of the protesting victim of this backlash is marked by a strong exclamation, though the mimicry continues ironically, continuing to address the white man as 'baas', and giving the sense of cowering behind the turn of events, denying individual involvement and responsibility for them. Significantly the 'wind of change' trope that figured in Malawian writing and Rampolokeng's poem reappears again here, recycled yet again and adopted to fit the present situation.

The next verse reaches to other moments of transition in Africa's past, invoking the Swahili Independence slogan: 'Uhuru is always better organised than the/ Apart-hate and tyranny'. The poet reinvents a recognisable signifier whose meaning has been diminished in its original context, and applies it to contemporary South Africa. He is thus inserting South Africa in a wider narrative of liberation struggles that situates it in relation to other countries on the continent. The insightful wordplay of 'apart-hate' is reminiscent of Rampolokeng's witty carnivalisation of English that exposes unconscious meanings.

'Mr Freedom', by Ronnie Nemungadi tells the story of liberation in a fable of the absence and return of a longed-for figure. As discussed earlier, 'freedom' is always a contested term, a signifier of desire which can never be entirely fulfilled, and thus has rhetorical power at times of crisis, as an undefined space which people can fill with the projections of their desires. In this poem it is the laws of apartheid that define lack of freedom:

Mr Freedom is coming to free us all.
We are in need of equal rights, no colour bias.
Terrorism Act, Group Areas Act must go,
Bannings and harassment must go.
Give us our beautiful Azania.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Buthelezi (1997) p.59

The term 'Azania' once again becomes the utopian signifier of possibility, again demarcated from the present nation by the name change. It is a term that is national in its vision, demonstrating that the poet sees himself as a member of a nation subject to national oppressive laws, not as a subject of a city, region, ethnic or racial grouping,

As in the poem 'A Child is Born', featuring a child whose surname is 'freedom of association', the figure of Mr Freedom in the poem has strong Christ-like overtones:

He went to paradise for us all.
He went away, but not to stay.
Soon, very soon I shall sing freedom songs.
When the trumpet of freedom sounds
Oppression and iron bars shall open.

The narrative clearly suggests the Christian meta-narrative, borrowing from Revelation for its imagery of the sounding trumpets and the triumphant return of the ultimate martyr. The narratives of absent resistance leaders in jail or in exile correlate well with this messianic iconography, which, as discussed, had its Malawian corollary at Independence. Though used less at Malawi's transition to multi-partyism,¹¹⁸ the symbolism of returning heroes in poems such as 'Birth of a Son' and 'A Child is Born' are closely related to 'Mr Freedom'.

The anthropomorphism of freedom as 'Mr Freedom' similarly figures a heroic son of a sacred mother: 'Let the handsome son of mother soil free us'. The figure of the son returning to the motherland is a ubiquitous one which Reckson Makunga's adapts in his 'Motherland Welcome Your Son' to characterise the dominant heroic narrative of postapartheid South Africa:¹¹⁹

Oh! Motherland your son is a hero.
The whole world knows him.
He was jailed for 27 years because of his
motherland.

Oh! Motherland welcome him with tears of joy.

Elleke Boehmer has discussed the problems of the 'motherland' figure in nationalist discourse in its multiplicity of configurations as Mama Africa, mother country, mother freedom and the great mythic and

¹¹⁸ The return of opposition leader Chakufwa Chihana from exile abroad in 1992 might be an exception, where the scene was staged at an airport to replicate the spectacle of Banda's return over 30 years earlier. Chihana, however, was immediately arrested.

¹¹⁹ For full text of poem, see Appendix II p.239

geographic matrix of origin.¹²⁰ She notes that 'it is a male figure who is cast as the author and subject of the nation' while the female is often 'the strength or virtue of the nation incarnate, its fecund first matriarch' though this is a role 'which excludes her from the sphere of public national life'.¹²¹ Although this analysis clearly applies to the symbolism of the poems above, I argue that, as Vaughan, Maughan Brown and others suggest, we need to consider our evaluative criteria when discussing these popular texts, for their function perhaps *requires* types and stereotypes that are inherited and immediately recognisable.

Taking a reader-centred approach to fetishistic, stereotypical representations of women by male writers, Stephanie Newell suggests that when, for example, the 'good-time girl' is invoked 'she retains her familiar appearance but is adapted and transformed' for as well as being familiar, she is 'an internally dynamic type, reconfigured by individual authors and instilled with specific, local preoccupations about gender'.¹²² Newell considers audience interpretation in her argument, suggesting that readers often interpret such figures contrary to a literal reading in a way that empowers the reader. Suggesting an analogous function between the stereotype and the proverb she writes:

The repetition of character types ... signals an ideological complex which far outweighs the presence of such women in society at large. Filled with compressed meanings, containing warnings, advice, judgements and guidance, these characters need to be *applied* by readers in order to fulfil their potential meanings.¹²³

She concludes that 'women seem to read the texts differently from men'.¹²⁴ This argument could hold for the other stereotypical representations of women as sacred mothers, for in the instances above we do see a ubiquitous representation of the female being applied to a very specific instance in time and location, which reinterprets the motherland/hero-son configuration to one that functions in the positive iconography to affirm the readers' subjectivity as South Africans, whether they are male or female. I suggest that the instantly recognisable configurations that appear in the poems serve a function that Barber writes about: '[The audience] however volatile and scattered, is still reached by a technique of immediacy, of an emotional 'obviousness' that deepens and reaffirms common values.'¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Boehmer (1991) pp.3-23

¹²¹ Boehmer (1991) p.6

¹²² Newell (2000) p.101

¹²³ Newell (2000) p.155

¹²⁴ Newell (2000) p.155

¹²⁵ Barber (1987) p.48

As argued earlier, such poetry may give expression 'to what people may not have known they have in common'. I suggest that we read these poems as ways of expressing, often emotively, a consciousness of a former collective oppression, a common experience of political change which includes euphoric hope and frequently, a continuing disheartening subjectivity to political malpractice and economic hardships. Their transformative power lies not in challenging an inherited allegory of mother/land heroic agent/son, but in addressing as wide a constituency as possible through maximum appeal. A subverted stereotype cannot hold the same immediate recognition and appeal.

I end this discussion of the *City Press* poems with an article that asks us to read the South African and Malawian contexts in relation to each other. In a collected volume of articles by the Malawian self-styled literary critic, Alfred Msadala, I came across a review of *Something for Everyone*, the anthology of the South African *City Press* poems, originally published in the Malawian newspaper *Michiru Sun*. Msadala frequently writes in newspapers on literature, in articles titled as diversely as 'The Teacher, the Poet' and 'Let's celebrate with Robert Blake', propounding an aesthetic of didacticism, local relevance, 'matureness' and the success of conveying authorial intent. In the article 'Good Morning South Africa!',¹²⁶ he takes the title of one of the *City Press* poems¹²⁷ to discuss the volume 'which comprises works from South African black youths, some of whom had hope, others with hate and yet others with humour'[sic].¹²⁸ He cites the poem by Richard Shilenge in which the persona wonders when he will wake up,

And be greeted by a voice
From the radio saying
"Good morning South Africa!
The day of Freedom has come".

Msadala sets out the political background of the poems' original publication and he comments upon the anthology's editorial policy:

one may also see that the piece lacks editorial punch; this is deliberate in order to conserve the originality of the source at the same time portraying that this is the work of the immature both physically and academically. What is of paramount importance is the conception.¹²⁹

He thus explains and accepts the reasons why the editorial policy is inclusive and non-interventionist.

¹²⁶ The original publication date is not given but the article must have appeared in 1994 when the South African election it refers to took place. For full text of the poem, see Appendix II p.238

¹²⁷ the poem of course in turn recycles the title of the popular 1980s war movie 'Good Morning Vietnam'.

¹²⁸ Msadala (1997) p.38

¹²⁹ Msadala (1997) p.38

An important clue is given by Msadala about the motivation for his article, and the choice of text he reviews, incorporating personal empathy with the poets:

As I was writing this article, it had just been announced that the National Party in South Africa, the party that had been ruling, led by whites, had just conceded defeat ... I cannot imagine how the Shilenges were feeling then that the inconceivable day had come at last.¹³⁰

The subject of the review is selected with an eye on events in South Africa to create a sense of local relevance. Msadala then goes on to make a general statement about literature and society that includes the local Malawian context, where similarly motivated poems appear. Casting writers in an almost mystical role, as seers, he writes:

Sentimental feelings put to record are some of the most treasured assets an individual or society can own. They never expire but instead become valuable at a future time especially when people discover that such are prophetic.¹³¹

The date of Msadala's newspaper article is significant, for if it was published in the *Michiru Sun* within the week of the South African election results, that is soon after voting on 27-30 April, 1994, the first democratic elections in Malawi were themselves only a couple of weeks away, on 17 May, 1994. It is impossible, I think, to read the review of the South African poems without considering this timing. The review of the poems, and especially the title, 'Good Morning South Africa!', though not making an overt reference to the Malawian context, can only be read as an anticipatory comment on Malawi by default, through the South African example. The choice of this anthology as a subject of interest shows once again how Malawians see the South African transition as a reference point for their own political changes. By writing about newspaper poetry in a newspaper, Msadala is validating his own medium and form of communication by referring to a comparable situation that publishes such 'treasured assets'. It is interesting to consider why Msadala never makes the connection overt, but offers the review up instead for an allegorical reading. One suggestion might be that it was not yet guaranteed what the outcome of the election in May would be, and as Banda was standing as the MCP's presidential candidate, the possibility of a return to power of the same regime was still real.

¹³⁰ Msadala (1997) p.39

¹³¹ Msadala (1997) p.39

iv. Conclusion: reader contributions and the democratic subject

I have argued that newspaper poems need to be read as a social gesture in process that facilitates transformation, and can play a crucial role in democratisation and imagining new subjectivities. There is something unique in the figure of the reader-poet sending in a contribution to the newspaper, which sets the artistic and political gesture apart from a publication of poems in a book by an established publisher. This, I suggest, is particularly the case here as the press plays such an important role in political transition. Yet can we really posit reader-contribution as somehow inherently democratic in its deconstruction of conventional distinctions between producer and consumer as Michael Vaughan suggests? David Kerr, referring to African popular theatre forms,¹³² and Karin Barber, referring to Yoruba *oniki* praise poetry,¹³³ both quote Derrida to demonstrate how the particular genres of their interest break down any notions of singular authority over a unified text where the audience plays a passive consuming role. In short, both expose the inherently deconstructed nature of the cultural forms under discussion, which in performance refuse to privilege notions of a fixed text or distinctions upheld by capitalism, between producer and consumer, original and copy, author and reader, *auteur* and *voyeur*, representer and represented. Derrida states:

where the spectator presenting himself as spectator, will no longer be seer or voyeur, will efface within himself the difference between the actor and the spectator, the represented and the representer, the object seen and the seeing subject ... That public festival will ... have a form analogous to the electoral meetings of a free and legiferant assembled people.¹³⁴

Indeed, Kerr argues that the participatory dramatic performances which take place in rural Malawi manifest something close to this ideal, particularly as they are able to empower the least powerful in the society to give voice to their concerns.¹³⁵ In a literary corollary, one could argue that the readers Hankie Uluko, Lusekelo Katoki, Richard Shilenge and Bonginkosi Bafanyana present themselves here *as* readers within the pages of the text they themselves read; the usually voiceless, nameless, receptive reader-figure produces, or 'speaks' in these poems, voicing its priorities, in these cases the concerns of a nation in transition.

¹³² Kerr (1988)

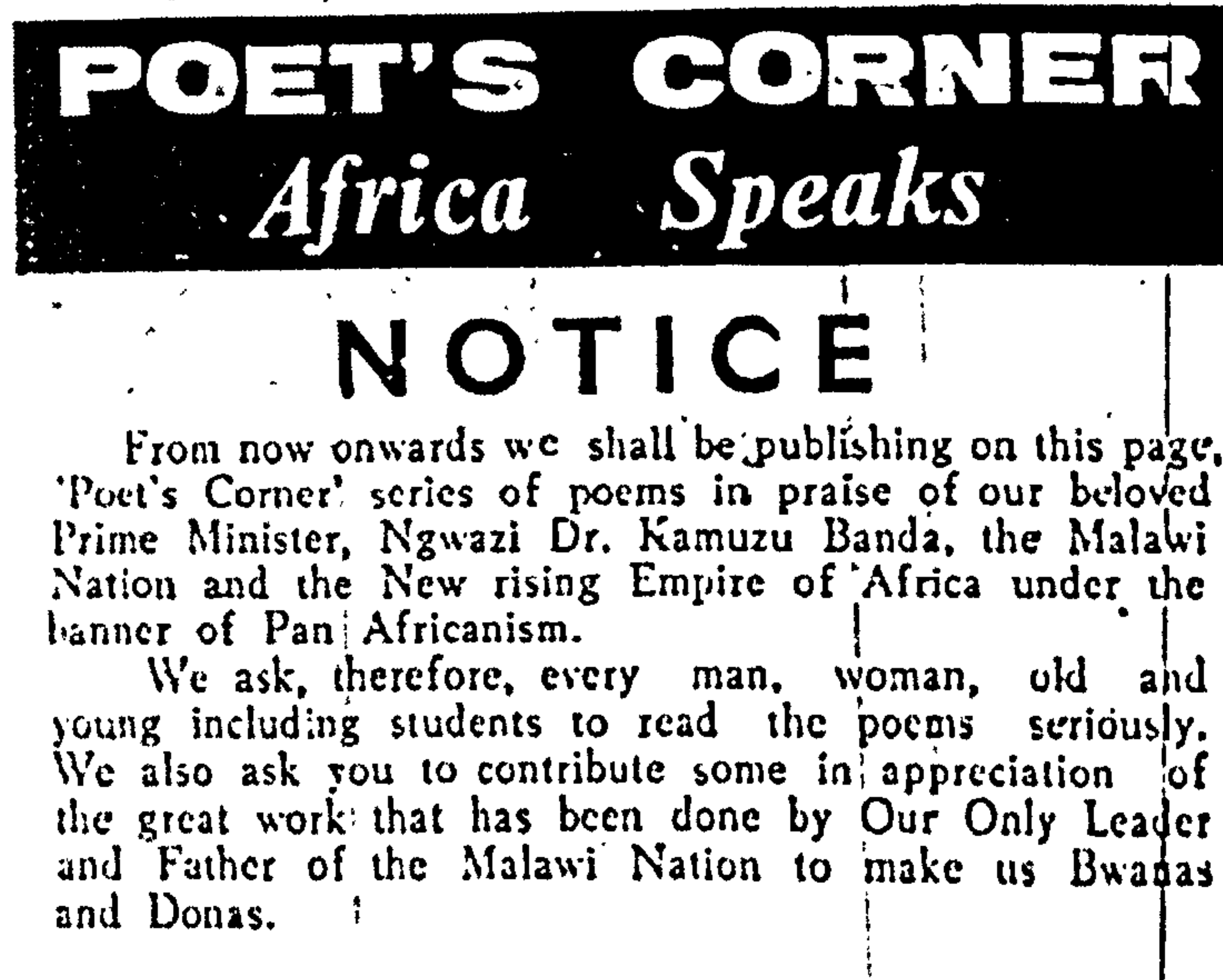
¹³³ Barber (1984)

¹³⁴ Derrida (1974) p.306

¹³⁵ Kerr (1988) p.174

The erosion of the distinction between reader and writer, is discussed also by Walter Benjamin, more specifically referring to the Soviet press. Though the political context he writes of may be rather different, the theoretical figure which he discusses is remarkably similar to the one in my argument: 'the reader is at all times ready to become a writer, that is, a describer, but also a prescriber. As an expert — even if not on any subject but only on the post he occupies — he gains access to authorship'.¹³⁶ The newspaper, he argues, provides the reader with a forum in which to express the conditions of her/his existence. Only she/he is an 'expert', able to recall 'the post he occupies' without the distance involved in being represented by another. He goes on to state, in terms which predict Gayatri Spivak's discussion of the subaltern, 'Work itself has its turn to speak'.¹³⁷

However, it would be naïve to ignore the fact that reader-contributions are policed by editorial authorities. The *Malawi News* case is particularly extreme when we look at the call for reader contributions, which appeared two weeks after the declaration of self-rule in 1963:¹³⁸



[figure 3.4]

This egalitarian call for praise seems to have a sinister undertone, to participate and revel in a growing hegemony, by reading and writing. The express aim of the reader-contributions appears to be to demonstrate that the readers truly absorb and celebrate the authority of the ruling power.

¹³⁶ Benjamin (1978) p.225

¹³⁷ Spivak (1988)

¹³⁸ Anon. (1963a)

Indeed, no newspaper is an idealistic space, free from political hierarchy and, as Benjamin notes, undermining the Derridean argument, '[i]t still belongs to capital'.¹³⁹ As with all cultural events defined by the transaction of audience response, there is always a limitation to the argument that audience participation is intrinsically democratic, whether in letters to the editor or radio phone-ins. Newspapers, like all of these communicative forums, have their own authorities and conventions which guard their ideological boundaries. Banda's regime extended this act to jealously police the ideological boundaries of the whole nation by monopolising the press in the name of national unity.

However, are reader-poets of Malawi and South Africa mindlessly reproducing their reception and absorption of hegemony, singing mantras of praise to a new heroic leader or political system with self-effacing deference? Can one not posit a transformative event in the reproduction of praise? I do not refer to the ironic subversion of mimicry, but to a gestural politics which is similarly elusive. In other words, it could be argued that like Reckson Makunga in his poem dedicated to Mandela's story, expressed in terms of the collective 'Motherland', Lusekelo Katoki is performing an act of self-realisation through his exhortation of Banda. This conclusion can be reached by a number of ways: firstly one can interpret Katoki's praise of Banda by default as a 'paean' to the collective nation. This is suggested by one reading of the ambiguous title of the poem 'Our National Paean'. Such an associative approach is maintained by two academics who have engaged with Malawian political culture; Kerr suggests that according to a local aesthetic, 'the main function of praise poetry was to link the achievements of the community to the strengths or skills of the chief'.¹⁴⁰ In complement, Nurse, writing about the crowd's response to Banda at an early public rally in 1964 suggests that: 'To them he is not someone set too far apart, on a pedestal: he is an apotheosis and projection of themselves, and they acclaim him not with slavish deference but with the joy and enthusiasm they feel in the epiphany of their own importance.'¹⁴¹

Another way of reading Katoki's poem as an act of self-realisation is by returning to the notion of elaboration. In my opinion, he, like all the other reader-poets discussed, demands a certain admiration of himself from his reading peers in accord with the glamour of being published in print under his own name, analogous to the reflected glory that Finnegan suggests falls on the praise poet. He thus broadcasts and disseminates within the elite reading circle his own elaborate literary expression, his ability to

¹³⁹ Benjamin (1978) p.225

¹⁴⁰ Kerr (1998) p.22

¹⁴¹ Nurse (1964) p.106

reproduce embellished readings of classical, religious and imperial narratives and his innovative literacy in political discourse. Indeed, two years earlier, in a letter to the editor dated 6 July, 1961, from (presumably) the same 'L. Katoki', the contributor portrays himself as an enthusiastic participant in a reading culture, recommending to fellow readers the recently published pamphlet by the politician Du Chisiza, as a 'symbol of Malawi national intellectualism'.

Therefore, if the production of meaning is a transaction involving the imagination, the readers of 'Our National Paean' or 'Motherland Welcome Your Son' may not necessarily imagine themselves as deferential loyal subjects, whatever the literal meaning of the text, or the contextualising call for contributions. According to the conventions by which they read, they may interpret the text, for example, as an expression of a pact in which they play a role. Barber uses this idea of trans-interpretation, in her seminal work on popular arts in Africa. She uses as an example, a radical South African audience creating a radical interpretation of a Gibson Kente play, despite its apparently moderate, compromising ending:

The audience, or parts of it, virtually created its own play out of the materials offered by the playwright. This is only a strong version of what happens in all textual interpretation. There is nothing in any text or any other work of art which the reader *has* to see. An audience may deliberately or unconsciously refuse certain meanings. Parts of the audience may reconstruct the meaning in different ways.¹⁴²

This too reinforces my earlier argument about the reading of stereotypes, adapted to suit the desired interpretation. I realise that when I refer to the newspaper poems, I am being speculative, yet the recent resurgence of interest in audiences' agency in the productions of meaning in popular cultural studies supports my argument, with its own concrete evidence, as a special edition of *Africa* on audiences suggests.¹⁴³ Janet Wolff's reassertion of the same point suggests that this is a common trend, not only in studies based in Africa:

Even the most conventional genres and texts turn out to have this radical potential, as ethnographers of popular culture produce case after case of readers and television viewers who use texts in unexpected ways to resist everyday life and confirm alternative views.¹⁴⁴

Most importantly, this opens the *possibility* of such reader-centred readings. However, I would add, with regard to the praise poetry addressed to Banda, that, crucially, the interpretative parameters shift as the

¹⁴² Barber (1987) p.58

¹⁴³ See Barber (1997)

¹⁴⁴ Wolff (1993) p.152

praise moves from being voluntary and celebratory, to being forcibly and physically coerced, as happened in the increasingly autocratic Malawi.

The political gesture of individual contributions of newspaper poetry may be varied, and its analysis partly speculative. This is entangled with intricate questions of authority, which differ according to the plurality or monopoly of the press. Yet it is vital, as Benjamin affirms, to consider the role of the press theoretically, and examine its contribution to the erosion of distinctions, upheld transparently as part of a wider ideological project:

The mighty process of recasting ... not only affects the conventional distinction between genres, between writer and poet, between scholar and popularizer, but also revises even the distinction between author and reader. Of this process the press is the decisive example, and therefore any consideration of the author as producer must include it.¹⁴⁵

The creative re-formulation of readings in the form of newspaper poetry represents a responsive production by individuals, which counters an impression of unseen passive reception. I have argued that the poetry contributed to newspapers not only responds to certain topical issues, but also gives an indication of how these topical issues in the paper are read, in terms of what motifs and vocabulary are popularised and prioritised for the most immediate impact and how we need to be sensitive towards the gestures of involvement and innovation that these poems enact. In other words the creative writing partly re-produces what touches readers' imaginations, what they pick up, admire and identify with. This forms a dialogue between *reception* and *production* which blurs the boundaries of definition around each term wherein lies the ideal of non-hierarchical exchange.

