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Sites of Resistance:

Writing as Protest in Black Anti-Apartheid South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

“What we have to ask ourselves now is whether we have an artistic and cultural vision that corresponds to this current phase in which a new South African nation is emerging. Can we say that we have begun to grasp the full dimensions of the new country and new people that is struggling to give birth to itself, or are we still trapped in the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination?” (Sachs, “Preparing” 239)

This thesis explores the genre of protest literature that arose out of South Africa’s black anti-apartheid movement during the 1980s. By examining three novels, Mongane Wally Serote’s *To Every Birth It’s Blood* (1981), Miriam Tlali’s *Amandla* (1980), and Njabulo Ndebele’s *Fools and Other Stories* (1983), as well as Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane’s film, *Mapantsula* (1988), I address the following questions: What was the function of protest literature in a society where the government controlled every aspect of daily life? How did protest literature encourage protesters while simultaneously smuggling itself through censor boards? Was protest literature merely agitprop, written as propaganda? Or was each individual work published because of its intrinsic literary value? How did the politics of the anti-apartheid movement hinder the production of nonpolitical fiction?

Protest literature in South Africa functioned to inspire resistance against the apartheid government. It appeared in various forms between the National Party’s implementation of apartheid in 1948 and Nelson Mandela’s release from

Robben Island in 1990. One important turning point in the anti-apartheid movement occurred in the South Western Townships (“Soweto”) outside Johannesburg. On June 16, 1976, hundreds of black South African students participated in a peaceful protest, organized by the South African Students Organization. They objected to the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which established Afrikaans as the official language of instruction in black schools. The young protesters resented being taught in the language of their oppressors, “the language of apartheid” (Brink, “Introduction” 19), which many did not speak. They marched across Soweto, planning to converge on a stadium for speeches and songs of protest. Although their protest was nonviolent, police opened fire on the students. Hundreds were killed or injured.¹ I purposefully chose to address only protest literature published after the 1976 Soweto Uprising, as the period between the Uprising and Mandela’s release from Robben Island in 1990 is the most politically charged phase of resistance during apartheid.

Framework Established by Literary Critics

My theoretical approach to this paper begins with Nadine Gordimer’s essays on protest and writing. Gordimer, a white liberal South African novelist and political activist, explores the effects apartheid has on South African society in her novels, short stories and essays. In her 1971 essay, “Speak Out: The

¹ Accounts of the number of casualties differ. A 2007 book published in South Africa to help South African youth understand the Uprisings cites various numbers. Venter says that 104 children under the age of 14 died on June 16, while estimates of the number of students injured vary between 1000 and 2000. Only 2 white policemen died that day. (Sahm Venter. *Youth Day June 16: Exploring our National Days*. Jacana Media: 2007. 16,20.)

Necessity for Protest,” she defines protest as, “aris[ing] as an ancillary to political opposition in situations where the political machinery is defective in allowing opposition its due voice and corrective influence” (Gordimer, “Speak Out” 89). In other words, Gordimer argues that the South African culture of protest arose precisely because of the apartheid government’s enforced suppression of ideas. In a country where citizens may not express political opinions, they are forced to give voice to their opinions in alternative forms. Two such powerful alternative forms are literature and film. As Gordimer asserts, “Protest is not a revolutionary means but a reforming one ... Protest is the need to speak out in a silenced society” (93). Apartheid “silences” the majority of its people, and protest literature gives these people voice. It speaks directly to people “outside ... whose [own] responses are blunted by unquestioning conformity” (95). Protest literature, Gordimer argues, is a venue of motivation for those who have lost their own spirit of resistance, who no longer see apartheid’s racism, who are forced to comply with their government’s racist vision.²

Andre Brink, writing five years later, also saw the importance of protest literature as an instrument of reform. Without explicitly defining protest literature, Brink wrote an essay in August 1976, just two months after Soweto, which claims, “much of the future lies in the hands of the South African blacks themselves” (Brink, “After Soweto” 149). This assertion opens doors for black

² Gordimer intimates her fears about the future of South Africa’s writing culture in her 1979 essay, “Relevance and Commitment.” After writing, “struggle is the state of the black collective consciousness and art is its weapon” (Gordimer, “Relevance” 137), she admits that despite the valuable necessity for black art, “black art has not really visualised itself beyond protest” (140).

South Africans to write protest literature; Brink gives them the power to reclaim their own lives. In effect, protest literature provides an outlet and black writers learn to explore the horror of the South African reality, writing explicitly honest stories about the truth of living under apartheid. Brink contends, “Within the context of a situation like the one in South Africa writing can, and does, become effective as a revolutionary act in its own, peculiar, right” (151). He asserts, “it is imperative for the voice of the writer to be heard” (152), especially when it is used to “explore and expose the roots of the *human condition* as it is lived in South Africa” (152). This exploration of the “human condition” is precisely how protest literature gains its legitimacy. Protest literature reveals, explores, and ultimately relies on a form of life -- the ‘everyday’ under apartheid -- that black South Africans recognize and relate to. They, in turn, are expected to sympathize with the decisions of protagonists who join the Movement, and eventually follow in these characters’ revolutionary footsteps.

Comparing Brink’s work, above, published one month after the violence in Soweto, with Albie Sachs work, below, published nine days before Mandela’s release, sets the framework of critical thought that surrounds protest literature. In 1989, Sachs presented a paper entitled, “Preparing ourselves for freedom,” at the African National Congress’ Conference. It was published a year later, on February 2, 1990, as South Africans began to sense the unraveling of apartheid’s control. The paper’s release in this charged public forum spurred a flurry of conversation about the nature of culture, art and politics.

Sach's paper suggests that when culture is allowed to function as "a weapon of struggle," rather than the foundation of a society's art, South African "artists are not pushed to improve the quality of their work, it is enough that it be politically correct" (Sachs, "Preparing" 239). In this statement, Sachs implies that all protest literature that emerged between 1950 and Mandela's release is "impoverish[ed]" and functions as less than art (239). He calls for a suspension in the production of protest literature, suggesting the banning of such work for "a period of five years" (239). "Preparing ourselves for freedom" marks a turning point in the history of South African literature, as well as the history of the South African fight for freedom. Following its publication, South African literary culture began to reclassify itself as "post-apartheid" literature.

Njabulo Ndebele, a black South African novelist and critic, wrote about protest literature after Sachs' famous article. In 1994, he proposed that the genre assumes:

...a rhetorical form in which the three chief rhetorical aspects [are]: one, the identification and highlighting of instances of general oppression; two, the drawing of appropriate moral conclusions from the revealed evidence and, three, the implicit belief in the inherent persuasiveness of the moral position. (Ndebele, "Redefining" 63)

He concludes that protest literature reaches a stylistic full-stop. It "appears to have lost its objective basis," he argues, which eventually allows it to become "a socially entrenched manner of thinking...[which] now reproduces itself uncritically" (60). From a post-apartheid perspective, Ndebele's article calls into question the validity of protest literature.

Definition of Protest Literature

This thesis retrospectively studies protest literature of the 1980s by defining a paradigm by which to recognize protest literature, exploring its artistic traditions, and asserting its necessity in accumulating strength for the movement against apartheid. This thesis thus challenges Sachs' stance regarding the redundancy of these works. As Ndebele points out, protest literature can seem to become "a rhetorical form" because each text addresses the same issues. It allows repetitive attention to the same topics -- an effective literary structure that simulates the repetition these same topics had in the daily lives of blacks living under apartheid's oppression. As a way of mapping the genre, I created a definition of protest literature, turning these repeated topics into a series of conventions through which to recognize protest literature. These conventions guide my analysis of the four individual works addressed in this thesis, as I determine whether they uphold or defy the model of protest literature.

Close readings of protest literature reveal that five main conventions exist within all effective works within the genre. These five conventions are: the role of the community in the life of the individual; the role of funerals as political motivators; the role of American influences, ranging from politics to music to clothing, in the struggle against the South African government; the role of familial and generational connections in the creation of strong, informed characters; and the role of history in reclaiming independence. Each author or director is free to

employ these five conventions differently, which allows variations among the texts. This paper will use the presence of the conventions as a standard against which to classify works as protest literature. Texts that include all five qualify as paradigmatic protest literature, while those that employ a less complete version of the conventions function differently in the framework of anti-apartheid literature.

The first convention of protest literature addresses how communities relate to each other. Authors often depict a polar society: the black community represents the good half, while the white community, and the blacks who work for them, represent the bad. Sachs criticizes the ubiquity of this polarity in protest literature, saying:

We [South African writers] line up our good people on the one side and the bad people on the other, occasionally permitting someone to pass from one column to the other, but never acknowledging that there is bad in the good, and even more difficult, that there can be elements of good in the bad; you can tell who the good ones are, because in addition to being handsome of appearance, they can all recite sections of the Freedom Charter³ ... at the drop of a beret. (Sachs, "Preparing" 240)

Communities in protest literature are easily recognizable. Individuals profiled are either noticeably inside 'the community,' or outside of it. There is little room for movement across the divide. Throughout this thesis, my use of the term 'the community' indicates the good, black community.

³ The Freedom Charter is a document written by the Congress Alliance (consisting of the ANC, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Congress of Democrats, and the Coloured People's Congress) and presented to "3000 delegates from all over the country" at the Congress of the People, Kliptown, Soweto, on June 26, 1955. It lists basic tenets that "reaffirm[ed] the multiracial character of South African society" (Lodge 71). On the second day of the Congress of the People, police arrived, bearing guns, to end the Congress. When the ANC won the 1994 democratic elections, pieces of the Freedom Charter were included in the new Constitution of South Africa.

The second convention traceable throughout protest literature is the use of funerals to stage political protest. South Africa under apartheid is tormented by political deaths, and citizens attend many funerals every year. Thus, funerals themselves become a politically-charged site of struggle; if a specific death does not relate directly to apartheid, it calls to mind other apartheid-related funerals. Writers of protest literature use this to their advantage. Invariably, they include funerals in their plots to politicize their texts.

Although there is no formula for the inclusion of the third convention, reading across the genre reveals a fascination with America. References to America appear in some form in all examples of protest literature, making discussion around America the third convention. The American civil rights movement, politicized by America's Black Power Movement, created the ideological basis for the South African Movement against apartheid.⁴ Without having to specifically write "Black Power," South African authors are able to

⁴ Gerhart explains in her book, *Black Power in South Africa*, how America's Black Power movement, which arose out of the American civil rights movement, influenced Black Consciousness in ideology and language of resistance. "Comparisons of the United States and South Africa became popular exercises at SASO leadership training seminars," Gerhart writes (276). She quotes an article written in the September 1970 *SASO Newsletter*: "One group was asked to study the significance of the statement 'before entering the open society, we must first close our ranks.' ... The group ended up by stating that the original statement should read 'before creating an open society we must first close our ranks.' The difference of course is of paramount importance in that in the first one, the Afro-Americans accept that they will never be in a position to change the system in America; ... whereas implicit in the latter statement is a hope to establish a completely new system at some stage ... We must not be the ones to be invited to participate in somebody else's system in our own private yard" (anonymous, quoted by Gerhart 276). The Black Consciousness Movement not only adopted aspects of the Black Power movement, but also adopted their slogans and use of the term "black" -- "'black' people, in the terminology of American radicalism, were distinguished not by their color per se but by their oppressed condition as the outcasts of affluent white society" (277). This use was applied to South Africa as well, but its popularity was limited as the term was often used instead as a synonym for "African."

indirectly reference it through a mention of American music, or an American politician's visit to South Africa.

Interestingly, America often functions as a site of false consciousness in protest literature. Ron Eyerman's book, *Consciousness and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, applies Marx's theory of false consciousness to individuals, stating that "falsely conscious individuals [are] individuals, who, if they thought they saw clearly, produced a picture of reality that was inverted 'and that was subservient to the individual'" (45). Eyerman explains Marx's concept as a false awareness that provides a backwards view of society. Instead of learning the truth, individuals who are falsely conscious create a world based on the opposite of truth. Building on this concept, I use 'false consciousness' throughout this paper to characterize individuals who attach themselves to an ideology through which they hope to understand their own world. For example, in Serote's *To Every Birth*, characters relate to American jazz music, only to find that by not relating to South African jazz, they have arrived at a false consciousness. Their false consciousness steers them away from the truth of their South African situation, creating alienated characters who unknowingly separate themselves from the Movement with which they try to align.

The fourth convention of the genre dictates the role of the characters' generational interactions. The appearance of three generations is typical in protest literature. First is the generation of the protagonist, which is generally socially active, even if the protagonist himself is not. The second generation is that of the

protagonist's parents: the "missing generation." They are not socially motivated and tend not to join the Movement. The grandparents are the oldest generation, and arguably the most important. They function as a connection to history, reminding the protagonist's generation that the people once owned the land that the white government now controls. Together, these generations form families that play important roles in the politicization of the protagonists; strong family relationships encourage successful participation in the Movement, while alienated families are less likely to join.

The final convention of protest literature marks the culmination of the previous four conventions as characters experience a 'birth of consciousness.' Throughout the paper, I use the term 'consciousness' to indicate a character's awareness of the need to join the Movement. I termed this final convention the 'birth of consciousness' to echo the title of the first novel I analyze, *To Every Birth Its Blood*. This birth is present in all anti-apartheid literature, regardless of whether or not it is to be classified as protest literature. However, protest literature is unique among all other types of anti-apartheid literature because it unites the first four conventions in the final one. After discussing all the effects apartheid has on daily life, each author either narrates a birth of consciousness in his characters, or inspires it in his audience. As with any birth, however, before the coming of consciousness must come the pain and suffering that accompanies daily South African life. Only after acceptance and realization of the true South African situation can characters, and audiences, arrive at consciousness.

With the characters' birth of consciousness, each novel becomes a virtual 'Site of Resistance' against apartheid. 'Site of Resistance' is a term used throughout this thesis to capture the effect -- the function -- of protest literature: black authors make their novels a voice of protest in a country where black 'citizens' have few rights. Because of the extreme political violence taking place in South Africa, authors transport physical sites of resistance, such as the rallies and protests that are often found at funerals, into literary scenes of rallies and protests, catalyzing their characters into action and thus making the novel, as a whole, a virtual Site of Resistance. These scenes of protest are as familiar to the black South African reader as actual demonstrations; indeed, they have the power to motivate readers in the same way a rally would motivate participants. Authors write these books to resist apartheid in the society Gordimer described as "silenced," while audiences read them to understand and, perhaps, motivate their own resistance.

The History of Protest

To interpret this birth of consciousness, it is vital to understand the history of the political movement that gave rise to protest literature. Protest literature is founded in the theory of Black Consciousness, which was created by Steve Biko, a medical student at the University of Natal. Influenced undoubtedly by the black political thought flowing out of America at the time, Biko broke from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). NUSAS offered

membership to people of all races, which Biko thought contradicted black interests. Instead, he established the South African Students' Organization (SASO) in 1969 (Arnold xix), extending membership only to people of color. SASO and its theory of Black Consciousness quickly spread throughout South Africa, influencing the actions and convictions of students of all ages.

The basic philosophy of Black Consciousness is two-fold. First, Biko realized that psychological abuse allowed the white South African minority to maintain total control over the black majority. As Brink wrote in 1976, "In South Africa an oppressed majority is being kept in bondage through the system of apartheid which guarantees white supremacy" (Brink, "After Soweto" 131). Gail Gerhart, in her book, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology*, quotes Biko as saying, "Not only have [the whites] kicked the black but they have also told him how to react to the kick ... With painful slowness he [the black] is now beginning to show signs that it is his right and duty to respond to the kick *in the way that he sees fit*" (266). Biko later wrote that the key to Black Consciousness is "mental emancipation as a precondition to political emancipation" (Biko, quoted by Arnold xx). The idea that blacks must first liberate their minds is a fundamental concept of Black Consciousness; they must become conscious of their own worth, even in the face of continued white oppression.

The second vital aspect behind Black Consciousness centers on Biko's assertion that as long as blacks allow whites to speak for them, blacks will never

learn to speak for themselves. Without learning to rely on their own voices for protest, they will never gain political voice. This aspect of Black Consciousness allowed Biko to justify opening SASO membership only to people of color:

The ideological direction of NUSAS, SASO argued, was determined by white students, who embraced a liberal nonracialism that was out of touch with the realities of South African society, in which the interests of white students, as members of a group privileged by apartheid, diverged from those of black students, who were oppressed and exploited by apartheid. (Sanders 166)

Biko stressed the importance of separating from white liberal ideology,⁵ which encouraged a nonracial world over black liberation. This fundamental conflict in interests convinced Biko that blacks must refuse the help of white liberals, educate themselves, and establish their own method of liberation. “We wanted to remove [the white man] from our table,” Biko stated, “strip the table of all the trappings put on it by him, decorate it in true African style, settle down and then ask him to join us on our own terms if he liked” (Sanders 166).⁶

⁵ Biko was afraid that the white man might want to help, but did not need to help. In his article, “Black Souls in White Skins?,” published in the August 1970 *SASO Newsletter*, Biko explained, “The liberals view the oppression of blacks as a problem that has to be solved, an eye-sore spoiling an otherwise beautiful view. From time to time the liberals make themselves forget about the problem or take their eye off the eye-sore. On the other hand, in oppression the blacks are experiencing a situation from which they are unable to escape at any given moment” (Biko, quoted by Gerhart 265).

⁶ Armed with the idea that black liberation can only come from themselves, Biko led SASO into perpetual non-violent protest against the apartheid government and its way of life. At first there were many dissenting voices, concerned about the group’s background and goals. Some argued that SASO was a secret branch of the government, since it effectually preached segregation (Gerhart 267). Others argued that even if not a government organization, SASO had given into apartheid’s ideals of a segregated society. Still others recognized that it was trying to be a force of change in the black community, but thought it should encourage a more militant technique; “why waste time on an introverted, elitist, intellectual movement for ‘consciousness,’ when the real priority was action?” (Gerhart 267). Despite these hesitations, however, the concept of Black Consciousness “that teaches its followers to not participate in their own oppression” (Sanders 163) touched a nerve in thousands of students across the country. Students related to and understood --

It is Biko's conviction, that black political theory and black approaches to resistance are inherently different than white theory and approaches, that prompted my decision to examine only literature produced by black South African writers. Regardless of the place in which the authors and screenwriters wrote their books, all of them are black South Africans (with the exception of Oliver Schmitz, co-screenwriter of *Mapantsula*), all have lived in South Africa, and all published their books and screenplays with South African publishers.

To outsiders, SASO appeared to be an informal group of students who were following, and even advocating, segregation. Accordingly, SASO was not at first suppressed by the apartheid government (Arnold xxi). This freedom allowed SASO time to become integral to the lives and experiences of black South Africans.⁷ As a result, "a significant percentage of the African intelligentsia and middle-class-to-be of the 1970s and beyond ... [received] a level of political education and ideological diffusion never before achieved by any black political organization" (Gerhart 270). Although the Movement never affiliated itself with an official political party, it reached people through "informal channels of influence" (Lodge 324). SASO redefined the definition of black and united the black majority by giving agency to black experiences.⁸

had experienced -- the subjugation and persecution that Biko and the other leaders of SASO preached.

⁷ Within a few years of its inception, the Black Consciousness movement expanded and organized with such success that by 1972 there was a regular newsletter in circulation that printed 4000 copies of each issue (Gerhart 270).

⁸ Ultimately, "Black Consciousness was, in a sense, nonpolitical politics. It appealed to the masses of poor, semi-illiterate Blacks precisely because it was able to cast theory in terms of the day-to-

Protest literature arises from the vision of political unity borne of Black Consciousness. Books of the black South African anti-apartheid canon are steeped in pro-Movement sentiments.⁹ Some authors particularly advocate Black Consciousness, while others simply encourage participation in the growing protest against apartheid. Despite these differences in the authors' perspectives, my own use of the term "Movement" universally applies to the fight against apartheid, regardless of whether particular authors specifically promote Black Consciousness.

Conclusion

Each of the four texts I examine advocates participation in the Movement, but each relates differently to the five conventions that define protest literature. I will examine the works from our current post-apartheid mindset, keeping in mind the recent conversations between Sachs and his contemporaries regarding culture

day frustrations that most Blacks experienced, and therefore readily understood" (Arnold xx). It spread quickly, becoming more a way of life than a political movement.

⁹Gordimer's discussion of Black Consciousness in South African art is a key voice in understanding how the political movement impacted the contemporary literary scene. She begins by arguing, "the black artist has to assert the right to search out his own demotic artistic vocabulary with which to breathe new life and courage into his people" ("Relevance" 137). This right, she explains, is not only a way to relate to the artist's community, but also a way to block out the white artist. Consequently, the white liberal artist who understands that "a purely white-based culture is as meaningless for white as for black, in the future South Africa" (139) is left alone: "the rejection of whites-only values by no means implies a concomitant opting in [to] the black culture. The white artist, who sees or feels instinctively that exclusively white-based values are in an unrecognised state of alienation, knows that he will not be accepted, cannot be accepted by black culture seeking to define itself without the reference to those values that his very presence among blacks represents" (138). He is thus trapped in a "double alienation" (138). How white South African 'protest' literature reflects this "double alienation" is a subject worthy of another thesis; the relevance of black protest literature, however, is affirmed by Gordimer's assertion that black art and culture did indeed seek to locate itself in a new sphere that was created and defined by blacks themselves.

and the nature of art. Ultimately, this paper will examine how protest literature establishes and defies its own tradition, analyze the potential effects of such literature on black South Africans, and challenge Sachs' stance against protest literature.