Newspaper poems serve, according to Maughan Brown 'to make the human cost of the conflict real in ways that political analysis and statistical data, however instructive, cannot',¹⁴⁶ defining a role for creative expression in a time of political change. This is an opinion that is repeated by Rosemary Jolly and discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5 in which she argues that the 'statistical on its own, tends to detract from the personal suffering it documents'.¹⁴⁷ Maughan Brown is strident in his defence of these poems and the need for their analysis as expressions of non-privilege, recalling Barber's charge of 'condescension typical of elite criticism':

¹⁴⁵ Benjamin (1978) p.225

¹⁴⁶ Maughan Brown (1991) p.49

¹⁴⁷ Jolly (1999) p.1

To ignore these poems on account of the journalistic or popular cultural medium through which they were published, to dismiss them from consideration on the grounds of their functionalism, or their lack of 'literary' polish, would have rather too much in common with the oppressor's rejection of the voice of the oppressed for comfort.¹⁴⁸

These poems offer academics the chance to re-examine the criteria by which we evaluate literature in the academy, and by which we consider certain texts more valid for analysis than others. Maughan Brown suggests that they can expose a telling hypocrisy, in which the poems' easy dismissal 'must bring the "objective" ideals of academic literary criticism into tension, if not contradiction, with the liberal sympathies which inform the academy's institutional political stance'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Maughan Brown (1991) p.63

¹⁴⁹ Maughan Brown (1991) p.63

CHAPTER 4

Testimony, Truth and Woman

A society cannot reconcile itself on the grounds of a divided memory. Since memory is identity, this would result in a divided identity ... Identities forged out of half-remembered things or false memories easily commit transgressions.
José Zalaquett, member of the Chilean Truth Commission¹

It also remains a challenge to all who are, in some way, involved in memorializing the past, to keep multiple versions of the past alive and not to privilege, as has so often been done, a few master narratives that offer a sense of unity at the cost of ignoring fracture and dissonance.
Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee²

i. Truth and testimony

How can personal experience of a traumatic past be written? Whose version of events under a past repressive regime is heard? The inevitability of amnesias effective in a post-totalitarian state has been discussed earlier, yet one has to ask how far these repressions are protective of the new regime of authority, and how far they are protective of individual, traumatised psyches. A further inquiry is therefore, whether there is, under these conditions, a recuperable truth of past events. These questions stake out a vigorous, ongoing cultural debate whose polarities are represented by the contrasting epigraphs to this chapter. In the first, José Zalaquett of the Chilean Truth Commission promotes a stable, unified sense of identity and closure in response to past oppression, a recuperation through a revelation of truth. In contrast, the editors of *Negotiating the Past* consider the concept of final truth and closure, especially in the guise of national unity, as dangerously hegemonic. They resist the formation of a coherent, homogeneous national identity, for such an identity is imagined through illusory narratives of the self and meta-narratives of the nation and its leader-hero, at the cost of silencing contradictory stories of liberation. They further urge caution with regard to the binary separation of truth and falsehood, which Zalaquett relies on, by suggesting different conceptions of truth according to the positions of enunciation and epistemologies of interpretation.

This debate will be discussed further before narrowing the focus on the influence of gender on writing about the past, which is foregrounded in two valuable texts about the transition from

¹ Zalaquett cited in Ross, K (1998) p.335 and Krog (1999) p.36

² Nuttall and Coetzee (1998) p.14

totalitarianism. One, Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*, is a high-profile, controversial, much discussed text, extensive in its response to details of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa. The other, *Suffering in Silence*, is a slim, polemical, rough-edged volume by Emily Mkamanga, the first book-length study of the experience of women under Banda's rule. Yet despite significant differences in style, aim, profile and the discursive gesture they enact, both texts aim to rehabilitate versions of a repressed past, addressing gender and its implications for memory and for means of repression. They blur generic boundaries in doing so, constantly slipping from reportage and historical analyses into narratives of the female self. The gendered focus of this chapter is admittedly narrow considering the quantity of debates that are taking place about the validity and effectiveness of the numerous ways, media and sites of reconstructing the past. It can only, by considering gender and the variety of experience within this grouping, serve as an example of how certain social constituencies will have experienced totalitarianism in different ways, and thus seek to come to terms with the past differently. The discussion of how to write about the past will continue in the following chapter in an analysis of two fictional texts which inquire into and meditate upon past suffering, considering not only the techniques of construction, but the act of fictionalising the past after a defined moment of change. But it is important first to sketch out some of the main lines of debate about re-making the past before situating the two texts under discussion within this debate.

In South Africa, alongside the various fora for re-presenting the past, such as changes in monuments, museums, education curricula, the re-naming of sites and the proliferation of published autobiographies,³ the most high-profile mechanism for acknowledging publicly the ultimate consequences of apartheid for individuals was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In its legal inception it aimed towards a complete version of past events, a total revelation:

PROMOTION OF NATIONAL UNITY AND RECONCILIATION ACT, 1995.

It is hereby notified that the President has assented to the following Act which is hereby published for general information:-

To provide for the investigation and the establishment *of as complete a picture as possible* of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights committed during the period from 1

³ Nuttall (1998)

March, 1960 to the cut-off date contemplated in the Constitution, within or outside the Republic, emanating from the conflicts of the past, and the fate or whereabouts of the victims of such violations.⁴

While the TRC is held up as an exemplary procedure, many academics and social commentators have taken up Tutu's suggestion to engage with its process critically. Mahmood Mamdani, for example, criticises it for its focus on 'primary victims', with the implication that the structural oppression represented by apartheid laws is thus downplayed. He notes that '[t]he violence of apartheid was aimed less at individuals than at entire communities', a point which the privileging of individual narratives arguably obscures.⁵ The TRC report was authored by fifteen commissioners, and thus is inevitably fraught with internal contradictions in position, voice and style. It summarises and records the stories of thousands of others, thus creating a further plurality of authorship and layers of mediation. Testimony was often simultaneously translated in the commission hall, creating yet another level of mediation, another remove from an individual's narrative. The report can thus be seen as plural and internally dissonant. Yet others, such as Saul Tobias, argue that taken in a wider view, as a symbolic whole, it stands as an archive, a chronicle of the past which brings truth, finality and closure to a riven history:

the Truth commission narrative, despite its pauses, retreats, occasional reversals, its footnotes and disclaimers, remains a fairly familiar one. It is, broadly speaking, the story of a movement from division to unity, from fracturedness to wholeness, from confusion to clarity, from ignorance to understanding. As such, the TRC initiative bears many of the characteristics which historians associate with the production of common memory: features such as the orientation towards common understanding, cohesiveness, closure, and what Saul Friedlander has described as a 'redemptive stance'.⁶

However, Heribert Adam and Kanya Adam see this redemptive stance as a fault that limits interpretations of the past; they argue that the TRC's theological perspectives affected its credibility, and that 'the quest for an official truth and common memory do not allow for pluralist interpretations of history'.⁷

Much of the debate around the TRC springs from differing conceptions of 'truth'. At this moment in cultural and literary studies, where the definition of truth is under intense scrutiny by poststructuralist theory's rejection of essential meanings, the debate about culture and historiography in South Africa, rehearsed to some extent also in Malawi, is charged and often slips into a debate about contesting theories

⁴ Government of South Africa (1995), my italics

⁵ Mamdani (2000) p.59

⁶ Tobias (1999) unpagged

⁷ Adam and Adam (2000) p.33

and their political value and agency.⁸ Poststructuralist thought suggests, in Brink's words, that 'nothing could possibly be excluded a priori from the endeavours of language',⁹ referring implicitly to the Derridean '*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*' philosophy. Related to this idea is that fact that we can only access the past through language, and yet, as Stuart Hall puts it, our relationship with the past is like the child's relationship with the mother, 'always-already "after the break", it is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth'.¹⁰ This idea promotes the concept of fictions by suggesting the constructedness of all narratives; as Peter Horn puts it: 'fiction is an attempt to keep the story of the past open, an attempt to deny the impression that historians try to create that what they say is all there is to say about the past'.¹¹ These ideas have important implications for the notion of truth, for as one contributor to a volume *Culture, Power & Difference: Discourse Analysis in South Africa* typically suggests, that 'truth ... is textually produced and delimited; that facts are not found, but *made*'.¹²

Many are disturbed by the poststructuralist challenge to the authority of truth, language and narrative, when, in Robert Young's words 'historical analysis too obviously becomes a question of interpretation rather than the amassing and judging of historical evidence'.¹³ This is especially so at a time when political agency is being sought and recuperated. The Malawian historian and writer, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, for example dismisses 'the postmodernist politics of reactionary impotence, whose delegitimisation of past narratives is an end in itself'.¹⁴ Annamaria Carusi's critique of deconstruction turns to the contemporary South African situation to address the efficacy of discursive scrutiny and its timing. She argues that 'every attempt to engage deconstruction in the service of a political agenda is immediately doomed to failure'.¹⁵ She adds:

there is no possibility of judging at all or even deciding which is the 'better' of two alternatives: in the terms of difference alternatives are textual traces endlessly open to deconstruction; no finality is possible. The subversion of Truth then brings with it a complete instability of rationality, with the consequences of the untenability of any political position. ... Undecidability, multiple and endless possibilities of meaning, the parody of the past ... have no place in the context of real

⁸ For example Nkosi (1998), Ndebele (1998) and Brink (1998b)

⁹ Brink (1998a) p.20

¹⁰ Hall (1994) p.395

¹¹ Horn (1998) p.31

¹² Dixon (1997) pp.17-18

¹³ Young (2001) p.390

¹⁴ Zeleza (1994) p.484

¹⁵ Carusi (1991) p.101

political urgency, where there is a need not for endless self-reflexivity, but for definite decisions to be made.¹⁶

Carusi and Zeleza thus value the agency of narratives and the closure they offer, rejecting the dispersive, disruptive effect of any ultimate challenge to the notion of narrative, instead suggesting narrative's crucial strategic role in forming political agency. So although it is generally agreed by all the thinkers above that poststructuralism's main thrust involves a deconstruction of narrative authority and a problematisation of a final truth and essential meanings, the question remains whether such deconstructions invoke a futile, disabling 'reactionary impotence' or a self-aware, democratising challenge to the power and suppressions inherent in dominant discourses.

An awareness of contesting notions of truth is evident in Tutu's opening paragraphs of the TRC report, which acknowledges, yet tries to reconcile the opposing viewpoint. Tutu offers the report as a 'window' to the 20,000 testimonies it summarises 'offering a road map to those who wish to travel into our past', for it 'is not and cannot be the whole story; but it provides a perspective on the truth about a past'.¹⁷ He stresses the importance of the revelation process, countering those who advocate a collective amnesia by using the basic psychoanalytic tenet that the past has 'an uncanny habit of returning to haunt'. He then switches to a theological discourse of revelation and healing: 'However, painful the experience, the wounds of the past must not be allowed to fester. They must be opened. They must be cleansed. And balm must be poured on them so they can heal.'¹⁸ The ultimate teleological goal of the revelation of truth is a healed, harmonious, united and reconciled society, which experiences, through disclosure of the past, its own closure. A powerful literalisation of this discourse of excavation is the reference to a total of fifty disappeared activists whose remains have been exhumed and re-buried, as a direct result of TRC testimonies, bringing archeological revelation and ritual closure to their families.¹⁹

Importantly though, Tutu acknowledges the different ways of telling the truth: 'The past, it has been said, is another country. The way its stories are told and the way they are heard change as the years go by.'²⁰ Two paragraphs earlier he indicates the existence of lacunae in the testimonies, as a result of repression and distortion, '[we] would have loved to have had the time to capture the many nuances and

¹⁶ Carusi (1991) p.101

¹⁷ Tutu et al. (1998) 1(1) paragraph 5

¹⁸ Tutu et al. (1998) 1(1) paragraph 27

¹⁹ Tutu et al. (1998) 1(1) paragraphs 29-30

²⁰ Tutu et al. (1998) 1(1) paragraph 17. The TRC actually defines four different ways of perceiving truth.

unspoken truths encapsulated in the evidence'.²¹ Yet ultimately his is a vision in which truth is distinct from the language in which it is recalled: 'The truth has always been there. It has simply been hidden from the public gaze.'²² His final rousing conclusion famously sets out his personal religious, universalist, multicultural vision of South Africa under the banner of the symbol of the conveniently 'multi-coloured' covenant between God and Noah after the great flood, the rainbow: 'My appeal is ultimately directed to us all, black and white together, to close the chapter on our past and to strive together for this beautiful and blessed land as the rainbow people of God'.²³ Tutu's flexible notion of truth appears to refer to a broad, symbolic social truth, rather than the microscopic truth of the courtroom, to use Albie Sachs's distinction.²⁴ Tutu's idea of the TRC report's symbolic value is supported by his deputy Alex Boraine, who sees a strong need for symbolic gestures of national reconciliation at the moment of transition: 'While it may not be possible for an entire nation to be reconciled, perhaps there is a huge and awesome onus on leaders of nations to apologise symbolically and then to move forward.'²⁵

The TRC has found strong resonance in many countries,²⁶ including the emergent 'new' Malawi, as questions of guilt, accountability and justice inevitably have arisen. Another clergyman, Rev Kenneth Ross, strongly argued in favour of the establishment of a committee in Malawi along the lines of the South African model in his article 'Does Malawi (Still) Need a Truth Commission?'²⁷ I use the past tense 'argued' deliberately as he has since stated that he thinks that Malawi has missed its chance to put in place a Truth Commission.²⁸ In his article, he cites Zalaquett, who contributed to the planning of the South African TRC, to stress the importance of expressing events in language, of naming:

When a people has passed through the trauma of being subject to a regime which has practised egregious human rights abuses, there is a need for 'naming' of what has occurred and this is what can be achieved by a Truth Commission.²⁹

²¹ Tutu et al. (1998) 1(1) paragraph 15

²² Tutu et al. (1998) 1(1) paragraph 51

²³ Tutu et al. (1998) 1(1) paragraph 93

²⁴ Sachs (2000) p.97

²⁵ Boraine (2000) p.78

²⁶ See the database of papers on <http://www.trcresearch.org.za> where comparisons are made between the South African TRC and post-war Germany, Chile, Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland and the U.S.

²⁷ Ross, K (1998)

²⁸ November 1999, seminar at University of Edinburgh, Centre of African Studies.

²⁹ Ross, K (1998) p.335

Like Tutu, he raises the issue of the regime's 'disappeared', providing thus not only a humanly emotive point of identification, but a strong metaphor, inscribing the disappeared bodies with the Truth, whose identification and excavation are a human necessity for reconciliation and closure.

Ross reviews the various scattered attempts to deal with the past, including personal testimonies in newspapers, the re-naming of roads and buildings after those who opposed Banda and the prosecution of Banda and six of his closest advisers on the charge of ordering the assassination of three Cabinet ministers and an MP who died in a fake car accident in Mwanza in 1983. The defendants' acquittal, Ross notes, was anticlimactic in its failure to achieve any legal guilt on the part of the nation's former leaders. He criticises Banda's subsequent diluted apology as it both plays down past wrongs and denies responsibility. This view anticipates Mkamanga's similar response to the apology. For Ross, these recollections, reinstatements and namings of atrocities and their perpetrators are inadequate. He proposes an authoritative chronicle, or official master narrative, by 'researchers and writers', or a 'Malawian Elie Wiesel',³⁰ and not 'piecemeal, haphazard and individualized' attempts at reconstructing the story of the past.³¹ Even the officially sanctioned National Compensation Tribunal, which considered applications for financial compensation from those who suffered under the Banda regime, is regarded as inadequate by Ross, for although it publicly acknowledged individual suffering, it risked 'privatizing' the uncovering of the past, and could not afford to hear many testimonies.³² This, he adds, is convenient for the ruling government, for unlike in South Africa, many dominant positions are still occupied by figures from the previous regime, and any authoritative, public inscription of their past would amount to a greater embarrassment than the rumours and occasional investigative reports in newspapers could precipitate. So although most people are aware of the perpetration of atrocities, Ross still values a singular, coherent and officially sanctioned chronicle, which can package and symbolically represent the truth of the past.

Significantly, he expresses this need in the same theological ontology of truth revelation, forgiveness and cleansing as Tutu: 'There is a need for a much deeper national movement of confession, repentance, forgiveness; cleansing and restitution.'³³ Indeed, the final section of his paper is entitled 'The Truth Commission as a Religious Imperative',³⁴ setting out his Christian conviction regarding guilt and

³⁰ Ross, K (1998) p.341

³¹ Ross, K (1998) p.344

³² Ross, K (1998) p.342

³³ Ross, K (1998) p.346

³⁴ Ross, K (1998) p.349

absolution. However, maybe in anticipation of potential criticism of a certain powerlessness and one-sidedness of the act of forgiving, Ross emphasises the biblical story of Zaccheus in which restitution is a condition of repentance.³⁵ Echoing Tutu's more value-free terms, of the past returning to 'haunt' the present, Ross quotes the evangelical rhetoric of John de Gruchy, who was involved in the TRC: 'to repress the demons of the past inevitably means the bedeviling of the future'.³⁶ These theologians are thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, more inclined towards a concept of essential, final truth than are many contemporary cultural critics influenced by poststructuralism. Their theologies of healing and restitution overlap in this regard with the few discussions of the TRC in terms of indigenous African epistemologies. According to Mogomme Masoga, for example, the ritual enactment of memory, which the performative acts of the TRC fulfil, facilitates Tutu's much-discussed notion of indigenous theology, *ubuntu*. Masoga suggests the use of indigenous healing paradigms such as the Zulu *ukubuyisa* (bringing back) and *ukugezwa* (ritual cleansing) to bring about healing and cleansing by the TRC for, as he argues persuasively, 'it is the people from this stratum of society [those familiar with these rituals] — which constitutes the majority of South Africans — which have been at the sharp end of apartheid's atrocities'.³⁷

The desire for a coherent version of the past as an step towards healing is not exclusive to theologians and religious studies academics. Ross's colleague at the University of Malawi, Jan Kees van Donge, who values the symbolic gesture of the Mwanza trial, expresses this argument in simple psychoanalytic terms. Introducing the concepts of selection and repression at the beginning of his article, 'The Mwanza Trial as a Search for a Usable Malawian Political Past', he writes:

some memory is necessary as people cannot function without a stable identity, the same can be said about governments: they need to create a history which legitimates their accession to power ... Such histories can be selective and they need not even be true. They do need, however, to be rooted in popular memory in order to be effective. Citizens, on the other hand, look for such mental maps.³⁸

Interestingly, like Tutu's 'roadmaps', van Donge employs the metaphor of cartography, ensuring an orientation in collective conceptions of a national history. The psychoanalytic analogy could be useful: psychotherapeutic processes involve a reconciliation of internal conflict and fracture to provide the possibility of a stable identity, though methods of recovery of past events may be temporarily destabilising

³⁵ Ross, K (1998) p.352

³⁶ Ross, K (1998) p.352

³⁷ Masoga (1999) p.223

³⁸ van Donge (1998) pp.91-2

and traumatic. Yet the aim for psychological resolution through coherence proposed by van Donge interestingly stands in contrast with the irresolution celebrated by poststructuralism. Again an academic writer on Malawi looks to South Africa as a comparative model, here on the contributions of legal prosecutions on collective memory:

If people do not come clean before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, however, they can still be prosecuted before the courts, as is clear from the trials in Natal. Such exercises are not only mechanisms to bring about justice but ways and means to create a collective memory in a situation where a previous official mental construction has become untenable.³⁹

He thus argues for the symbolic value of the Mwanza trial in contesting blame during such an official mental reconstruction: 'The trial is seen as the struggle about the interpretation of the past', thus fulfilling a much smaller scale, yet analogous function to the TRC.⁴⁰

So what role might the arts and cultural production have in the discussions about truth, guilt, reconciliation and healing? When Ross implies that it was getting late to introduce a Truth Commission in Malawi, he suggests another means of reworking the past. According to him, the momentum and popular pressure was lost for a South African style TRC:

It may be that the only way for the purpose of a Truth Commission to be fulfilled will be through informal, non-governmental, non-public activity as various groups and individuals reveal their memories of past abuses.⁴¹

He cites as an example the popular initiative, the 'Ex-Detainees Association of Malindi', who formed a support body, particularly for its illiterate members.⁴² Yet significantly, he states that it is up to cultural workers, novelists, poets, musicians, dramatists, painters and dancers to tell the story of the past, to give shape to a popular collective memory of the years of oppressive rule. He quotes Mapanje's assertion that artists 'should hope to lay bare the barbarity that human beings are capable of inflicting on others without accountable cause',⁴³ and notes that '[s]uch a process has already begun ... through the poetry of Mapanje himself and the novels of Zeleza, Ng'ombe and Kayira'.⁴⁴ Interestingly, Charles Villa Vicencio makes a

³⁹ van Donge (1998) p.93

⁴⁰ van Donge (1998) p.91

⁴¹ Ross, K (1998) p.348

⁴² Ross, K (1998) p.349

⁴³ Ross, K (1998) p.348

⁴⁴ Ross, K (1998) p.348 He is referring to Tryambe Zeleza's *Smouldering Charcoals*, James Ng'ombe's *Madala's Children* and B.M.C. Kayira's *Tremors of the Jungle*. Reuben Chirambo similarly writes 'in the absence of a Truth Commission, what writers and artists wrote and are writing is a reconstruction of our history, our experience of the past'. Chirambo (1999) p.79

similar point about the role of creative expression, suggesting its role as a *supplement* to the narratives of the South African TRC:

Can the historian ever capture the pain of testimony, the agony of someone else's memory or the trauma of translating 'raw experience' into the spoken or written word? This is perhaps where poetry, music, fiction and myth can contribute more to healing than any attempt to explain in some rigid, forensic way 'who did what to whom'.⁴⁵

Clearly Ross's position of truth revelation and reinscription is closely aligned with that of Zalaquett in the first epigraph as he selects citations which support the revelation of truth. The important relationship between culture and memory is introduced here, a relationship of particular personal interest, as we have seen in Chapter 1, to Jack Mapanje.

Mapanje's incentive to write his (as yet unpublished) prison memoirs,⁴⁶ which he says will be interspersed with poetry, is to challenge the 'insidious notion of *reconciliation*'⁴⁷ which he found on his return to Malawi. As a victim who suffered overtly under Banda's regime, it appears that he rejects reconciliation and forgiveness in favour of judicial justice. Yet it becomes clear that this is not the case. He supports 'reconciliation without malice',⁴⁸ but not reconciliation at all costs, that is, amnesty at the cost of amnesia. In the foreground must remain memory, he argues. The scars, both physical and psychological, will remain and so they must be written about, as much for therapeutic, as for didactic reasons:

it is clear to me that in order to establish genuine reconciliation, Malawi needs people who can reconstruct the stories of thirty years of Banda's autocratic rule without fear, in the hope that the atrocities committed would not be repeated. My programme is meant to be forward-looking, not backward-looking. It is meant for the good of Malawi's future.⁴⁹

As Mapanje develops his argument, he approaches the subject of realist documentation as he himself discovers the impossibility of representing his own traumatic prison experiences 'realistically', where the psyche's surreal distortions were as much the reality to the detainee as the weevils in the food and the companionship of fellow-detainees. In his own words:

I was aware that some memories will be indistinct; their reconstruction slippery. But perhaps it is not common knowledge that in Mikuyu Prison the line between fact and fiction, reality and

⁴⁵ Villa-Vicencio (2000) p.25 Njabulo Ndebele, too, suggests that literature continues what the TRC begins: 'there may be an informal truth and reconciliation process under way among the Afrikaners. Its contours are taking shape in the form of such novels as Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*.' Ndebele (1998) p.24

⁴⁶ Mapanje sent me a copy of the manuscript, yet asked me not to quote from it yet, until it is published. Extracts are published in Mapanje (1997a) and (1999b).

⁴⁷ Mapanje (1995a) p.13, italics in original.

⁴⁸ Mapanje (1995a) p.13

⁴⁹ Mapanje (1995a) p.14

fantasy, reason and irrationality, sanity and madness, truth and falsehood was often so thin that it seemed non-existent.⁵⁰

Yet Mapanje does not try to counter the surrealism of detention, with its Kafkaesque figures who metamorphose into mosquitoes and cockroaches, by trying to 'normalise', or be rationally objective in his recall of his prison years. His aim is to evoke the *expérience* undergone by the mind, the horror and mental struggle of his detention by imaginative, not documentary means, reflecting, in Wole Soyinka's words, 'a map of the course trodden by the mind, not a record of the actual struggle against a vegetable existence'.⁵¹ Again the allusion to cartography arises, the map once more acting as a condensed representation of, and guide out of, disorientation. Mapanje continues:

I will tell the story of my incarceration not because it will not be questioned or that it will be perfectly narrated, I will tell it for fear of forgetfulness. The truth of my story will have to be found in the totality of the symbol or the propositions expressed despite the glaring gaps, slips and silences of memory.⁵²

His narrative is a story of memory in the sense that he is narrating *against* forgetting, yet also inevitably narrating, as in the testimonies of the TRC, *the act of* forgetting when faced with the unspeakable, as Tutu suggests in regretting not being able to 'capture the many nuances and unspoken truths encapsulated in the evidence'.⁵³ Like Ross and Villa Valencia, he sees the role of culture as central: 'Now that tyranny has gone, let *aesthetics* take over, let memory take over to *artistically* reconstruct the injustices we have suffered.'⁵⁴ This is evidently the function of the two novels discussed in the next chapter, yet as I will be arguing, even the two 'non-literary', documentary texts discussed in this chapter slip into self-expressive reconstructions of subjectivity.

Implicit in Mapanje's statement is also the generalisation he makes, that the experiences of detainees are no more valid for recall than the memories of all oppressed people under Banda's regime: 'Prison as space is the quintessence of physical brutality, obscenity, irrationality and madness that human beings can inflict on others'.⁵⁵ Mapanje's memoirs are clearly autobiographical, yet he denies complete factual veracity, foregrounding their subjective nature. Considering the rise in the genre of autobiographical writings, variously referred to as memoir, autobiography and testimony by individual

⁵⁰ Mapanje (1995a) p.15

⁵¹ Mapanje (1995a) p.17 citing Soyinka (1972) p.vii

⁵² Mapanje (1995a) p.15

⁵³ Tutu et al. (1998) 1(1) paragraph 15.

⁵⁴ Mapanje (1995a) p.14, my italics.

⁵⁵ Mapanje (1995a) p.19

writers, I will be asking how the two women writers under discussion, Emily Mkamanga and Antjie Krog, use autobiographical practices in their multi-generic texts, and what claims to a strategic truth they make. By focusing on gender in this chapter, I discuss how the two women writers counter the masculine tendency of some of the new discourses in South Africa and Malawi in their construction of the new nation, bringing up the familiar question about the gendering of the new imagined community. The relevance of this to both South Africa and Malawi, despite their different political trajectories, can be discerned from the resonance of Rosemary Jolly's interest in masculine definitions of the postapartheid state with my discussions of Banda's self-configuration in earlier chapters:

In the face of testimony one needs to think through the precise nature of the complicity between the apartheid state and the denigration of women, in this case black women. It has become commonplace to see the state as allied with masculine authority: the president becomes the "father of the nation"; or, more specifically in the apartheid context, the divine right of masculinity, so to speak, is upheld in a direct line from God-the-father to the father of the nation, and from there to the father of the congregation and the father of the immediate family. Yet what are the ramifications of this engendering of the state as male?⁵⁶

Indicative of this gendering of statehood in transition is the discourse of emasculation and impotence which emerges from victims, yet which reinstates conventional gender configurations. In a selected fragment of testimony, Krog gives an illustration of the psychosomatic effects of the discursive violation of masculinity by a regime which recognises grown men only as 'boys':

"I lost everything. My house and everything that was in those four rooms. Now the reason why I come before the Commission is that I now have a problem — because I'm now no longer able to perform sexual activity to my wife ... " ... A man has lost his manhood — and he wants it back.⁵⁷

Yet the reassertion of nationalist masculinity has a dangerous precedent during the wave of African Independence in the 1960s, as Boehmer suggests:

The feminization of the male colonized under Empire had produced, as a kind of reflex, an aggressive masculinity in those who opposed colonialism. Nationalist movements encouraged their members, who were mostly male, to assert themselves as agents of history, as self-fashioning and in control. Women were not so encouraged.⁵⁸

The implications of this construction of masculinity and its real ramifications are significant to the question of gender in the transitional state in 1990s South Africa and Malawi. I will consider the way that the two writers construct womanhood in their texts, in writing about other women, but also in their constructions

⁵⁶ Jolly (1999) p.4

⁵⁷ Krog (1999) p.211

⁵⁸ Boehmer (1995) p.224

as female narrating subjects. The role of autobiographical writing in transition will thus be considered, particularly in what capacity the narrating subject constructs itself and negotiates its relationship with others, for example in terms of family relations, in relation to the nation and to the new dispensation, whether the tone is one of resistance or, as might be expected from an autobiographical form, whether it contains an element of confessional.

With regard to the confessional mode, Catherine Belsey argues that the split in subjectivity becomes most apparent at moments of social crisis or transition when 'confidence in the ideology of subjectivity is eroded'. At such times, she notes, 'the text permits the reader to glimpse a division of the subject'.⁵⁹ Referring to Renaissance drama, when society was in transit between feudalism and capitalism, she detects a number of instances where the subject of the *énoncé* and the subject of the enunciation, both, importantly, in the present tense, are split. She gives an example from *Richard III*: 'I rather hate myself/ For hateful deeds committed by myself! / I am a villain; yet I lie, I am not'.⁶⁰ This form of utterance is apparent also in the political transitions I refer to, most overtly in the modes of autobiography, confession and testimony that form part of the renegotiations. One close example comes from the testimony of a white policeman in front of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa: 'I have decided to stop apologizing for Apartheid and to tell the truth. With this I will betray my people and I will betray myself ... To make peace with myself.'⁶¹ In confession and reparation, the 'I' of the one seeking amnesty is split from the 'I' which is still defined by 'my people', and which carried out the deeds. The 'I' is the subject *and* the object of the sentence, existing in contradiction in the words 'I will betray myself'.

I use the term testimony to refer not only to the oral evidence given before the TRC, but also, following Nadine Gordimer's broader characterisation, the kind of writing that these two texts present: 'Testimony creates the conditions for reflection. It is a re-examination of the past to which, whether or not we were direct protagonists, we all find ourselves subject.'⁶² In the act of writing in a genre that contains elements of testimony and autobiography, each writer enacts the gesture of the testimonies they incorporate, simultaneously replicating and transforming the stories they mediate. I will also consider whether the more small-scale output and popular form that Mkwana's text takes in any way affect its

⁵⁹ Belsey (1980) p.85

⁶⁰ Belsey (1980)

⁶¹ Krog (1999) p.105

⁶² Gordimer (1995) p.29

value in comparison with the high profile *Country of My Skull*, or whether this conventional distinction should be problematised. All these questions serve as examples of how a different constituency from the dominant one perceives the stories of the oppressive past. The focus could have been on any form of minority group. Work is being done for example on homosexual subjectivities⁶³ and minority religious subjectivities⁶⁴ in the new South Africa. Yet here I will attempt to explore the question, as Krog puts it: 'Does truth have a gender?'⁶⁵

ii. Emily Mkamanga's *Suffering in Silence*

A number of historical accounts of Malawi under Dr Banda have been written, though none has inflected this history through a consideration of gender, so Emily Mkamanga's *Suffering in Silence: Malawi women's 30 year dance with Dr Banda* is unique in this respect. This account of women's experience under Banda takes one social constituency and serves to narrate how its experience is different from that of the dominant majority. Spaces are configured and stories of female experience told. Mkamanga's previous publication was a slim novel *The Night-Stop*⁶⁶ written from the point of view of the long-suffering wife of a promiscuous lawyer who rebels against expectations, leaving her husband as he lies in his hospital bed incapacitated after a car accident in which one of his girlfriends is also injured. Mkamanga is also a regular contributor to newspapers in Malawi.

Chapter 1 of *Suffering in Silence* opens as a standard historical text, taking as its starting point the moment of Independence:

The change of government in Malawi in 1964, from colonial rule to independence had one major objective. This objective was to replace the repressive regime of the colonialists by an acceptable African majority government. Unfortunately this was never fully realised. While government transition from colonialism to independence was a success, the main objective of removing a repressive regime ended up a mere pipe dream.⁶⁷

The opening starts out apparently objective and its discourse is academic, yet it slips through increasing subjectivity, 'unfortunately', to popular polemic, 'a mere pipe dream'. This mixed style is typical of the text as it fulfils a number of different functions which will be explored in detail. These include didactic

⁶³ See for example Heyns (1998) on apartheid and homosexuality.

⁶⁴ See for example Robins (1998) on Jewish memory in apartheid South Africa.

⁶⁵ Krog (1999) p.271

⁶⁶ Mkamanga (1990)

⁶⁷ Mkamanga (2000) p.10

historical documentation, personal memoir, an informal trial of dictatorship and feminist rallying call. The discourses and rhetorical gestures employed address these different functions in sequence, and sometimes simultaneously.

In the author's preface which reads in part like an apology, Mkamanga invokes a global interlocutor as she addresses the reader directly:

I hope that none of you readers will take this book as a personal confrontation; rather I suggest that you take it as a confrontation of the ill intended system of governance which was based on a single personality. This book's main task is to show the world how vulnerable we Malawian women were in a dictatorship which drastically down graded [*sic*] our status to second class citizens; and we can still be in such a predicament in a democracy or any other future form of government to come if we choose to remain silent.⁶⁸

The invocation of the speaking 'I' over silence indicates the use of autobiographical practices as political practice, as Julie Swindells argues:

Autobiography now has the potential to be the text of the oppressed and the culturally displaced, forging a right to speak both for and beyond the individual. People in a position of powerlessness — women, black people, working-class people — have more than begun to insert themselves into culture via autobiography, via the assertion of a 'personal' voice which speaks beyond itself.⁶⁹

Mkamanga's voice is polemical and didactic; it again uses idiomatic language here, 'second-class citizens' (a possible reference to Buchi Emecheta's novel of the same name which is widely available in Malawi) and positions her as representative through the pronoun 'we' in 'we Malawian women'. Its structural confrontation with a single personality sets the narrative up as a form of prosecution of Banda, and individualises blame. The accusations mount up in the text, and the blame is ultimately individualised in the villain of the text: 'Banda's heavy handedness was a deliberate policy to enable him to be the only one to run the show. As he declared as much, it is only right and proper to lay all the blame for the abuse of women on him.'⁷⁰

Mkamanga is self-reflexive about the selectivity involved in constructing her narrative: 'I have refrained from just tabulating the abuses which are, in any case, too numerous, but have highlighted events which led to the demise of all women's groups be it in rural or urban areas.'⁷¹ Yet at other times she calls for her account to be read as a report, or documentation, though again the function is didactic: 'I feel

⁶⁸ Mkamanga (2000) author's note p.6

⁶⁹ Swindells (1995) p.7

⁷⁰ Mkamanga (2000) p.10

⁷¹ Mkamanga (2000) p.11

it is necessary to record the events of that period for posterity. This is one of my humble contributions to the betterment of future generations considering that history has a tendency of repeating itself given half a chance.⁷² Like van Wyk, Okri, Tutu and van Donge, Mkamanga notes the need to tell as a means of preventing a repression and repetition of the past.

As the first quotation suggests, much of the text is made up of a narration of political events, the kind of historical text that records events, places, dates, names and explores some of the causal relationships between them. Topics range from education, health and political structures to accounts of conditions for rural and professional women, from literacy rates to legal acts and economic figures; statistics and references are dutifully provided, all supporting the assertion of gender inequality in Malawi. Yet as the following extract demonstrates, this factual discourse is constantly ruptured by subjective personal experience:

Apart from later activists' wives like Mrs Catherine Chipembere, Mrs Chokani, Mrs Chisiza, Mrs Gertrude Rubadiri, Dr Vera Chirwa, Mrs Rose Chibambo, Mrs Maloya of Lilongwe, Tijejani NyaGondwe from Karonga (whose activities I first heard [sic] about in 1958 when I was 9) there were many others. Interestingly and in passing, I had an opportunity of meeting and talking to one, a Mrs Maloya, in 1968 when I was studying at Bunda College of Agriculture ... I must admit that I was not at all impressed with the lady despite her undisputed contribution to the independence struggle.⁷³

Past events are not interpreted through theoretical paradigms but through personal *experience*. She goes on to recall how Maloya became one of Banda's most aggressive and defensive supporters only to fall foul of him and end her days in poverty. Individual women are thus named and recalled and anecdotes told according to the narrator's memory of them. Thus the text's subjectivity is foregrounded as it slips from historical account into memoir.

This act of remembering splits into opposing gestures as Mkamanga positions herself in relation to events. As she weighs up her own role in the events of the decade, she often recalls experiences either in terms of resistance or in terms of confession. For example, when discussing the Catholic Bishops' 1992 pastoral letter, the first document to publicly criticise Banda's regime, she writes of her act of resistance to authority: 'By noon that Monday the letter was declared by the police, to be seditious material and we were all required to go and surrender it to the police. I kept my copy for my son to read in the evening and

⁷² Mkamanga (2000) p.11

⁷³ Mkamanga (2000) p.22

thereafter destroyed it.⁷⁴ She similarly represents resistance in the name of motherhood when she writes concerning a cloth which was banned by the Malawi Censorship Board as it carried the portrait of an unknown woman when only Banda's portrait was allowed to be disseminated in this form. Mkamanga write: 'Shop owners incurred heavy losses in destroying metres and metres of the unsold material. I did not destroy my cloth instead I used it as a bedsheet for my daughter.'⁷⁵ This construction is reminiscent of the scene in *Cry Freedom* where Biko's wife hides an illicit document in the innocent space of the baby's nappy, offering an intimate site of resistance exclusively available to the maternal. Mkamanga also uses the memoir to facilitate the generic code of confession:

One of the most popular song [sic] of *woman against woman* was about a woman called Najere Sadyalunda who was one of the few post cabinet crisis Malawian women ministers. She later became a political detainee ... During the 6 years or so that she was in prison, women went all out at every Banda's meeting [sic] to sing *Najere siutuluka khomo tatseka* (Najere you will never be released from prison, we have closed the prison gate). I cannot deny having sung this song at some stage.⁷⁶

In a similar mode she admits her representative complicity with the regime when she remembers her treatment of a cousin: 'Meanwhile women dismissed from their jobs because their husbands were detained suffered in their villages ... I did not even have the courage to assist a cousin who had a detained husband.'⁷⁷

This self-representation of culpability is counteracted by the subject-position she creates for all women as victims on account of their gender. Mkamanga discusses victimhood as it affects various constituencies of women, yet she in turn represents Malawian womanhood as a fractured constituency when she turns to the issue of regionalism. Mkamanga is from the north, a region which was underdeveloped during the Banda years, but from whose long-established mission schools many of Malawi's intellectual, professional class emerged. The collective pronoun 'us' indicates her self-positioning here: 'Songs were composed by the popular *Kamenya Choir* from Dedza district verbally abusing northerners by telling us in no uncertain terms to go back to our region.'⁷⁸ The constituency of victimhood thus shifts from the earlier 'we Malawian women' to 'us northerners' demonstrating the multiple and contradictory boundaries of subjectivity.

⁷⁴ Mkamanga (2000) p.12

⁷⁵ Mkamanga (2000) p.42

⁷⁶ Mkamanga (2000) p.36

⁷⁷ Mkamanga (2000) p.58

⁷⁸ Mkamanga (2000) p.77

However, Mkamanga's testimony more often goes beyond stories of first person experience to relate other women's stories. She usually paraphrases those women who have told her their stories, using the third person: 'she thought that those policemen were going to assist her since her son was a senior policeman. On the contrary ... The old lady was thrown into detention for being the mother of a detained son.'⁷⁹ One powerful technique is to quote the testimony given by a female ex-detainee to the psychiatrist, Karl Peltzer, who carried out research for the International Centre for Research into Torture. In this insertion of testimony, Mkamanga quotes the complete story as told by the informant to the researcher, transforming the function of the story in the act of re-contextualisation from one of private clinical evidence to one of public personal testimony of female victimisation. I quote in detail to replicate this act of extensive quotation for the power of the narrative, for the obvious repression of the unspeakable in the story and especially as such testimony from Malawian women is so rare:

In 1993 I heard about letters against the government being distributed by people who had access to fax machines. They the (Police) [*sic*] came to my office and said I was arrested, starting to search my desk and computer room. They did not find anything. Then they took me for a house search, into the bedroom, body search etc. They found nothing. I had to sign the search warrant and they told my relatives at the house that I was wanted for a few days. At the police headquarters they slapped me, my eyes were swollen. They asked "Do you know why we arrested you?" "No I don't" I said. "You should know! Do you think you can overthrow the government?" They slapped me again.⁸⁰

She is stripped, pinned down by three policemen and apparently sexually abused, though her story is told in terms of elisions:

They took the pliers *as if* they were to cut my throat. They said "This is your last chance, you can live, we cut your intestines. We will kill you here and nobody will question us" [*sic*] I was crying, feeling pain, from the electric shock. I said "Leave me, I am going to tell something." *I was bleeding.*⁸¹

The italicised words mark the suppressed story of the atrocity she suffers: she is pinned down on her back, and when she gets up, cannot find her bra and pants, further pointing to the circumvention, in her story of violent sexual abuse. Another disturbing account, narrated by Peter Ngulude-Chinoko in a short article, 'The Experience of Women Under the One-Party State and in the Political Transition', quotes the story of another female Malawian ex-detainee, which replicates the torture above though with fewer gaps

⁷⁹ Mkamanga (2000) p.58

⁸⁰ Mkamanga (2000) p.18 citing Peltzer (1997)

⁸¹ Mkamanga (2000) p.18, my italics.

in the narrative: 'He then took a pair of pliers and pressed the pliers into my vagina and pinching it with the pliers about ten minutes. I cried and cried. I started bleeding so I asked to go to the toilet.'⁸²

The traumatised elisions in the narration of Peltzer's patient become more evident in comparison with this other woman's story. If we assume the techniques of torture are the same, the discursive function of Peltzer's patient's 'as if' in 'as if they were to cut my throat' becomes poignantly apparent as a figure of repression. She continues to narrate the effects of the torture on her:

Then I was released. We were told to go to our offices. I was in bad shape, my whole body swollen. My parents were happy. These other people were afraid to talk to me, avoiding me. I could not sleep thinking I was still in prison. On physical examination I was given tabs for Bilharzia. My memory is too bad, I have irregular and painful periods; I keep on forgetting what I want to do. I am taking sleeping tablets. I am affected with my performance at work, my vision is bad I cannot see far — even now after two years. I consulted a specialist who said that my problem was due to stress. Sometimes I day dream [*sic*] and things are coming back to me. I will hear noise from my ears going to my head. When I am free I feel sometimes a blackout. My eyes are also affected. In order to be less affected when I am lonely I just keep myself busy.⁸³

This woman suffered for the hazard of being a secretary, a job largely carried out by women. With access to the technology of dissemination, a gendered position once again becomes a potentially subversive one. Mkamanga goes on to describe how the channels of dissemination again ended up in an intimate, private space of bodily function — public toilets: 'Women, who are the majority of secretarial staff in Malawi, made sure that documents discrediting Banda were placed in most of the public toilets for the public to read.'⁸⁴ One asks whether there is a link between the intimate spaces of the toilet and the bedsheet as sites of subversion and the interrogator's outright attack on the genitals in response, the most private and intimate part of the body. In the particular form of torture evidenced, the authorities penetrate the potentially subversive spheres of intimacy in an apparently gendered relation of power.

Yet this gendering of power is complicated, the lines between victim and perpetrators blurred when Mkamanga turns to the female members of the Malawi Young Pioneers, Banda's loyal youth militia. Here the ambiguity of women's position as agent and victim of abuse is suggested in the phrase 'the female MYP abuse', which reads ambiguously, the female MYPs as both abusers and abused:

The climax of the female MYP abuse was when they were asked to do extraordinary things. From time to time, ex-political detainees revealed that the women MYPs were used as instruments of torture on male prisoners. One such torture involved lining up naked male prisoners and ordering them to put their hands on their heads. While in that position women MYPs would play with each

⁸² Ngulude-Chinoko (1995) p.97

⁸³ Mkamanga (2000) p.18

⁸⁴ Mkamanga (2000) p.19

man's genitals and make humiliating comments about the sizes and shapes of the genitals. If the men got sexually aroused, the same woman would start whipping each man's erect penis or alternatively poke it with a sharp object. No woman in her right senses or frame of mind would like to do such mean acts to a man. But these women MYPs had to perform such dirty acts as they were ordered and in the process some suffered serious mental consequences.⁸⁵

Some of this information comes from Peltzer's study, yet his article does not state that women were forced to carry out this form of humiliation, or that they suffered psychologically as a result. One asks whether Mkamanga is creatively filling in gaps to emphasise her thesis of women's victimisation for she partially defends these women through an appeal to natural behaviour in 'no woman in her right mind'. She shows no such sympathy towards male torturers, who, she apparently assumes, act of their own volition. She thus inadvertently reinforces gender stereotyping in her polemical style. She does this also through the construction of women as 'secondary victims':⁸⁶ 'Women lived through the three decades without knowing what it was like to live without fear. We also feared for our sons, husbands, sisters, or any other relatives and friends who could be picked up at any time.'⁸⁷ This construction of the anxious maternal is, of course, one infused with gendered assumptions that are not circulated around notions of masculinity.