I first analyze *To Every Birth Its Blood* (Serote, 1981) and *Amanda* (Tlali, 1980). Through my analysis of these two texts, I establish protest literature as a genre that relies on a system of conventions to stimulate support for the Movement. Next, I look at the film *Mapantsula* (Schmitz and Mogotlane, 1989), which serves as a bridge between protest literature and anti-apartheid literature. It touches on each of the conventions, but does not necessarily conform to them. My final chapter examines Ndebele's *Fools and Other Stories*, which completely breaks from the genre. *Fools and Other Stories* is, undoubtedly, an anti-apartheid collection of short stories, but in it Ndebele foreshadows his post-*Fools and Other Stories* conversations with Sachs' regarding the validity of protest literature. He does not address the same issues as protest literature, choosing instead themes which he sees as better relating to the apartheid experience, and more conducive to the creation of original art.

Although protest literature can seem repetitive because of its strict paradigm of conventions, Serote and Tlali each apply the conventions differently to their texts, staying within the genre while establishing support for the Movement. These examples of protest literature remain accessible and meaningful to their black readers by involving characters in the everyday

experiences of living in a township during apartheid. Thus, during the 1980s, the genre was a highly relevant art form, used to express and understand black South Africans' positioning under the oppressive apartheid government. Sachs' 1989 call to end protest literature in a post-apartheid society was a legitimate way to thrust his country into a new era, but his disregard for the essential role of black protest writing during the height of the people's political struggle reveals his own estrangement from the country that was South Africa under apartheid.

CHAPTER 1

Before the Birth Comes the Blood: *To Every Birth Its Blood* as the Beginning of Protest Literature

To Every Birth Its Blood, by Mongane Wally Serote,¹ is a reflection of the tumultuous time-period in which it was written. Serote began the novel in 1975, before the Soweto Uprising, and finished it in 1981, as protest literature began to take form as the overarching genre of the 1980s. Consequently, its structure represents the difference between the ‘silence before the storm’ when Serote began writing, and the heightened political agitation that was occurring as he completed it.² Serote wrote the novel in two parts: Part I tells the story of an individual protagonist, Tsi, who remains listless as he observes apartheid’s increasingly tight yoke on his community; Part II reverses perspectives to create a collective point of view. The community joins the Movement, and the Movement subsequently becomes the protagonist as it fights apartheid’s oppression.

¹ Serote was born in 1944 in Sophiatown, a vibrant downtown Johannesburg neighborhood. The South African Group Areas Act of 1950 forcibly demolished Sophiatown, forcing all its residents to relocate. Serote’s family moved to Alexandra, a township on the outskirts of Johannesburg, where Serote attended secondary school. In a 1995 interview with Rolf Solberg, Serote identifies Alexandra as a major source for his politicization: “I [grew up] in Alexandra, a highly politicized community. For one reason or another, I thought I wanted to write and I started writing at quite an early age. The two, politics and writing, have played a key role in my formation as a person: the two feed on each other” (Solberg, “Interview” 180).

² Nick Visser insists upon the novel’s “formal complexity,” surmising that the novel is inherently contradictory and inconsistent. The historical context in which the novel was written, he argues, is intrinsic to its basic contradictory nature. Because Serote began writing it before the Soweto uprisings of 1976, “this first fictional project was not about, could not have been about, June 1976 at all” (Visser 69). Thus, he argues, it began to change forms after the uprisings, and Serote merged what was already written with the new powerful politics of post-Soweto South Africa, creating a text with two separate forms.

Most critical thought surrounding *To Every Birth* defends its unusual two-part structure.³ To explore *To Every Birth*'s effect on the growing genre of protest literature, it is necessary to examine the novel's themes and how Serote includes them. Therefore, this paper will examine these themes, and how they become the conventions of the genre.

Because the defining moment of the South African resistance movement occurred after Serote began *To Every Birth*, Part I is less oriented towards protest literature. Part II, however, foreshadows the issues that are present in typical protest literature. This chapter will analyze *To Every Birth* through a comparison of Part I and Part II as Serote begins to predict and apply the conventions that define the genre of the 1980s.

The Story

To Every Birth is a story told in two parts. Part I portrays Tsi, a journalist who writes for a liberal paper owned by a white American. He spends most of his time drunk, contemplating his failing relationships with his wife, Lily, his family, and his friends. He frequently thinks about apartheid and its effects on his life.

³ Dorian Barbour extols *To Every Birth* as "the most powerful and penetrating exploration of the Power period" (Barbour, quoted in Sole, 51) that exists in South Africa today. She argues that the novel reads as a consistent whole. The two parts act together, she determines, demonstrating Serote's main argument that individualism in a time of political crisis is wrong, while community action is right. Serote, she argues, advocates a shift from alienation to community action. Another important critic, Stephen Clingman, argues that Serote's main purpose in *To Every Birth* is to depict a fictional new world. Serote and his contemporaries are, he writes, "reworking transitions from the 1950s through to the 1970s; but in part [the literature of the period is] enacting and anticipating developments in the current phase as well" (Clingman 45). According to Clingman, Serote writes a text "whole-heartedly committed to the idea of a necessary alternative future, and the fact that it must be constructed through collective political agency and organization" (50).

His brother, Fix, is arrested and detained for an indeterminable amount of time. On assignment with a co-worker named Boykie, Tsi also is arrested, brutally attacked and tortured for an unidentified crime. After being imprisoned for seven days, Tsi leaves the experience listless and disillusioned. Following his arrest, he begins working for McLean's College, which aims to advance black education. Again, he is arrested and questioned, although this time promptly released. "The front page of a Johannesburg newspaper" (Serote, *To Every Birth* 128) details his arrest. Eventually, he decides to leave McLean's, convinced that McLean's will not make a difference in his country. Part I ends as Tsi visits his family to tell them the news about terminating his job.

Part II begins with a focus on John, Tsi's friend, who plays only a minor role in Part I. Tsi virtually disappears from the narrative. Part II unfolds without much plot; Serote introduces various characters and stages conversations between them about the Movement. One of these characters, Dikeledi, attends the trial that sentences her father to fifteen years on Robben Island. Following his trial, she joins the Movement and helps orchestrate an attack on white policemen who guard a township funeral. The Movement also kills a black policeman, Mpando. At the close of Part II, Tsi reenters the story; he is in exile in Gaborone, Botswana, missing his wife.

Individuals versus Communities

In Part I of *To Every Birth*, there is no sense of the collective. Instead, Serote creates individual characters that live around each other; sometimes they relate to one another and sometimes they do not. Each is aware of apartheid, and most are unable to resist. Part II portrays the Movement as the protagonist; the community has joined together and it is united in purpose, thought and action.

At the beginning of the narrative, Tsi is isolated from the family and friends around him. He describes himself as “lost” as he walks through the streets of his neighborhood: “I fear this feeling. It knocks me down. It puts the lights out of me, I do, I fear this feeling. I do not know, God, I do not know how many times it has grabbed me. Suddenly, not knowing where to go. It is strange, strange indeed; I fear this feeling. Lost. Big man I am. Lost. Lost, yet aware I had someone who loves me, cares, wishes to be with me. Yet here I was, lost in the streets” (39). Serote’s poetic background is clearly evident in this passage. The repetition, the short sentences, and the parallelism all work together to reveal Tsi’s truly alienated state of mind. The passage is a stream of consciousness, allowing Serote to reveal to the reader ideas that Tsi may not yet have admitted to himself. He is completely “lost,” despite having a loving wife. He cannot connect with her, he is unable to find his home although he stands in his own neighborhood, and he thus does not know “where to go.” He pleads with God to guide him, but his perpetual alienation suggests that God has forsaken him.

Ironically, Tsi contributes to his own alienation. He is filled with self-doubt, which prevents the establishment of profound relationships with people around him. Instead of benefiting from human interaction, he listlessly wanders, asking himself questions regarding his seemingly hopeless future: “Where will I go from here?” (44). Ignoring his own question, he admits, “My mind could not focus on anything” (44). Later he ruminates, “What’s all this shit? Heaven knows. What is going to happen to us? The men. The women. The children. What is going to happen to us? What shit is this?” (45). Again, he avoids answering, instead explaining to himself, “No words were left. Everything had become so futile. Energy. Strength. Care. Shit. Everything had become so futile” (45). Serote allows this passage, too, to take the form of a stream of consciousness. Tsi is unable to organize his own thoughts, indeed he literally cannot cope with the world around him; it is filled with the horrors of the past. It does not matter if Tsi finds the “energy” and “strength” to “care,” to try to change the future for himself and those around him. Trying to care becomes “futile,” as everything has turned to “shit.” Tsi knows that the present is not ideal, but instead of trying to change the future, he spends his time trying to determine where his life and his government went wrong. Trapped by his own memories, Tsi is unable to function in the present.

His lost feeling arises out of his awareness of the world around him. He understands the effects of apartheid around him, but is powerless in the fight against them. For instance, he is preoccupied with his brother Fix’s enduring and

unexplained imprisonment, yet has no way of freeing him. While visiting his family, he announces, “I have no way of knowing [where Fix is], no one can ask, see, or talk to anyone about him. That is the law he is arrested under” (32). Here Tsi stops talking, although his thoughts continue. They pull him away from his safe family kitchen, and into his own world, a world defined by doubt and confusion. He silently reflects, “Fix, shit, what was happening to him. All the stories I read, all the tragic stories about political detainees falling from stairs, jumping out of the windows, committing suicide under strange circumstances, were unleashed, they flashed past me. I wondered where Fix was” (32). Tsi cannot keep his mind in the present moment; it is perpetually pulled to his own dark thoughts. Serote’s implication is that the apartheid state prevents its black ‘citizens’ from claiming their own lives, either by arresting them or by brutalizing them until they are afraid to even think. Black South Africans are unable to progress while they are marginalized by a government that oppresses them.

The timeframe in *To Every Birth* parallels Tsi’s trapped and confused state of mind. By depicting time in a cyclical fashion, Serote gives the impression that life is repeating itself.⁴ First the audience learns the aftermath of events they read about later (Tsi’s general, drunk lethargy is a response to his beating by the police

⁴ Reckwitz criticizes this structure, calling it “difficult to keep track of” because of the consistently “shifting ... temporal vantage point of the first person narrator... where past and present intermingle or interpenetrate each other” (290). On the other hand, Sole argues that the overlapping effect of the first half of the novel is necessary to demonstrate the extremity of the South African situation. He justifies the dislocated storyline, saying, “Politics so over determines the individual lives of black people, due to the particular nature of apartheid and its interference in private life, that individual activity and psychological trauma can never be seen in isolation from political events” (Sole, “This Time Set Again” 59).

in a brutal and pointless attack). It seems as if Tsi has been beaten and depressed many times. He reflects, "I was not really sober. But I was not drunk either" (39), and then later that night, "I must have been asleep" (41). His own memories are vague and disordered, he cannot distinguish drunk from sober, awake from asleep. Serote's decision to use a circuitous chronology is confusing, but intentional. It echoes Tsi's mental condition itself. Tsi has lost control of his life, and thus, has lost track of time. While driving through the night, he says, "We were lost in the night, and the drama of our time was this time set again" (70). He has experienced this night many times, constantly forced to repeat and relive it.⁵ Consequently, he seems to suffocate under memories of his own beatings and interrogations,⁶ eventually grinding to a halt, unaware of waking time or new experiences. Tsi cannot move forward in his life, as he remains forced to relive these old, painful memories because of his inability to overcome them.

The timeline of Part II straightens out as the Movement takes over the narrative. Serote switches between characters to establish the feeling of unity

⁵ As the narrative of Part I unravels, and the reader begins to understand the true chronological order of the events that have taken place, Tsi's personal awareness of the political situation around him gradually increases. Following the extreme police brutality he suffers with Boykie, he finds strength within himself. He realizes, "It was while I sat there... that I felt a deep need to survive" (Serote, *To Every Birth* 68). Yet, because he is an individual, he immediately gives up hope. He admits, "everything, the darkness, the vastness of the empty earth, empty sky, even the lights that kept a steady distance behind us, suggested nothing about life, or survival" (68). Serote's language -- empty, vast -- underscores the alienation and solitary essence of Tsi's life. He cannot fight for his right to "survive" without the help of the community he is incapable of attaching himself to. While aware of apartheid's unequal nature and negative effect on its black 'citizens,' he remains passive, unable to take action against the government. Tsi has no attachments to the community around him, and thus is unable to join in its protest against apartheid.

⁶ Sole describes Tsi as being unable to "escape the painful memory of the political history which has constructed a 'people's defeat' in Alexandra, [or] the meaninglessness of individual life and death within such a history. Even drowning himself in music and drink cannot stop Tsi's obsessive political-cum-existential reflections; while these reflections, despite their cogency, cannot bring him to act" (Sole, "This Time Set Again" 59).

across the community; by revealing the thoughts and actions of many people, he is able to demonstrate a certain cohesiveness in the goals of Alexandra's people. Early in Part I, Serote establishes the "us" versus "them" mentality that pervades protest literature, saying, "The Golden City [Johannesburg] belongs to the white people of South Africa, and the Dark City [Alexandra, "one of the oldest townships in South Africa" (25)] to the black people" (25). This set of images calls to mind the wealth that South Africa has in gold and diamonds, as well as Joseph Conrad's famous "dark Africa." Although both realities share a city separated by "a mere nine miles" (25), the experiences of each are separated by skin color, lifestyle, and freedom. This polar community structure extends into Part II; the black community represents the 'good' community, while the white policemen represent the 'bad.' Ironically, the 'good' community lives in the "Dark City" and the 'bad' in the "Golden."

Their geographical isolation from the black community further characterizes the white policemen as a unit that works against the people. One character realizes, "you were either on the side of the Black people or you were not" (203). There is no in-between. Those who are on the wrong side, such as the policemen in the climactic funeral, are killed. Those on the right side belong to the Movement, which becomes its own character in Part II. One member of the Movement, Onalenna, is told that, "the Movement had exploded cars in town" (225). She wonders, "why is the Movement doing this? ... Why was the Movement provoking the law?" (225). The Movement itself takes on the role of

main protagonist in Part II. It drives the remaining plot of the novel, “exploding cars” and “provoking the law.” Together, the characters in Part II discuss, plan and execute conspiracies against the government -- all under the auspices of the Movement. Although they have unique personalities and interests, they become members of a single entity, supporting themselves and each other.

Throughout *To Every Birth*, Serote refers to the “whole of Alexandra” (245) as a unit; he describes them as “the people, the men and women of Alexandra, on foot, in cars, singing” (247). Serote attributes this group of people with organic qualities associated with nature. They are a single “flood of people” (247) who are “flowing” (245) through the streets.⁷ The image of people “flowing” portrays them as having merged into a single entity, and then supporting and encouraging each other as they move in the same direction, towards the same goal. Once unified, the people become “like the wind” (220), and “like an old tree” which “spreads and spreads its roots ... entrench[ing] itself in the soil, issuing root after root, to spread and spread and spread” (264). This personification evokes images of the Movement as something that is natural and unable to be stopped. Dikeledi, a member of the Movement, becomes aware that “the movement was like the wind” (220). Then she realizes, “she was one with this wind” (220). The Movement becomes the voice of the collective, and the collective cannot be halted, re-channeled, or swayed. Serote presents the

⁷ Sole describes this environment, saying, “Inhabiting this urban milieu is a welter of people who individually may not be known to the authors, but nevertheless are part of the community they perceive as their own” (Sole, “Days of Power” 71).

Movement as a united element; its rebellion throughout Part II is not the act of a single person, but an entire community.

By defining the Movement as organic, Serote implies that it belongs to the people. The literal meaning of “organic” implies something having the characteristics of a living organism. Based on this definition, the Movement acquires characteristics of the people; indeed, it acts as the main character in the novel’s second half. The Movement is as “natural” in this environment as the black people who support it. Unlike the white government, it exists in, with, and around the African soil. It becomes “the tall tree, spreading its branches all around, giv[ing] shade to the weary” (264). The Movement functions as a source of comfort and security for those who are tired of fighting the battle alone, or tired, like Tsi, of not fighting at all. Like the acacia trees that dot South Africa, the Movement cannot be uprooted, ignored, or defeated.

The Movement, representative of the true Alexandra, becomes a synecdoche for the whole of black South Africa.⁸ It demonstrates Serote’s ideal vision of the community, united and fighting apartheid. Knowing that Alexandra in Part II stands for black South Africa during the Days of Power, Tsi in Part I becomes representative of black South Africa before the Soweto Uprisings. His alienation could be seen as a form of calm before the unification that resulted from the Uprising. He was aware of the issues, but unaware of how to fight. The

⁸ Kelwyn Sole presented the idea of Alexandra as a synecdoche for “all the townships in all of South Africa” in his lecture on *To Every Birth*, 17 April 2007 at the University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa.

Movement provided this opportunity not to Tsi, but to everyone in Alexandra and in South Africa. Members are given a purpose, allowing them to reclaim their lives from the circular existence that consumes Tsi. Through this polar structure - the individual and the community -- Serote implies that the Movement is right. Protest literature picks up on this message, focusing on the 'good' community of the Movement and the 'bad' community of the government.

Graveyards Predict Funerals

Graveyards and funerals across protest literature are locations charged with meaning: they reference apartheid's reality of funerals, speeches and protests. People who are familiar with this reality would recognize graveyards and funerals in art, regardless of whether they were familiar with the conventions of protest literature. Thus, Serote includes graveyards and funerals in his novel; without having to explain them, readers understand the emotional tone the locations imply.

The second scene of *To Every Birth* is set in a graveyard. By using a graveyard so early in the text, Serote foreshadows the importance funerals will play later in the text. As Tsi enters Alexandra's graveyard, he thinks:

Ah, if graves could talk! There they were, spread throughout this vast field, their number-plates sticking up in the air, as if they were hands waving bye-bye. The tombstones looked like miniature sky-scrapers... Birds were singing. A cow mooed. Cars roared. But the silence was stubborn. It stuck in the air, looming over the heaps of soil and those who could still walk. (10)

The graveyard depresses Tsi. He wonders what the story behind the deaths are, wishing they "could talk" to him. He knows that, "the graveyards can tell that

story [the story about past failures and oppression] very well” (65). Describing them as “waving” to him, Tsi personifies them, as if he relates to the grave instead of the person interred, which further emphasizes his own alienation. He cannot relate to the people, but to the objects they have become.

The “vast field” of graves impresses the reader with the sheer volume of deaths the community has had. These deaths are their foundation of their society; they are their “skyscrapers”, their buildings, their infrastructure. When Tsi looks “at Alexandra from the graveyard, it looked like a graveyard” (12). The buildings and shacks of Alexandra have become the tombstones and number-plates of Alexandra’s graveyard. The deaths have become Alexandra’s legacy.

As Tsi contemplates this transition, he feels the weight of death’s “stubborn silence...looming” over him and the rest of Alexandra. However, although aware that Alexandra is immersed in death, the death does not motivate Tsi to political action. Instead, it demobilizes him. When he leaves the graveyard, he wanders back to his home and turns on John Coltrane, sits and reflects.

Serote’s emphasis on graveyards in Part I allows him to stage the climax of the novel at a funeral in Part II. This funeral scene is very typical of protest literature. Elements of resistance and protest are woven throughout, the whole community participates, and there is a sense of unity within the community against the government. The scene unfolds as the Movement plans and executes an elaborate plot to kill four policemen who monitor the community’s actions at the funeral of a local boy. Serote leaves the details of the boy’s death vague; the

death could be anyone's and the funeral symbolically belongs to the entire community. Through this anonymity, Serote implies that many people have died. Despite being 'held' in Alexandra, this funeral thus contains and represents moments of resistance and struggle at funerals across South Africa.

Because funerals present the opportunity to resist, they inevitably include moments of danger. White policemen hover over black funerals; they 'maintain the peace,' authorized to open fire if needed. Consequently, funerals often *lead* to more deaths. During *To Every Birth's* climactic funeral scene, characters express the danger they associate with funerals, saying, "I do not like going to funerals these days" (246), and later, "I don't want to get shot" (248). Their unease reveals memories of past funerals. The policemen's deaths at this funeral prevent future violence at both this, and future, funerals.

Ironically, the characters expressing fear are the ones who stage violence at this funeral. The difference between the violence these characters fear and the violence they initiate is defined by whether they act defensively or offensively. Serote suggests that the violence caused by the Movement in Alexandra is not only reactionary, but *preemptive* to the violence that might occur at the hands of the whites who guard the funerals. "This crowd," Serote writes, "this Alexandra which had been burying its children for such a long time now, was getting uneasy. They had been shut in from both sides by [the police]" (246). The community of Alexandra has buried many children, been to many funerals, and is thus familiar with the riots, arrests and deaths that can occur when white policemen monitor

funerals. Consequently, instead of being attacked, the township takes charge and becomes the attacker. Backed by the support of the Movement, the township is, for the first time, on the offensive.

Graveyards dot the landscape of Part 1 of *To Every Birth*. Tsi's passive reflection on these graveyards demonstrates the sort of 'stalemate' that defined South Africa in the early 1970s. Serote's frequent reference to them reminds readers how pervasive apartheid is in their lives and how many in their community have lost family members to apartheid. In essence, the incorporation of graveyard scenes is another way Serote, writing before the Soweto Uprisings, reveals the effects of apartheid without demanding action from his readers. The climactic funeral in Part II, on the other hand, thrusts the community, and Serote's readers, into action.

America as False Consciousness

The presence of America in protest literature is often a source of false consciousness. In *To Every Birth*, Serote uses American music to create what Tsi imagines as a refuge where he can hide from the reality of his alienation. Most references to America take place in Part I, as Tsi tries to use music to access and understand his world. Serote includes references to music that accompanied the American civil rights movement to highlight the influence American culture had on the South African struggle. In a 1993 interview with Andrew McCord, Serote explained, "If you come from Alexandra as I do, there was a very strong tradition

of collecting music, especially Afro-American music -- jazz, blues, this sort of thing. So these things have played a very important role in one's life. In a sense, they oriented one emotionally -- in the struggle to cope" (McCord 181). By Part II, the Movement has taken control of the narrative; America is no longer necessary as a false refuge, helping one "cope" under apartheid. On the contrary, "coping" is no longer relevant; "coping" implies a passive form of existence, while the Movement advocates for action.

Throughout Part I, Tsi frequently incorporates the records and sounds of American jazz musicians into his thoughts. The music serves as an escape for Tsi, who listens to forget his surroundings. John Coltrane, for example, enables him to continue day-to-day activities, even when basic tasks seem insurmountable. "My baby was not home yet," reflects Tsi, "I put on John Coltrane. I lit the primus stove and put the kettle on. I made up the bed" (Serote, *To Every Birth* 17). The music provides a safe place where he is at ease, and thus productive. It offers a refuge to Tsi, who is trapped in his own memories. The temporary hiatus provided by American music contrasts sharply to Tsi's alienation.⁹ Whereas Tsi without music is alienated and alone, he feels safe when music is present.

Although Tsi allows American music to serve as his refuge, Serote's language reveals the music as a false haven; Tsi's dependence on it is evidence of

⁹ Titlestad argues that, "music ... holds out the promise of human agency, of making meaning, even in an otherwise overwhelming state of alienation. It wards off the danger of a melancholic resignation" (115). On the surface, this understanding of the power of music is valid. Tsi does indeed see music as holding "out the promise of human agency." Serote's ultimate point, however, is that getting trapped in music can become dangerous, even self-destructive. Music allows Tsi to sit and hide, while what he should be doing is fighting with the community that is outside his front door.

his false consciousness. Instead of going outside and joining the Movement, he stays in his house, listening. The music encourages Tsi's isolation, making him dwell on his own internal self-doubt. Tsi realizes, "Suddenly, Nina Simone's voice became a hammer, pounding and pounding on my head, shoulders, pounding and pounding me to pulp" (22). By literally entering his body, the music destroys Tsi.

The "pounding" sensation makes him feel as if "the walls of the room began to stalk me, to crowd me" (22). Listening to American music, Tsi cannot escape himself, his surroundings, or his thoughts. He turns the music on to comfort him as he does housework, but the music betrays him. Instead of protecting, it wrecks. He must leave his house to escape his 'safe haven.' Ironically, then, American music does encourage Tsi to fight apartheid; it forces him to leave his house, which becomes his first step towards joining the community outside.

Serote also uses organic imagery to characterize music as a form of false consciousness. During an argument with his wife, Tsi narrates:

I heard the music. I did not see her [Lily] move from the bed to the bookshelf where the record player was. Neither of us had heard Hugh [Masekela] stop with his trumpet. Nina [Simone's] voice took off, as if running; like a gentle dangerous storm, took over the piano, which stalked along, slowly like a river. (59)

In this scene, however, it is not Serote's descriptive language that controls the imagery, but Tsi's misguided consciousness. The American artist distracts him; Simone's voice lures Tsi away from his South African identity and native music.

Thus, it is the American artist Simone, not Masekela, who is described in organic terms. Serote attributes the qualities of a “storm” to Simone. Instead of misleading readers, however, Serote’s decision subtly warns that the American musician -- and thus the individuated identity associated with it -- is not the answer. She is not a gentle storm, but a dangerous one. She “took over” Masekela’s recording and took control of Tsi’s mind. This dark, negative language reveals that although Tsi himself remains confused, Serote seems to encourage readers to support Masekela and other South African artists.

Tsi’s violent reaction to the American artist as “pounding [him] to a pulp” contrasts sharply with the ‘music’ of Alexandra, which he interprets as “purrs and buzzes in the air, in the sun, in the wind, in the eyes of men, in the bodies of the women, it purrs and purrs and purrs” (22). This soft township music is ‘performed’ by Alexandra’s community -- a collective from which Tsi remains isolated. Serote draws a connection between the “pounding” American noise and the soothing “purrs” of Alexandra. This softer, purring form of music, Serote implies, is the better form -- the South African form. The American music may present itself to Tsi as a safe haven during his moments of isolation, but the music of Alexandra functions as an invitation to join the actual safety inherent in the collective of the Movement.

The community members involved in the Movement make little reference to American music. They are already engaged in -- and by -- the music of

Alexandra. The music heard on the streets is the music of the Movement; a woman sings:

We remove the blood, it's not nice to walk on
 We remove the bodies
 It would be terrible to see dogs eat them
 And then we hope
 Hope for what? ...
 I know we are much more than that
 We are people
 Who have struggled a long long time
 Now we have to use the lessons of our struggle! (142)

Serote is able to use his poetic background to compose songs rich with meaning, heritage, and hope. He uses these songs throughout Part II to motivate and unite members. Whereas American music functioned as a coping mechanism, an escape from Alexandra, Serote employs innately South African songs, composed by and for the Movement, to remind readers and characters that the Movement protects all its members, even in death. "Go well, go well, young fighter / We will always remember you" (245), they sing at a funeral. Join the Movement, they urge, "This is a heavy load, / It needs strong men and women" (247). The Movement is mature enough to produce its own music from within. It relies now on its own internal strength, rather than on 'out-sourced' music, the music of America.

The idea of American music as a coping mechanism in Part I is seen in Tsi's interaction with it; he views it as a refuge with which to escape his own life. In describing the American music, Serote recalls the organic imagery he used to describe the Movement; instead of images of tall, stately trees, however, he refers

to dark storms. This alternate, dangerous shift reveals to the reader that American music functions only to provide Tsi with false consciousness. The music is associated with his alienation; once the collective takes over the plot, the American music disappears. Serote implies that American music and ideals are irrelevant to the South African Movement. The Movement is strong enough to provide its own music, guidance and support.

The Development of Generational and Familial Interactions

The depiction of generations and families in *To Every Birth* does not follow the conventions of protest literature. Neither Part I nor Part II includes the three distinct generations. Instead, Tsi's generation is present throughout the text, while Part I portrays generations above Tsi's, and Part II focuses mainly on the generation below. Although the three generations are not included in the same section, Serote demonstrates that those who respect generational differences and familial ties are more successful in resisting apartheid. Thus, the generational connections and familial interactions in *To Every Birth* imply that everyone must work together to fight apartheid: families must unite, and generations must learn from each other, passing knowledge from one generation to the next.

Families in Part I do not play an important role. Although Tsi occasionally spends time with his family, when they are together he cannot connect with them. For instance, when Tsi spends a week in prison after being arrested and tortured for a traffic violation, he does not tell his family. Although they directly ask him why he disappeared, he defers answering. "Don't worry

about what happens to me,” he tells them (81). Even when accused of living selfishly, he ignores them. “Go to hell, you always think you live alone in this world, other people are concerned about you” his mother “angrily” tells him (81). He responds, “Tell them I am in hell” (81). Because he refuses to explain his imprisonment, his answer about hell sounds like avoidance. His family takes this comment as a snide remark, not expecting that the hell he refers to is apartheid’s illegal incarceration. His closed-off manner further alienates him from his family, leaving him alone to face his grief.

Because he is not connected to his family, he is unable to learn from his father, a member of Part I’s older generation. He seems aware of both the battles they fought and the reasons for their surrender, but ultimately, he does not seem to care about their past. He reflects:

Many townships have gone and many people have gone down with them. ... Long ago, [my father] used to walk fast, wake up early in the morning, work late into the night. Now something has happened to his movements. His back bends forward, he walks slowly, almost dragging his left leg. ... Every time I see my father I think about the stories he used to tell us. About what happened to him as a little boy. As a young man, when he began to work for the white people, and when he realized he had to rely on himself. ... Then suddenly, as if the clouds had gathered and covered the sun, a gloom hung on his face, eyes, and even in the house. ... Something had snapped. Nothing was visible. No words meant anything. ... These old people had, with all their strength, with all their lives, tried to build a future for us, but everything was against it. The eyes of the old people, their voices, their movement, even the way they chose their words to talk to us, or the way they would now and then hold our hands, had an end, an admonishment about it. Nothing seemed to be alive anymore. ... Yes, the old people had no more strength, there had not been any battles won, everyone of them was worn out. (51-53)

Tsi knows they are no longer politically active, but recognizes that once they were. They gave up, he realizes, not out of cowardice, but because they literally lost the energy to resist.¹⁰

With this understanding, Tsi finally begins to realize what his parent's generation has gone through, and the legacy he is expected to continue:

I began to understand what kept him [my father] so quiet. I began to understand why he seemed to be frightened by us, Fix, Ndo and myself. I began to understand why he was so close to his daughter, so far away from his wife, and I realised what his eyes were saying, with their ever-weary, bloodshot look. I began to understand why his shoulders were so bent, why his movement, as if carrying an unbearable load, seemed to creak, I began to understand. But then, that was just the beginning, it was just an understanding, I trembled to know, I had my own journey to make. (85)

Tsi, finally, realizes that he must take part in the Movement, but he does have the energy to begin. He knows that it will leave him “ever-weary, bloodshot.” He does not want to feel “far away from” his own wife. Consequently, Tsi's non-action throughout Part I is an inadvertent effect of the pain he recognizes in his parents. He is demobilized by their defeat. They have fought the battle and lost; Tsi sees no reason to begin his own.

In contrast to Tsi's disregard for his parent's once-revolutionary attitudes, he regards his grandmother with reverence. Respect of elders is prevalent throughout African literature, a reference to the traditions of many indigenous cultures. In protest literature, however, it holds another value: the generational connection between the protagonist and the elderly increases awareness of past

¹⁰ Clingman sees the first section of the text as “manifest[ing] the characteristic moods, methods and insights of the Black Consciousness movement”, which leads him to the conclusion that “the Black Consciousness generation [represented by the first section of the text] rejected its parents because of their political failures – and ... Tsi, for instance, sees only defeat in his” (Clingman 51).

political wrongs. During Tsi's arrest, as he suffers through extreme "spiritual, psychological torture" and "physical brutality,"¹¹ he gathers strength from her memory. He remembers the lessons she taught him about solidarity; lessons involving Tsi's "journey," one that must "be made with and among other people" (73).¹² He hears his grandmother saying that he "was the only one who would know which people [he] could make the journey with" (73). He recalls lessons about the history of his people: "Child you must know, in the darkness of your past, where you come from ... that your past is so scattered, nothing could hold it, that you have a future to build" (73). This is the moment when he decides he must end his career as a journalist, which affords him little to no political voice, and take control of his own life. Influenced by his grandmother, Tsi finally decides to take control of his own life.

The alienation Tsi feels from his father also reveals another important aspect of Serote's text. Education is a theme that runs throughout Part I, expressed mainly in reference to the difference between his parents education and Tsi's own. From his father's point of view, Tsi's education caused his alienation:

Education had fucked my [Tsi's] mind up, he [Tsi's father] would say. His heroes were old men like him, who knew the law, who had respect, who were not like me, reading what white people said and believing it, and then walking the streets at night, hardly having time for God, cursing him for creating day and night instead of a long, endless day. 'You ashame us, you young people,' my father would say." (86)

¹¹ Quotations taken from Serote's own description of being imprisoned in solitary confinement in 1969 without trial (Solberg, 180).

¹² Tsi's grandmother encourages him, in this passage, to become aware of, and join, the community and the Movement. Although he ultimately never does, this message resonates with Serote's audience. In Part II of *To Every Birth*, the characters do join the Movement. It seems, to the reader, as if they have taken the grandmother's advice.

Education separates the generations. Only after Tsi joins the staff at McLean's College does he realize the truth in his father's statement.¹³ In the final chapter of Part I, as Serote sets up the issues at stake in Part II, Tsi says, "Education is a socialising agency; in South Africa, black children are subjected to an education which is instrumental in imparting the dominant ideology of apartheid or separate development, a system which the black people in general abhor... History is taught, in both white and black schools, to distort the reality of South Africa; enforced segregation in schools entrenches the segregation system as a whole" (129). Interestingly, these same ideals motivate the Soweto Uprisings, ultimately giving rise to protest literature. After the Uprisings, children stopped attending school as an act of protest; consequently, issues surrounding education disappear from Part II, even as the younger generation is introduced.

In Part II, the generations shift. Serote introduces Oupa, Tsi's cousin and foil. Rather than sharing Tsi's alienated parents and upbringing, Oupa grew up surrounded by the community's support and care. Serote describes him as "a typical boy from the corner, moulded and nurtured by Alexandra" (156). Because

¹³ Tsi does try to align himself with a community. He takes a job at the fictional McLean's college, where he heads "a research unit which was aimed at compiling syllabuses for high school dropouts, and investigating ways of effectively introducing the correspondence school to the blacks in South Africa" (Serote, *To Every Birth* 120). Ultimately, McLean's is not the type of organization that Serote hopes his readers will join. He wants them to join the community, and so Tsi, functioning in this capacity as Serote's voice, determines that, "McLean's College is not the answer to the problems of pupils in the country. The root cause of these problems was the system created by the Government" (129). Part I ends with the implication that although Tsi has tried to change himself and those around him, he faces a force too large for a single man to change. He must align with the Movement to fight the government. Tsi, however, is not yet ready for this shift from alienation and loneliness to collective action. The last line of the section, "A silence fell among us," (132), echoes the alienation and loneliness Tsi experiences throughout Part I, and sets the stage for the community action that occurs throughout Part II.

of the community's involvement, Oupa does not acquire Tsi's defeatist attitude. Instead, he learns to be "respectful" of his elders (156). As a young adult, he joins the Movement.

Serote further highlights the difference between Tsi and Oupa by making an example out of Oupa. His respectful attitude and participation in the Movement exemplifies Serote's ideal version of South African youth. Consequently, Oupa is arrested and he dies in custody. He is, Serote implies, exactly the type of youth the government most fears, exactly the type of youth who has the power to overthrow the government, and exactly the type of youth Serote most encourages his readers to become.

In addition to Oupa, Serote creates a family, the Ramonos, that contrasts Tsi's family, the Molopes. The Ramonos are strong and resilient. They love and nurture each other and members of their community. Serote describes the husband, Mike, as "a tough landlord" (179), but one who "got on well" with people "who understood him" (179). His wife extends Mike's example of leadership, caring for the neighborhood children when they are sick, giving advice to "women in the yard" (179), and organizing the chores of the women who stay in the house with her. Despite being the landlord -- and thus presumably more wealthy than his tenants, a fact that likely causes tension in the poor black townships -- the community respects Mike. The narrator reveals the respect with which Mike treats the community in return: "But whatever he did, he consulted his other tenants: and whatever decision was taken was a collective decision"

(179). From this first description of the Ramonos, the reader understands that they are politically involved, active members of the Movement. This involvement is the reason for their status as leaders of the community.

Although Mike Ramono is arrested and suffers a drawn-out court case that results in fifteen years on Robben Island -- a “long, long time” (189), his sentence inspires his daughter to take action. Dikeledi reflects after the trial:

She felt very sad. She felt sad because she knew, she understood so well that South Africa had shut out all other choices. There was no way now that any other thing could be done with the present way of life, with this South Africa, with the South African way of life; there was nothing else that could be done to save it; there was only one way left -- people had to fight. She understood now that there was no such thing as people being born free. She understood that there was no such thing as freedom being asked for, that freedom must be fetched, must be won, must be fought for. Her father had said it in court, and she agreed. (189)

Serote’s repetitive and parallel construction in this passage makes this passage resonate. Dikeledi is undergoing a dramatic and life-altering birth of consciousness. The repetition highlights the call to action; Serote tells the reader multiple times that there was “only one way left.” The Movement cannot remain inactive; if the community wants freedom, it must be “fetched... won... fought for.” Dikeledi’s reflection on her father and his trial convinces her to join the Movement. Her relationship with her father brings her to this political awakening and awareness.

In general, generations throughout *To Every Birth* bring characters to realizations concerning their necessary involvement in the Movement. This interaction will continue in typical protest literature, although as the genre

develops, the convention governing generations will become more and more specific; there are always three generations present in protest literature and each plays a specified role. Although Serote's own generations are not cast by function, looking at *To Every Birth* as a whole reveals the roots of the convention.

The Birth of Consciousness

The birth of consciousness in *To Every Birth* is enacted as Serote's characters reclaim their history. As the characters join the Movement, readers become aware of the value of the Movement and its lessons: power, strength, unification and history. Consciousness is born, then, not just in the characters, but also in the readers. Serote's text serves to motivate and mobilize black South Africans into action following the Soweto Uprisings.

Tsi, tellingly, never reclaims his history. Although warned by his grandmother of history's importance, he eventually follows his father's example and gives up any hope of fighting apartheid. Consequently, he never comes to consciousness. The message is clear: only after individual characters like Tsi unite in the Movement, becoming a 'single' collective character, can they expect to understand their world.

Other characters in the text, however, recognize that history has been ripped from their memory. Boykie realizes, "we have been beaten into submission" (66), and later, "...but that's because we are a defeated people" (68). Kewlyn Sole argues, "all memory can bring about is an acknowledgment of

defeat” (Sole, “This Time Set Again” 60). When fictional characters, or actual black South Africans, look at their past, they only see the history of the white conquest. The rest has been re-written, “beaten” out of black memory. Until texts are written about characters that are able to actively reverse the trend of defeat, and re-write the history of South Africa, the process of remembering is worthless. It holds only false memories that tell of the white government’s perpetual supremacy.

Dikeledi recognizes that an old woman named Ma-Maria is “still a fighter” (228). By using the word “still,” Serote emphasizes Ma-Maria’s age; she has been fighting apartheid for a long time. Like Boykie, Dikeledi knows her people suffer from historical blindness. She consequently determines she will ask the old woman about her life, her story, “for record, for history, for memory” (228). Accordingly, individual characters like Boykie and Dikeledi focus on the wrongs committed against the black people of South Africa; they expose the white mans’ crimes, and raise awareness of a history that has been taken from the black man. To understand the Movement, it is vital to understand the facts of the past. Understanding this history allows the people of Alexandra -- and the people of South Africa -- to reclaim their memory.

Once united, the characters begin to win their battles, such as the funeral where the policemen die. The Movement empowers them to forget the false defeat. They realize that their history was taken from them superficially, but that ultimately, history belongs to those who remember it. “Vorster you own guns, we

own history” (246), they chant at the climactic funeral. Regardless of how the white government tries to beat them, violence has no power over the history of a people in its land. Black South Africans have belonged on South African soil for the entire history of time; even killing all of them will not change this fact.

Together, the black citizenry stand up and recreate a history they know belongs to them -- it is “as old as the grave of the first San or Khoikhoi who was killed by a bullet that came from a ship which had anchored at Cape Town to establish a stop station” (258). The rhythm of this long sentence is reminiscent of a chant or nursery rhyme that is easily memorized and repeated to children. Serote uses this rhythm to establish the black history of South Africa as oral. Furthermore, by identifying an oral history, Serote suggests that it can easily be lost. If one generation fails to teach the next, then the people have lost their history. This missing past provides room for the apartheid government to establish their own version of the black man’s story.

Reminded of the importance of their oral heritage by the elderly who remain around them, the collective of Alexandra -- a symbol of the entirety of South Africa -- reclaims the history of their time in South Africa.

If people control time, Serote argues through his demand for historical redemption, they understand it. If they understand time, they control history. If they control history, they have the power to take back their land from their government, and fill the government with their own people. This reclaiming of history, evidenced by the transition from the alienation of Part I to the community

remembrance of Part II, serves as the final and ultimate Site of Resistance in *To Every Birth*.

Conclusion

Serote's *To Every Birth* was begun before the Soweto Uprisings. Consequently, it is possible to map the development of the genre of protest literature through the issues that develop and transform between Parts I and II. By the end of the novel, Serote explores five different themes that morph into the genre's conventions: individuals and communities, funerals and graveyards, American music, families and generations, and the birth of consciousness. Each of these is based on recognizable aspects of daily life, experiences that readers would relate to. In effect, the book mirrors reality. When readers see characters joining the Movement against apartheid, they too are motivated to join. To end apartheid, Serote argues, one must join the Movement. Its community enables members to rely on each other during a period when the government is failing its people.