There are other examples by which Mkamanga reinforces traditional representations of femininity. There is a note of disapproval in the description of leading pro-Banda women: 'Most of the Women's League leaders were single women or divorcees. Those who were still married had "rubber-stamp" type husbands who had no say on the activities of their wives.'⁸⁸ The assumption is of course that any self-respecting husband does have a say over what his wife does! The narrator thus acts as a moral commentator on corrupted womanhood, contaminated by politics into a state of impurity. Similarly she blames feminine 'nature' on encouraging Banda's megalomania: 'By our nature, we women were the easiest to get carried away; we started singing Banda into glory.'⁸⁹

The image of the crying woman recurs repeatedly in *Suffering in Silence*, where it is clearly a descriptive artifice rather than an account of real actions. For example, in her 'author's note', Mkamanga imagines what women would have said in a sympathetic forum, such as the TRC:

⁸⁵ Mkamanga (2000) p.60

⁸⁶ This is TRC terminology to refer to women as victims by default rather than as direct subjects of abuse. The term is discussed further below.

⁸⁷ Mkamanga (2000) p.16

⁸⁸ Mkamanga (2000) p.38

⁸⁹ Mkamanga (2000) p.26

Given an opportunity and a favourable platform many women would have shown the irreversible physical ravages and testified to the heartache, bitterness, anger, agony and the unstoppable flow of hot tears which went on for a long time behind the scenes.⁹⁰

The image is rhetorical and contrived, as are the tears shed at the swearing-in ceremony of Banda as Prime Minister: 'As he concluded his oath of office by saying "So help me God" the whole stadium burst into cheers as women could be seen shedding tears of joy. "At long last a *son* of Nyasaland is taking charge of things".⁹¹ This remark, 'which could be heard from most people'⁹² is not attributed to anyone and again stands rhetorically as a construct of the narrator's imagination of events.

Unterhalter and Epstein raise the issue of the crying woman as a conventional construction of femininity with reference to the TRC report, noting the disproportionate number of images of women crying:

Each of the five volumes of the TRC report include black and white photographs at the beginnings of each chapter. Out of the 14 pictures of women alone or in groups with other women, almost half (6) show women crying. In the whole report there are only two pictures of men weeping and both of these are at funerals.⁹³

Villa Vicencio notes that in the media, the 'images sent around the world were of people (mostly black, mainly women) weeping on stage'.⁹⁴ Mkamanga is thus clearly operating from within a tradition which associates femininity with emotion. Yet taking into account the popular intertext of this discursive idiom, the use of this image can be considered according to Karin Barber's theory of reading popular culture. In this reading, recourse to conventional representations of women are Mkamanga's way of understanding and demonstrating the suffering and complicity of women in the regime, and can be interpreted as a powerful fictional construct. Using Barber's ideas, for example, the use of this stereotypical artifice has a predominantly communicative, demonstrative function, the 'aesthetic construct is exploited for its maximum effect, for its most powerful appeal'.⁹⁵ Barber continues that the audience, 'however volatile and scattered, is still reached by a technique of immediacy, of an emotional "obviousness" that deepens and reaffirms common values'.⁹⁶ The commonality of experience of women is thus invoked through the use of cliché in a number of ways: in the rather idiomatic title of the book, *Suffering in Silence*, reinforced in the

⁹⁰ Mkamanga (2000) p.7

⁹¹ Mkamanga (2000) p.24 italics in original.

⁹² Mkamanga (2000) p.24

⁹³ Epstein and Unterhalter (2000) p.4

⁹⁴ Villa-Vicencio (2000) p.25

⁹⁵ Barber (1987) p.43

⁹⁶ Barber, (1987) p.48

instantly recognisable image of the emotional woman, an image that aspires towards a common recognition of women's experience. As in previous discussions of stereotyped representations of women, the agency of the image is located in the reader's ability to transform, through interpretation, an effectively passive signifier into an active, visible statement.

Mkamanga's text does also overtly break many stereotypes of Malawian womanhood as submissive and collusive in Banda's patriarchal power structures. In the preface she writes that she wishes to 'erase the fallacy, held especially by men, both inside and outside the country, that women who were popularly known, even beyond the Malawi borders, as *Mbumba za Kanuzi* (Banda's women) were the greatest beneficiaries of Banda's rule'.⁹⁷ Her accounts of acts of resistance, abuse and gender inequality, as well as the reinscription of the names of Malawian women activists and the stories of detainees, fulfils this aim discursively.

In sum then, Mkamanga positions herself multiply, and at times contradictorily, as Malawian, as woman, as northerner, as professional and as mother. Through her depiction of acts of resistance against colluding nationalist and masculine forces, she constructs herself as victim and yet through the confessional mode, as partly complicit with the system. She acts as a mediating and enabling representative voice to a number of women's stories, and although much of the text is a seemingly objective account of political events in terms of dates, places, names, I have focused on those passages where the subjective 'I' erupts, sometimes quite unexpectedly, into this discourse, causing a generic shift towards an autobiographical account. These ambiguities can be discussed fruitfully in relation to Antjie Krog's account of covering the TRC for the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), in which questions of the narrating subject, the mediation and hospitality of testimony, generic blurring and the collusion of masculine and nationalist discourses are as significant.

iii. Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*

The wealth of information available to Krog on individual suffering dwarfs the number of officially documented accounts available to Mkamanga, so the huge discrepancy in scale and formality of sources must be taken into account when comparing these texts. Yet Mark Sanders' generic description of *Country of My Skull* could easily also apply to *Suffering in Silence*: a 'hybrid work, written at the edges of reportage,

⁹⁷ Mkamanga (2000) p.9

memoir and metafiction'⁹⁸ which 'makes itself host to testimony'.⁹⁹ Like *Suffering in Silence, Country of My Skull* is, as Michiel Heyns puts it, 'a rite of passage narrative of which Krog herself is the protagonist and author' and is thus autobiographical in its practices.¹⁰⁰ It is a story of the TRC as experienced by the author's narrating consciousness, a significant portion of which is the insertion of selected testimony of both victims and perpetrators given in front of the TRC. The text, therefore, contrasts with the reports Krog, as Antjie Samuel, compiled for SABC, in which genre the 'I' is largely absent. Krog's deliberate diversion in *Country of My Skull* from recounting her experience 'truthfully' is indicated in this meta-fictional moment:

"Hey Antjie, but that is not quite the what happened at the workshop," says Patrick.

"Yes, I know, it's a new story that I constructed from all the other information ... I'm not reporting or keeping minutes. I'm telling ... I cut and paste the upper layer, in order to get the second layer told, which is actually the story I want to tell ... I am busy with the truth ... my truth ... Seen from my perspective, shaped by my state of mind at the time and now also by the audience I'm telling the story to. In every story there is hearsay, there is a grouping together of things that didn't necessarily happen together, there are assumptions, there are exaggerations to bring home the enormities of situations, there is downplaying to confirm innocence. All of this together makes up the whole country's truth. So also the lies."¹⁰¹

The selection and inflection of the 'whole country's truth' (as distinct from the 'country's whole truth') through the personal narrative again correlates with Mkwana's method '[I] have highlighted events'¹⁰² and '[t]his book is entirely based on my thirty years of experience and observations coupled with some information from documents'.¹⁰³ Heyns calls this 'an act of narrative appropriation', where the narrator appropriates the story of a political transition to form a new sense of democratic, yet also mourning subjectivity. Whereas Mkwana's memory is apparently jolted into telling anecdotes by the events she recalls, Krog does more than recall and re-tell, by consciously re-ordering events, or placing testimony in a fictionalised context. Both texts thus enact a form of semi-autobiography which Nuttall identifies as typical in the transitional period:

the public rehearsal of memory — through the act of testifying before the TRC, or the writing of autobiography — is always a more jagged and less controlled process than this suggests. It is a palpable, messy activity, which has as much to do with a struggle with grief, to fill in the silence,

⁹⁸ Sanders (2000) p.16

⁹⁹ Sanders (2000) p.14

¹⁰⁰ Heyns (2000) p.43

¹⁰¹ Krog (1999) pp.258-9

¹⁰² Krog (1999) p.11

¹⁰³ Krog (1999) p.9

or to offer something symbolic to the dead, as it does with the choreographing of a political and social script. It is a complex composite, neither entirely ineffable and individual nor entirely socially determined.¹⁰⁴

Of course every autobiographical text negotiates the relationship between the individual and the socially determined, yet in a time of transition the subject is socially and politically overdetermined, resulting in a rise in the autobiographical genre.¹⁰⁵ Although there are countless issues to be debated around the TRC process and Krog's 'hospitality' or 'appropriation' of testimonies (according to one's viewpoint), I will again focus on the narrating consciousness and its challenge to dominant masculine nationalist discourses through a construction of stories of womanhood in South Africa, including the self as woman.

Country of My Skull is structured as a collage of testifying voices and narrative reflections. It thus resembles what Albie Sachs regards as the collage of the TRC report as a result of the multiple authors, uneven structure and the report's overt subjectivity as a 'protagonist'. He sees this unevenness as one of the report's most endearing features:

I think the TRC report is a brilliant document. I loved it because it was so uneven, it was rough, it had seams, you could see the stitching, and it was authentic, it was real. It was not one of those boring, homogenised commission reports that are read by only a few experts. It contained the passion, the variety and even the contradictions of the process itself ... the TRC put its findings down on the table, and was itself a protagonist, it was not simply recording history.¹⁰⁶

This counters any view of the TRC report as a coherent archive so desired by Kenneth Ross. The constructedness of the TRC report is foregrounded by Krog's reviewer, Fiona Ross:

What do we do with stories, performances, shards of experience? The Commission is engaged in melding them into a narrative of patterns of human-rights violations, a narrative that itself is envisaged as forming one of the founding stories of the new nation.¹⁰⁷

Fiona Ross thus sees the TRC report as a narrative, an organisation of versions of experience into a particular structured order or dominant 'founding story', echoing nationalist and theological inclinations towards singularity. Yet she simultaneously emphasises the TRC report's fragmentary nature, its 'constructedness' or textuality which undermines such coherence.

The TRC saw the cases of women's suffering as exceptional, for it acknowledged the difference in the experience and recall of oppression by men and women by holding a special hearing on women.¹⁰⁸ Yet

¹⁰⁴ Nuttall (1998) pp.75-76

¹⁰⁵ Nuttall (1998) pp.75-88

¹⁰⁶ Sachs (2000) p.98

¹⁰⁷ Ross, F (1998) p.4

¹⁰⁸ Special hearings at the TRC were dedicated to children and youth, prisons and women.

ironically the sub-chapter on women at the end of the report's Chapter Four is representative of the ways women are often annexed, a marginal ghetto in national concerns. The TRC report acknowledges as much in the introduction to the section:

The argument that gender-neutral approaches are often discriminatory because they unwittingly assume a male outlook is in accordance with the conception of equality found in the South African constitution. This conception is one of substantive, rather than merely formal, equality. It recognises indirect as well as direct discrimination, implicit as well as explicit and intentional bias.¹⁰⁹

Paragraphs 6 and 7 of the same chapter delineate the differences in the ways in which men and women spoke about themselves in giving testimony with the result that many women fell into the category of indirect, or 'secondary victims'. Often women portrayed themselves in relation to the suffering of active husbands, sons, fathers and brothers, downplaying abuses against their own bodies:

Over the life of the Commission, commissioners distinguished less and less between what were originally perceived as 'primary' and 'secondary' victims. They acknowledged the difficulty of distinguishing between, or weighing, the physical and psychological pain suffered by the direct victim and the psychological pain of those to whom this person was precious. The CALS [Centre for Applied Legal Studies] submission elaborates on other types of pain and suffering, such as when a family loses its breadwinner and the loss of status of a woman who is widowed when her husband is killed. It quotes Ms Sepeti Mlangeni, widowed two months after her marriage: "I am an outcast in my own society."¹¹⁰

Again, this situation is directly comparable with the situation for wives and widows of dissidents in Malawi, as Mkamanga relates.

Although the structure of *Country of My Skull* integrates female experience, it does acknowledge the difference of women's experience in the narrative. Some chapters are dedicated exclusively to women's stories, such as 'Two Women' which contrasts the evidence of a white woman testifying about the attack on her golf club's Christmas party and a black woman relating an attack on her home on the previous day, in which her husband died. The simultaneity of the events is foregrounded by the date, the settings contrasted, yet the experience of grief compared. The book is also framed according to female references: the Vintage and Jonathan Cape publications of the book portray the suffering maternal on the cover in the form of the deeply furrowed face of Joyce Mtimkulu as she holds scraps of her son's hair after testifying about his death. The epigraph to the text, 'for every victim who had an Afrikaner surname on her lips' addresses suffering womanhood through the feminine pronoun, simultaneously inscribing Afrikaner guilt.

¹⁰⁹ Tutu et al. (1998) 4(10) paragraph 3

¹¹⁰ Tutu et al. (1998) 4(10) paragraph 7

This places Krog in an ambiguous position empathetic to victimisation by virtue of her gender, yet related by virtue of language and culture to many of the worst perpetrators.

After the dramatic opening pages in which the overdeterminedly masculine Eugene Terr'blanche storms into the text at an initial meeting on the TRC process, the narrative retreats from report to autobiographical mode, from the public space of the hearing to an intimate domestic space: 'As if back into a womb, I crawl — the heavy eiderdown, the hot-water bottle. Through the window I see the sleeping farmyard washed away in the moonlight. A plover calls far off.'¹¹¹ This introductory narration of the self is characterised by allegories of femininity: the dark, semiotic space of the womb and the light of the moon. The narrating consciousness is implicitly, yet firmly defining itself as female.

Yet I do not suggest that Krog is setting up a framework of intuitive femininity which somehow enables her to represent poetically and empathetically the voices of other women. Indeed, in an article by Maya Jaggi in *The Guardian*, Krog distances herself from this perception:

The acclaimed author and journalist Rian Malan simply tuned out, saying he didn't want to 'mix blood with breakfast'.

"It's a typically male response," Krog says. "Everything emotional is described as female, so you don't have to deal with it. Tutu, especially, was the target of awful attacks. In comic strips they always draw him with a dress and falsely emotional. That's how people dismiss it, by saying it's women's stuff."¹¹²

Yet even within the TRC commission, Krog narrates the experience of being discriminated against on account of her gender; when she writes a news story about the deputy chair, Alex Boraine, he responds vehemently: "Then I think: No, he would not dare to react like this to any of the male journalists covering the Commission. But I'm supposed to be supportive and nothing else."¹¹³ The narration of this experience validates in a small way her empathy with other victims of discrimination, suggesting that the envisaged reform where races and sexes are all treated equally is still some way off.

However, Krog is overwhelmingly aware of the privileged position from which she writes, in particular as an Afrikaner, coming from a family with a history of supporting the National Party.¹¹⁴ In the text she has two brothers, whereas in reality she has three, a deliberate strategy to deny the referentiality of

¹¹¹ Krog (1999) p.6

¹¹² Jaggi (1998) p.6

¹¹³ Krog (1999) p.343

¹¹⁴ Krog (1999) p.16

the autobiographical details, and an attempt to raise further questions about truth. This identification of herself as an Afrikaner woman is one of the dominant themes that Krog reflects on, using a confessional style. Her cultural alliance with Afrikaner perpetrators is agonising to her in its personal implication as an Afrikaner subject:

They are as familiar as my brothers, cousins and school friends. Between us all distance is erased. Was there perhaps never a distance except the one I have built up with great effort within myself over the years? ... What I have in common with them is a culture — and part of that culture over decades hatched the abominations for which they are responsible.

In a sense it is not these men but a culture that is asking for amnesty.¹¹⁵

Yet Krog implicitly asks for understanding, for example when Tutu pleads for a more overt gesture of reconciliation from the Afrikaner society:

The journalists present, mainly English and black, watched impassively.

I grew heavy with desperation ... What more does Tutu want? Is it something as insignificant as an apology from a senile P.W. Botha? Is it more? ... Is it more than money? Is it to give the land back? What word, what embrace will unburden us all?¹¹⁶

This split in her subjectivity which defines shame elicits physical symptoms, which Krog also talks about in her interview with Jaggi: 'I am powerless to ignore what vibrates in me — I abhor and care for these five men. I get up one morning with my face all swollen from a rash.'¹¹⁷

In *Country of My Skull*, Krog invents an extramarital affair for her own character. Her reason, she says, is that 'I physically had to hear another tone — of kindness, caring and softness — to counteract what I was reading.'¹¹⁸ Some of the book's more poetic, lyrical moments arise from this affair, the following symbolic moment about the nameless man's support is an example: 'Slowly we walk back. His hand is reassuringly on the back of my neck. Soaking wet we walk — back into the oppressive night.'¹¹⁹ Yet the affair also serves to allegorise some of the questions about confession, guilt and reconciliation, placing them in an intimate, domestic context. When, for example, the narrator confesses to her husband, the conversation about truth is a direct replica of Krog's basic concerns about the TRC testimony and the

¹¹⁵ Krog (1999) p.144

¹¹⁶ Krog (1999) p.436

¹¹⁷ Krog (1999) p.145

¹¹⁸ Jaggi (1999) p.6

¹¹⁹ Krog (1999) p.217

question of singular and multiple truths, where the estranged husband, the victim, states his need for a single verifiable truth:

'It is useless to talk about the truth. My whole telling of what happened will be driven forward, determined, trimmed, slanted by my desire not to hurt you, to entice you back, to protect your honour and to convince you to exonerate me.'

'Rubbish. There is always a basic truth: you cheated on me. Why? Where? How? From when to when.'¹²⁰

It might not be too reductive to note the significance of the fact that in this scene a male character seeks a verifiable, singular truth along the lines of that sought by theologians, while the female character is less fixated on a singular truth in her thinking.

There is an important distinction in narrating subject position between Mkamanga and Krog, for whereas Mkamanga does experience fracture within the constituency of women according to ethnicity and regionalism the degree is much less, and the circumscription of ethnicity not legally enshrined as under apartheid. Importantly, Mkamanga does not have to justify her right to the country's citizenship on the basis of ethnicity. Krog, on the other hand, writes from a position of privilege which her whiteness and professional status provide for her. By the end of the book, Krog celebrates her slow release from her sense of alienation and collective Afrikaner shame in an epiphanic moment: 'towards Africa. Ours. Mine. Yes, I would die for this ... And I realize that it is the Commission alone that has brought me to these moments of fierce belonging.'¹²¹ This trajectory is in fact redemptive at this point and, as Heyns suggests, enacts a 'rite of passage' through which she constructs for herself a new African subjectivity.¹²²

In her representation and mediation of other women, however, it is clear that her subjectivity as a white woman is central to this process. Krog is concerned with the figure of the testifying maternal, as will be discussed, and how maternity, menstruation and rape are used against women as means of torture. She recounts for example the added difficulty of being a female detainee, citing the testimony of a woman who told of rats coming to nibble her soiled sanitary towels when she was menstruating.¹²³ On the issue of the

¹²⁰ Krog (1999) p.300

¹²¹ Krog (1999) p.421

¹²² Carli Coetzee (2001) similarly argues that 'Krog is able to imagine herself connected to the country and able to say "we", "ours", "mine"', yet identifies a different point in the novel as this redemptive moment, when the narrator breaks down and cries, distinguishing herself from the men of her race who do not weep. p.695

¹²³ Krog (1999) p.271

discourse of rape, she provides an interesting contrast with Mkamanga, which serves to illustrate how truth can be discursive and thus contradictory:

Men don't use the word 'rape' when they testify. They talk about being sodomized, or about iron rods being inserted into them. In so doing they make rape a women's issue. By denying their own sexual subjugation to male brutality, they form a brotherhood with rapists which conspires against their own wives, mothers and daughters, say some of those who testify.¹²⁴

Yet Mkamanga, writing about women in detention in Malawi, keeps the two definitions separate: 'some were even subjected to having iron rods inserted into their private parts in addition to being raped.'¹²⁵ The conjunction 'in addition to' serves paradoxically to keep the definitions separate. Taking these two examples, the question 'were you raped?' becomes discursive, answered differently according to conditions such as gender, individual definition and the object of penetration. The atrocity remains the same, yet the language that defines it varies. Here is a point at which truth arguably becomes discursive.

Krog discusses differing versions of the maternal, as when she presents four different versions of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela in the chapter 'Mother Faces the Nation'. Madikizela-Mandela's appearance before the TRC presents a deformation of the relationship between mother and 'son' which has come to punctuate the text in the many appearances of women testifying about the deaths of their sons, for her appearance is to tell the story of young Stompie Seipei's killing. Krog's dedication of a whole chapter to the case reflects the world media's interest in it, which she questions in terms of two stereotypes informed by racism and sexism:

Why is it that this woman, a black woman from a long-isolated country, creates such an unprecedented media frenzy? Is it because Winnie Madikizela-Mandela answers to the archetype: Black and Beautiful? Or because she answers to the stereotype: Black and Evil?¹²⁶

Despite her concern about a hunger for media stories that fit neat preconceptions, her sympathies do not lie with Madikizela-Mandela. Black women are thus not presented as inherently good and suffering. Class is another factor that delineates position, which is identified visually as a spectacle of difference between Madikizela-Mandela and those testifying against her: "The cameras move from her exquisite face, her diamanté-studded sunglasses, her throngs of delicate bangles and rings, to the faces of the victims —

¹²⁴ Krog (1999) p.277

¹²⁵ Mkamanga (2000) p.17

¹²⁶ Krog (1999) p.368

engraved with hardship, pain, poverty.¹²⁷ The working-class black woman is raised by Krog to archetypal, mythic status, the proprietor of the emergent truth:

She is sitting behind a microphone, dressed in beret or *kopdaek* and her Sunday best. Everybody recognizes her, Truth has become Woman. Her voice, distorted behind her rough hand, has undermined Man as the source of truth. And yet. Nobody knows her.