CHAPTER 2

“The People have the Power!”: *Amandla* as Typical Protest Literature

Miriam Tlali’s first full-length novel, *Amandla* (1980), raises a voice of protest against apartheid. The single-word title is the Xhosa word for “Power.” It becomes the battle cry of the Movement against apartheid, both on the streets and in Tlali’s novel. While following the paradigm of protest literature, Tlali drafts a novel grounded in the relationships between members of her protagonist’s family, the Moremis. Balanced with these relationships is a series of condemnatory dialogues and accounts detailing the Moremi’s public censure of apartheid. The dual focus of the text – the relationships of the home and the politics of the street – provides a background for the five conventions I use to identify protest literature. Each of these conventions draws upon elements of daily South African experience. *Amandla* is thus an ideal example of protest literature because it uses recognizable elements of the everyday to become a Site of Resistance, impressing readers with the urgency of the call to join the Movement.

In a 1989 interview with Cecily Lockett, Miriam Tlali affirms that, “A novel is something you have to reflect on; you have to create it, you have to have characters, interplay of characters, it has to reflect what goes on in your society” (Lockett 71). In *Amandla*, Tlali does so by presenting daily reality in the lives of her characters. She describes her understanding of the writing process as creating

work which reflects “our lives ... about how we live, our feelings, our aspirations ... about the lives of (especially) black women in their relationship with white women in South Africa” (Tlali, “Quagmires” 96). The writing process for Tlali, then, partly explains to others what is happening in their lives, and partly helps her interpret her own. She depicts images of the everyday; scenes of “detentions without trial, deaths in detention, the detention of children” (96) fill both the streets of South Africa and the pages of her book. “All I do,” she asserts, “is write about the true situation as I see it” (97). By grounding *Amandla* in South Africa’s streets, Tlali replicates South African experience. Black South African readers can easily identify themselves as characters in *Amandla*, and, Tlali hopes, alter their own actions to emulate those of *Amandla*’s idealistic characters.¹

The Story

Amandla opens with stories of rioting in Johannesburg’s city center. It introduces the main character, Pholoso, and the people close to him. The reader meets Felleng, Pholoso’s girlfriend, and two of his close friends, Sipho and Dumisani. It also introduces the recurring image of the media; township people throughout the text rely on the government radio for information about the “truth” of the political situation.

¹ Sarah Nuttall interviewed southern African women in a study she conducted to determine what attracted women to the literature they read. In her article, “Reading in the Lives and Writing of Black South African Women,” she explains “the didactic power of reading,” saying, “reading is for political knowledge, is linked to political action, and is important for ‘conscientising’ the community. By implication, Tlali’s own text is put forward as a ‘tool’ of politicisation (although Tlali uses some fictional conventions her work is more of a historical record)” (87).

The next chapter thrusts *Amandla* forward a year, to June 16, 1976, the day of the Soweto Uprisings. The reader hears an account of the events through Pholoso, who runs to his aunt's house as the riots end. He relates the circumstances of Dumisani's death to his aunt, Nana, her husband, T, and their family. Taking a newspaper out of his pocket, he looks at "a picture of a boy who had been shot, lying limply in the arms of a youth, while his anguished sister ran alongside, away from the storm of police bullets" (Tlali, *Amandla* 11). This



Image of Hector Pieterse, the first death of Soweto.

image of Hector Pieterse is an image all of South Africa can instantly recall.² It has earned its place in South African popular culture as a symbol of the Movement; by including it, Tlali places *Amandla* in the center of post-Soweto politics.

After Chapter 2, the text follows Pholoso's community in the year after Soweto, as they bury their dead, continue to organize underground student-led resistance movements, and watch the township around them suffer many more protests and acts of resistance. Tlali cultivates Pholoso's close relationship with his paternal grandmother, Gramsy, even during his imprisonment, release, and underground 'exile.'

About half-way through her text, Tlali introduces the black policemen of the community; Sergeant Mamabolo's wife is having an affair with a Constable, Nicodemus. Each aims to kill the other, remaining free to claim the wife, Teresa. Both are, instead, shot by insurgents.

The text closes after Gramsy's death, with Pholoso's self-imposed exile to Swaziland and separation from Felleng.

² Hector Pieterse was the famous first casualty of June 16, 1976. This photograph, as described by Tlali, is an often referred to image that symbolizes the horror of Soweto and the strength of the resistance movement. Hector, aged 12, is just one of the many children who died because of a peaceful protest. (Pohlandt-McCormick, Helena. "Essay: Story of a Photograph - Sam Nzima." "I Saw a Nightmare:" Doing Violence to Memory: The Soweto Uprising, June 16, 1976. Columbia University Press & Gutenberg-e.org. 29 April 2008. <<http://www.gutenberg-e.org/pohlandt-mccormick/pmh01a.html>>.)

Gathering Strength through Families and Generations

The first of the five conventions of protest literature concerns the presence of familial and cross-generational ties. Like all protest literature, Tlali clearly establishes three generations: the youth, the parents, and the grandparents.

Pholoso is the generation of youth; he is a soldier in the school-aged battles against Bantu Education. This generation comprises the “school-kids ... turn[ing] the world upside-down” with threats of “boycotts and strikes” (99-100). Because of them, the police “are overworked. Too many students are being arrested and the police have their hands full. More attention is directed at the students than at the other members of the public. The students are considered a potential threat” (135). They are the citizens ruling Soweto in the post-Uprising days.

Pholoso’s parents’ generation, the same generation as Tsi’s parents in *To Every Birth*, are apathetic and misguided. Like Tsi’s parents, they are aware of the fight around them, but unable to get involved. ““The *children*,”” one of these adults “sigh[s], ‘they can be so determined!’” (23). The emphasis on the word “children” makes it seem as if the children’s age, not their politics, is responsible for the Uprising. The word “determined” underscores the adults’ condescension towards the children around them. They patronize the children’s game: skipping school, the parents assume, will not help fight a battle that is already lost. A school principle insists, “the school children are not kids, and they know what they want” (24). Although the adults in *Amandla* are aware of the children’s

Movement, they feel defeated and see the Movement as futile. They can no longer fight what they see as an “issue [that] has been a bone of contention for a long time” (24). Although “bone of contention” is a figurative expression, the literal meaning of the phrase refers to a skeleton, which makes apartheid the foundation of the community’s South African experience. Tlali’s use of the phrase “bone of contention” reveals the adults’ perception of apartheid as an ingrained and inescapable South African institution. It has become part of their bodies and their souls.

Although mentioned only briefly, Tlali includes an old man, Makalo Magong, to establish the generation that remembers. His age demonstrates how long the Boers have been in control, and his presence in the story reminds other characters of this history. As he watches flames consume the second government building in two days, he “need[s] time to think, to grasp fully the significance of the spectacle before him” (57). It holds his attention, and he stands, fixated: “He gape[s], tongue-tied, waiting for his feeble mind to work so that the meaning of all this could sink in. It was actually happening, right there in front of him, in his own lifetime ... the *Boer-krag*, the Boer might, was burning to ashes – crumbling right in front of him ... Unbelievable!” (57). His inability to process his own participation in something that “only God can do” (57) calls to mind the decades of Boer control. At 83, Magong remembers working for the Boers as a child. Although he hoped that their “might” would fall, he never imagined they would.

As a member of the oldest generation in *Amandla*, he passes on the story of his long life and the Boer's long rule to the children of Soweto.

After establishing generational divisions, Tlali creates endearing relationships between them that set her work apart from other protest literature. By centering the story around Pholoso's family, Tlali indicates the importance of families in the struggle. His family, the Moremis, raised Pholoso in an educated household; they all work together to enable Pholoso's success. The third person omniscient narrator announces, "Thanks to Gramsy, his aunt Nana and her studious husband, T, Pholoso had developed his young, inquiring mind" (90). His family has nurtured in him the respect for his own mind that the Movement teaches its followers.

Because of his family's care, Pholoso has the courage and self-conviction to become an active leader,³ spreading the Movement among other students. Being part of his family does not entitle him to this position of leadership; instead, his familial relationships prepare him to earn it. He encourages fellow student leaders the same way his family supported him. He tells them, "Sit down under a tree and read. It is good for your soul. Remember the words of Mao-Tse-Tung: 'Revolution begins within the consciousness of men.' We have to start changing from within before we liberate our people" (92-93). Pholoso's philosophy echoes that of the Black Consciousness Movement.

³ In this capacity, Pholoso is depicted as a charismatic young man, a "fluent, articulate speaker" (90), and "an indispensable force" (90) in the organization. Described as "suave" (80), his voice alone is enough to "immediately instill confidence in the hearts of the dedicated core of young" students (82).

At the same time, Tlali uses Pholoso's respected voice as her own. Through Pholoso, she tells readers to take charge of their own lives; if they want liberation they must first convince themselves they deserve it. In his speech's closing, Pholoso announces, "As a human being, you must believe in something. We are dedicated to the struggle for liberation. *Amandla Ngawethu!* [The people have the power!]" (93, translation added). Because his family has believed in him, he has strength to believe in his peers and in the Movement. Tlali advocates the Movement by first creating a character empowered by his close-knit family, and then delivering the message through him.

A second way Tlali uses families to encourage participation in the Movement is by cultivating strong bonds between Pholoso and his paternal grandmother, Gramsy. When apartheid rips this relationship apart, the reader, who now respects the Moremis and their support of Tsi, is shocked -- perhaps even outraged -- into action.

In a conversation with her sister, Gramsy explains her special connection to Pholoso: "How can I keep from liking him so much, Marta? Pholoso is the child of the son I lost, the only son I ever had ... Pholoso himself cannot stand the idea of being separated from me. I shall never let him go. He is mine. He has taken the place of his father in my heart" (39). She feels an affinity towards Pholoso that can only be described by the bond between a mother and son. Pholoso's presence comforts Gramsy, whenever the two are together, Gramsy is

happy and relieved. Tlali describes her face as “[lighting] up when she saw him” (269).

After emphasizing this bond, Tlali betrays it three times. She first separates Pholoso and Gramsy by imprisoning Pholoso for his revolutionary activities. When Pholoso escapes from prison, he immediately runs in the “direction of his home where, he knew, Gramsy would be thankful to see that he was alive and well” (169). This reunion is brief, as Tlali separates the two a second time, taking Pholoso ‘underground’ as he continues his involvement in the Movement. Although ill, Gramsy stays alive long enough to see Pholoso one last time. The two literally form a life-sustaining relationship with each other; their forced separations underscore the impact apartheid has on the daily lives of oppressed black citizens. Tlali describes their final meeting, saying: “there was very little they could say to each other, but the gratitude, the happiness and contentment he detected on her face were enough to convince Pholoso that Gramsy had ultimately realized her dream. ‘Pholoso, you’re back at last,’ she sighed in relief when he put her to bed and kissed her for the last time” (270). After Gramsy’s death, Pholoso is filled with the warmth of the final meeting. Her unwavering trust in him provides Pholoso with the strength to continue his resistance.

Their close bond allows this relationship to endure the stresses of apartheid, but their inevitable -- and forced -- separations disgust the reader. Gramsy’s death becomes the ultimate insult; although readers may not relate to

imprisonment and underground ‘exile,’ natural death affects everybody. Readers mourn the loss of Gramsy as keenly as Pholoso does; they understand the pain her death causes him, and recognize that apartheid is responsible for it.

Apartheid separates families, through incarceration, revolutionary action, and exile. These separations make inevitable death all the more poignant. Tlali’s portrayal of the frailty of life and the life-supporting nature of familial relationships, juxtaposed against the oppressive regime that overpowers them, creates urgency in her call to join the Movement. Black citizens, Tlali forces readers to recognize, cannot live under an apartheid system that separates families.

The Good and the Bad: the Polar Communities in *Amandla*

The tension between various community in *Amandla* becomes the second convention of protest literature. Throughout the text, Tlali’s omniscient narrator switches between his own voice and other character’s voices. Adopting this narrator allows Tlali to speak to her reader from many different points of view. As these various voices align, Tlali creates a sense of community between her characters. Tlali also creates an exterior, or bad, community by profiling characters who aid in the government’s control of its black citizens. These two communities battle for control of the narrative, and the government.

Instead of profiling a single character, giving the impression that apartheid only subjugated individuals, *Amandla*’s episodic structure reveals the thoughts

and actions of many different people. This narrator presents an objective view of the Soweto that formed in the wake of the Uprisings, explaining the root of its close-knit community:

Almost everyone in Soweto had had the same personal reason never to forget the 16th of June of the previous year. There had been varying forms of tribulation in nearly every household and family circle. The agony of loss and disaster had left its indelible mark on everyone. The after-effects of the student demonstration and resultant widespread riots were similar to the perils suffered during wars and epidemics. (272)

The unprecedented oppression of June 16, 1976 forces this community to unite.

While Tlali's community never receives the personification that Serote assigns his, her consistent character-switching implies a connection among all black South Africans.

The people have established a clear 'us against them' mentality that is apparent throughout the text. Although the government tries to control every aspect of their lives, the community enables the people to resist. For instance, the police appear at Dumisani's funeral to monitor and limit political action. Pholoso, wanted by the police as a leader of the student movement, stands up to pay his respects, but is not recognized by the police. The mourners know of both the police's presence, and Pholoso's identity, yet reveal nothing to the police. Tlali writes, "Without any formal introduction, the mourners watched as he moved to the fore. Many of his schoolmates who immediately recognized the suave student leader's voice, were by now aware of the intention to conceal his identity. Their attentive faces revealed little to arouse undesirable official curiosity" (79-80). They are united in their actions, fighting the police and the government.

Even their thoughts seem united. The omniscient narrator reveals that the police force is seen as “the intimidators ... with their dogs and guns” (119).

Throughout the text, many different points of view are presented; each of them with the same effect: the youth call black policemen “[spies], traitor[s] of the people” (139). Two policemen are tortured. The youth want to “deal with them so they will remain a living example” of what happens to those who defy the people. Black police are called “rats...the most vicious, cold-blooded and cruel torturers they have in the force...lice” (140). The people in Soweto’s community view the black police with derision.

While most of the characters are involved in the Movement, Tlali uses the images of black policemen to represent all those who are not. As the initial shock of the Uprisings dies down, Tlali introduces the “kaffer-konstabels” (44) Nicodemus and Lazarus. The derogatory term “kaffer-konstabels” may have been applied to them by the black community they live in or the white community they work for; Tlali leaves it unclear. This ambiguity allows her to indicate their low social standing among both groups. They are described as being in a profession that is “so unpopular” that “lesser and lesser numbers (especially in the urban areas) were prepared to take the decisive plunge” out of the Movement to join the oppressors (44). Those who are part of the police force are working for the government, and those working for the government become an enemy of the people.

Ironically, the police perceive the situation differently. They see themselves as the community's true protectors. During the Zulu Impi rampage, Pholoso, with the help of his community, escapes from the police van that is transporting him between prisons. From the police's point of view, they see a woman of the community break from the crowd to come talk to them. They do not see the young boy who uses this distraction to open the door of the van. As the woman flirts with them, the omniscient narrator shares the policemen's thoughts: "Here was someone prepared to disassociate from the 'hooligans' and the 'intimidators'. She [the flirting woman] was demonstrating her loyalty to the true defenders of the people of Soweto" (167). The police think they are saving Soweto from itself, from the "hooligans" and "intimidators" it is populated with. They have separated from the community, and in doing so aligned themselves with their "true defenders" – the government.

After isolating Sergeant Mamabolo and Constable Nicodemus as traitors of the community, Tlali makes an example out of them. The two community "defenders" find themselves driven apart by their mutual love for Mamabolo's wife. Although each plots to kill the other, they both die in a bloody scene staged by anonymous "guerillas" (262). Tlali creates the guerillas only as artifices; condemning the policemen for joining the wrong side, she punishes them. Instead of allowing them the mercy of killing one another, she has them murdered by an anonymous force bigger than either one of the policemen. The "eager, efficient men who had been trained in Russia, and who had come specifically for the

purpose of eradicating ‘pests’ like Mamabolo” (263) stage their deaths to look like a shoot-out between the two policemen. The death of these two traitors, these two “pests,” reveals Tlali’s disdain of government employees. As government employees, they defied the people, and they died.

Like all protest literature, *Amandla*’s communities create a polar society: good (the people) versus bad (the government). Movement between these two groups seems impossible; all black South Africans are expected to side with the people. Tlali uses the black policemen as a severe admonition to her readers: choosing the wrong side of the war condemns one to death.

Funerals and Graveyards as Political Motivators

The third convention of protest literature is the use of funerals and graveyards to symbolize the struggle of the period. *Amandla*, like Serote’s *To Every Birth*, uses its main funeral scene as a site of resistance. Serote sets his text’s climax at a funeral, providing his characters with an opportunity to attack rather than being attacked -- it is a site of literal protest. Tlali, however, sets her main funeral scene earlier, using it as a site of political motivation. Those at the funeral are paying their respects to Dumisani, Pholoso’s best friend who “had been one of the first to give his life” in the opening scene’s riots against “the notorious system of Bantu Education” (75). By calling him “one of the first,” Tlali invokes the famous image of Hector Pieterse, the first death of Soweto, that Pholoso had seen on the front page of the paper. This implied image reminds the

reader of the politics behind Dumisani's own death. Because the funeral is associated with a political death, it becomes attached to the political unrest that underlies the whole novel. Upon learning whose funeral this is, and understanding its political implications, the reader becomes immediately aware that this scene, and what transpires in it, bears importance.

The scene opens with a conversation between Nana and Betty, two community women lamenting the government's control over the funeral. "This thing of refusing us permission to hold a mass funeral for all those who died on the 16th," Betty starts, "We should be left alone to bury our dead the way *we* want. Who interferes with them when they bury theirs?" (73). Tlali uses Betty to reveal her own objections to the government's invasive policies, presumably established to prevent riots at the funeral. Especially at a political funeral, Betty and Nana must keep their voices quiet; even among their own people, there are traitors -- as demonstrated by the black policemen -- who could be "informers in the procession" (75). Danger is everywhere, and black South Africans are never safe nor free from the oppression. Even the township's children are forced to "evade" the police by "living like birds ... in old cars, dongas, garages" (75). Although the women's voices are quiet in this scene, Tlali's own voice is strong. She issues constant warning to her readers, encouraging them and training them to take up the fight with both alacrity and alertness.

The government tries to control political funerals; in addition to preventing traditional burials and recruiting spies among the people, it places

police vans around the periphery of the scene. Tlali mentions the vans frequently, reminding readers about the political nature of life and death in South African townships. The police sit and watch as school-children “march” by (75); they hide in their “long columns of waiting police-vans – anxious, gleaming eyes just visible through the heavily-wired windows” (75). The irony of this scene is hard to miss; while the women discuss their collective fear of the police and for their children, the police -- the community’s self-appointed “defenders” -- sit “anxiously” in highly-protected, “heavily-wired” vans watching the procession. They hide from the gathering crowd, evidently more afraid and better protected than the township’s citizens.

The main speaker at the funeral is Abraham Tiro, a “popular student leader at Turfloop University” (76).⁴ By choosing a student who is not part of the cast of characters, Tlali implies that the Movement is taking place across the country, not just in the townships surrounding Johannesburg. Even though he is not from Soweto, he is, as a black South African youth, inherently part of the Movement. The speaker appeals to the emotions of those present, announcing, “The echo of Sharpeville on the sixteenth of March 1960 resounded in Soweto on the sixteenth of June 1976” (77). Tiro equates the two events, appealing to both those who were at Sharpeville 16 years earlier and those youth who participated in, or were affected by, the Soweto Uprisings. He reminds people that this

⁴ Turfloop University is a school in Limpopo, a northern region of South Africa. It was a black university, and sent members of its Student Representative Council (SRC) to the December 1968 meeting organized by Steve Biko to establish SASO (Gerhart 261). Turfloop University consequently has a history of active participation in the Movement. Tlali’s readers would have understood this important reference.

struggle is a part of their history -- people have been fighting for decades, and should continue to fight.

Tiro continues his speech:

We salute our dead with humility. Dumisani Daluxolo was one of those who laid down their lives in the struggle against the unjust society where truth is blindly ignored... It is true that the whites of this land deliberately and consciously deny the blacks that right to freedom...It is an undeniable truth that we the blacks are of this continent of Africa....What is the use of that exaltation and momentary delight as you [the Afrikaans] retire with your gun at the end of the day, as you reflect and pride yourself in the knowledge that you have mowed down what you call 'rebels' when you can never destroy their spirit of determination. (77-78)

Although delivered by a single person, Tiro constructs his speech in first person plural, incorporating every black citizen of South Africa. The statement, "we the blacks are of this continent of Africa," unites the funeral attendees with all black South Africans. As a single people, they experience the same "unjust" social conditions, standing together in the "spirit of determination" that will bring them a new future.⁵

Tlali describes a pause in Tiro's speech: "There was silence. The speech was long, and yet the huge crowd stood in unflagging attention. They were gripped by the stern eloquence and sincerity of the young lawyer" (78-79). Tiro mesmerizes the audience, who absorb his every word. Tlali indicates the power

⁵ Tlali's mention of the "spirit of determination" in *Amandla* echoes a article she wrote in the 1980s entitled "Quagmires and quicksands." In this article, depicts the hardships of daily life and the endurance of the African people under apartheid. "The people of Soweto and the other townships," she remembers, "were taking the reins into their own hands and trying to find a foothold in the chaotic, beleaguered black residential areas. They were all the time protesting, demanding and clamouring for a voice behind the locked 'doors'. There was to be no turning back. The people were determined. The police shootings and police brutality were not going to deter them. The whole country was literally seething with resentment from school-children and workers, from young and old-alike" (Tlali, "Quagmires" xxx).

of this funeral speech by describing the audience's "unflagging attention." Tiro concludes his motivational speech with a call to action: "Surely the power that motivated them into action will not stop here, it will go on working" (79). Tlali wants the audience to pass on the funeral's message to others who were not there, just as she wants *Amandla*'s message to be passed from those who have read it to those who have not.⁶

Tiro's speech is another instance of authorial intervention in *Amandla*. Tlali justifies her intervention in a 1994 interview with Rosemary Jolly, saying, "I did it deliberately, I preached ... What I was interested in was to get anybody, any African who read the book, to be conscious of the system. That was my intent" (Jolly 144). Using Tiro as her voice, Tlali "hit[s] at it [the unjustness of their society] without any reservation at all" (144). Tiro is the ideal character for this message; he is from everywhere and anywhere, he is from a township and also educated. He is both the people in his audience, and Tlali's readers.

The funeral scene ends with a reiteration of the community's unity. When Pholoso is overcome by emotion and no longer able to speak, he "raise[s] his clenched fist" causing "the multitude [to] instantly and unanimously roar[s] a deafening 'Amandla!'" (Tlali, *Amandla* 80). They are for each other, united in thought and action. Those who attend the funeral unaware of its politics would

⁶ Tlali frequently references the media, mainly radio, and its power to pass on knowledge and inspire conversation; "At home, in Soweto, the residents had already learnt of the drama in the city centre through the various news media ... the excitement was even more pronounced" (Tlali, *Amandla* 6); "Have you people heard what the radio says?" (24). Characters in *Amandla* who listen to the radio discuss what they have heard often take the radio's messages as truth. Just as the radio influences people's awareness and understanding, so too can a funeral speech influence people's awareness and understanding of the Movement.

leave aware that the community is strong enough to fight the power of the government; likewise, those who start reading *Amandla* unaware of Tlali's political agenda would finish it aware of the government's corruptness and the importance of the Movement.

American Influence in *Amandla*

The fourth convention of protest literature is the presence of America as a force for change. Interestingly, Serote uses America as a false consciousness; it leads his characters away from the truth of the Movement. Tlali, on the other hand, employs America differently; America, in *Amandla*, functions as an way to begin discussion about the Movement. Tlali first mentions America during Dumisani's funeral. Tiro, near the beginning of his speech, compares South Africa to America, saying:

America is just now celebrating its bicentenary. Two hundred years since the foundation for a just society was laid. That the right to freedom of all peoples shall be respected, and government shall be by the people, of the people and for the people...Like Abraham Lincoln, we are saying now that 'Those who died did not die in vain...' (77)

This speech invites conversation about America, South Africa and their influence on each other. The civil rights movement influenced South Africa's liberation movement, but Tiro is not idolizing the civil rights movement, but America's founding fathers. They are, Tiro implies, the first people responsible for a "just society" that allows for "freedom of all peoples"; the concept of a "just society" is over 200 years old, he laments, and still South Africa is not free. Lincoln's

quotation becomes a call to action. It is time, Tiro asserts, to change the way South Africa views freedom.

The next time Tlali refers to America, she does so through a casual reference to Henry Kissinger in the context of his visit to South Africa. As Pholoso escapes from the police van, the police chief wants to shoot him, but, recalling the advice of his superior, he does not: “shooting would only result in many casualties. He had had the presence of mind to remember that the chief of Riot Police had warned them strongly against any indiscriminate shootings, especially as the Prime Minister was on his way to the meeting with Mr. Kissinger” (168). The police are evidently aware of their tendency towards heavy-handed punishment. They are embarrassed, on the occasion of Kissinger’s visit, and feel the need to restrain from typical defensive measures. America, in this instance, serves as a moderator, limiting the number of apartheid related deaths. The South African government is on its best behavior when Western countries are involved; one character points out that, “The system here [South Africa] is really maintained by these powers, who have vested interests in” South Africa (248).

This comment begins a heated conversation regarding American and British interests in South Africa. Tlali uses the conversation to discuss the varying political arguments that are present in 1980, at the time of publication. After Soweto, politics of the street became increasingly heated; in a response as

early as *Amandla*, published just four years after Soweto, the issues had not yet been resolved.

Like her funeral scene, Tlali again chooses a minor character who is not part of Pholoso's family to present one of the arguments. Killer Molatudi is "an old family friend" (211) of T's, and his voice indicates the widespread concern over the government's oppressive reaction to Soweto. The other main argument is presented by Pholoso's uncle, T, who insists that western countries will help black South Africans end apartheid, even if their own motivation is different.

The first point of view offered is T's, who asserts, "the big powers have vested interests here. They are therefore concerned about having a stable state of affairs here to protect and ensure the safety of those interests" (248). He insists that there are western "organizations and trans-national forces which are in operation against this regime" (249). Referring to "strong pressure groups [created by] the black Civil Rights Movements, church-groups and liberal organizations found in such countries as the United States" (250), T argues that South Africans are not alone in their fight against apartheid. "The present U.S. policy to cripple the South African system by adopting a firm anti-Bantustan emphasis and support for majority rule here, cannot be belittled" (252), he concludes. They will have help, if indirectly, from outside.

Killer argues exactly the opposite. "It would be childish," he objects, "to expect that we should be given our freedom by other people" (249). He interrupts T to continue, "These children have merely stumbled into this. ... What transpired

after that – all this confusion and indecision prevailing now – demonstrates the lack of foresight of the leaders we have” (250-1). T quickly silences him, accusing Killer of contradicting himself. Killer, T argues, must be unaware of the true situation on the streets:

Are you really suggesting that these riots came about without any prior awareness whatsoever, that they were merely an accident? What do you think has been going on all along? Where do you come from anyway? You yourself speak of ‘the long-smoldering wrath’. Where does that wrath smolder from? You must be going about with your eyes shut and your ears plugged. (251)

T’s exuberant criticism temporarily suspends the conversation in a “long silence” (251).

At this point in the conversation, it is unclear which side of the argument represents Tlali’s own voice. The conversation moves back and forth in a perpetual tug-of-war, covering little ground. Tlali’s voice finally comes through Zwane, T’s neighbor, who is invited to join the conversation as the silence lengthens. “As I see it,” Zwane begins, “you two people are totally agreed on one point, that is, we have to free ourselves. That’s the real issue, and no one disputes that” (252). By constructing the phrase, “we have to free ourselves,” Tlali leaves her meaning vague; she could mean either, ‘we must eventually be free,’ or, ‘we must rely upon ourselves for freedom.’ This intentional ambiguity leaves the argument open, encouraging further discussion by readers. In effect, Tlali is merely “livening the debate on these questions” (Sachs, “Preparing” 239). Ultimately, Zwane concludes, “We all want our land back, all of it. That is the feeling of every black man, woman and child in this country” (Tlali, *Amandla*

253). The conversation ends with Killer “[shaking] his head in despair... [and] sighing” (253).

Tlali does not reach a conclusion about how to structure the Movement, but the fifty pages she dedicates to the discussion act as the central material of her text. The remainder presents options for enacting the Movement, employing each of the five themes of protest literature as possible sites of resistance against apartheid. Whereas Serote establishes a firm opinion on America as a site of resistance -- it is a threat to the Movement as it offers an alluring, yet mistaken, sense of hope to the community -- Tlali makes no such judgment. Instead, like the civil rights movement’s influence on South African liberation, Tlali uses America to influence and begin thinking about the Movement in *Amandla*.

Birth of Consciousness

The birth of consciousness in *Amandla* comes through the story of Pholoso’s exile to Swaziland. The final chapter depicts Pholoso’s farewell to his girlfriend, Felleng, while reviewing the major events of the story and reiterating the main themes. First Tlali re-establishes the power that Pholoso’s presence has on people; he is the leader of the people. Felleng’s mother, upon shaking hands with Pholoso, recognizes his as “a firm powerful grip.” She can “feel the determination and self-confidence reflected in the young man’s face being transmitted into her own weak palm” (283).

Next, Tlali uses the young lovers' goodbye to speak directly to her audience; Pholoso's final conversation with Felling becomes Tlali's final conversation with her readers. "In order to fight we must be armed, not only physically but also mentally" (289), Pholoso tells Felling. Tlali wants her readers to brace themselves; the fight they have in front of them may not be easy, but it remains necessary. It has been imminent since colonialism saw Europeans take African land.

Finally, Tlali reminds her readers of the struggle, the history of their land, and the history of their people. During an earlier speech to a group of student leaders, Pholoso had said, "We have been deprived of our land, the land of our forefathers" (92). Echoing these sentiments in this final chapter, Pholoso tells Felling, "The events of the past year – like others in our centuries-old history of struggle for liberation – should be and will be a part of us for a long time to come. And we are part and parcel of this soil." Pholoso continues, "We cannot jump out of our skins" (290). This emphasis on the color of skin extends throughout the chapter. Pholoso asserts, "Your skin is either your condemnation or your salvation, depending on its colour" (287). Tlali's concern with skin color could indicate her support of the Black Consciousness Movement, which stresses the need for blacks to fight on their own, without the help of other races.

A short vignette within this scene stands as a metaphor for the Movement. While handing Pholoso a change of clothes, Felling notices as "something valuable" (284-5) falls off the bridge they are standing on and sinks into the river

below them. Pholoso tells her to “let it go,” and then “they both lean over the steel rim and watch as the prayer memento s[inks] into the water. The concentric circles [grow] wider and wider as it vanish[es] into the black slime at the bottom of the water, mingling with the murky sediment of rubble, tins, garbage and other decayed deposits” (285). As the medallion sinks into the water, it seems that Pholoso’s exile is: the end of the cry for Amandla!, the end of the call for power, and the end of the Movement; with his exit, he takes with him the hopes and the power that his presence instills in those around him.

The “brass medallion,” its “silver chain trailing around it like a halo” (285), does not, however, remain at the bottom of the river. Instead it rises again “as a current [catches] it” (285). The oppression of daily life, of the “rubber, tins, garbage and other decayed deposits,” that collect and depress the people and their surrounds are not enough to keep the medallion, or the Movement, suppressed. If the moment the medallion hits the water is the moment that consciousness is born, then the ever-widening, concentric circles represent the expanding Movement. The current symbolizes the community, which will continue the fight against apartheid even after Pholoso leaves the country. It sweeps through the streets, through the communities and through South Africa, inspired by people who have given their souls to the effort. “When the enemy blasted Tiro [who spoke at Dumisani’s funeral] in Botswana with a letter-bomb, his spirit did not die,” Pholoso reminds Felleng, “Dumisani and all the others are gone but their souls are here with us. They are our enduring inspiration” (290). With his last words,

Pholoso “soothes” Felleng, “whispering softly: ‘Let us not lose faith, Felleng. We are still young and the future belongs to us; it is in our hands. Let us continue to look ahead and work hard. It is only when we work towards the attainment of our ideals that there can be hope for Azania. We can never fail, we shall win because history is on our side’” (293).

This coming to consciousness is, in effect, the final convention of a protest novel; the first four sites of resistance merge, allowing the readers -- not necessarily the characters -- to understand their own involvement in the Movement. Like Serote, Tlali appeals to the history of the people to establish this message: the Movement is not the effort of a single person. Instead, the community must join together to fight a force too large for a single citizen. As it gains and loses members, it will continue on its course until its goal is achieved – the liberation of the black people of South Africa.

Conclusion

Miriam Tlali’s *Amandla* highlights many of the pertinent issues surrounding apartheid and the liberation movement. What sets Tlali’s work apart from Serote’s, however, is “the *ease*” of understandability, to use Sarah Nuttall’s word.⁷ The love story between Felleng and Pholoso drives the novel throughout

⁷ During the course of her interviews, Sarah Nuttall determined that ultimately there are two reasons why southern African women read: first, they want easily understandable literature; second, they want literature which teaches them something. Nuttall summarizes: “Reading romances involved a form of learning about emotional issues and how to deal with them... [In addition,] they all liked reading that was easy to deal with, process and interpret... It was the *ease* with which they could read rather than the text’s contents which was important. Certain generic

the students' Movement. While Tlali does include in *Amandla* philosophical arguments, as well as and conversations about politics, most of them are contained in the conversation between Killer and T. The rest of the novel subtly demonstrates the severity of the situation by following a family as it is affected by apartheid.

Tlali creates Pholoso's family to mimic typical black South African families, placing importance on generational connections and community interaction. The characters in *Amandla* invest time and energy in protests and political funerals. South African readers see Pholoso's family, and are able to identify with it. They see what leads Pholoso and his peers to fight apartheid, and realize the parallel conditions in their own life. The reader ultimately recognizes the effects apartheid has on South African citizens and on the reader's own life by recognizing apartheid's effects on Pholoso's family. The final message of Tlali's text is that all the figurative 'Pholosos' in South Africa should stand up and join the Movement, becoming the current that keeps the final medallion afloat.

codes and conventions, easily recognisable by readers, more or less ensured certain kinds of emotional responses" (90).

CHAPTER 3

Film as (Non)Protest: How *Mapantsula* Begins to Break the Mold

Mapantsula (1988),¹ a movie depicting a street criminal's gradual political awakening, is co-written by Oliver Schmitz, a white South African, and Thomas Mogotlane, a black South African. The two writers pitched the film to the South African censorship board as a 'gangster flick,'² and received permission to film in and around Johannesburg. With the government's sanction, Schmitz directed Mogotlane in the role of Panic, the movie's protagonist. This collaborative, interracial genesis sets the film apart from other anti-apartheid films of its time, and establishes *Mapantsula* as an indispensable voice in the Movement.

Far from following a typical gangster, however, *Mapantsula* depicts petty-criminal Panic's birth of consciousness. Opening with images of his daily life on the street -- stealing, tricking, dancing and drinking -- Schmitz and Mogotlane construct the film from flashbacks of what led to Panic's current imprisonment.

¹ Although it was released in 1988, the expanse of the project lasted four years. Thus, it was begun in 1984, during the height of protest literature. Upon its release, it was initially banned. After appeals, it was "subject of massive cuts, and restricted to cinemas of two hundred seats or less. In addition, an age restriction of two to nineteen was imposed" (Nathan and Krouse 10).

² In a 1991 interview, Schmitz explained the censor board issue: "Someone was employed to write a fake, gangster, no politics script, a pure adventure story. I reworked this, as it wasn't close enough to the original to fool anybody. We thought we had to play things safe, to have a nice, clean harmonious little gangster movie set anywhere in the world. We did this because of the state of emergency, because of censorship, we didn't know how these money people would react to the political content. It even goes right down to the film guarantors, who sort of knew what we were doing, but turned a blind eye. To get insurance for shooting in Soweto in 1987 was a real problem, we were still in the third state of emergency. Anything could have happened" (Nathan 20-21).

As the film nears its conclusion, the flashbacks occur more frequently. Panic himself appears to become confused as the flashbacks multiply. At one point, the audience wonders whether Panic remembers one funeral twice or two separate funerals. This quickening rhythm heightens the film's tension as it races towards the climax.

Schmitz and Mogotlane assemble their film in this disjointed manner to create the impression that the audience is with Panic in his jail cell as he reevaluates his life to determine the cause of his arrest. These memories seem to play out in front of Panic, allowing him to see his own actions from the outside, as those around him see them. Gradually, he understands that although he tries to ignore the Movement, he cannot escape the pervasiveness of apartheid. In the end, he demonstrates his ultimate understanding of the protest by firmly asserting that he will not betray his people.

Mapantsula is thus a complicated film that urges all who see it to participate in the Movement, thereby aligning the viewers' coming to consciousness with Panic's own. This chapter explores how Schmitz and Mogotlane incorporate the five conventions of protest literature: references to America; generations and family; community; funerals; and the birth of consciousness -- to portray the events and influences that lead up to the moment of Panic's ultimate act of resistance.

Mapantsula does not completely conform to the first four conventions: America is not explicitly mentioned; the film portrays only two generations

instead of three; the communities involved are more complex than a simple good-versus-bad polarity; and political funerals are dismantled by police, rather than simply monitored. When the conventions and their unusual applications are analyzed, however, Panic's dynamic shift from gangster to member of the Movement breaks from the tradition of good versus bad, creating instead a single character that embodies aspects both good and bad. This dynamism allows *Mapantsula* to function as a bridge between pure protest literature and the non-political art that Albie Sachs called for in 1989, one year after the release of *Mapantsula*.

The Story

Schmitz and Mogotlane construct *Mapantsula* through flashbacks. The unfolding story depicts Panic's time in jail while the flashbacks reveal his life as a criminal before his arrest. The final flashback depicts Panic's arrest, and also marks the beginning of the current story-line. Thus, for the purpose of this critical analysis, a clear telling of the entire story in chronological order is the most logical way to explain the film's plot.

The beginning of Panic's narrative depicts his life as a gangster, or mapantsula. He goes to clubs, dances, drinks, and sleeps in. Jobless, he cannot afford his rent, and so perpetually evades his landlady, Ma Modise. His relationship with his girlfriend, Pat, is strained by his constant requests to borrow the money that she earns as a housekeeper in a wealthy white suburb. When

Panic visits her at work, a fight ensues between the employer and Panic, a confrontation that leaves Pat unemployed and without pay for her last two weeks of work. Pat ends her relationship with Panic, frustrated that he is unable to support her.

Responding to growing unrest in the township over rent increases, Duma, a member of the United Democratic Front (UDF), organizes a community meeting. Sam, Ma Modise's son, escorts Pat to the meeting. There, he introduces her to Duma, whom Pat hopes will help her demand back wages from her former employer. There, Pat and Duma begin a friendship that makes Panic jealous. Panic begins to stalk Duma in an effort to win Pat back.

After the funeral of an anonymous character, Sam disappears and Panic helps Ma Modise search for her lost son. They eventually learn that Sam has been killed by the police, and Panic attends Sam's funeral to support Ma Modise. Duma also attends the funeral, which the UDF is using to protest the apartheid government. The police open fire on the funeral procession, injuring Ma Modise. When Duma and Panic run out from the protection of the crowd to help her, they are both pursued by the police. Panic is arrested and Duma breaks free.

In jail, Panic shares his cell with other members of the liberation movement, although he clearly is not in solidarity with them. Many of the jail scenes depict a white Afrikaner interrogating, torturing and bribing Panic. Neither Panic nor the audience knows the reason for Panic's arrest, although the audience learns that Panic has escaped sentencing in the past by acting as an

informer. The white interrogator clearly expects Panic to cooperate again with the white government by betraying the black community. The film ends when Panic refuses become a traitor to his people.

Misinterpreting Panic's Gangster Costumes: America v. The Townships

The first convention of protest literature centers around America. Schmitz and Mogotlane break from the tradition of protest literature by including only one brief reference to America. Released amid a stream of anti-apartheid movies coming out of Hollywood, such as *A World Apart* (1988), *Place of Weeping* (1986) and *Cry, Freedom* (1987), *Mapantsula* stands out as a South African film. It was written and acted by South Africans, and filmed in Johannesburg's townships and city centre. Film critic William H. Worger calls the film "authentic" (*Mapantsula* 1141). Indeed, the South African actors' accents are genuine, while the mix of English, Zulu, Sotho and Afrikaans spoken by both black and white characters throughout the film is true to the language of the streets.³ The white ruling class

³ Schmitz comments on the language in the film, saying, "It was true to life. It is such a mixture in South Africa. Language is very political here, which is just as important as the more obvious politics. We started off with everyone speaking English, but it sounded false and looked terrible. You lose the expression and the feeling. It has become a tradition in theatre, this use of English, but it does not work in film, when you translate something in tsotsi-taal into English. We have so many languages that interplay in so many different ways. Like a policeman refusing to speak English to his subject, only Afrikaans, as it is his language and part of his domination. Or Panic and his girlfriend Pat speaking Zulu in front of Pat's employer, this is also political on another level as they know she cannot understand the language. He is swearing at her employer in Zulu, which brings out character and various levels of how people relate. You lose the relations people have with each other, the status, the class, you lose it when you bring it down to one language. It is a problem" (Nathan 23). Mogotlane continues the conversation, "I would agree. It is very, very important because there are more than twenty-four dialects in South Africa. For one to be able to express oneself, to speak in one's own language, is vital. And it is political. Tsotsi-taal is the central language here. A lot of people know about it as it uses a bit of English, a bit of Afrikaans, a bit of Zulu, Sotho and so on. This is a matter of communication. I speak a bit of your language,

under apartheid spoke English and Afrikaans while the black majority spoke -- grudgingly -- a mixture of native and colonizing languages. South African writers and actors lend *Mapantsula* legitimacy as a story about the Movement. It is not a film depicting a western interpretation of the problems in “Africa,” but a cry for courage, arms and support from South Africans to others in, and not-yet-in, the struggle against apartheid.