The truth and the illusion of truth as we have never known them.¹²⁸

Indeed, statistically, more women testified than men (overall 54.8% of testimonies were from women, and in some areas up to 75%), often as survivors or 'secondary victims' where men died.¹²⁹ The result of this is that the repository of memory is largely female, and thus the new version of events is largely shaped by mourning women. However, this leads to the constructions of heroic narratives of men at the cost of downplaying the women's own suffering and the trauma as survivors. Sadly, as the statistic analysis shows, there is a great gender imbalance in the subjects of testimony:

Very early in the process, anthropologist Fiona Ross analysed the 204 testimonies that she heard during the five weeks of Commission hearings. She found that close on six of every ten deponents were women, but that over three-quarters of the women's testimonies and 88 per cent of the men's testimonies were about abuses to men. Only 17 per cent of the women's testimonies, and 5 per cent of the men's testimonies were about abuses to women, with the remainder about abuses to men and women.¹³⁰

These figures show that women were either actually regarded as less of a threat to the apartheid state or that women's suffering is not being fully acknowledged in the testimony. In both cases it is patriarchal social structures that cast men as the agents of change which cause this imbalance.

Yet when women do testify, this causes a mood of heightened wonder; Krog conveys a sense of discovery of the extraordinary in the ordinary in the line: 'The voice of an ordinary cleaning woman is the headline on the one o'clock news.'¹³¹ The implications of black women's experience for reconciliation are more difficult: 'It is easy for Mandela to forgive — life has changed; but for the woman in the shack, it is not possible.'¹³² A critical gulf remains between the discursive change in status, where the victims'

¹²⁷ Krog (1999) p.372

¹²⁸ Krog (1999) p.84

¹²⁹ Tutu et al. (1998) 4(10) paragraph 12.

¹³⁰ Tutu et al. (1998) 4(10) paragraph 24.

¹³¹ Krog (1999) p.48

¹³² Krog (1999) p.168

suffering is officially recorded and publicly acknowledged, and the material reality for the same 'reinscribed' woman.

Krog then turns to the maternal and the material in her own family, arguing that self-consciousness of the cost of privilege is a way of living with her conscience after the TRC process:

I see my mother coming back from the chicken-run with her two youngest grandchildren, each swinging a basket of eggs. She seems frail, but the scene is peaceful, we are so lucky, so privileged ... But whereas this privilege used to upset me in the past, now I can hold it against the truth that we are all aware of. No longer an unaware privilege, but one that we know the price and mortality of.¹³³

Clearly many would regard this position as inadequate, as again not much direct material redistribution comes about from this discursive reorganisation. Earlier, Krog's own failing maternity is a marker of her alienation from the familiar:

I walk into my home one evening. My family are excitedly watching cricket on television. They seem like a happy, close-knit group. I stand in the dark kitchen for a long time. Everything has become unconnected and unfamiliar. I realize that I don't know where the light switch is.

I can talk about nothing but the Truth Commission. Yet I don't talk about it at all.¹³⁴

The family is used to allegorise the familiar, from which she is now distanced and disorientated, inviting an allegorical reading in terms of her sense of unbelonging to the country at this early stage in the TRC process. As with the affair, personal relationships which define her female subjectivity, as lover or as mother, are used to depict her relationship with the changing society. Maternity is of course the theme of Sindiwe Magona's novel *Mother to Mother*, which is discussed in the next chapter, in which she too tries to reconcile the implications of political actions and changes in terms of motherhood across racial, cultural and economic divides.

One of the main criticisms of *Country of My Skull* is its appropriation of testimony. The question of whether Krog is enabling or distorting the voices or relegating them to a backdrop to her own narrative of selfhood is a valid one. Yet it is one of which Krog is very much aware. Again, it is maternal failure which introduces this question:

After the amnesty deadline I enter my house like a stranger. And barren. I sit around for days. Staring. My youngest walks into a room and starts. 'Sorry, I'm not used to you being at home.'

¹³³ Krog (1999) p.413

¹³⁴ Krog (1999) p.71

No poetry should come forth from this. May my hands fall off if I write this.

So I sit around. Naturally and unnaturally without words. Stunned by the knowledge of the price people have paid for their words. If I write this, I exploit and betray. If I don't, I die.¹³⁵

The image of barrenness overlaps and links these two concerns of the family and language as they configure nationhood. It is thus arguably Krog's self-consciousness which turns the use of verbatim testimony from one of exploitation to one of hosting. Sanders notes that for Krog the question is 'a writer's facilitation of the utterance of others ... Krog's book makes itself host to testimony'.¹³⁶ Krog enables the stories to be packaged and heard in a format which is more accessible to readers than the ten volume report, despite the latter's availability on the internet. Krog acts as an effective international host and local interpreter of the disturbing stories. And yet, as with her self-awareness of privilege, it is inevitable that many will interpret this act in materialist terms, that she is 'riding on the back of victims' grief'.¹³⁷

However, Krog argues that her femaleness aids the deconstruction of manichean opposites required by transition and reconciliation:

it's a male thing this obsession with evil ... For starters, all the journalists zooming in on the perpetrators are male — the smell of male bonding, male culture, misguided bravery — the machismo fascinates men. With women it is different, and I think it has to do with giving birth. You have children, they all come out of you — yet one a wonderful person, the other a *stront*. But you know that deep down in him, he also has something good.¹³⁸

The sceptical voice might say that this blurring of boundaries between good and evil serves to defend the perpetrators, that this argument comes about from her need to understand how the Afrikaner culture, of which she is a subject, can produce the most hardline perpetrators.

The most worrying irony is that the dominant discourse on reconciliation is still a masculine discourse:

In a recent article in the English press a black academic asked: 'We have Mandela pleading reconciliation, we have Tutu pleading reconciliation — where, oh where is the White Prince of Reconciliation?' Indeed: where is he? And of course, it can be nothing but a 'he'.¹³⁹

The fact that reconciliation, according to Krog, is sought on male terms reinstates female inferiority.

¹³⁵ Krog (1999) p.74

¹³⁶ Sanders (2000) p.14

¹³⁷ Jaggi (1999) p.6

¹³⁸ Krog (1999) p.395

¹³⁹ Krog (1999) p.439

iv. Conclusion

The two texts loosely fall into a distinction that Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid make: 'feminist historiography may be feminist without being, exclusively, women's history'.¹⁴⁰ Whereas Mkamanga's tends more towards a women's history, recounting events, laws and incidents that affected and were affected by women, Krog's wider focus from a distinctly gender-conscious position defines it more as feminist historiography. The dynamics of their racial subjectivity in relation to their gendered ones are different, where race is a much more significant issue for Krog, as she seeks to re-define a new subjectivity of non-privilege in a South Africa whose new constitution emphasises egalitarianism.

Interestingly, each woman addresses the gesture of official apology by her former president and reacts to it in similar terms: sceptical, yet acknowledging the symbolic value of the gesture. Krog configures the national gesture again as a familial one in her conversation about the apology with Tutu: "But didn't he say," I ask the Archbishop, "the way someone would say to his wife — 'I'm sorry I hit you, but you know, you deserved it?'"¹⁴¹ Yet she gives Tutu the last word, implying the validity of his position: 'If he hadn't said anything people would have said "How callous!" ... I mean, he can't win.'¹⁴² Mkamanga narrates the story of Banda's apology conveying the excitement and annoyance his statement aroused:

It came as a great surprise to me to hear Banda in his own voice addressing the nation. Though his voice was cracked with age and sickness, I still glued myself to the radio to hear the defeated *Ngwazi (hero)* speak ... He was apologised [*sic*] to all Malawians whom he vaguely and casually said "*might have suffered in one way or the other during his reign*" and went on to ask for a reconciliation ... However, I found that the apology left more questions than answers.¹⁴³

The woman's position in the family is brought up again in the list of inadequacies of the apology:

Banda did not even have the courtesy to explain why and how all the atrocities came about. At least the women he called his *Mbumba* deserved some plausible explanation about how and why their husbands, sons and brothers disappeared.¹⁴⁴

Repeatedly thus, in both women's writing, the narrating consciousness considers how the macrocosmic impacts on the microcosmic; both women refer to the conventional, domestic roles of women in interpreting the presidential apologies.

¹⁴⁰ Sangari and Vaid (1990) pp.2-3

¹⁴¹ Krog (1999) p.161

¹⁴² Krog (1999) p.161

¹⁴³ Mkamanga (2000) pp.99-100

¹⁴⁴ Mkamanga (2000) p.101

The two women thus share many similar themes, concerns and even vocabularies. However, they are distinguished by their tone, style and generic format. Both write in their second language, but Krog, as the poet, is more self-conscious about the relationship between language and the subject of her text, and her voice is much more lyrical and self-inquiring. She is more willing to experiment with the language, and the structure of the text, its fragmentary nature reflecting the fractured considerations of truth and defying the possibility of a coherent story. She overtly fictionalises her life, seeking poetic allegories in which to explain what is difficult to grasp in words.

Mkamanga's text envisages a different function, for although a published novelist, she recounts the story of women in Banda's Malawi as a historical, factual account. However, personal narratives, anecdotes and subjective accounts seem to erupt accidentally from the text which is categorised as 'Social History/African/Malawi'. The elusiveness of disciplinary boundaries is illustrated by the fact that Krog's text, so overtly poetic and subjective in its style, is categorised by Vintage under 'Current Affairs/Politics'. As suggested in Mkamanga's discussion of Banda's apology, Malawians often voice their envy for a process as transparent as the TRC, by which some of the reasons for past oppression are explained.

The extraordinary strength of both of these texts is in the ways that they combine social scientific facts with autobiographical practices and reported testimonies of experience. Rosemary Jolly, writing about the TRC and 'related narratives', argues that this is a powerful combination:

Both kinds of knowledge come in the form of narratives, and each kind of narrative has its own strengths. We can see this particularly when the two sorts of language, documentary and personal, are put together. The statistical on its own, tends to detract from the personal suffering it documents, whereas oral testimony, on its own, is often devalued for being anecdotal rather than comprising 'hard facts'.¹⁴⁵

Jolly reflects thus what Mapanje, Ross and Villa Vicencio indicate, that the aestheticisation and creative re-imagination of a historical past to re-conceive of the future is a necessary continuation and development of the revelation process which starts with the formal testimonies of personal experience within the institution of something like the TRC, and can act as an alternative forum for remembrance and re-imagination where such an institution does not exist. This complex relationship between documented fact

¹⁴⁵ Jolly (1999) p.1

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¹⁴⁵ Jolly (1999) p.1

and fictionalisation, and ultimately between historical and fictional writing at a time of political transition, is the subject of the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Inscribing Memorials

And he saw what is meant by history: those not dead trying
to explain how those who are dead became so.
*Justin Cartwright*¹

In its earliest uses history was a narrative account of events ... the sense has ranged
from a story of events to a narrative of past events, but the sense of inquiry has often
been present.
*Raymond Williams*²

i. Literary memorials

As the previous chapter demonstrates, the act of remembering is one central to political transition. It functions to rehabilitate and validate what has been suppressed or disregarded, to explain by telling stories from different perspectives, and thus to proceed through mutual understanding towards the *ideal* of reconciliation. Remembering and creating memorials to characters discredited by contemporary official history can be interpreted as a democratic gesture, for to remind ourselves of what Connerton writes, '[t]he more total the aspirations of the new regime, the more imperiously will it seek to introduce an era of forced forgetting'.³

In Chapter 4 the constructedness of factual accounts of the past was discussed in terms of narrative techniques and literary idioms used by the writers. The novels discussed in this chapter are both self-consciously presented as fiction, yet both take factual events as their starting points. The relationship between fact and fiction, story and history will therefore be considered again, this time in relation to a different genre, the novel, to emphasise the continuity between story and history, as Raymond Williams suggests in the second epigraph. The first novel, Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*, continues the concerns of female suffering, and is written in the voice of the mother of a young man involved in the murder of a white American student in Guguletu in 1993. The event is factual, and the men involved in the killing were granted amnesty by the TRC amnesty hearings in 1998, defining Amy Biehl's murder as political.⁴ Felix Mnthali's *Yoraniyoto* is the story of the wife of a detainee searching for the truth behind his

¹ Cartwright (2001) p.10

² Williams (1976) p.146, italics in original.

³ Connerton (1989) p.12

⁴ See amnesty decisions, 1998 on <http://www.truth.org.za/decisions/am98.htm>, downloaded 01/11/01.

death in detention. There are a number of autobiographical details in the story that demonstrate that it springs from Mnthali's own experience. Both texts are biographical, possibly semi-autobiographical, fiction, a genre whose contested boundaries between fiction, biography and autobiography can be resolved in the term 'life-narrative'.⁵ Like Nuttall, quoted in the previous chapter, Boehmer, Gunner and Maake suggest that the 'the recurrent interest in life-narratives is one predominant way in which [the difficulty of representing South Africa's divided realities] is addressed'.⁶ They suggest that such narratives demonstrate the 'transformative or *informing* power of story-telling, its capacity to dramatise and make sense of the complexities of existence'.⁷ This function of literature to inform, to dramatise and to make sense of complexity is performed retrospectively by both novels discussed in this chapter, as they narrate events of the past in search of explanation. The transition has allowed this re-opening of the past to new forms of interpretation, and many see this as a condition for envisioning alternative futures.

The concern of the novels discussed in this final chapter is how to write of the dead and how to explain their killing. In both cases this involves a return to a consideration of the past, hence much of *Mother to Mother* is set in the apartheid era, and *Yoraniyoto* is largely set in Banda's Malawi. The differences of the political contexts have been well rehearsed by now, yet the experience of transition has been argued to be comparable. It is the relationship between remembering the past and explaining the present in the light of the past that will be the focus of my readings of the novels. I will consider some of the debates about recuperation and rehabilitation of the past from the last chapter in relation to these novels, particularly whether the texts acknowledge multiple perspectives and versions of truth. Both texts have deceased characters at their core as catalysts for the story, which is why I use the term 'memorials' in the chapter heading, incorporating a sense of textual commemoration of the dead. Although they are more the stories of the survivors than the stories of the dead, it is the memory of the deceased which drives the narrative in both cases, and which structures them as literary epitaphs. Yet their function is much more than this, for both novels seek to explore why the death has occurred, that is, focusing on the processes and causality within the social conditions that allowed the death rather than concentrating on the deceased. It is this aspect of inquiry into the past that both the epigraphs capture. The character thus becomes a metonymic subject of the system, open to analogous readings as representative of suffering or

⁵ This is the term used by Boehmer, Gunner and Maake (1995)

⁶ Boehmer, Gunner and Maake (1995) p.558 Michael Green makes the same suggestion in Green (1997) p.89

⁷ Boehmer, Gunner and Maake (1995)p.559

turning towards violence. Yet this structuralist reading is counteracted by the deep poignancy of the narration of individual lives that starts to convey the individual, personal implications of being interpellated as a subject of an oppressive political system, whether as perpetrating or suffering subject.

As the society in each case is a totalitarian one, the literary memorials have a cautionary, activist role. These stories are told from the perspectives of a mother and a wife, yet both disturb the TRC definition of 'primary' and 'secondary' victim; the wife of the detainee in *Yoraniyoto* is herself detained briefly and suffers a miscarriage, becoming both kinds of victims simultaneously. The mother of the perpetrator in *Mother to Mother* is shown to be a victim in her own right, not only through the guilt of her son's actions and empathy with the mother of the murdered girl, but on a larger historical scale as a victim of a larger social structure of which her son in turn is also a victim. This porous distinction between victim and perpetrator therefore develops the theme introduced with reference to Mapanje's 'Guilty of Nipping her Pumpkin Leaves', where the returning exile is subject to feelings of guilt. The questions that arise, and which the discussion seeks to address, include how certain people and events are remembered by others, why certain characters are remembered and how this affects the transition. As a result of their genre as fictionalised biographies, both texts also raise the debate surrounding the politics of speaking on behalf of another.

ii. Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*

Shame and anger fill me night and day. Shame at what my son has done.
Anger at what has been done to him.
*Mother to Mother*⁸

The narrative temporality of *Mother to Mother* is given very precisely as Wednesday 25 August, 1993, a date that correlates with the killing of Amy Biehl in Guguletu. The novel is structured like a diary, divided into segments from 5.15pm on the Wednesday, when Mandisa, a domestic servant, is told by her employer that there is trouble in her township, up to 1pm on the following day, Thursday, when her son's involvement is fully revealed to her. Yet the narrative is by no means chronological; the eight 'journal entries' each start off with a report of current events which then shift, following Mandisa's train of thought, into the past as if seeking explanations or corollaries there. The last entry 'Guguletu, late afternoon, Wednesday 25 August, 1993' is the only entry out of chronological order. It follows Mandisa's meeting with her son in

⁸ Magona (1998) p.198

hiding and returns to the scene of the attack, enacting Mxolisi's detailed confession to his mother of his part in the murder.

The novel is written in the voice of the mother of the perpetrator to the American mother of the victim. As Meg Samuelson points out, Mandisa thus transgresses race and community by appealing to her 'Sister-Mother' in terms of gender and most importantly by identification through motherhood, a strategy 'perhaps only made possible by the demise of apartheid'.⁹ The maternal is a voice that Magona uses to position the subject-narrators of her previous two autobiographical texts, *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*.¹⁰ Yet the American identity of the addressee and the stereotypical representation of the white South African 'madam' in the text lead Samuelson to suggest that Magona does little to dissolve the differences between South African women. Nevertheless, as Attwell and Harlow note, the project of the novel is still a valid one: 'The mode of address is also internationalized, which makes possible the central thematic and ethical project of the text: to create empathy via an understanding of the historical context.'¹¹ It thus contains some resonances of Alan Paton's project in *Cry the Beloved Country*, in which Kumalo tells the story of his son, who is hanged for the murder of a white man.¹²

Mandisa tells her story, and therefore the story of Mxolisi, in segments, in terms of the hardship they suffered under apartheid, including its forced removals and enforced migrancy which destabilised families and broke up wider communities. Yet the community is not idealised. It is seen as intolerant and oppressive towards unmarried teenage mothers, forcing the reluctant Mandisa and China into an unhappy marriage at the cost of furthering their education, as a result of which China abandons his family and Mandisa drifts from job to job and from man to man, bearing two more children in these unstable circumstances. The story thus redefines the simple manichean relationship between victim and perpetrator. The strategies Magona uses to diffuse and thus defuse this dichotomy make up a large part of my analysis of the novel. A discussion of the interesting relationship between fact and fiction in this piece helps to place it in a literary culture within South Africa, yet also in relationship to Malawian novels that enact a similar fictionalisation of actual events, as in the novel discussed comparatively to *Motlxx to Motlxx*, *Yoraniyoto*.

⁹ Samuelson (2000) p.232

¹⁰ Samuelson (2000)

¹¹ Attwell and Harlow (2000a) p.7

¹² Paton (1958)

An interview with Magona makes an useful starting point for questions about the function of this novel:

Attwell: Mandisa's story is partly your own and partly your friend's?

Magona: No, it's fiction. It's really imagination. I knew her when we were children. I know what happened to her early on when she got pregnant as a young teenager. The rest I imagined. It's fiction.

Attwell: Using your own experience?

Magona: Using my own experience and the experience of women that I know in the township. And the urge to talk to the Biehls was there. I wanted to explain that, sometimes with the best intentions in the world, there are situations where parents can not be effective parents ... The parents were not there to raise their children ... For having allowed such a climate to thrive in South Africa we are all culpable. We are all culpable. Yes, those four young men are the ones who must bear the blame ultimately. They made that choice. But why did we make it possible for them to have to make a choice like that?¹³

Magona insists that the novel is a fictional investigation into the question of individual and collective responsibility. Yet in saying that she 'knew her', referring to Mandisa, she is conflating the fictional character with the real Evelyn Manqina, showing a porous boundary between the two in her mind.¹⁴ In response to Attwell's further question, Magona locates the factual event as the motive for writing and the addressees as the actual parents of Amy Biehl. Her criteria for fictionalisation are thus ambiguous, for although the name of the victim and the addressee, the location and timing of the killing, are factual, the name of the main perpetrator and his family, the physical appearance of Amy and the details of the murder are different, where contrary to the TRC record, Amy is not robbed of any possessions in the narrative.¹⁵ This generic ambiguity disturbs the simple distinction that Margeret Daymond makes between Magona's earlier fiction, the collection of short stories *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*,¹⁶ and her autobiographical texts: 'Stories entail our responding to imagined conditions of utterance whereas in autobiography actual time and place, what we understand as the specific forces of history, are operative.'¹⁷ In *Mother to Mother* both definitions are in operation simultaneously. There are two interdependent questions that arise out of this ambiguity: why present the story as a novel, overtly fictionalised, and

¹³ Attwell and Harlow (2000b) p.285

¹⁴ Manqina and her son are featured in the documentary about the TRC 'Long Night's Journey Into Day'.

¹⁵ Samuelson (2000) p.243n.

¹⁶ Magona (1991), Magona (1992a) and Magona (1992b)

¹⁷ Daymond (1995) p.572

having done so, why preserve any direct references to the actual, raising the readers' expectations of a factual account?

In the preface, Magona compounds the impression that the writer's motive is to some extent therapeutic 'to ease the other mother's pain ... if a little',¹⁸ but adds didactic and expository motives: 'are there no lessons to be had from knowing something of the other world?'¹⁹ The question arises what the effect of Magona's fictionalisation is compared to a presentation of the life-narrative as a social historical case study. There might be several reasons; most obvious is the wider appeal of a literary text, and the less rigorous attention to factual accuracy required by fiction, and instead the possibility to adjust details to create a more persuasive narrative argument. An example is the elision in the novel of the fact that Amy was robbed of personal possessions, which would introduce a criminal element to the murder, whose motive is represented as purely political and therefore somehow more justifiable as part of a greater cause.