Despite his obviously South African accent, Panic’s character could be seen as an emulation of American characters. Keyan Tomaselli, another film critic, calls Panic’s gangster behavior, a “form of ostentatious expression [that] is culled from American gangster movies of the ‘40s, and more recently, disco dancing popularised by *Saturday Night Fever*” (Tomaselli 52-3). He continues, “Fashions are fashions copied from *Esquire*, and other kinds of music and inebriation are other influences” (53). Certainly, the costumes Mogotlane wears in the role of Panic, which consist of fedoras, suits, and two-tone patent leather dress shoes, stand out. He is surrounded by the traditional Zulu dress of his landlady and the other matrons of his community, the conservative skirt-and-sweater costumes assumed by Pat, and the jeans and t-shirt worn by many of the other male characters. Particularly when compared to those around him, Panic’s clothing could be construed as emulating an American gangster.

a bit of mine, so in turn we will be able to understand each other. In the townships there are many Zulus, Xhosas, Sothos, Tswanas, etc. For them to understand each other, they have got to know a little of each language. If I stick to my language, Tswana, the Zulu boy will never understand me. If he sticks to Zulu I will never understand him. I need help from him and he from me” (Nathan 23).



Still from *Mapantsula*. Panic dances at a club.

A different way to analyze his “ostentatious” wardrobe, however, is to interpret it not as Panic’s attempt to imitate American gangsters, but instead to examine it in relation to Panic’s own understanding of his social status. It is clear that Panic does not respect Americans; the only reference to America in the film is made by Panic, as he mocks a comedian for trying to be American. He does not want to be identified as American. Neither, though, does he want to be recognized as living in the township. He prefers his own impression of the ‘higher-class’ life he leads as a mapantsula. From his point of view, his dress depicts his status; by wearing suits, he gains respect. “What you wear is who you are, mama,” he tells two older women he meets on a bus. Panic’s attitude is not one acquired from American gangster films, but one he assumes to raise his status

on the streets of South Africa. He thus arrives at a false consciousness. His clothing, he believes, makes him better than those around him.

Unfortunately, the community knows his pretentious clothing stems from his inflated personality. Ma Modise tells him, “If I were twenty years younger, I’d steer clear of you! You dress like a gangster!” When Pat meets Panic, she tells her friend, “these guys are wild,” and later, “these two like stabbing people.” Panic’s fancy clothes receive a reaction exactly the opposite reaction of what he hopes for; instead of demanding respect from those around him, they reveal him as a mapantsula. The two old women on the bus laugh when he tells them he is a traveling salesman, saying, “A traveling salesman? Him? Not on my life! He’s just a silly man! That’s what these gangsters do, they go around lying to everybody.” These women know that his respectful attitude and fancy clothes are a façade covering his criminality.

The truth behind Panic’s motivation to dress like a gangster lies somewhere between the two extremes of gangster and social status. He has been subconsciously affected by American gangster films, absorbing their fashions, attitudes and lifestyles. But instead of using ostentatious clothing as a way to present himself as a gangster, he dresses in a fancy style to project a positive image of himself. He wants to be seen as a successful traveling salesman who is above the social status of a typical township citizen. However, this community, represented by Pat and the old women, has also been influenced by gangster movies; they see Panic’s clothing as symbolic of his social status as a gangster. It

would take a complete change of Panic's wardrobe for the community to see him as anything but a mapantsula.

Generational Impact on Participation in the Movement

Like the examples of protest literature discussed above, *Mapantsula* also highlights generational aspects of the Movement. Instead of the three distinct generations typical in protest literature, however, *Mapantsula* presents only two. Neither generation conforms to the expectations of the genre. Whereas *To Every Birth* and *Amandla* employ the older generation as a vehicle of historical education, *Mapantsula* portrays the older generation as confused. The older characters do not remember a time before apartheid, and thus do not understand the purpose of the youth's revolutionary actions. The youngest of the generations, in both typical protest literature and *Mapantsula*, is the generation to bring change. What sets *Mapantsula* apart is that not every member of this generation is politically involved. In the film, the young generation includes both Duma and Panic, characters with opposite political aspirations. As Schmitz and Mogotlane begin to break out of the conventions of protest literature, they permit their character's politics to stray. Consequently, politics become less indicative of a character's generation.

Two characters represent the film's older generation. Panic meets the first, an old man, when he is looking for Sam. The old man complains, "There are so many kids running wild these days. What's wrong with the world? Where are their parents?" Astonished that children have so much freedom, the old man is disgusted by parents' lack of control. Parents are not controlling their children, however, because they must work longer hours to pay ever-increasing rents. The old man has lived under apartheid too long to question the system and recognize the effects apartheid has on the community. Unaware that increasing rent affects him along with the rest of his community, he is disdainful of both the rent strike and the consequent absent parents. The elderly have become so indoctrinated into the current system they no longer see it as oppressive. The old man's presence in



Still from *Mapantsula*. Old man whom Panic encounters, as he complains about the children.

Mapantsula encourages viewers to identify unrecognized instances of the government's control in their personal lives.

An old woman at the township meeting demonstrates this same apartheid-induced blindness. She criticizes the Mayor for not helping the people: "With the last rent increase, you said it was to improve on the sewage and the roads! But what happened? Nothing!" She understands that the government has not fulfilled its promises, but her reaction conveys frustration, not accusation. Like the old man whom Panic encounters, she sees the consequences of apartheid, but is unable to identify the cause. Consequently, she condemns the Mayor for not serving the community, unable to see that the black Mayor's hands are tied by apartheid.



Still from *Mapantsula*. Mayor at Community meeting.

At this same meeting, however, Duma, a member of the younger, politically active generation, stands up and accuses the Mayor of working against the people. The Mayor begins his speech, “Friends we are here to answer any questions you may have for us... I do realize that we have grievances in the community. We are all South Africans, we know our problems, and we have to solve them ourselves. But our approach to the solutions has to be slow-.” At the word “slow,” he is drowned out by the objections of his unsatisfied, frustrated audience. Although the Mayor is black, he is well dressed, and clearly not affected by the rent increases. Thus, he is not respected by his community. Duma interrupts, addressing the audience with his body language and the Mayor with his words:

Mr. Mayor! I call you such even though you were not elected by us and have no [legitimacy] to stand on this platform. You speak of democracy and you say we must do this, we must achieve that. But who’s this ‘we’ you’re talking about? We have no money for rent. We do not have enough to support our families. Many of us are out of work. There is a shortage of jobs. Whereas you, Mayor, have a high paying job. Many businesses, houses, cars. So maybe for you, apartheid is comfortable. But it is at our expense. And we are sick and tired of carrying you on our backs. What we are saying is this: you must accountable to the people, or resign. Amandla!

Duma cannot ignore the Mayor’s inadequacies, nor his direct connection to apartheid. As a member of the younger generation, he demands that the Mayor resign. As he speaks, he is a dark object in the center of a bright backdrop. He stands out of the frame, giving the audience the impression that he is surrounded by light, or knowledge. The filmmakers’ voices are clearly identifiable in Duma’s speech, underscoring their disdain for apartheid’s supporters within the black

community. Duma and the old lady have contrasting reactions to a Mayor who abandoned his people to prosper under apartheid. The difference between their reactions highlights the generational disparities in political attitude found throughout the film among members of the same community.



Still from *Mapantsula*. Duma at Community meeting, addressing Mayor and audience.

The meeting acts as a ‘site of resistance’ within the film; characters use it to resist in the film, while audiences use it to gain an understanding of the need to resist. If *Mapantsula* followed the conventions of protest literature, all members of Duma’s generation would be present. However, Panic, the film’s protagonist, is not present. His participation in this ‘site of resistance,’ and thus in the politics expected of his generation, ends at the door to the meeting. Here, Panic pauses to

listen for a moment before he shrugs, sneers, and swaggers away. Although he is a member of the younger generation, his personality and character are fragmented, evidenced not only by his inability to conform to generational expectations, but also by the three different names he has throughout the movie. On the street, he is known by “Panic,” at home, his landlady calls him “Themba,” in prison, the white interrogator addresses him as “Johnny.” The filmmakers imply that he cannot embody a single character until he becomes a self-assured member of the Movement, embracing the politics expected of his generation.

Mapantsula thus defies the convention of protest literature that relies on expected generational actions. Instead, it becomes a more realistic portrayal of revolutionary South Africa. Although generations are associated with certain types of behavior, such as Duma’s participation in the UDF and the old lady’s resistance to change, there are always people, such as Panic, who do not fit these molds.

The Good, The Bad and The Grey: The Communities of *Mapantsula*

Another convention of protest literature is to establish two communities: the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’. *Mapantsula* is no exception. Duma and the comrades who share Panic’s jail cell represent the “good” community, while the black and white policemen represent the “bad” community. While establishing these two communities, however, *Mapantsula* also establishes a third. It introduces a new cast of characters who occupy a ‘grey space’ that neither oppresses nor protests.

Instead, characters in this 'grey space' function between the 'good' and 'bad' communities. They allow Schmitz and Mogotlane to venture away from the paradigm treatment of communities in the genre to create individual characters who are strong and dynamic.

One of the first scenes to portray black policemen, who are members of the 'bad' community, shows them listening to jokes told by a white superior to a white subordinate. The black policemen trail behind the white superior as he asks, "What do you call a kaffir with an AK-47?" Although the joke could be at their expense, the black policemen do not respond. Instead, they allow the interrogator to finish his joke with the retort, "A terrorist!" The black policemen listening to the joke laugh along with the white men; as black policemen, they do not see themselves as terrorists bent on dislodging the apartheid government. They are instead honest and trustworthy members of the force, defending themselves and their government against the unruly "kaffir terrorists" who live in the townships. The black policemen assume it is the black men in the communities and the jail cells whom the joke scorns. The policemen call these township inmates "bloody terrorists," demonstrating their contempt for the people who challenge the system.

However, according to the definition of "terrorism," it is the black policemen -- not the township's citizens -- who are the terrorists. Terrorism is "the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or



Still from *Mapantsula*. Black policeman, escorting Panic to an interrogation.

coercing societies or governments, often for ideological or political reasons.”⁴

Ironically, when the black policemen open machine gun fire on non-violent protesters, they become “an organized group” using “violence” against the black South Africans “with the intention of intimidating them.” This short scene reveals Schmitz and Mogotlane’s disgust for these black policemen; they are not only laughing at a joke told at their expense, but they are also terrorizing their own people by upholding a system that oppresses them.

Black policemen continue to appear throughout the film, trying to intimidate people on the streets and in the prison. They hand out food, and usher

⁴ "Terrorism." The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. 29 Feb. 2008. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/terrorism>>

Panic to and from his interrogations. One of these trips shows Panic as he begins to break down under the police torture. Stripped of his fancy suit and left in a dirty undershirt, his appearance conveys defeat -- especially compared to the tall, well-dressed black policeman who accompanies him. Speaking in Zulu, this well-dressed man advises Panic, "Brother, you must talk today. Otherwise he will kill you. ... Tell him the truth. If you're afraid, tell me." The black policeman, whose eyes are invisible behind his dark sunglasses, appeals to Panic as if they were comrades. He speaks in their own language, seemingly siding with the people against the government that employs him. His self-assurance, however, is similar to Panic's own before his arrest. While his demeanor and clothing makes him seem important, it does not hide his true emotions; it is clear to the audience that the man sympathizes with the government. If Panic took his advice and told him anything, the man would repeat Panic's admission to the white authorities. Panic, like the people he knew in the township, sees through the act; the fancy clothes, like Panic's before him, reveal the policeman to be uninvolved with the Movement.

Schmitz and Mogotlane place opportunistic black policemen in the film to reveal their contempt for men who are preventing their own liberation. By siding with the white government, the men are enabling their own oppression, as well as the oppression of the entire community. By joining the police force they are impeding the creation of a united black community, which would have the

strength to defeat apartheid. It is their actions that keep the community fragmented and consequently tyrannized.

Panic, like the black policemen, stands outside of the community. When he enters his jail cell for the first time, his clothes, his actions and his attitude set him apart from the comrades who already lived there. Surprised to see him walking into their cell in a shiny new (stolen) suit, they demand, “Just tell us why you are here.” He replies, “because of the comrades.” This retort reveals the basic conflict of interests between the two parties. If a comrade were to assert that he was in jail “because of the comrades,” the statement would imply that he, too, had joined the Movement for his friends. On the other hand, Panic has entered “because ... the comrades” tricked him into it; he blames the protesters at Sam’s funeral for his imprisonment. Panic is not one of them and does not share their anti-government sentiments. Thus, he concludes that a misunderstanding is behind his arrest. The comrades can’t comprehend his confusion, asking, “Brother, don’t you realize...?” They are awed at his inability to recognize that the color of his skin inherently makes him a comrade in apartheid’s eyes. Although Panic has not joined the effort, the comrades -- easily identifiable as members of the ‘good’ community -- have been fighting for him, and all members of the black community.

The fighting has united them, creating the impression that Panic’s many cellmates are a single body. They share the same jokes and have the same past. As Panic enters his cell for the first time, his cellmates are overheard laughing

about the high number of arrests affecting the community. One man tells his friend, “Comrade, it’s true, the cells are full. The whole township will soon be here!” The other responds, “What’s the point? Why don’t they just send us back to our schools?” and the first retorts, “What’s the difference? At least we have privacy here, and we don’t have to worry about being arrested anymore!” While they have this conversation, they are sitting on the floor, each equal with the other. None of their costumes stand out, as Panic’s do. Their mention of “schools” reveals that they are still students, echoing the issues of Soweto and Bantu Education that are addressed in typical protest literature. Panic’s cellmates have all given up their student lives to share this cell. They are united by their imprisonment.



Still from *Mapantsula*. Panic’s cellmates joke about the benefits of being in jail.

As a result of this unity, the ‘good’ group becomes strong and resilient. Many of the jail scenes depict the comrades’ reliance on each other as a way to gain courage and maintain tenacity. For example, they sing songs throughout the night, despite orders to keep quiet. A particularly poignant scene features a young teenager doing laundry in the cell. When he is too short to hang his shirt up to dry, an older, taller boy comes to his aid. Another scene shows comrades standing together by refusing to accept the prison’s meager portions of *mealie-pap*⁵ as supper. Panic is the only man in the cell not participating in these moments of solidarity. He does not know the words to the songs that the others sing, he wears his dirty, food-stained shirts without washing them, and he eats his supper while the others refuse.

While the good and bad communities are clearly depicted, the ‘grey’ community is less apparent. It consists of the old man Panic meets when he is looking for Sam, and Panic’s landlady, Ma Modise. The old man neither supports nor opposes the Movement -- he simply fails to understand it. Ma Modise demonstrates a different type of grey space, one which allows her to move between the good and the bad communities. She finds herself in contempt of the Movement, represented here by the rent strike, until after it kills her son. She is annoyed when Panic uses the Movement as a convenient excuse to avoid paying his rent. When he tells Ma Modise, “people are saying we don’t pay now,” she

⁵ *Mealie-pap* is a traditional South African dish made by boiling a mixture of water and ground corn.

accuses him of “listening to township gossip.” She is not seen at the township meeting, indicating her clear disdain for the revolutionary actions of the township.

This absence does not, however, make her automatically part of the bad community. She is not supporting the apartheid government, she is simply not resisting it. Her passive attitude changes dramatically when her son disappears. She is at the front of his funeral march, yelling at the policemen and accusing them of murder. To her, the policemen represent the entire system responsible for her son’s death; with his death, she seems to become politically aware. However, the audience is left wondering whether she has actually come to a political consciousness, or whether her outbreak is spurred only by her grief. Thus, although she has appeared to sway slightly from supporting the bad community to supporting the good community, she remains in the grey area not available under the strict conventions of protest literature.

Mapantsula takes time to develop the impression of a fragmented society.

In his 1994 book, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*, film critic Rob Nixon writes:

By taking the risk of pointing out that South Africa’s oppressed are neither automatically nor uniformly radical, Schmitz is able to focus on organizational challenges facing the resistance in the late 80s, among the most formidable of them, the challenge of integrating the vast lumpenproletariat into the struggle. (91)

The filmmakers see black South Africa as divided on matters of liberation. On one side is the black community. They protest together, support each other, and are depicted as happy and whole despite their oppression. On the other side are

the black South Africans who try to exploit apartheid by joining the police force, ignoring liberation movements, and burglarizing rich white citizens. While they will always be behind and below the white South Africans in reality, they see themselves as better than those members of the 'good' community who protest and end up arrested. In between is the grey community, a group of characters who neither support nor protest apartheid. They have the option to move between groups, although the filmmakers would hope they move, like the landlady, towards the 'good' community. Schmitz and Mogotlane use the three different categories to highlight the 'bad' characters, begging their viewers not to become apartheid's enablers.

Funerals as Protest

There are two funerals in *Mapantsula*, and like those in *To Every Birth* and *Amandla*, they both function as sites of resistance. The first serves as both a demonstration and a funeral, organized by members of the UDF. Panic does not attend this funeral, although he finds himself participating, almost by accident, in the second. The second funeral takes the form a memorial protest in honor of the disappeared Sam. Although involuntary, Panic's participation makes it clear that movement between the good and bad communities described above is possible. The funerals in *Mapantsula* function like funerals in traditional protest literature, but the characters who attend *Mapantsula*'s funerals do not align with the expected behavior.

Despite the obvious use of funerals as protest, Rob Nixon argues that one of *Mapantsula*'s greatest strengths is its inclusion of protest in locations other than funerals. He asserts that:

The protest march-cum-funeral which features in the mass market movies [and protest literature] is indeed politically significant and has the added advantage of providing cinematic spectacle. But *Mapantsula* goes further than the other films in opening up a broad vision of the strategies which have empowered the resistance and begun to force the regime's hand: rent strikes, prisoners' hunger strikes, the populist actions of the UDF, and the assiduous advances of the trade union movement. (93)

By recognizing *Mapantsula*'s many sites of resistance, the audience becomes more aware of the sites of resistance that exist in the South Africa they live in. Schmitz and Mogotlane encourage their audience to participate, like Pat, in as many as possible. The understanding that *Mapantsula* raises in its audience is yet another way that the film distinguishes itself from typical protest literature.

The first funeral featured in *Mapantsula* is a site that the UDF uses to protest. The characters in this scene are the same as those who addressed the Mayor at the community meeting, adding to the viewer's impression that the community itself is the one protesting apartheid. They object to increasing rents, apartheid-related deaths, and the system itself.

The scene opens with the protesters marching and singing, awash in red and yellow. The costumes and placards add to the scene's chaos and amplify the characters' dancing, singing, stomping and fist-pumping. A striking feature of this scene is the seeming enthusiasm with which the protesters approach the funeral; although they are in mourning, they have transformed their grief into



Still from *Mapantsula*. The opening shot of the first funeral scene.

energy and throw themselves into the protest. With each death, they are further convinced that the system needs to change.

The funeral provides an opportunity for the community to gather in resistance, an element that makes the burial seem secondary to the protest. The coffin, hidden under a flag, is only visible in brief glimpses between marching bodies. Schmitz and Mogotlane create anonymity in the death by never naming the deceased. He could be any one of the many people persecuted by apartheid. This funeral functions perfectly within the conventions of protest literature; those who are at the funeral are protesting. They object to the countless, nameless deaths that must be buried under apartheid.

The end of the march, however, is more important than the beginning. The protesters walk directly into a group of waiting, armed policemen. The police attack the group, beating them with clubs and arresting one of the protesters. The entire scene is filmed by men with video cameras, presumably the media, who are visible in the corner of the screen. Schmitz and Mogotlane use these men to insert themselves into the film, demonstrating the importance of the liberal media (such as themselves) in the fight against apartheid.

The scene fades into an image of Panic, rushing into his landlady's house, yelling, "Ma! I heard there's been trouble!" This is the first time that Panic seems at all concerned with, or even aware of, the fight around him. Up to this point,



Still from *Mapantsula*. The media is visible in this shot, as the funeral procession marches into waiting policemen, black and white, who begin beating them with clubs.

Schmitz and Mogotlane have revealed the community's growing political activity and agitation only in scenes that follow Pat and her friendship with Duma. Panic has always remained oblivious to the commotion.

The first funeral, then, plants the seeds of Panic's consciousness which ultimately, and inadvertently, grow out of the second funeral. The second funeral scene begins much like the first. There is singing, dancing and protesting. This time, however, there is no body; although the protesters are mourning the disappearance of Sam, his body has not been released from police custody and thus the mourners cannot hold a proper funeral. Ma Modise, Duma and Panic each attend this memorial for their own isolated reasons. The landlady mourns the loss of her son, Duma supports the Movement, and Panic, unexpectedly, supports the landlady.

The second funeral becomes a site of pure protest. Like the first funeral, the mourners are apprehended by police. A white police officer shouts into his mega-phone, first in Afrikaans, then English, "This is an illegal gathering. I repeat – This is an illegal gathering." As he realizes his orders are being ignored, his expressions and body language change from those of control to those of concern. Asserting his assumed authority, he orders, "You have seven minutes to disperse. If you do not..." He is interrupted by Ma Modise, who throws herself in front of the police, shouting, "You murderers! Where's my son? You bloody bastards! Damn Boers! What have you done with him?" The police shoot her, spurring a violent response from the crowd, who begin to throw rocks.



Stills from *Mapantsula*. Ma Modise breaks away from the crowd to bemoan her lost son.

A chaotic ‘fight’ ensues: the police open fire on the township from behind the safety of their vans’ bullet-proof windows, while the people throw rocks at the vans. Tear gas consumes the set. Through the gas, it is vaguely possible to identify the outlines of people and placards, but impossible to identify their color or level of hostility. Regardless, the police keep shooting. Panic and Duma appear out of the crowd to drag the injured Ma Modise away from the fray, as the police open fire on the now-aggressive protesters. This peaceful funeral march has become instead a violent riot, propelled forward by the police’s overzealous reaction. Pursued by two policemen, Panic and Duma run from the funeral.

This entire scene is also caught on film, which, ironically, is later used against Panic in the police interrogations. It is the liberal media that tries to depict



Still from *Mapantsula*. Police shoot from inside the protection of their vans.

real events, rather than an apartheid version, and that has captured Panic's participation in the funeral. It is, inadvertently, Panic's viewing of footage taken by the liberal media that brings him to consciousness.

The disorderly end of the funeral is the moment when the flashbacks catch up to the opening scene; Panic is arrested and Duma escapes. The police see Panic as a possible informer about Duma, his whereabouts, and his 'criminal' activities. For the police, Panic's participation in this funeral is enough to make him a member of the Movement. Panic himself, on the other hand, is unclear as to the motivation for his involvement, and, ultimately, why the police have singled him out for questioning.

Panic's confusion is what sets *Mapantsula*'s funerals apart from typical funerals in other protest literature. If *Mapantsula* adhered to the conventions, it would present, as it did, funerals at which people protest. It would also, however, present funerals where all in attendance support the protest and are aware of the political statement intrinsic in funeral marches. Panic does not know these unwritten codes of behavior and expectation at funerals, allowing Schmitz and Mogotlane to move away from the conventions of protest literature.

Panic's Birth of Consciousness

In all protest literature, the first step towards a birth of consciousness is remembering and embracing the history of the land and its people. *Mapantsula*'s only reference to history is given by an old spiritual healer that Panic remembers consulting during one of his flashbacks. Like Duma in the scene with the Mayor, the spiritual healer is bathed in light, while Panic sits in the dark shadow of the wall. Compared to the wise woman beside him, Panic sits in a vulnerable, child-like position. His legs are stretched uncomfortably out in front of him and his back curled over as if unable to support his weight. This sensitive lighting and dramatic staging suggests that Panic has been broken down. He has forgotten his life and status as a mapantsula, and is now returning to childhood. This staging exposes his vulnerability as he relies on the healer to gain true knowledge of his

Still from *Mapantsula*. Panic visits a sangoma to learn about his past.



people. Without her, he is confused and misled, having lost -- or never learned -- the lessons of his past.

The spiritual healer tells him, "The ancestors speak. People always want to know about the future. The past they prefer to forget. What can you tell me about our history?" His inability to answer demonstrates that the people forced to live under apartheid are out of touch with their ancestors; they no longer know their past or its importance. She advises Panic:

There are questions I cannot answer, and here you must take responsibility for your own life. To get something, you must give something. You reap what you sow. Remember this, the past and the future are for dreaming about. The present is for living. An opportunity comes once and then unless you grab it, it is gone. Our ancestors said this long ago.

This speech not only foreshadows a question that will confront Panic later in the film, but also impresses upon a black audience the weight of their own history. It

can be presumed that Schmitz and Mogotlane's ideal audience parallels Panic in their quest to reclaim history. The spiritual healer advises both Panic and the film's audience that although the past is a part of who they are, they cannot constantly dwell on it. Instead, they must take the lessons they learn from their pasts and their dreams, and apply those lessons to their present. If they fail, the opportunity to change their present "is gone."

The second step towards a birth of consciousness is a realization of the weight of history. The second funeral is not a moment of clarity or realization for Panic, but instead a moment of accidental participation. It is only later, upon viewing video footage of the march, that he is able to recognize his participation in it, willing or unwilling. It is, ironically, the policemen's misunderstanding of Panic's motives that brings Panic to this realization. They assume he is involved, although he himself is unaware of his involvement. As they force him to view the video, he sees himself, on film, through their eyes. He has joined a long history of Africans; he has become part of the protesting community.

It is here that the spiritual healer's advice comes into play; she told him that he must seize the chance to "live" the present before he misses it and "it is gone." When the police demand that Panic reveal Duma's whereabouts, an admission that would condemn Duma to certain death, Panic pauses and reflects. The flashback-oriented structure suddenly becomes crucial to the narrative; Panic reviews his life and his experiences as he debates how he can change Duma's future. The older generation's reserved behavior, the youth's riots, the wise

woman's advice and his own moment of protest, all come together. "No," he calmly and assertively announces to the cops. He will not turn in the revolutionary Duma. He will not become one of the many agents against the people. He will not ensure his own oppression. Panic enacts his own birth of consciousness, thus fulfilling the final convention of protest literature.

By saying no, Panic condemns himself to imprisonment or even death. But he does not condemn himself as a traitor of the people, the cause, or the Movement. He has traded his literal freedom, a freedom that allows him to leave the jail, for his political freedom, a freedom that allows him to escape -- in theory -- the oppressive political regime that controls him. Instead of a life where he is 'free' to live, yet restricted in possibilities, he chooses a life in which he is free to think, yet restricted in movement. With his "No," Panic leaves behind the life of the isolated, self-serving mapantsula, and instead joins the community of comrades in his cell. Together, they fight something much larger than any single one of them.

Conclusion

As it promised the apartheid government, *Mapantsula* demonstrates the detrimental consequences of being a gangster in South Africa. Panic receives no respect from his community. Presumably because of his many illegal activities, he is eventually arrested and tortured by the apartheid government. Following the 'script,' *Mapantsula* could be read as a simple gangster film.

The entire film, however, is much more involved than Schmitz and Mogotlane initially admitted to the government. Released the same year as Sachs' 1989 "Preparing ourselves for freedom," *Mapantsula* preemptively becomes a film that attempts to enact Sachs' call to end protest literature. It still addresses the five conventions that define protest literature, but it treats each convention differently than is expected of typical examples of the genre. First, instead of incorporating America, Schmitz and Mogotlane denounce it through Panic's actions and costumes. Next, their treatment of both generations and communities admits the more complex realities of daily South African life than protest literature allows. Not every character acts as expected based on his generational and community affiliations. Finally, Panic's ultimate birth of consciousness is a dramatic turning point in his life. It allows him to become a dynamic character, something protest literature often avoids. Essentially, each of the five conventions becomes more complex and contradictory in *Mapantsula* than they are in traditional protest literature like *To Every Birth* and *Amandla*.

The structure of *Mapantsula* plays a vital role in its advancement of the five conventions: without the flashbacks, Panic and the audience would not gain political awareness. It is only in juxtaposing images of the comrades in jail and Panic's own torture with images of the communities protests in the township that Schmitz and Mogotlane can impart a political significance to the film.

Through the film's complex structure and variations on the five conventions of protest literature, Schmitz and Mogotlane uphold the necessity of

the values of protest literature, while demonstrating the ability to individualize each text. *Mapantsula* becomes the first pylon in a bridge that is built between protest literature and art that is created without political goals. Early in the bridge, however, *Mapantsula* still serves a political function. The final word in the film, “No,” turns *Mapantsula* into a fiercely political anti-apartheid statement, as Panic refuses to turn his back on the community to which he is intrinsically tied by the color of his skin.

CHAPTER 4

Future-Oriented: *Fools and Other Stories* as Literature Before Its Time

Njabulo Ndebele's *Fools and Other Stories* (1983) is a collection of short stories that resonates as "anti-apartheid." While the text signifies Ndebele's strong views on apartheid, it does not adhere to the paradigm of protest literature. Some of the five conventions that define the genre exist in the text, but not all of them are present. The interplay of generations and community has been altered and enhanced, while references to America and political funerals have disappeared. Ndebele focuses instead on Bantu Education and its damaging effects on an entire generation of youth. The characters still undergo a birth of consciousness, but it is woven into the coming of age moment demonstrated by each child.

Ndebele's storylines features everyday aspects of growing up -- fights and competition, school and music lessons, changing relationships between parents and children -- which culminate in these coming of age moments. By the end of each story, the protagonists understand the power they possess and the change they can effect in the world around them. While aspects of coming of age are universal experiences of children around the world, Ndebele sets his stories in a black South Africa subjugated by apartheid. Consequently, apartheid's invasive policies are an ever-present shadow over the characters. Despite references to

apartheid, *Fools and Other Stories* is not protest literature: Ndebele never allows the Movement to become a character; he includes no scenes of mass-protest; and instead of direct discussion about apartheid, he reveals its weight through its effect on Black South Africans.

The collection is composed of five short stories, all of which are set in the 1960s in a Transvaal township. This chapter will examine the political relevance of the collection in reference to the final three stories, “Uncle,” “Music of the Violin,” and “Fools.” It will focus on Ndebele’s underlying criticism of Bantu Education, his focus on generational interactions and his construction of polar communities. Each of these three themes enables Ndebele’s protagonists to find agency in their own lives, ultimately allowing Ndebele to craft a collection of short stories with a distinctively anti-apartheid message.

Discussions around *Fools and Other Stories*

Published in 1983, *Fools and Other Stories* anticipates Sachs’ 1989 call to end protest literature. Ndebele’s critical essays, written between 1984 and 1994, also recommend a shift towards a new South African art form. In “Redefining Relevance,” Ndebele underscores the importance of escaping from what he calls a “socially entrenched manner of thinking” (Redefining 60). Although writing before Sachs challenged South Africa’s entrenched culture of protest, Ndebele was working as an artist ahead of his time.

As a result, *Fools and Other Stories* was misunderstood upon its release, receiving a harsh 1986 critique from J. M. Coetzee. In “Tales out of School,” Coetzee accused Ndebele of taking the “child’s-eye view,” which he deemed “the easy option” (38). He does not value the stories Ndebele presents, expecting him to include in his collection more obvious depictions of apartheid. “No doubt the fact that Ndebele does not live in South Africa has something to do with this” (38), Coetzee writes. Ndebele, he assumes, is out of touch with the true South Africa; anyone who is living there and experiencing it, implies Coetzee, would be forced to write more traditional protest novels “of the Soweto school” (36). He identifies the “Soweto” school by its “language, spiked with township slang and vernacular turns of phrase, unliterary to the point of being anti-literary and even subliterate... [which] is as much the legacy of poor schooling in a linguistically segregated society as it is an affirmation of proletarian origins” (36).

Ironically, by denying that *Fools and Other Stories* follows the Soweto school, Coetzee insinuates that the text is not “subliterary,” but ‘ultraliterary.’ Only in a period as politically desperate as the 1980s would an ultraliterary text be criticized. This criticism demonstrates the extreme attitudes of South Africa’s artistic community at the time. Their only goal is to end apartheid, and the only way they hope to do so is by motivating people through literature and art. Coetzee implies that with his “clean, polished English [that signifies] an orthodox literary apprenticeship” (36), Ndebele is simply not black enough. The township communities will not relate to him. To Coetzee, Ndebele’s writing emulates a

white man's, without the "township slang" that comprises a motivating, if "subliterary," Sowetan protest novel.

On some level, Coetzee's opinions are valid. Ndebele wrote the text in exile, while studying creative writing at the University of Denver. Rather than negatively affecting *Fools and Other Stories*, however, Ndebele views his distance from South Africa as part of a necessary and healing literary process. In an August 1998 interview, Ndebele remembers his time abroad, recounting:

By the time I went to Denver, I was already wanting to write [*Fools and Other Stories*]. What Denver did was to provide me not only with an opportunity to do so, but also one in which to reflect and to enjoy an intimate interaction with fellow students, fellow creative writers and my teachers... *Distance* can enable one to see the reality one comes from more clearly than if one was actually there. The imagination can produce clearer and more compelling pictures. I am glad that I was away from home when I wrote [*Fools and Other Stories*]. (Manigat, "An Interview")

While Coetzee attributes *Fools and Other Stories*'s non-Soweto form to Ndebele's exile, Ndebele's distance from his subject allowed him to craft a powerful non-Soweto collection of short stories.

Ndebele time in South Africa "shocked [him] into realizing hell is everywhere" (Manigat, "An Interview"). Consequently, *Fools and Other Stories* reflects his political awareness; it is an anti-apartheid text. He creates a well-written collection that addresses issues other than the typical conventions of protest literature. Thus, it breaks from Coetzee's "Soweto school" and from the genre of protest literature altogether. Through his essays and *Fools and Other Stories*, Ndebele asserts that the quality of literature is as important as its political sentiments. This foreshadows the ideology behind Sach's 1989 challenge to

South African artists. Thus, *Fools and Other Stories* becomes an innovative South African text in the middle of a stagnant decade. It is, perhaps, better understood in retrospect, classified as ‘post-anti-apartheid,’ as ‘anti-apartheid,’ or as a collection of stories about South African life under apartheid.

The Stories

The story “Uncle” follows a young boy, Vukani, whose uncle, Lovington, comes to visit. With his arrival, Vukani willingly separates himself from school and friends, hoping to spend more time with his admired uncle. While uncle and nephew are together, Lovington plays the trumpet and teaches Vukani the secrets of their past – a story Bantu Education purposefully avoids. Echoing Sites of Resistance found within protest literature such as *To Every Birth* and *Amandla*, Lovington reveals the history of the people who have always owned the African continent. “Uncle” closes with a party at Vukani’s house, as the community gathers to play music and dance.

The second story, “Music of the Violin” is about a young boy, also named Vukani, who grows up in an affluent black township household. His parents strive to provide him with opportunities that are “as good as any white boy’s” (132). They pay for expensive violin lessons, demanding that he study Mozart, Brahms, Liszt and Dvorak. However, his knowledge of Western music and instruments causes him significant trouble amongst his peers. They mock him, assault him, demand that he learn the songs of the street on his “strange guitar”

(133), and threaten to rape his sister if he does not. Plagued by apprehension over these encounters, Vukani challenges his parents and their ‘white ways.’ He vows to stop playing the violin. This declaration of independence sends his mother into the “wail of the bereaved” (151), the evocative aural image with which Ndebele closes the story.

The final story, “Fools,” does not feature a child protagonist. Instead, it introduces the once inspiring, now deflated teacher, Zamani, and his isolation from the township’s community. Prior to the story’s opening, Zamani had enjoyed the community’s respect. As the community’s favored teacher, he married the mayor’s daughter. The marriage was strained, however, when Zamani had an affair with a student, Mimi, who consequently dropped out of school to father Zamani’s illegitimate child. In the first paragraph of “Fools,” it is this disillusioned and morally-dejected teacher who meets a young student, Zani, at a train station.

Ultimately, “Fools” follows idealistic Zani as he takes on the role of teaching his former teacher how to reclaim his life, find a purpose and learn to accept himself. At the story’s climax, Zamani’s Principal accidentally hits a Boer’s car with a rock while trying to discipline Zani. The angry Boer punishes all in his presence, yelling at the Principal and whipping Zamani. Zani runs from the scene and the imminent threat of the Boer, while the now-educated Zamani stands up for himself and his community for the first time.

Street versus School: Education in *Fools and Other Stories*

In *Fools and Other Stories*, Ndebele explores the meaning and source of education in apartheid-ruled South Africa. There are two ‘forms’ of education presented in *Fools and Other Stories*: first, the education of the street that is taught by the people and encourages their liberation; and second, the education of the schools (“Bantu Education”) that is written by the white government and supports their supremacy. In the first two stories, “Uncle” and “Music of the Violin,” Ndebele situates the children’s education in their homes. However, the protagonists in each story learn different ‘forms’ of education. The Vukani in “Uncle” is taught the lessons of the street and its people by his uncle, Lovington. Conversely, the Vukani in “Music of the Violin” learns the form of education endorsed by the government from his parents and his school’s textbooks. The final story, “Fools” works differently than either “Uncle” or “Music of the Violin.” It presents both forms of education in a single story, and the site of education is not confined to the household.

Before discussing the ways in which Ndebele presents the two contrasting forms of education, it is important to address the significance of using the same name for protagonists in different stories. Both Vukanis have a best friend named Duksi and a crush on a girl in their class named Gwendoline. This parallelism between the stories encourages readers to connect “Uncle” and “Music of the Violin,” as well as their opposing philosophies of education. The two stories become conflated, and readers lose track of which story provides which form of

education. Effectively, the reader leaves the two texts with the impression that a single Vukani received both types of education.

In “Uncle,” Lovington teaches Vukani life-skills and their people’s history. “If you have to be a scholar,’ he says, ‘then be a real one. Have enough light whenever you read. Only words that are glowing with light will get into your head. Then you can think clearly” (63). With this speech, Lovington brings a paraffin lamp to brighten the room and places it next to the candle on the table. Vukani, watching the new light, realizes that, “Big things swallow small things” (63). Approached as an anti-apartheid moment, Vukani’s realization can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the “big thing” Vukani refers to could be the system of apartheid itself. It is swallowing the “small thing” -- the black people who live under it. On the other hand, the “big thing” could be the people and their truth, who, after all, are the country’s majority. They have the potential to work together, eventually growing larger than the shadow apartheid casts over them.

Lovington’s subtle explanation about the source of light, clarity, and knowledge leads to Vukani’s first moment of political awakening. If Ndebele aimed to make *Fools and Other Stories* an example of protest literature, this scene would include a direct discussion about the dangers of the white minority and the potential of the black majority. Instead, Ndebele uses an indirect approach. He depicts the moment in relation to Vukani’s developing understanding of the world

around him -- “big things swallow small things” -- and relies upon the reader’s own interpretation of the text to politicize it.

Ndebele continues politicizing “Uncle” in this understated vein. He influences the observant Vukani through Lovington’s actions and words, and educates the reader through Vukani’s interpretation of Lovington. For instance, Lovington’s disappearance one Sunday leads Vukani to remember sharing long Sunday walks with his uncle. He recalls:

com[ing] across men who were sitting on benches close to the walls of their houses. They would be reading the *Golden City Post* or the *Sunday Times*. After greeting, Uncle would say: ‘So what does the white man say today?’ ‘The usual thing,’ they would say. ‘So why keep on reading?’ ‘To make myself angrier and angrier!’ And the men and Uncle would laugh. (71)

Vukani seems to assume that, on this particular Sunday, Lovington has gone on another walk and is still having the same conversations with the same people on the same benches. Ndebele includes Vukani’s seemingly transitory memory for a specific purpose: although Vukani himself does not yet understand the implication of the *Sunday Times* conversation, the conversation is important and politically-charged for the reader. Not just a casual conversation on a Sunday stroll, it serves as a searing comment on the state of “usual” under apartheid -- a state which angers the majority of people, and which has existed for years.

One afternoon Lovington announces that he and Vukani will share a bath.¹ Lovington uses the occasion to tell Vukani the history of their people. Reminding

¹ Lovington says, “We are going to clean up our bedroom and then have a good bath afterwards... we are mn” 96-98). His use of the collective first person encourages Vukani’s self-pride to grow.

him of “the king of the Basotho, King Moshoeshoe,” Lovington describes “how [the King] defeated the Boers by rolling rocks at them from the top of the mountain of Thaba Bosiu” (98). In light of this story, he encourages Vukani to “know that mountain all [of his] life. It is the fortress of the greatest wisdom: living with the Earth” (98). Lovington wants Vukani to recognize that the people who now appear defeated by apartheid once defended their land against the Boers.

Such knowledge of the past is crucial, Lovington teaches Vukani. It is only through memory that the people have the power to rise up again. He tells Vukani about a book that was written “a long, long time ago” (103), explaining:

And because [it was written] we can read about the great empires of Africa. Although they are no longer there now, we know that they were once there. And that is good because we know where we come from. So we can know where we are going. And we all have to rise up again in this world because we were all once a very great people. And we can only rise up again if we know. So we must always find time to know. Whether you go to school or you don’t you must find time to know. Then you can never be deceived. Once you know you can never be deceived. (103)

Lovington’s mention of “school” reveals his fear of the second form of education. At the same time, he seems aware that Vukani cannot escape attending school. Thus, he has taken this bath with Vukani to teach Vukani the skills to prevent his own indoctrination. Even while attending school, Lovington admonishes, he “must always find time to know.” By looking for education in places other than school, Vukani can never be “deceived” by the lessons taught within the government’s walls. He impresses upon the young Vukani that,

The “happy” (98) Vukani admits, “I look at him [Lovington] out of the corner of my eye before I do what he is doing” (98). Vukani is eager to please his uncle, and reluctant to reveal he does not yet know how to be a ‘man.’ Thus, Vukani studies Lovington’s actions and is receptive to Lovington’s lessons.

“history will always clean your soul, and knowledge will enter it when it’s clean, and settle forever” (106). Vukani has the power to transform his future, a power his generation embraces when they stage the Soweto Uprisings a decade later.

Lovington’s form of education, and the message it contains, contrast sharply with the next short story, “Music of the Violin.” The education embedded within this story is prepared by the white government and taught in township schools across South Africa. “Music of the Violin” opens as a different Vukani does his homework for school. Studying from a textbook prepared by white writers specifically for students in the black townships, the first question Vukani reads is, “How did the coming of the whites lead to the establishment of prosperity and peace among the various Bantu tribes?” (124). Such questions emphasize the bias in the white government’s form of education, especially when compared to the form of education rendered in “Uncle.”