However, I would also suggest that fictionalising the account reduces the kind of ventriloquising which raises so many ethical issues, for example in the debate around Charles van Onselen's life-narrative of the share-cropper Kas Maine, *The Seed is Mine*.²⁰ The text is based on Maine's oral testimony, interviews with his family and documentary evidence, and purports to be his story. However, Minkley and Rassool argue that 'the story of Kas Maine is much more van Onselen's story', particularly the construction of dramatic elements in the narrative.²¹ By calling this Maine's story, van Onselen arguably casts memory as something whose construction processes are transparent, something 'prior to history, and subject to tests of verification'.²² Magona avoids this dilemma by declaring her work fiction, going out of her way to undermine the verification of certain facts, taking ownership of the construction of the story as the writer of the novel. However, a further assumption that Minkley and Rasool suggest in van Onselen's narrative, which Magona also makes implicitly in her preface, is that the protagonist's life-narrative is a representative one of submerged experience, that '[p]ersonal memory or memories stand for collective ones'.²³ Although this is the narrative of one mother and son, she asks: 'What was the world of this young

¹⁸ Magona (1998) p.vi

¹⁹ Magona (1998) p.v

²⁰ van Onselen (1996)

²¹ Minkley and Rassool (1998) p.97

²² Minkley and Rassool (1998) p.97 van Onselen stresses that Maine 'astounded with his ability to recall' and that his testimony was successfully 'verified' and 'checked against documentary evidence' as a result of which it has been possible 'to recreate the life of a man'. However, he does admit 'ambiguities [and] complexities' in what is otherwise presented as a transparent recovery operation. van Onselen (1996) pp.10-1

²³ Minkley and Rassool (1998) p.98

women's [*sic*] killers, the world of those, young as she was young, whose environment failed to nurture them ... ?'²⁴

The question of who can speak on behalf of whom is an important one in postcolonial theory, as it involves discursive power relations that result in many postcolonial writers being regarded as mediating representatives of a certain constituency of people, able to bring subaltern experience into discursive recognition. Yet whereas van Onselen makes no claim to close personal empathy with Maine's life experience,²⁵ Magona cites this as the motivation and justification for her narration of Evelyn/Mandisa's story. She writes of her response to the death of Biehl:

Pain for the bereaved family, yes. But also pain for the mother of the murderer, someone "whose saliva I knew," as we say in the townships, where we share candy from each other's mouths.²⁶

She thus claims a kind of authenticity based on shared experience and extreme empathy, speaking on behalf of the disenfranchised Evelyn/Mandisa as a representative of a constituency of Guguletu single mothers. Yet, as Linda Anderson notes, 'the claim to speak for others is always problematic and can also elide further differences under an assumed representativity'.²⁷ The problem here is that Magona, as Daymond points out, speaks from a very privileged class position, as U.S. resident and employee of the UN. Magona can be seen to cast herself as mediator, familiar with the life of the township woman and yet also, as a U.S. resident, familiar with the perspective of the American parents of the victim. Daymond considers this shift in her own social position as another reason for her turning to fiction. Referring to Magona's stories *Living Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, which are based on her experiences as a domestic worker, Daymond writes, 'Magona's own changed status need not prevent her from speaking, *in her fiction*, from within the class she has left.'²⁸

Magona herself suggests that she writes fiction by default because of what her writing is *not*: I am no historian. Thus, in my case, telling cannot be in that mode. History's dry exactitude kills the story; too many details simply disappear'.²⁹ This again compares with Jolly's suggestion at the end of the last chapter that a combination of documentary, statistical and personal, expressive narratives creates a powerful result.

²⁴ Magona (1998) p.v

²⁵ He does suggest the representative personal implications of Maine's story, that reflects 'a life that often tells us as much about ourselves as it does about Kas.' van Onselen (1996)p.11

²⁶ Magona (2001) p.4

²⁷ Anderson (2001) p.104

²⁸ Daymond (1995) p.571 my italics.

²⁹ Magona (2001) p.1

As noted by Samuelson and others, Magona's mode of telling, whether in her autobiography or *Mother to Mother*, has been to cast herself in the role of the customary maternal story-teller of oral culture.³⁰ Another story-telling voice is dramatised within *Mother to Mother* where the *Imbongi* figure resituates the history of the Xhosa cattle-killing from the version learned in schools, elevating the language into crafted, literary expression:

Deep run the roots of hatred here
So deep, a cattle-worshipping nation killed all its precious herds.
Tillers, burned fertile fields, fully sowed, bearing rich promise too³¹

History is thus interestingly given literary expression, far from the 'dry exactitude' that Magona shuns in academic history. Although the set of expectation raised in this amalgamation of fact and fiction is ambiguous, the central tenet of the text does not depend on precise generic classification. It explores Magona's conclusion, through the narration of events that led up to 25 August, 1993, that '[f]or having allowed such a climate [of hatred] to thrive in South Africa, we are all culpable'.³² By dispersing culpability, Magona thus performs where Mahmood Mamdani suggests that the TRC fails, by acknowledging that 'the violence of apartheid was aimed less at individuals than at entire communities'³³ in a process of 'bureaucratic terrorism',³⁴ to use Colin Bundy's term, and that the individualisation of blame and victimisation is too selective a method.

Collective responsibility raises the issue of a larger group psychology in such declarations of joint culpability clearly implicating all those beyond an immediate event. Localised conflicts are seen as symptoms of a larger conflict in which everyone participates. It is therefore not surprising that Samuelson identifies a 'strong condemnation of group psychology' in *Mother to Mother* which sits rather ambivalently with previous praises of the security of community.³⁵ If collective identity is a precondition for collective memory³⁶ it is not surprising that the collectivity by which Mandisa is outcast is represented as repressive. Samuelson points to the negative depiction of crowds for example as 'a gigantic many-legged millipede'³⁷

³⁰ Samuelson (2000) p.228

³¹ Magona (1998) p.176

³² Attwell and Harlow (2000b) p.285

³³ Mamdani (2000) p.59

³⁴ Bundy (2000) p.18

³⁵ Samuelson (2000) p.230

³⁶ Adam and Adam (2000) p.32

³⁷ Magona (1998) p.11

or a queue for a bus as 'a messy affair, not unlike the intestines of a pig that children are roasting'.³⁸ The crowd takes on further uncanny animistic properties that stand as a metaphor for Mxolisi's symbolic entry into a collective psyche:

The group opens up and swallows him. In their midst he is lost. You couldn't tell him from the others now ... swaggering strides say much about the common purpose that binds the group together, cements the members into one cohesive whole.³⁹

Mandisa's own experience of being swallowed by a crowd demonstrates a similar helplessness and capitulation of agency:

Pressed and pushed forward I allowed the crowd to propel me forward, my feet hardly touching the ground ... Passed along from bodies to bodies, with no volition or direction on my part.⁴⁰

As a result threat resides in these crowds, signalled by abject, disembodied attributes:

Hands grabbed others' elbows and dug into unfriendly shoulders. They were scoured by sweaty beards smelling of Lion Lager beer, greasy and matted hair, the roughened surfaces of threadbare coats. They were cold-slimed by the unwiped noses of little children on the backs of mothers.⁴¹

These images of the crowds are very different from the carnivalesque depictions of the same crowds and grotesque conditions in *Ways of Dying*. Yet a reminder of Sue Vice's argument about the relationship between the abject and the carnival grotesque might be helpful here: 'the grotesque itself exists only as a carnival form: its real-life original is everything that is "terrifying"'.⁴² Magona's style of writing evokes the terrible morbid possibilities of the crowd, whereas Mda's depictions demonstrate greater regenerative possibility and potential, crowds as agents of change and suspended authority. Dirt and bodily secretions threaten the subject in both depictions, yet whereas Mda's carnivalesque transforms these into a cheerful grotesque involving unwashed bodies and farting, the 'sweaty beards', 'unfriendly shoulders' and 'cold-slimed' mucous of Magona's crowds show that the carnivalesque mode is not in operation in her novel. Similarly, the representation of shacks as '[t]iny houses huddled close together. Leaning against each other, pushing at each other. Sad small houses crowned with gray and flat unsmiling roofs'⁴³ depicts a melancholy contrast to Noria's cheery, multi-coloured home-made shack.

³⁸ Magona (1998) p.24

³⁹ Magona (1998) p.11

⁴⁰ Magona (1998) p.25

⁴¹ Magona (1998) p.25

⁴² Vice (1997) p.170

⁴³ Magona (1998) p.27

Interestingly, as in *Ways of Dying*, there is a virgin birth in *Mother to Mother*. However, the conception is explained rather more rationally than in *Ways of Dying*. The teenage Mandisa, preserving her virginity under communal threat of shame, has sexual encounters with China just short of penetration yet that still result in Mxolisi's conception.⁴⁴ This is expressed in Xhosa epistemology by the midwife, 'Utakhetu! She has been jumped into!⁴⁵ Unlike the magical sense given to Noria's son's birth there is something very uneasy about Mxolisi's birth:

My virginity was rent not by a love or a husband, even. No, but by my son ... Where I had often heard it mentioned that a woman will always have a tender spot for the man to whom she gave her virginity, how could I feel that way towards my son?⁴⁶

In this thought she expresses an uncanny discomfort that her virginity is taken by her son, enacting an oedipal trauma. However, the virgin birth must also be read in terms of the Christian epistemology that surrounds Mxolisi.

Complementing the loaded symbolism of Mxolisi's birth to a virgin is the language that Mandisa uses in her opening lament, addressed to God, to speak of her son: 'Did he not know that they would surely crucify him for killing a white person?'⁴⁷ His mother thus casts him controversially as a Christ-figure, a human sacrifice for the sins of his people. The function of this is to portray Mxolisi as more sinned against than sinning, supporting the basis of the plea for understanding depicted in the epigraph from the novel. However, in another typical disturbance of simple characterisations, Amy is cast as the Christ-figure on the same page: 'Now, your daughter has paid for the sins of her fathers and mothers who did not do their share of seeing that my son had a life worth living.'⁴⁸ The two become representatives of their race, Magona thus emphasising the misunderstood difference which caused the death in the first place: 'Your daughter. The perfect atonement of her race. My son. The perfect host of the demons of his.'⁴⁹ Again the discourse is biblical, Mxolisi representing here an inverted 'heavenly host', a dangerous receptacle of the collective repressions and traumas of black South Africans. The most important function here is to disrupt on several fronts the media representation of Amy as the angelic golden girl and her killer as demonic savage.

⁴⁴ Magona (1998) p.96

⁴⁵ Magona (1998) p.112

⁴⁶ Magona (1998) p.156

⁴⁷ Magona (1998) p.3

⁴⁸ Magona (1998) p.3

⁴⁹ Magona (1998) p.201

It could be argued that the biblical epistemology responds to the theological discourse of the 'New South Africa', with its biblical symbol of promise and reconciliation, the rainbow, discussed in previous chapters. Samuelson argues that the novel demonstrates that redemption is not possible: 'delivery from bloodshed is denied as Magona explores a cyclical understanding of self-destructive internalised violence in South Africa's history'.⁵⁰ However, all of Magona's contextualising comments in the preface and interview indicate that she does see interventions such as her novel as filled with the potential for understanding and communication.⁵¹ This is signified not least in her choice of the messianic, redemptive name 'Mxolisi', meaning 'He, who would bring peace'.⁵²

As noted, Magona seeks to diffuse the guilt of Biehl's murder by widening the constituency of implicated parties. Although Mxolisi's ultimate responsibility is restated, as one of 'these monsters our children have become',⁵³ he says he was just one of many who stabbed her, and that it was therefore pure chance that his stab caused the fatal wound.⁵⁴ Controversially, the victim's naïvety is also called upon by Mandisa as a contributing factor to her death: 'people like your daughter have no inborn sense of fear. They so believe in their goodness, know they have hurt no one, are indeed helping, they never think anyone would want to hurt them.'⁵⁵ It is, however, figures of political authority who bear the brunt of the blame, not least the politicians of the new South Africa:

these heroes who lash out at my son today, voices raised in indignation, are they not the same who, only yesterday, were full of praise for him? Was he not part of the Young Lions they glorified? Did he not do as they shouted for all to hear? ONE SETTLER ONE BULLET!⁵⁶

She overtly states 'some of the leaders who today speak words of consolation to you ... mark my words ... they, as surely as my son, are your daughter's murderers'.⁵⁷

Clearly the apartheid figures of authority play a greater role in blame, not only through the effects of the policies they implement, but in their representation of disproportionate violence. One incident from Mxolisi's childhood which creates an association for him between whiteness and traumatic violence takes place when he is four years old and he betrays two friends of his who are in hiding from the police

⁵⁰ Samuelson (2000) p.238

⁵¹ Magona (1998) p.vi and Attwell and Harlow (2000b) p.285

⁵² Magona (1998) p.136

⁵³ Magona (1998) p.2

⁵⁴ Magona (1998) p.195

⁵⁵ Magona (1998) p.2

⁵⁶ Magona (1998) p.198

⁵⁷ Magona (1998) p.199

in a wardrobe, assuming in his innocence that a game of hide and seek is being played.⁵⁸ Mxolisi's two young friends are shot in front of him as they try to flee, as a result of which Mxolisi becomes mute for many years, traumatised by the devastating effect of a few words. Yet the community that rejects the mother and child are also implicated in Mxolisi's traumatic childhood, for they fuel a subtle resentment in Mandisa towards her son. A *sangoma* suggests this when Mandisa takes Mxolisi to her to diagnose the cause of his loss of speech:

'Go home. Think about your child. Children are very sensitive. They know when we hate them.' After a small pause she shook her head. 'Perhaps I use a word too strong ... but, resentment can be worse than hate.'

It was my turn to gasp. My whole being turned to ice.⁵⁹

The *sangoma* diagnoses that 'this child has seen great evil in his short little life. He needs all the love and understanding he can get.'⁶⁰ Yet clearly her economic circumstances do not allow Mandisa to spend the time she needs to with the little Mxolisi, resulting in his repression of trauma, with disastrous consequences.

As can be seen, Magona places varying amounts of blame on the mother who resents her son's birth, the community who reject her, the policeman who shoots the boys in front of the young Mxolisi, the present politicians who fostered violence as a means of expression, the naïvety of the victim for assuming she would not be identified as an enemy, and the other people in the mob who stabbed her before arriving at Mxolisi's ultimate responsibility. The multiple locations of culpability result in an array of emotions demonstrated by the speaking subject, including justification, guilt, anger, sympathy and shame, suggesting an ambivalent voice arising from her complex subject position. The novel therefore does much to explore complexity and to disturb the easy representation of race and gender that the media inherited from colonial and apartheid representations, of the preconceived spectacle of the violent black man killing the vulnerable white woman. Instead, the historical and social grounds of this particular death are explored in a powerful plea for analytic thinking beyond surface representations.

⁵⁸ This again resembles the innocent betrayal of Vutha in *Ways of Dying*.

⁵⁹ Magona (1998) p.154, ellipses in original

⁶⁰ Magona (1998) p.154

iii. Felix Mnthali's *Yoranivyoto*

'Yoranivyoto' describes this experience.
 'Sweep away the ashes', it says.
*Yoranivyoto*⁶¹

Felix Mnthali's *Yoranivyoto* can, like *Mother to Mother*, be read as a literary memorial that explores a complex, oppressive history. It was published in Glasgow in 1998 but Mnthali expressly states that the novel was written in Gaborone in 1992, between August and November. This positions it liminally, at the outset of the transition process, after the pastoral letter and the demonstrations of March 1992, yet before the referendum of June 1993 which decided the end of the Banda-era. Mnthali previously published a volume of poetry, *When Sunset Comes to Sapitwa*, whose dominant tone is described as that of 'mature serenity'.⁶² Much of the poetry is characteristic of Malawian poetry written under tight censorship laws in that it explores its environment and human relationships through pervasive use of metaphor and irony to evade the surveilling eye. Its centrepiece is an extended autobiographical poem about Mnthali's experience of political detention in the mid-1970s, that experiments effectively with multiple voices and moods.

With the relaxation of the enforcement of censorship, writing prose at transition, has given Mnthali a chance to tell stories of Malawi's past, inscribing his own experiences as a writer and academic who was detained, then left for Botswana some time after his release. I focus on the novel's complex relationship with the past, again asking how the narration of the past seeks to contribute to the present. Like *Mother to Mother*, the narrative structure of *Yoranivyoto* is not chronological, its textual playfulness posturing in part, not as a diary, but as letters in a fictionalised form of testimony. However, unlike the single narrative perspective of the previous text, *Yoranivyoto* is striking for its plural narration, taking the forms of multi-layered first person narratives, dramatic monologue and a series of letters by different writers. Plurality is multiplied by the fact that the narrators all constantly quote other texts. Some intertexts are overtly literary, including direct quotations from Yeats, Donne, Milton, Achebe and Awonoor. The common cultural text of idiomatic expression provides another form of intertextuality as a result of which the writing often appears received and clichéd. Indeed, Mnthali also uses quotation strategically, in the service of reciting and representing the past, quoting Banda's rhetoric on detaining any opponent 'till he rots',⁶³

⁶¹ Mnthali (1998) p.13

⁶² Roscoe and Msiska (1992) p.64

⁶³ Mnthali (1998) p.39

and citing Banda's speech from Hansard during the Cabinet crisis in 1964 on the 'four cornerstones' of the nation:

Study the Hansard of September 9, 1964 and you will see what I am talking about:

"I stand before you a very sad person. The four cornerstones on which our party and our government were built have been broken. Those four cornerstones are unity, loyalty, obedience and discipline."

I remember those exact words of our wise and dynamic Leader because like your husband, I was working in Zomba at the time.⁶⁴

The dominant discourse of the era is thus recalled through an ominous, haunting recitation of Banda's voice enacting some all-too familiar idioms. The effect is again to blur the distinction between factual and fictional texts, questioning the function and validity of each. As in *Mother to Mother*, the use of precise dates that are factually verifiable contributes to the illusion of reality or social biography.

Through the revelation of the contents of the letters, the male narrator discovers more about his colleague, Anniversary Mganthira. Anniversary's dedication to her late husband, who died in detention years earlier, fascinates her colleagues at the university where she teaches. A bond grows between her and the narrator as he acquires Anniversary's trust and she reveals her past, which develops into romantic love by the end of the novel. And so a form of closure is achieved when Anniversary's traumatic past, which includes her own brief detention, and resultant miscarriage, has been told. The first chapter, which sets the scene, ends with the narrator anticipating the revelation of letters pertaining to Anniversary's husband. They have, rather symbolically, been 'safely locked away in a bank in Mutare', signalling a repression of the stories which are about to be excavated:

I could hardly wait to set my eyes on the papers which both Anniversary and Bonginkosi had promised to show me. Back in Gabarone, it did not take long before Anniversary brought to my office bundles of papers in packages she had just received by courier. My eyes fell on something which must have been a collection of bits and pieces of paper which Anniversary seemed to have preserved with a tender loving care as if that was the best she would ever keep of the man she still loved. I too seemed to be in the presence of a sacred relic and as such relics demand I studied the pieces of paper as if I were in a world-renowned library or in the Museum of Mankind. What you now see before you are reproductions of what Wavisinga and others wrote of Anniversary as well as random thoughts and scribblings of Anniversary herself. I have had neither the time nor the inclination to make what you are going to read look presentable. I hope it speaks for itself.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Mnthali (1998) p.51

⁶⁵ Mnthali (1998) p.9

The passage introduces the idea that this novel is structured as a patchwork of incomplete 'bits and pieces', which constitute a 'sacred relic' of remembrance, again suggesting a textual memorial. Multiple versions are presented through the multiple writers of the different letters, each putting forward their own understanding of events surrounding Wavisinga's detention and death. The novel does not try to create a whole out of the fragments, but depicts memory as fragmentary and incomplete, punctuated by instances of amnesia. The gaps remain in the text, the dissonance unresolved, as I will demonstrate.

The text playfully postures as a reproduction of papers fit for a 'world-renowned library'. This playfulness continues with the assertion that addresses the reader with a metafictional jolt: 'what you see before you are reproductions'. Similarly self-reflexive and humorous is the apology for the presentation of the texts. With the last sentence, 'I hope it speaks for itself', the narrator bows out of commenting on the succeeding 'relics', playing with the illusion that we are reading unmediated testimony. Yet the effect, I suggest, is the opposite, as the text's reference to itself *emphasises* its textuality, as a construction which is *not* presenting a transparent biography of Wavisinga, or a singular narrative of the past.

The next chapter, for example, constitutes a letter written in detention by Wavisinga, Anniversary's husband. It opens:

My Dear Anniversary,

This afternoon we were at it again, I mean that season of memories and reminiscences during which my mind insists on going over every little detail, every little excitement, every sadness and sorrow, and every flitting joy among the ruins of our lives ... The stories and memorabilia go on and on and at the end of the day when I return to my cell I can hardly sleep.⁶⁶

It becomes clear that this is a novel of remembrance in at least two ways: it is a novel remembering the Banda regime, as well as a novel meditating on the act of remembering, portraying the effects of memory. The letter's opening, 'My Dear Anniversary' creates a poignant ambiguity in meaning, which emphasises the symbolism of the protagonist's name. 'Anniversary' connotes not only a sense of looking back, but a sense of looking back as one moves forward in time. An anniversary is a repeated ritual that allows one to move beyond a significant event by allocating a space for retrospection. Even at her birth, Anniversary becomes the catalyst for allowing her family to move on from mourning a grandmother. She thus enacts the function of her name:

⁶⁶ Mnthali (1998) p.10

Your coming at that very moment was seen as an auspicious message from the world of your ancestors. You became the consolation which enabled your family to sweep and dispose of the ashes from their courtyard of mourning with love and dignity. 'Yoranivyoto' describes this experience. "Sweep away the ashes", it says.⁶⁷

It is clear that by choosing a ritual act of sweeping away the ashes of mourning as the title for his novel, Mnthali is conveying a dual vision of transition literature, of both looking forward, clearing away the past, and looking back to the past in memoriam. Connerton stresses the value of ritual performance in human remembrance for '[a]ll rites are repetitive, and repetition automatically implies continuity with the past ... they do not simply imply continuity with the past but explicitly claim such continuity'.⁶⁸ He adds further that 'many rites mark beginnings and endings', and it is this kind of forward-looking commemoration which I suggest *Yoranivyoto* explicitly enacts.

Yoranivyoto desires unity in its form, in its 'harmonious' romantic closure. It also expresses the desire for unity in the words of its characters. Wavisinga, for example, voices the desire for a coherent chronicle or narrative of the past along the lines of a Truth Commission report: 'When the time comes to put our record in order, I would not advocate any revenge, only a fervent wish that the real truth might be known.'⁶⁹ Historical events are indeed revised in the novel, their effects woven into the texture of the fictional characters' lives. An example is the Mwanza 'accident', revised as the Mwanza 'assassinations', which currently stand as a symbol, in popular memory, of the abominations of the Banda regime. In one passage the fictional Wavisinga recalls a character who corresponds to one of the three Cabinet Ministers killed by the regime in 1983:

The cheerful man of whom Wavisinga spoke in such glowing terms has now been dead and buried for some years. He was not detained ... He was reported to have died in a car accident a day after he and the other three prominent party leaders who died with him had been reported missing and were urgently being sought by the police. No funeral. Only mid-night [*sic*] burials in their villages of origin witnessed by uncomprehending relatives who were not allowed to either wash or see their bodies.⁷⁰

As in *Mother to Mother*, this passage incorporates factual events into a fictional narrative. Similarly, the circumstances of Wavisinga's detention are marked by autobiographical details resonant with Mnthali's own experience. Anniversary, like Mnthali, is an academic who, after release from detention, moves to Gabarone. Anecdotes from Wavisinga's detention are represented, almost too absurd to appear realistic:

⁶⁷ Mnthali (1998) p.13

⁶⁸ Connerton (1989) p.45

⁶⁹ Mnthali (1998) p.13

⁷⁰ Mnthali (1998) p.30

'Soramsore gleefully wagged his finger at me to say that I possessed a record made in Russia which clearly made me out to be a communist!'⁷¹ At his arrest, Mnthali's possession of a Tchaikovsky LP was cited as evidence of his subversiveness.

However, while there is a desire for 'true testimony' and coherence, and a certain realist documentation of factual details which act as markers of recognition to an informed reader, Mnthali consciously disperses and displaces these details on to separate fictional characters in different circumstances. He thus memorialises by *not* forming an accurate documentation of fact, but by imaginatively conveying a sense of *experience*, of 'bringing to life' an experience of conditions in Banda's Malawi. Life in Malawi under Banda involved the subjective experience of constant personal insecurity, instability and conflict of stories that circulated, and this is enacted in the reading of the novel.

There are, for example, instances where one letter-writer's version of events does not conform to another's. One example concerns the guilt of the Special Branch chief, Chiswaswa, in accelerating Wavisinga's death. In Chiswaswa's letter to Anniversary, whom he loves, he justifies the Banda regime's iron security, the suppression of dissent, the culture of hero-worship and the repatriation of intellectuals to their regions of origin. His letter is written for the recipient 'to hear my side of the story', representing the position of those who were convinced that they were doing the right thing in enforcing authoritarian power. He writes to maintain that he in fact saved Wavisinga's life, despite his 'stubbornness'. Chiswaswa tries to ingratiate himself with Anniversary by writing: 'In fact, I had to work hard to convince the powers that be of the futility of their intention to "finish him off". I told them that they would be courting unnecessary adverse publicity.'⁷² In contrast, Anniversary's uncle, who is detained with Wavisinga, gives her another version:

Although they did not kill him there and then, they were really beating to kill him. Chiswaswa will tell you that he tried to save his friend. Don't believe him. It is well-known all over this prison that this man is the hawk of hawks when it comes to dealing with detainees.⁷³

By leaving the question of Chiswaswa's actions unresolved, Mnthali creates the fracture and dissonance put forward by Nuttall and Coetzee in which no singular version of events gains complete authority. Difference is valued over a perceived unity.

⁷¹ Mnthali (1998) p.20

⁷² Mnthali (1998) p.54

⁷³ Mnthali (1998) p.60

Similarly, another passage in the novel restates the sense of uncertainty about different versions of events. Anniversary's uncle writes her another letter from detention, which he calls 'my little testimony', recounting the events he has lived through. At one point he discusses the Party Conference which installed Banda as President, explicitly stating the existence of different versions of events:

Versions of what really happened differ widely. The late Attati Mpakati maintains that he saw and tried to prevent the coming of a neo-colonialist state ... Others who were present maintain that it was understood normal democratic means of accession to all positions in the party would be followed as soon as the freedom we were fighting for had been attained.⁷⁴

These examples therefore illustrate that a literary inscription of past events need not suggest coherence and closure. By telling the story of *Yoraniyoto* through multiple narrators whose stories coincide and contradict, Mnthali diminishes narrative authority by constantly deferring it, his own as well as that of the characters who write the letters. The consequence is a destabilisation of any sense of final authoritativeness and truth.

However, Mnthali avoids the charge of sliding towards a dangerous relativity or 'reactionary impotence'⁷⁵ by naming silenced opponents of Banda, as he does above, referring to the assassinated journalist Attati Mpakati. Elsewhere he reinscribes the risky, failed efforts of the ministers who resigned at the Cabinet Crisis and of Yatuta Chisiza in militarily overthrowing the Banda government; and so Mnthali demonstrates a clear ideological position, which stands against the ruler who presided over political detentions. By naming and legitimising through reinscription, he is fulfilling a role analogous to a Truth Commission, as Zalaquett sees it in the previous chapter: 'there is a need for "naming" of what has occurred and this is what can be achieved by a Truth Commission'.⁷⁶ Indeed Mnthali names and recalls, yet what the structure of his novel emphasises is the uncertainties and fluctuations inherent in these namings and recollections. He thus also implies that the TRC's ultimate desire for proven final truths can never be fulfilled. The text quotes from the epistemologies of both transcendent reality and poststructuralism, and therefore I suggest that the novel negotiates the polarities of the theoretical debate discussed in the previous chapter on how to approach the reconstruction of the past. Pat Bryden's review of the novel gives a sense of this bridge between unity and dissonance, coherence and fracture:

⁷⁴ Mnthali (1998) p.60

⁷⁵ Zeleza (1994) p.484

⁷⁶ Ross, K (1998) p.335

Constructed in a fascinating way like a musical symphony — one tune leading into another, merging and accumulating in harmony or discord to form a satisfying whole ... Literature succeeds better than history in bringing to life the reality of that history.⁷⁷

A satisfying whole, she states, is created out of harmony and discord, out of unity and dissonance. Like Magona, Jolly and Villa Vicencio, she sees the literary text as one more expressive of the experience of the past than the historical text.

Mnthali's fellow ex-detainee, Jack Mapanje, has a flexible understanding of 'truth' whose repetition is pertinent here: 'The truth of my story will have to be found in the totality of the symbol or the propositions expressed despite the glaring gaps, slips and silences of memory.'⁷⁸ He suggests the necessity to read texts as narratives against forgetting, yet also inevitably as narratives incorporating the act of forgetting when faced with the unspeakable. Whereas, unfashionably, he cites the function of writing as therapy, he notes that such stories cannot resolve, but only depict moments of traumatic repression and conflict. This is how I interpret the gaps and fractures created by the competing stories in Mnthali's novel. Like Peter Horn, cited in the previous chapter, Mapanje notes that in fictionalising the past, it is important not to look for the specifics of 'what really happened', but in the words of André Brink, 'the fact that [inventions] are resorted to at a given moment in an individual's life, or at a specific historical juncture'.⁷⁹

This, I propose, is one of the effects of reading *Yoranivyoto*, as it meditates predominantly not on the past as an objective, recoverable entity, but on the act of narrating the past as a fragmented process, made up of 'scraps and bits and pieces'. The use of clichéd expression and constant literary quotation further displaces the unity and coherence of authorship. In entrusting the narrator with telling the story of Wavisinga, Anniversary is able to move on, literally to embrace the future in the form of embracing the narrator, as she tells him: 'I opened my past, my present, and my future to you by handing over scraps and bits of paper around which my heart and soul are wrapped.'⁸⁰ By having told her past, however fragmented, Anniversary can achieve provisional closure through a romantic alliance with the teller of her story. The narrator closes with typically ironic modesty: 'I would no longer say that my interest in Anniversary Yoranivyoto's story had been purely academic ... We had entered what demanded that we remain in it together.'⁸¹ Malawi's past, like Anniversary's, is uncertain and fractured, yet its telling in

⁷⁷ Mnthali (1998) back cover

⁷⁸ Mapanje (1995a) p.15

⁷⁹ Brink (1998b) p.41

⁸⁰ Mnthali (1998) p.93

⁸¹ Mnthali (1998) p.93

dissonant fragments is conditional for a re-imagination of the nation's multiple pasts and futures at transition.

iv. Conclusion: history and fiction

Absolute categories and definitions are questioned in both of these novels. Constituencies of oppressed and oppressor are complicated in *Mother to Mother*, which disturbs conventional binary representations of victim and perpetrator. *Yoraniyoto* on the other hand questions the absoluteness of truth and the reliability of memory; in this novel, memory is presented as conflictual and incomplete, and the text is self-conscious of its own constructedness, even as it memorialises Wavisinga. On this point, *Mother to Mother* remains strategically coherent in its role of mitigating Mxolisi's actions.

In the process of showing complexity and ambivalence, both texts seek to complicate received representations of authority and subjectivity, and instead raise further questions. They thus avoid the moralising style of much writing under apartheid that Ndebele criticises:

moral ideology tends to ossify complex social problems into symbols which are perceived as finished forms of good and evil, instead of leading us towards important necessary insights in the social *processes* leading to those finished forms. Thus, showing no more than surfaces, writings influenced by such an ideology tend to *inform* without involving readers in a truly transforming experience.⁸²

Although I have argued in Chapter 3 that an aesthetic of immediacy, constituted of 'surfaces' or instantly interpretable symbols, has its own important value, I suggest that the novels discussed in this chapter have a different value in providing complexity and analysis. Although both texts are written with a deceased character at their core, they tend to inquire into the conditions of suffering that lead to the character's death, providing an 'insight into the social *processes* leading to those finished forms', the deceased remaining an absent subtext to the events in the novels. The inquiry into social processes is particularly central to the function of *Mother to Mother*, which is so closely identified with an historical event.

Both novels also raise the interesting question of why writers turn to literature as a mode of exploring clearly fact-based events. If, as Ian Buruma reminds us, '[m]emory is not the same as history and memorialising is different from writing history',⁸³ then we need to ask whether there is something about memorialising and literature which gives them a more creative, interpretative function than conventional

⁸² Ndebele (1994) pp.28-9 italics in original.

⁸³ Cited in Adam and Adam (2000) p.32

notions of history. Raymond Williams makes a useful distinction, that begins to define the literary, suggesting that history comes to mean 'an account of past real events', while 'story' includes 'less formal accounts of past events and accounts of imagined events'.⁸⁴ The result, he suggests, is an introduction of 'personal substance': 'there is a sense ... in which history which is both recorded and unrecorded can only find its way through to personal substance if it then becomes a novel, becomes a *story*' that is, 'where touch and breath replaced record and analysis'.⁸⁵ This distinction avoids the problematic of theories of historiography which concentrate on history's constructedness according to the same rules of narrative as story, or fiction, giving prominence to history's discursiveness and implying that it can therefore never be objective and value-neutral.⁸⁶ Yet even Williams' distinction is deliberately transgressed, to different degrees, by the four texts in this and the previous chapter, where the fictional accounts incorporate 'record and analysis' and the historical accounts use strategies to introduce 'touch and breath'.

In his search for a definition of 'the literary', Peter Widdowson also defines it in relation to history, where he too emphasises the creative element:

What we perceive here is 'the literary' as a proactive writing of history in order to discover — or rather, 'form out of nothing' — an identity in a social formation whose dominant discourses would consign a repressed group to silence.⁸⁷

The political function of literature is conveniently foregrounded here, although I would modify his 'out of nothing', for even the most imaginative text needs some common basis of language to draw upon for it to be understood. However, when nothingness is read as 'silence' or 'lack of evidence', he suggests the role of literature is in recreating a subaltern and postcolonial perspective:

'the literary' has strategically attempted to penetrate into that empty 'space' or echoing 'silence' which is the history of a people who have been vanquished and/or colonised by victors of one sort or another, not least by way of the victors' 'history' becoming the Authorised History of what occurred.⁸⁸

Mother to Mother, I would argue, is indeed the story of someone who does not fit into the official model of a New South African, thus recreating the voice of one of the transition's 'vanquished'. Mandisa tells how she has become 'a leper in my community'⁸⁹ while her son is an 'outcast'.⁹⁰ The narrative of Wavisinga, on

⁸⁴ Widdowson (1999) p.133

⁸⁵ In Widdowson (1999) p.181

⁸⁶ Hayden White (1987) is an influential figure in this debate.

⁸⁷ Widdowson (1999) p.135

⁸⁸ Widdowson (1999) p.179

⁸⁹ Magona (1998) p.199

the other hand, as a 'vanquished' person of the previous regime, is reconstructed by Anniversary because of the lack of official sources explaining his death.

Reflection on the genre used by Magona and Mnthali can also be illuminating. Widdowson argues that the term 'novel' retains traces of two different senses of newness, that is: "a new story"; "new, innovating, strange" — perhaps even "making strange [*sic*] or "defamiliarising"; and offering "news" — information or "insights" — about social life'.⁹¹ Both do indeed defamiliarise dominant narratives, of transition and of a former regime, by offering alternative new insights about social life. However, the novel genre can facilitate both unified narrative perspectives and more plural and self-reflexive forms of writing. Whereas *Mother to Mother* requires a strategic coherence, a unified self, *Yoraniyoto* is more plural. Although the latter does not represent the past as coherent and free from contradiction, Anniversary reaches a point of closure by the end, suggesting that even the telling of a fragmented and incomplete story has a restorative role. In inscribing and commemorating Wavisinga, and in the process of searching for the causes of his death, Anniversary meets the novel's narrator with whom she forms a new relationship. The novel thus ends on a note of combined remembrance of the past and potential for the future, a memorial to Wavisinga that enacts both ending and beginning. *Mother to Mother* inscribes the story of circumstances leading to Amy Biehl's death, standing as memorial not only to the victim, but transgressively also to the perpetrator, for whom, in the novel, there is no amnesty on the horizon.⁹² It is the argument used also by many in relation to the TRC, that a complete, unified record of the past, free from contradiction, is impossible, but that the act of telling and remembering, which is officially inscribed, gives form to people's experience, whatever their political alignment, redefining identities and enabling understanding of each other. The strength of literature to facilitate much of this telling and to imagine alternative lives must not be underestimated.

⁹⁰ Magona (1998) p.3

⁹¹ Widdowson (1999) p.136

⁹² The killers of the real Amy Biehl were granted amnesty by the TRC Amnesty Commission in 1998, the year *Mother to Mother* was published.

CONCLUSION

Southern African literature is like an archipelago. The islands with their peaks protrude in set positions, even if one does not readily see the connections between them beneath the surface ... Its various pinnacles may have been described often, but what it is necessary to chart now is what tides and drifts and spins, what internal interconnections, have made them the way they are.

Stephen Gray¹

In the introduction to this thesis I raised a number of questions on which I wish briefly to reflect. I asked at the outset whether the comparison between the literary output of South Africa and Malawi was possible and whether a moment of political transition was a viable point of departure for a literary study. I have sought to answer these question in practice, by attempting such a comparison. I was only able to look at a very small amount of the total literary output, though the fact that I had to be so selective is encouraging: it answers the fears of those who were concerned whether writers would engage with the transition, especially as so many of them developed their skills in a culture of political resistance. The five chapters use different vantage points, which emerge from the texts they discuss. Other vantage points could have been selected, yet I saw comparative discussions of previously censored writers, carnivalesque writers, popular voices, women's historical account and fictionalised histories as five of the most interesting areas of transition literature which could be compared between Malawi and South Africa. The more I worked with the texts I selected, the more intersections I discovered; concerns about freedom, memory, truth, narration, representation, the popular, democracy and newness have been shown to be prominent in the new literature emerging from both countries. All of these concepts merit more theoretical discussion than I was able to give them, for a review of all the different arguments that cluster around each term would have been an enormous task. Instead I have sought to apply the ideas appropriately in the contexts of the discussions, introducing some of the different ways in which they are understood.

Dialogues and intersections emerge between the chapters, where we find concerns for the popular in the carnivalesque and manifestations of carnival in the newspaper writing; the boundary between fiction and fact is one central to the texts discussed in the last chapter, but also to those in the first, where censorship assumes direct referentiality between fiction and contemporary society. The reader emerges as a figure pivotal to interpretations of both press poetry and censored literature, and truth, narrative and memory are shown to be central to the fictional, semi-fictional and non-fictional texts of Chapters 4 and

¹ Gray (1979) p.14

5. The binary definition of victim and perpetrator is challenged both by Mapanje's poetry in Chapter 1, by the TRC report in Chapter 4 and in Magona's novel in Chapter 5 and a concern for a transformation in gender relations is central to the women writers of Chapter 4 and Nadine Gordimer's novel of Chapter 1. Even something as apparently insignificant as the saying 'winds of change' charts an important drift as it turns up in both countries in both the 1960s and 1990s. An ever denser web can be woven of all the interconnecting strands which show themselves the more one explores the texts.

However, as Stephen Gray's geological metaphor in the epigraph suggests, different localities do produce different formations. I do not seek to elide the differences that exist between the texts and the political contexts they engage with in my search for commonality of experience and expression. I have aimed to bear the contextual differences in mind, for example the disparity in scale of publishing output, the different operations of the censorship boards, the dissimilar roles that the press plays in publishing literature, the greater influence of poststructuralist ideas in South African cultural debates and, of course, the contrasting levels of significance of a writer's race. There are further differences that are not so apparent from my study, because I sought to select comparable pieces. Vanzanten Gallagher, for example, in her review of postapartheid literary trends, identifies 'South African's Fanonian turn to the past for subject matter'.² She refers to 'a revival of interest in the travel journals, letters, memoirs of explorers, hunters and missionaries',³ for which there is no corollary in post-Banda Malawian literature. Similarly, in Malawi there were no grand philosophies such as *ubuntu* or 'African renaissance' derived from concepts of cultural authenticity and rebirth, which are arguably also Fanonian in impulse. Yet my aim has been to demonstrate that there *are* discernible 'tides and drifts and spins' between the two locations with their shared temporal and political moment.

Robert Young gives an interesting explanation of why postcolonialism has been of particular interest to literary academics:

postcolonialism is distinguished by the value and attention which it gives to the personal and the subjective which is why, again like feminism, its institutional origins were often located in literature departments which provided the solitary space within academic institutions where subjective forms of knowledge were taken seriously.⁴

² Vanzanten Gallagher (1997) p.379

³ Vanzanten Gallagher (1997) p.385

⁴ Young (2001) p.64

The definition he provides, of literary studies' interest in 'subjective forms of knowledge' is extremely useful to this thesis, for it re-inflects the arguments at the end of the last chapter concerning the role of literature in expressing the lived experience of political transformation. The texts I discuss are all postcolonial in most understandings of the word. However, in the Malawian texts from the 1990s the former colonising power is so deeply implicit as to be apparently absent and in relation to the South African texts a debate has been revived about the 'special type' of internal colonisation that apartheid represented, and the form of postcolonialism that it therefore elicits.⁵ Young, like many theorists, suggests that postcolonialism is not just about the 'triumph' over colonialism, but that 'it also describes the conditions of existence that have followed in which many basic power structures have yet to change in any substantive way',⁶ by which definition the texts discussed do qualify as decidedly postcolonial. He cites Amilcar Cabral's contention that the continuing objective is 'the pursuit of liberation after the achievement of independence'.⁷

Many of the institutional structures in South Africa and Malawi were inherited from colonial regimes, as was the English language, and its literary conventions. However, even these have been locally inflected and adapted to some degree, so that at least some of the indebtedness or blame for these inheritances must, in part, gradually recede, especially at a moment when the future is discursively so central. With the internalisation of repression after the two countries left the British Empire, comes a continuing shift in responsibility away from a culture of reproach directed at an external colonising force, to a search for some culpability for its problems within, which is a much more agonising, heartrending process that cannot rely on an easy defensive mobilisation against an outside colonising force, but necessitates a difficult examination of a fractured self. Duncan Brown persuasively suggests that such a process can be the basis for a 'revindicated nationalism' that admits the currency of the category in transitional nations, yet also 'reconciling the demands of difference and national belonging ... not on the fictions of imagined unity, but on a shared problematic: a mutual implication in a history of difference, which acknowledges local as well as global affiliations'.⁸

⁵ Visser (1997) p.83 He suggests five different dates which could define the postcolonial according to this definition.

⁶ Young (2001) p.60

⁷ Young (2001) p.11

⁸ Brown (2001) p.757

Postcolonial theorists are indeed turning their attention to the replication of imperial relations in current global relations.⁹ In this analysis alone we have seen how Malawi depends on South Africa economically, and how culturally and politically it looks to South Africa as a comparative model. South Africa is thus more and more becoming a sub-imperial power in the region as other countries, too, openly invite the newly legitimated nation into their borders, economically and culturally. Yet this is only a localised example of hierarchical international relations on a larger scale; this shift towards an examination of contemporary global economic power patterns that arguably reduce the significance of national political transformation is what Young seeks to express in his term 'tricontinentalism'¹⁰ in favour of 'postcolonialism':

The entire world now operates within the economic system primarily developed and controlled by the west, and it is the continued dominance of the west, in terms of political, economic, military and cultural power, that gives this history a continuing significance. Political liberation did not bring economic liberation — and without economic liberation, there can be no political liberation.¹¹

However, I suggest that national political change does have an impact on people's lives, for as Visser points out, the realities under which South Africans, and I would say Malawians too, live may not have changed dramatically in terms of a fairer distribution of wealth and power, but the 'possibilities under which people lived ... had undergone an epochal shift'. He adds that the relationship with the future is less contestatory: 'The future they project is no longer experienced as the future which South Africans confront.'¹²

Yet a number of notes of caution have been sounded in this thesis, in particular in relation to censorship laws. Echoing Kundera's warning, cited at the end of Chapter 1, not to replace one system of power with another, André Brink suggests that, contrary to most assumptions:

apartheid has *never* been the enemy. It has always been only the symptom and a sign, a footprint, of the enemy. For the true enemy to the human is *power*, in all its forms. The power of the lie, the power of the corrupt; of oppression; of injustice; of bondage. These things outlive apartheid: they exist, and have existed, in all human societies, at all times. ... when apartheid may be finally

⁹ Said (1993) pp.341-408, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1998) pp.110-15, Childs and Williams (1997) pp.210-17

¹⁰ 'Postcolonialism might well be better named "tricontinentalism", a term which exactly captures its internationalist political identifications, as well as the source of its epistemologies'. Young (2001) p.5 Some of the problems with this term are that with its constitution of the three continents Latin America, Africa and Asia, it ignores, for example, Aboriginal, Maori and South Pacific postcolonial relations and downplays other forms of postcolonialism within western countries, both indigenous and diasporic, such as Native American, African American and Irish and Black British constituencies.

¹¹ Young (2001) p.5

¹² Visser (1997) p.389

eradicated, but not injustice, not corruption, not lies, not intolerance: in other words, not power ... And this enemy is not so coherent or visible or obvious as apartheid.¹³

The warning is timely, as more evidence emerges of political malpractice and abuses of power in both countries. However, the generally engaged, constructive mood of cultural and social debates generated by the transition demonstrates that disillusionment and anxiety about the future remain subordinate, for now, to the near-miracle that was rapid political change and a reinstatement of basic rights without the oft-predicted civil war in both Malawi and South Africa.

My study of change and transition in literature, and how literature explores and shapes change, is a study which foregrounds what arguably preoccupies most literature. Kenneth Harrow suggests that what makes African literature so dynamic is its predominant preoccupation with change as it still deals with the rapid transformations in ways of life demanded by forms of colonisation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

There is one overriding issue facing African literature now, as at the time of its inception in Europhonic writing, and that is change. The issue of change appears in the preoccupations of authors faced with the struggle of a society to adapt to, as well as to create, new social and cultural order; it appears in the predominance of characters forced to face the dynamics of their own processes of transformation.¹⁴

This compares with Karin Barber's related view that much of the energy of contemporary African arts springs from an engagement with newness:

Art forms do not merely reflect an already-constituted consciousness, giving us a window onto something already fully present. They are themselves an important means through which consciousness is articulated and communicated. In times of rapid social change, it seems likely that popular art forms, with their exceptional mobility ... will play a crucial role in formulating new ways of looking at things.¹⁵

Although she is referring to the process of urbanisation, her arguments are even more applicable to cultural engagements with political transition. My study of literature at condensed spans of immediate political transformation demonstrates an intensified dynamic of concerns that are already prevalent in

¹³ Brink (1996) pp.178-9

¹⁴ Harrow (1994) p.3

¹⁵ Barber (1987) p.4

many African literatures. Literatures that engage with transition seek to negotiate, with a heightened sense of urgency, alternative relationships between continuity in memory and imaginings of newness.

Appendix I: Documents Relating to Censorship

[figure a.1]

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF CENSORS WHICH WAS HELD ON
17TH MARCH, 1982 AT 10.15 A.M. IN THE BOARD'S CONFERENCE ROOM

PRESENT

Rev. F. A. Chunga	Chairman
MS C. Chimwenje	Vice-Chairman
Mrs. B. R. Larouche	Member
Sister Ann Neilsen	Member
Mr. M. S. Mwanamai	Member
Mr. G. O. Sibweza	Member
Mr. A. Gibson	Member
Mr. A. Makalani	Representing Ministry of Education and Culture
Mr. B. Y. C. Gondwe	Representing Ministry of Local Government

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr. B. L. Walker	Representing the Office of the President and Cabinet
Mr. H. B. Vokhiwa	Secretary to the Board

APOLOGIES

Mr. N. G. M. Mxandawire Member

Minute 82/2/1 Opening Remarks

- a. The Meeting was opened at 10.15 a.m. with a prayer said by the Chairman.
- b. The Chairman welcomed everybody to the meeting and mentioned that the Vice-Chairman will be coming in later.

Minute 82/2/2 Confirmation of previous Minutes

Minutes of the previous meeting held on 21st January, 1982 were confirmed as the correct record of the proceedings and the Chairman signed the Minutes. On page 2, Minute 82/1/4 - Any Other Business; spelling of remuneration was corrected.

Minute 82/2/3 Matters Arising from previous Minutes

1. Audience with His Excellency the Life President on 22nd January, 1982 at Sanjika Palace.

The Secretary summarised what His Excellency said to the Board Members at Sanjika Palace as follows:-

- a. Decency - He stressed on the importance of maintaining cultural values in Malawi. e.g. respect for elders.
- b. Discipline - He spoke on the importance of Censorship Board in maintaining discipline in the country. He said Malawi has a respectable image and he gave examples of how this image is reflected when Malawi delegates are sent out to represent the country even in the Eastern Bloc countries.

- 2 -

- c. On Films - He advised the Board to be strict on censoring films rather than being lenient. XX
For example, he said that those films that exploit crime and violence could have a bad influence on the society especially the children. On deciding what is good for the society, he advised the Board that when in doubt, it should give itself the benefit of the doubt.
- d. Law and Order - He said there was law and order here because of good leadership; and he contrasted the lawlessness in other countries with Malawi.
- e. Members noted the summary and agreed that it be put on record.

2. Censoring of Video Tapes;-

Members discussed the possibility of registering all video/television equipment with the Board with the assistance of the Office of the President and Cabinet and the Department of Customs and Excise. Members were informed that there were discussions already with the Censorship Board, the Postmaster General and the Controller of Customs and Excise in connection with video tapes that come through the Post Office. A reply was being awaited from these Departments. Members resolved that the solution would be for the Postmaster General to redirect parcels containing video cassettes to Censorship Board.

3. Part-time Viewers;-

Members were informed that some more part-time viewers were recruited in January, 1982 and the total number of viewers was now 34. They were briefed on Censorship rules and guidelines and told what is expected of them. Members wanted to know how complaints raised by part-time viewers were being handled. They were advised that it would be most appropriate if their complaints were channeled through the Secretary to the Board.

4. Grading of films;-

Members wanted to know whether any proposals for amendments to the Act had been presented to the Secretary. Suggestions were made to appoint a Sub-Committee to look into Amendments to the whole Act. Members resolved that the matter be brought to the attention of the new Board which takes office after 17th April, 1982.

5. Trip to London;-

Members were informed that the Secretary to the President and Cabinet had informed the Chairman and the Secretary that they would not be able to go to London to attend the conference on Film Classification and Control because of the financial situation the Government was facing

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at the moment.

Minute 82/2/4 Consideration of Publications

Members considered the reports about books and made the following remarks:-

1.	<u>Title of the Book</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
1.	Better Is Your Love Than Wine	Banyolat Jean	Ban
2.	Bethany's Sin	McCammon Robert	Ban
3.	The Act of Marriage	Lattaya Tim and Beverly	Ban
4.	The Men in My Life	Watts Marthe	Ban
✓5.	Of Chameleons and Gods	Napanje Jack	Deferred - <i>To inform bookshops not to order this book</i>
6.	My Uncle Oswald	Dahl, Roald	Ban
7.	The Queens Bed Fellow	Bowdler Roger	Ban
8.	Roy Wellnysky	Allighan Garry	Pass
9.	The Artist and The Nude	Levy Mervyn	Pass but restricted for Artists
10.	Fire Storm	Duncan, R. L.	Pass

Minute 82/2/5 Rescission of banned Publications

The Secretary informed the members that correspondence between the Secretary to the President and Cabinet and The Attorney General and Secretary for Justice was still going on. It was then noted that reference to Government Notice No. 123 of 1972 and also Government Notice No. 135 of 1980 related to the prohibition and rescission in respect of the Rhodesian Herald and Sunday Mail in terms of the provisions of the Penal Code. The Board was wondering why a Rescission Order could not be made under the Penal Code in respect of other banned publications without any amendment. The Board agreed to pend the matter until the next meeting when the new Board meets.

Minute 82/2/6 Progress on the Censoring of Video Tapes

Recalling proposals made on Minute 81/5/4, the Vice-Chairman explained problems experienced in the censoring of video tapes especially on X rated films containing scenes that would normally be cut on the big screen; and also video cassettes that were pornographic when brought into the country. The Board resolved that:-

- a. Objectionable scenes be erased if the owner

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to have those parts removed.

- b. If the tape was totally objectionable it should either be erased, or arrangements should be made for it to be returned to country of origin.

Minute 82/2/7 Board of Censors Annual Report

- a. It was agreed that an Annual Report for 1981/82 be compiled with more details including Films and Video Tapes, Books, Records, Plays, Newspapers, Periodicals Magazines and Exhibitions.
- b. Catalogue of banned publications;-
It was considered too expensive to print a catalogue of banned publications and records for the period 1st July, 1980 to March, 1982. It was agreed that the office should circulate a stencilled list to schools and colleges, libraries, Ministries and all other departments concerned for their use.

Minute 82/2/8 Any Other Business

1. Public Reaction to Censorship;-
Members discussed whether the Board had maintained high standards of censorship and whether there was need to re-examine Guidelines to Censorship. The role of viewers was also discussed and it was felt that they needed more supervision. They needed to be comprehensive in the completion of their reports so that they should not mislead the Board. It was noted that most viewers copy from each other because they sit together. It may be necessary to separate them from each other. Also the Board should talk to them more often. The Board resolved to look into these areas again in future.
2. Members discussed briefly the liason between the Board and the Administration and suggested that there should be more coordination especially in decision making. Inquiries were also made on the improvement of the Records keeping system. It was reported that positive action was being taken in all those areas.
3. It was revealed that on several occasions, Board Members have been refused entry to view stage plays or public performances especially in Clubs when they present an Identity Card. It was agreed that a circular letter be issued to all Clubs and theatre owners reminding them that members of the Board have access to any Club, theatre etc. by law.

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4. It was reported that a certain Asian named Panjwan was importing undesirable video cassettes in the country. e.g. Lady Chatterley's Lover, the Cannibal etc which were banned at this meeting. It was resolved that his house be searched to find out if he keeps some undesirable video cassettes and publications.
5. Visit to Kamuzu Academy;-
The Vice Chairman reported her visit to the Kamuzu Academy. Members requested that the report be sent to them.
6. Members agreed that a copy of guidelines to Censorship should be sent to District Commissioners to assist them in explaining censorship requirements to the public in rural areas.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed at 5.05 p.m.

Confirmed and signed by the

Chairman _____

Date _____

[Signature]
2/6/82

Excerpts from the Regional Consultative Workshops on the Review of the Censorship and Control of Entertainment Act Chap 21:01 June, 1998, sponsored by GTZ (German Governmental Aid Organisation):

CULTURE AND CENSORSHIP

WHAT IS ACCEPTABLE AND NOT ACCEPTABLE

CENSORSHIP — DO WE NEED IT OR NOT?

YES, WE NEED IT

REASONS:

1. It acts as a guide in our social cultural behaviours.
2. It acts as a control measure against outside influences which are not acceptable or are undesirable.
3. It will give Malawi a National Identity.

WHAT THINGS IN OUR CULTURE SHOULD BE ACCEPTED OR ARE ACCEPTED: EXAMPLES

1. Do not censor literature on political or economic grounds to protect personal interests.
2. Positive traditional values/ractices [*sic*] should be maintained e.g. (a)
 - (a) Chinamwali
 - (b) Breast feeding in public
 - (c) Respect for our elders

THINGS NOT ACCEPTED

1. Use of idecent [*sic*] language e.g. drama, music, literature, radio and television.
2. Pornograph, blue [*sic*] movies
3. Violent films.

...

There is need to regulate the performing arts and music. Songs by local artists recorded outside Malawi should be censored first before distribution. Plays on the radio should first be censored before they are aired on the local radio. Some messages on M.B.C. on AIDS, education, child spacing etc. border on obscenity.

CENSORING AND CREATIVE WRITING

- Creative Literature by local scholars should be encouraged. Books should be classified according to age.
- Articles critical to the Government should be banned.
- Religion should not be banned except for satanic religion which is not part of our culture.

Appendix II: Selected Poems

Beginning Where We Left Off¹

So now that the senile lion has accidentally fallen
In the chasm of his own digging, let us thank the Lord
And resume the true fight we abandoned years ago

Let us begin by singing in the native tongues the old
Guards cut under the pretext of building our nation
Yet today after the monster has pulped his own cubs

Leaving the village tainted in sweat, tears & blood
Alarming his mates across the valleys, beyond the seas
Yet with his deadly crocodiles, puff-adders & scorpions

Now so submissive must we indeed gather the village
To pour libation on flaming ancestral rocks or should
We begin to roll up another sleeve for more insular

& baneful battles buried by the old legion who are not
Amused by our euphoria & are itching to avenge them-selves?
The grass huts Mbulaje's youth leaguers charred

Hacking their way among Che Moto villagers still stand
The dreaming potholes that will need our tender & those
Crocodiles & wicked amulets conceived, those untold

Cerebral malaras & tuberculoses they loved to cast
Down on rivalry, dressed as AIDS — what chaos, what
Sneer won't they raise for our freedom to requite?

*M 'bulaje iwine, n 'byeje sadaka **
M 'bulaje jwine, n 'byeje sadaka
M 'bulaje jwine, n 'byeje sadaka

*Kill another for you to eat the funeral rice.

When the Watery Monsters Argued²

When he revisited the Milimbo Lagoon of
His childhood he found it had rock-dried:
His dugout canoe, the driftwood, fish-traps,
The fishing tackle and the worms for bait,
Even the stubborn mudfish had moved on;

Only ghosts, watery beasts, surged forward
From the reed bushes of their barren lagoon,
Extending their wise handshakes and arguing,
'Man, neither cast this change of fortunes to
The winds nor reject your ancestral wisdom;

Do not waste your bitter herb on our bones,
We were mere messengers of your destiny,
Forget the past, forget whatever we inflicted
On you; people are now riding on the dreams

¹ Mapanje (1998) p.61

² Mapanje (1997) p.73

We denied them decades ago; now more than -

Ever before this young nation should not be
 Allowed to wallow in the past, the exigencies
 Of building this glowing nation must precede
 Everything and think positive, think future
 Without retribution, without malice ...' Yet

As the watery presences paddled their daft
 Sinking raft to their fisheagle island invoking
 Today's without their yesterdays, he wept at
 The blisters of their future without its present,
 He began to see what the fiends really meant:

He knew the silence their beastly transition
 Offered was neither victory nor antidote for
 The wounds the watery freaks had inflicted;
 He knew that weathering their weeping scars
 Would incite other bitter tears, he then swore:

'Brethren, golden glories are hard to police,
 But do not ask us to forget the past, and how
 Could poetry forget the past when Africa still
 Bleeds from forgetting its past; empower others
 To forget your past — my struggle continues!'

Habari Gani Africa Ranting³

(eureka europe gathers the dust of a fallen berlin wall
 africa rolls in the mud of its tropical brain-fall)

habari gani africa
 so free & unconscious where you sit
 drowning in complacence's shit
 a national situation its universal station top of the pops
 pulled off the shelf when the rand drops
 it takes a self-exultation / struggle ticket to ride the train
 fortune-wheels in cranial rotation
 slaves of example now masters of spectacle
 hoarding seed crushed in loins labour broken
 his / her / its imperial majestic(k) token
 vacuum cleaning out a skull turning the brain cocaine
 spliffing powdered bone / membrane rolled up in a dollar bill
 terms of revolution's dictation not for negotiation

habari gani africa
 government's hammering & anvilling consent
 quoted out of pavlovian con-text
 self aggrandisement's god complex in torment
 self-eulogises til images of own creation believe the guise
 soul thiefblindbelief demonsermonmindrelief gnu consciousness
 in bloodstreams loo crass reflections of pork righteousness
 nation's birth's midwife's face upon currency
 wrath's head stamping the image-making of democracy
 historical revamping drumbeating politicking
 upon a slime bomb's ticking
 bent-backing for international mother fucking
 epiloguing your orifices puckering to nuclear waste puking

³ Rampolokeng (1999) pp.27-30

habari gani africa

operation eradication death movement's in stealth
 declaration of good intention by tin-godly decree
 mortality a military spending spree of corpse-wealth
 morality's education for the living in health
 a spiritual fulfilment read the gospel of saint general
 in the satan staple book-write of denial
 smiles of mirror practise / tv screen cosmetise flies on disease
 spotlights out on melting americanised scream / ice-cream expression
 & fatsweat's a sweet taste to thirst of emaciation
 dark incontinent orwellian sequence content in emancipation
 liesmacks soundtrack the powermonging in conference
 crack-polished-bone-mirages affluence & wretchedness confluence

habari gani africa

for everything the media sells
 foul winds of small change fanning both flag waving & burning
 on both sides clogged-up brain-cells
 commerce's judas coins always spinning
 tails or heads of state turning
 & vanity before humanity only beasts beauty contesting & winning
 sankara-sermon-legacy's silent witness
 wash our marks of millennial cams in blood of self-sacrifice
 adam-father's sin-seed nakedness in the skin of his genes
 fallen smashed upon eartheaven's kilns to fashion artifices /
 edifices tegumental monuments luciferean at human genesis
 graveyard upheavals of self-revelations

habari gani africa

dross rehearsal in cock-suction for intravenereal progression
 a grain of wheat away from maggot-fat down six feet
 land of sunshining on the aboveground in starleading roles
 cold deep inside butt-plugged holes where scarred souls sit
 scorncobwebbed for intestincencration by nuclear excretion
 amputated arms held out for world rank alms of bob or two doles
 fake deliverance in providence's corruption
 bred on breadmoulded destitution
 not diarrhoea or constipation your innards revolution
 birth of the incubus bursting out of the umbilicus in eruption
 commerce acidsluiced out your intestines
 barrenstoned from lusty look of land-barons' medussa concubines

habari gani africa

criminal-against-humanity-element become celebrant
 hour of the serpent's servant in power's fervent dance
 to the slashed drum's heartbeat in despotocardiac arrest
 king-poet-pus sings president sore's praises
 faeces on tongue's feet pound to the sound of a wound's abscess
 stagnation's ambition putrefaction's ad / ministration
 arrived as implosion of oppression's child
 have you survived explosion of liberation gone wild
 nightfly hover above deceit heated under muckiness' cover
 new worldly empty embraces of darkness' lover
 black despair / regency shame borne coldfear's catarrh as trophy
 ignorance's arrogance destruction's slave-agent of catastrophe

habari gani africa

bloodstains on morguesheet sweat of impotence
 born to die lie dead in the street the lie of omnipotence
 scarstripes on the soul sign of dementation / delusion
 look of drugged minds hidden behind illusion
 & outside the grenade-reality-cracked window the botched moment

licemen of the west bearing gifts rearing rifts of torment
 come to perform reconciliation a land's abortion operation
 nuclear wasted to the world's acceptance / assimilation
 a disembowelment your creation cursed to a braindeathblow
 manchildwomanimal NOWHERE left / right / middle / O
 sixfeetdownbelow
 glow longknifenightsessionsplashed blooddroplets in the sewers
 fleshpieces from crossed Xs / axes of man-made-wood hewers

habari gani africa
 purification rite-sight / site unset for handheldfirstworld viewers
 no hard meat & bone news chewers
 parental guidance advised to toothless pensioners of civilisation
 radioactivation messages of rage beyond broadcast of the age
 riding gossamer telewaves the royal educated savage
 thunder before morning conceived of night's ravage
 squash for wine the fleas on which you dine serpentine
 brine-soaken oaken to the druid broken barkbacked
 dried-up spinal fluid hangs a lifeline / capitalisticked sucked bloodmine
 mortality / age on mortgage steal-deal tables fangstacked

(eureka europe gathers the dust of a fallen berlin wall
 africa rolls in the mud of its tropical brainfall)

shak-shak⁴

& the carnival entered the last streets
 of the shantytown of

my soul // lightning speed rhythm
 light moving heavy swinging hip

& so the poor wd throw pots of paint
 curdled in the heart to the drowsy skies

so the portraits wd sprout,
 paint of our joy colouring the clouds

riotous multicolour, righteous marching
 shak-shak prophet majaja in front

riotous hell & thundering drum
 shak-shak mthembu foot

sore from his impatient corns

& the carnival entered the last street
 shack shack landscape grey

hunger a mere sunshine away / & yet
 & yet the joy — profuse like air

mirth in madness, spirits rejoicing

& so the madmen — the high
 voltage jolly demons, feet

shoo shoo shifty snap shuffle

⁴ Motsapi (1997a)

& so the merry madmen of my soul

had the season's last stomp
after the chafe & bruise
of the 8 to 5 tortures

& while the electrick carnival
kicked the weals off
for the redeemer

already there's a sign
in the sky
for those who see

already the graffiti's up
the walls of my soul:

HISTRYS ON DE SIDE
OF DE OPRES

Good Morning South Africa!⁵

I wonder when it will
come -
When one will wake up
from a deep sleep
and be greeted by a voice
from the radio saying
"Good morning
South Africa!
The day of freedom has come"

In church priests will kneel
chanting prayers of freedom
"Free at last. Free at last.
"Thank God. We are free!"

Workers join hands
singing one song -
of the end of exploitation
that will unite all workers.
"Thank God we are free!"

In parliament
the new president will speak
From apartheid
to people's power
From exile to freedom
Freedom in our lifetime
Yes, we are free at last
Good morning new nation!

- Richard Shilenge, Kabokweni.

⁵ Buthelezi (1992) p.54

Motherland Welcome Your Son⁶

Tears of misery were your food while your son was away.
 Oh! Motherland your son is back.
 Oh! South Africa rejoice with the whole world
 Stand up and with both hands welcome your son.

Let tears of joy fill your eyes.
 Oh! South Africa your son loves you.
 He loves you more than his own life.
 Oh! Motherland welcome your son.

Oh! Motherland your son is a hero.
 The whole world knows him.
 he was jailed for 27 years because of his motherland.
 Oh! Motherland welcome him with tears of
 joy.

South Africa stand up and sing and dance.
 Your son has returned safe.
 Oh! Motherland welcome your son.

Viva Pen Of Culture⁷

What is happening in my land?
 My land is a desert of truth,
 The emergency swallows every drop of reality.
 Inequality is reality; reality is abnormality;
 Like howling dogs
 Ignorance haunts the voice of the people,
 Pregnant with the voice of my people
 Are the garbage bins of parliament,
 Exploding with squeezed-in voices of my people -
 Viva pen of culture, viva!
 What is happening in Azania?
 I see normality becoming abnormality,
 Abnormality becoming normality,
 Truth is a taboo in my land,
 Like ravenous lions, jails devouring my people,
 Graves voraciously devouring the people, and yet
 Accumulated emotions
 Burst the breast of the survivalists -
 Viva pen of culture, viva!
 Viva pen of resistance, viva!
 Draining the flooding emotions of my people;
 Oozing the aspirations of my people;
 Voicing the voices of the voiceless;
 Voicing the opinions of the voiceless -
 Viva pen of culture, viva pen of resistance!
 Pen of resistance:
 Your extreme silent voice
 Will remove the stubborn lids
 Of the garbage bins of parliament;
 The hands of your voice
 Will remove the shroud of lies -
 Viva pen of culture, viva
 For you have nothing to lose!

⁶ Buthelezi (1992) p.65

⁷ Bafanyana in Maughan Brown (1991) p.45

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