These two stories present the same history from two contrasting points of view: “Uncle” recalls the battles waged between the Basotho and the Boers, while “Music of the Violin” emphasizes the peace that whites brought to the Bantu tribes. Even the differences in the histories’ language indicate the racism inherent between white and black South Africa. In “Uncle,” Lovington calls himself and his ancestors “Basotho” -- the name of their tribe, while Vukani’s textbook in “Music of the Violin” derogatorily refers to these same people as “Bantu” -- a ‘catch-all’ phrase used by the white government for native Africans. In addition, Lovington calls the white settlers the derogatory term Boers, while the text refers

to them as the whites who brought “prosperity and peace.” The two versions of history presented in “Uncle” and “Music of the Violin” are, in effect, at odds with one another, yet presented to the ‘same’ Vukani. The reader must choose for himself which is the justified history and, by implication, the justifiable form of education.

History lessons are provided to both Vukanis, although the lessons taught are dramatically different. While the Vukani with an uncle learns about the “great empires of Africa,” the Vukani without one is learning about “South African history, the story of the coming of the white man” (137). The violin-playing Vukani attends school, but his education specifically teaches him to forget what Lovington teaches his parallel character in “Uncle.” The Vukani in “Music of the Violin” has not “found time to know,” and thus is “being deceived.” He is unaware of his people’s greatness, of the strong history they have enacted, and of their power to fight back and rise again.

The ‘educated’ Vukani’s mother, like her son, has absorbed the lessons of Bantu Education. Her language echoes its very vocabulary, while her conversations reveal her bias towards the white man. Her own education in the system ‘worked.’ Even when addressing her children, she demonstrates that white ways are the right ways. She refers to them as “kaffir children!” (132), using an Afrikaans racial slur reserved for blacks. She labels her daughter a “bloody street girl” (145). When her children are at home, she reinforces the education of the school.

However, Vukani's mother is much more complicated than she first appears. Because of Bantu Education, she places black people at the bottom of South African society. At the same time, because she aspires to emulate whiteness, she considers herself above the blacks, such as Lovington, who embrace the color of their skin. In order to separate herself and her upwardly-mobile family from the bad black township community, she provides them with a Western education and lifestyle. She pays for violin lessons and expensive china.

Her husband, a school inspector, has equally confused ideas about where his loyalties lie. He earnestly calls his friends "fellow Africans" (126) and "women of Africa" (127), while at the same time upholding apartheid's rule. He speaks disdainfully of a teacher who defies Bantu Education by not teaching his students how to garden. "We just can't get it into these teachers' heads that we have to uplift the Black nation," he complains. "That fellow was just not teaching the students gardening, and that is dead against government policy" (127). Government policy, he implies, is in place to "uplift the Black nation," preparing them for a life hoeing gardens and working for the white man.² Like his wife, Vukani's father is indoctrinated into the lessons of Bantu Education. He imagines that he has fully embraced his African roots, and enthusiastically accepts that these roots plant him in the white man's backyard.

² Ndebele's choice of language for Vukani's father echoes that of Verwoerd's own policies. Verwoerd justified his policy of Bantu Education, saying, "good racial relations cannot exist when the education is given under the control of people who create wrong expectations on the part of the Native." Education's purpose, he insisted, was prepare people "in accordance with their opportunities in life" (Verwoerd, quoted in Gerhart 255).

This same Vukani remembers a teacher named Maseko who declared one morning:

Children, I would rather be a hungry dog that runs freely in the streets, than a fat, chained dog burdened with itself and the weight of the chain. Whenever the white man tells you he has made you much better off than Africans elsewhere on this continent, tell him he is lying before God!
(132)

Maseko's speech compares a "fat, chained dog" to black men, like the policemen in protest literature, who get rich off of apartheid's oppression of them.

Compared to these opportunists, Maseko himself, clearly educated by the street and not by the tenets of Bantu Education, would rather be a "hungry dog that runs freely in the streets." He would, he implies, rather be a man who suffers under apartheid but remains free to think for himself, than a man who relies on apartheid for self-worth. This image is precisely parallel to the one that Panic imagines in *Mapantsula* when he realizes that he is part of the Movement and consequently tells the authorities "No." Both Maseko and Panic refuse to become fat and chained, preferring instead freedom of thought and allegiance.

Vukani also recalls, "Three weeks [after his speech] teacher Maseko was fired" (138). The speech and the letting-go seem unrelated in Vukani's young mind, although the reader recognizes that Maseko's speech is the only instance when the education of the street tries to pervade "Music of the Violin." The intrusion occurs, ironically, at the school, where all lessons should inherently be white. Consequently, the street is immediately suppressed, and Maseko is fired. Ndebele highlights Maseko and his revolutionary thoughts, revealing to his

readers instances in their own lives where apartheid punishes people for defying Bantu Education.

The striking aspect of this scene is its departure from the conventions expected of protest literature. Whereas a writer of protest literature would put Maseko's speech in the mouth of his protagonist, highlighting its morality and forming an entire scene around its political motivations, Ndebele barely includes this scene at all. It is a briefly mentioned memory, explained in barely two paragraphs, that leaves Vukani wondering "whether teacher Maseko was that dog" (133). Like his parallel Vukani's experiences with Lovington and memories of the old men reading the *Sunday Times*, Vukani has not yet deciphered the event's meaning. Consequently, he immediately counters his own accusation, questioning, "how could anybody pelt teacher Maseko with stones?" (133). Because this is a story about life under apartheid, not an example of motivational protest literature, neither Vukani nor Ndebele pass judgment on the teacher – the incident is merely another event in the coming of age of a child of apartheid. With incidents like these, *Fools and Other Stories* becomes an anti-apartheid text. It reveals the effects of apartheid, as well as different ways of approaching the Movement and Bantu Education, but it does not belabor an individual point of view, or underscore the message to join.

"Fools," the final story in the collection, deviates from the use of a child protagonist. As the most politically-charged story in the collection, it discusses both types of education: Zamani and his Principal give voice to Bantu Education,

while Zani presents lessons of the street and its political movement. These two forms of education cross more often than in the previous two stories. The final effect is that the reader is shown a complete picture of apartheid-era education; they have seen the education of the street and of the school, they have seen the two interact, and, with Zamani's ultimate moment of resistance, they have seen which one should prevail.

In "Fools," Ndebele turns the two forms of education into a spectrum. On one end is Zamani's Principal. He has "a picture of Dr Verwoerd hanging on the wall and gazing down at [him]" (176). Ndebele's description of Dr Verwoerd "gazing" down on the Principal underscores the Principal's devotion to Dr Verwoerd; he is a Christlike figure in the Principal's life. The Principal praises Dr Verwoerd as "a man with a fine intellect ... a man whose strength of mind and character stood before the world as a shining example of leadership ... [a man who] created a cave of safety for his children, his nation" (176). The Principal is oblivious of his own repression; he has become the "fat, chained dog" that Ndebele describes in "Music of the Violin."

After establishing the far side of the spectrum, Ndebele uses interactions between the conservative Principal and the liberal Zani to establish the other. Animosity between the two characters grows as Zani spreads revolutionary ideas among Zamani's students, outraging the Principal and his trust in Dr Verwoerd's vision of a "safe cave" for black South Africans. The Principal seems to

interpret this cave as similar to Plato's.³ Those in it are unaware of what they do not have. Zani, on the other hand, understands that the "safe cave" is an impossible situation for black South Africans, they have lived outside of the cave and will never be able to return to it.

The Principal senses their diametrically opposed understanding of Verwoerd's cave and tries to accuse Zani of bringing this upon himself: "What has education done to you?" (270), the Principal asks Zani.⁴ Education, the Principal assumes, is supposed to teach Zani his place in society; he is supposed to learn the skills of gardening, as Vukani's father suggests in "Music of the Violin." Ironically, education has taught Zani that he does not belong in the garden. Despite the school's indoctrinating goals, Zani takes the advice Lovington gives Vukani in "Uncle;" he looks for education in places outside of the government's schools. Consequently, although he is taught that he is 'a nobody,' he learns that he has the right to stand up for himself and his people.

³ The Allegory of the Cave is one of Plato's stories, originally published in his *The Republic*. It discusses the possibility of being taught to understand illusions of reality as reality -- much like false consciousness in protest literature. The allegory depicts people being chained in a cave, able only to see a back wall, across which shadows cross. They do not know that the shadows come from objects, nor that these objects exist. Thus, they come to understand that the shadows are 'primary,' instead of 'secondary' to their object. When one of the people is able to escape the cave, he learns the ultimate truth. He is blinded by the sun, and the question remains whether he should return to the cave to free the others, or let them remain 'in the dark,' but happy. This image relates directly to apartheid; if black people were hypothetically complicit with their oppression, they could be happy. Characters like the Principal, in fact, are. Zani, on the other hand, is like a person who has escaped the cave, and now re-enters it. Knowing the ultimate truth -- or, in the language of this thesis, having had a birth of consciousness that relieves him of his false consciousness -- he can no longer be content entrapped in a dark cave of alternate reality.

⁴ This question harkens back to a comment Tsi's father makes in *To Every Birth*. His father insists, "Education had fucked [Tsi's] mind up" (Serote, *To Every Birth* 86). These two comments about education seem to frame protest literature. One is made before the Uprisings at the moment of the genre's development, and one is made as an author encourages artists to begin working away from protest literature.

His own education teaches him to resist the government's education. Zani, in defiance of the Principal, refuses to answer the question. Infuriated, the Principal "gestur[es] his hand towards the people" and ironically reports that Zani feels the need to "display his education" (270). The tone of the conversation implies the Principal's embarrassment over Zani's higher education; it is wrong for a black man to learn so much, because he no longer feels safe in Verwoerd's cave.

The Principal in "Fools," like Vukani's parents in "Music of the Violin," came of age in a period of non-protest. He was educated under Bantu Education laws, and was already an adult when the time Sharpeville Massacre occurred. Ndebele depicts him and his generation as having lost themselves in the system, unaware that they are abiding by the rule of the oppressor. This generation occupies one end of the spectrum. The protagonists in the stories, on the other hand, seem to receive both forms of education -- each Vukani receives one form, lending the impression that one Vukani receives both. Zamani begins on the Principal's end of the spectrum and learns about the other end with the aid of Zani. The minor characters -- the ones responsible for the education of the protagonists -- see things in black and white, without the grayscale of doubt and dissent that begins to shadow the lives of the protagonists in *Fools and Other Stories*.

Unpredictable Generations in *Fools and Other Stories*

In *Fools and Other Stories*, Ndebele emphasizes which generations teach the protagonists, as well as how different generations perceive the effects of apartheid. Strict protest literature, such as *To Every Birth* and *Amandla*, also focuses on generational disparities like these, but whereas Ndebele maintains control over his generations, the generational convention of protest literature dictates the language *To Every Birth* and *Amandla* must use. Protest literature always includes three generations: the children of Soweto - the active generation, their parents – the missing generation, and their grandparents – the generation that remembers.

Conversely, creating multiple, varying stories allows Ndebele to hint at the themes behind protest literature without conforming to the established convention. He raises awareness of how apartheid affects different generations, but his collection is set before the 1976 Soweto Uprisings. Consequently, it depicts the coming of age of a generation before the children who join the Movement in typical 1980s protest literature. Thus, the generations in *Fools and Other Stories* do not match up with the three categories identified above. Ndebele includes only two generations -- the generation of the protagonists in “Uncle” and “Music of the Violin”, and the generation of their parents. In addition, not all members of a single generation share the same political points of view. Ndebele’s less-structured portrayal of generations strengthens *Fools and Other Stories*’ artistic value; it stands independent and apart from the need to adhere to the conventions

of protest literature, and thus becomes a more realistic portrayal black South African society.

Many of the generational aspects of the short stories in *Fools and Other Stories* are tied to the stories' presentation of education. In "Uncle," for instance, Ndebele casts Lovington as Vukani's link to the past. Assumably, Lovington should have acquired his knowledge of Africa's black history from the generation before him. Ironically, however, Lovington's father does not provide this street-based, anti-Bantu version of education. As a Protestant minister, he worked to proselytize Christianity, itself representative of the white man, instead of spreading the history of the black man. "He believed he had something important to give to the people" (103), Lovington explains to Vukani, "[but] his message did not reverberate with the strength of our experience" (104). Lovington must connect with the past without the help of his father. He thus turns to old books, teaches himself the education of the street, and breaks the protest literature tradition of learning history orally from older generations.

"Music of the Violin" also provides no generational link to the past for Vukani, who lives in a world entirely created and limited by Bantu Education. His mother internalizes the lessons she learned in school. She consequently is convinced that whites are better than Africans, and that Africans must thus aspire towards whiteness. Vukani's father works for the system, helping teach black students important 'life-skills.' Throughout "Music of the Violin," the father spouts the discursive 'language of apartheid,' saying, "remember they [the Boers]

say Western Civilisation is spoiling us, and so we have to cultivate the indigenous way of life” (143). As a school inspector, he aspires to ensure that schools in his district conform to government regulations, teaching their students the ‘right’ things. The reader sees Vukani, himself a student of Bantu Education, doing homework that requires him to answer questions about the greatness of the white settlers. He is trapped in the secluded sphere that apartheid carved out for black South Africans;⁵ his parents only further his isolation.

This Vukani needs what his parallel self in “Uncle” has: a family member who realizes the danger of indoctrination. Reminiscing about other children’s relatives, Vukani remembers “how envious he would be whenever he heard other children saying they were going to spend their holidays with their relatives. Perhaps a grandmother or an uncle” (147). Ndebele purposefully identifies these two specific generational relationships. Although there are no grandmothers in *Fools and Other Stories*, Ndebele refers to them because of their importance in examples of protest literature such as *To Every Birth* and *Amandla*.

Grandmothers are often a way for younger generations to connect with their past. Uncles, on the other hand, function as alternative parental figures that provide vital life lessons and histories to the young protagonists in *Fools and Other*

⁵ The concept of a ‘sphere’ for black South Africans calls to mind the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 and the subsequent Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959. The first designated certain areas in South Africa, about 13% of the country’s land, as “Bantu” homelands. These were the areas where black South Africans were to live. The second Act carried this segregation further, declaring that each homeland was as self-governing, quasi-independent nation; the creation of these nations completed the segregation of South Africa. As the homelands were declared independent, black South Africans lost their South African citizenship, ensuring they could play no government role.

Stories. Ndebele creates a dialogue between “Uncle” and “Music of the Violin” in order to compare the lessons provided by uncles and parents: the first Vukani’s revolutionary uncle strongly contrasts and highlights the second Vukani’s apartheid-educated and inculcated parents. Although they are of the same generation, the uncle enlightens, while the parents trap their son in enforced disillusionment.

“Uncle” establishes a middle generation to teach the younger one; “Music of the Violin” establishes a younger generation trapped in a world enforced by their elders; “Fools” employs a third strategy. Ndebele reverses the characters’ roles, and instead of old teaching young, young teaches old. Zani becomes his former teacher’s educator. The two meet as the text opens. Zamani remembers, “When I first saw him in the waiting room on platform one at Springs Station I wanted to know him” (154). The intrigue in this first sentence immediately attracts the reader’s attention, indicating Zani’s importance to the story. After this first interaction, Zani disappears from the narrative for a few pages, although Zamani dwells on memories of their conversation until they meet again.

The two characters remain intertwined throughout “Fools.” Even their names echo each others’; “Zani” seems a newer, fresher version of “Zamani.” Zani is a young graduate, completely enthralled with the Movement and determined to share his enthusiasm by recruiting new members. While Zani tries to redirect Zamani’s life, Zamani finds himself breaking down. His self-knowledge, like Tsi’s in Serote’s *To Every Birth*, crumbles before being bolstered

by his resolution to join the Movement. Before joining, he is alienated and alone, unable to connect with or even talk to his wife. After Zani teaches him about the struggle and he finally embraces it, he feels whole again, supported by the history of his people and their potential to defeat the whites. The last line of the story describes Zamani yearning to “get to” (280) his wife. He has, through his relationship with the younger Zani, healed his emptiness, allowing him finally to support the people around him and their relationships with each other.

Although each of these three short stories presents generational interactions differently, the varying types of interactions highlight the many possibilities for ‘enlightenment.’ Ndebele writes a collection of stories to demonstrate the need for historical memory, and to spotlight the way that passing knowledge down through generations can aid in the establishment of memory. He does not follow the conventions of protest literature, which would trap him in an established system of memory passed down from old generations to young ones. Instead, Ndebele creates multiple dynamic characters that educate each other in realistic ways. Their differing personalities contrast with each other, creating three unique stories, rather than one story written three ways.

Fluid Communities in *Fools and Other Stories*

The communities in *Fools and Other Stories* echo the communities in other protest literature: there are people inside the community and people outside of it. Most protest literature dichotomizes these differences, generally placing

protagonists and antagonists on either side of the division. Tlali's *Amandla*, for instance, places Pholoso inside the Movement; he is revered by the community, and his revolutionary actions are set in direct opposition to the black policemen who work for the system and remain isolated from Soweto's community.

Through this structure, Tlali implies that joining the Movement is the correct thing to do. It will earn you the community's respect. Serote's *To Every Birth*, while placing Tsi outside of the community, maintains the inner/outer community structure. Tsi constantly struggles to understand what it would mean to become part of the community he sees but cannot join. There is no antagonist besides the brief appearances of white policemen, who are on the same side of the divide as Tsi. Tsi's isolation, as well as the fact that he is 'siding' with the policemen, indicate that joining the Movement would transfer him from the wrong side of the community to the right side of the struggle.

In *Fools and Other Stories*, on the other hand, Ndebele's approach to community is much more fluid. Characters negotiate the divide, and until the final story, "Fools," there is no sense that either side is better than the other. The characters are sometimes supportive of the Movement, and sometimes unaware of it. Ndebele presents each of them as a thoughtful, dynamic character, giving them the option and ability to move between the divisions. This sensitive approach to the issue replicates reality better than protest literature. It allows characters to represent many different stances on the issue, giving readers a broader understanding of the issues at hand.

When “Uncle” opens, Vukani is walking home from school. He thinks, “After school, Monday. A hot November afternoon. Doksi, Wanda and I are walking home. We are kicking things as we walk along. We always do that” (53). The passage is a stream of consciousness, allowing the short sentences to emphasize the child’s point-of-view. His thoughts are simple and understandable. Vukani seems comfortable in his life, describing a typical day with his close friends. “We always do that,” he says. They have a routine and the next few pages delineate their typical afternoon activities.

This sense of camaraderie between the young students immediately unravels when Vukani comes home to the sound of a trumpet inside his house. The pride he reserves for his friends and their actions is replaced by pride in his uncle, who plays a trumpet the whole community can hear. As he approaches, Vukani becomes more and more certain of the trumpet music, saying,

There is no doubt now, it is coming from my home. It is coming from nowhere else. It is coming from the house where I stay. Number 1310. We rush into the yard and cluster at the door. ... And I look beyond them [my friends] at the children who are standing at the fence. They cannot come in. But my friends and I can, and will. (60)

The three children are still a unit, together in spirit and pride as they assert their status over the other children in the community. Upon entering his house, however, Vukani narrates: “I look at my friends. They are standing in a row behind me. We are looking at Uncle playing his trumpet. It’s right in my home” (61). As soon as they have entered, he separates himself from them, using the “I” versus “them” dichotomy. *He* is looking at *them* who are standing *behind* him.

It's his home and not theirs, his uncle and not theirs. With the uncle's arrival, Vukani has switched his allegiances, contrasting the community of the street to the community of the home.

By the end of the story, the two communities have merged. Vukani wakes from a nap to find "alot of music, many voices of people, and screams and laughter ... It's all happening right in [his] home" (119). The entire community is at his house, and his mother and uncle are also participating. His mother is there, "carrying a tray with a huge jar full of cool drink," (122); his uncle is there, "putt[ing] his trumpet to his lips and blow[ing]" (122); Vukani himself "put[s] the record on" (122). Together, "the whole township" (122) takes part in creating a cacophony of "the gramophone, the trumpet, the concertina, the guitar, the mouth organ, the hooting cars, and the wedding song" (123). The party causes Vukani's pride in both his family and his community to swell. He closes the story by sighing, "Oh, Uncle, everybody is here" (123). With this "oh," he realizes that the two communities can co-exist. By becoming part of a strong family, Vukani enables the community to come to him. The joy that emanates from the scene and its characters demonstrates that these two spheres need not remain separate entities. In the intersection of street and home, there is strength.

The characters in "Music of the Violin" never have the chance to realize this strength. The two communities remain entirely separate throughout. There are moments when the community of the street tries to infiltrate Vukani's house, but it is quickly ushered back outside. One of these near-crossings occurs when

Vukani's parents host a couple, the Zwanes, for dinner. Mrs Zwane tells Vukani's mother, "Mother-of-Teboho, you really missed [out] ... A white woman came all the way from Emmarentia -- high-class exclusive suburb, mind you -- to address the meeting on Jewish recipes. Came all the way to Soweto for that. It was wonderful" (128). Thrilled that she had the opportunity to learn Jewish recipes -- white recipes -- from someone whom she admires, Mrs Zwane feels compelled to share, even brag, to her host. Both women recognize that the Jewish woman, Mrs Kaplinsky went out of her way to meet with them, an indication that both acknowledge her superiority. Mrs Kaplinsky deigned to meet them, and they feel privileged and grateful.

While the women continue discussing the Jewish recipes, Mr Zwane sighs, "Sometimes these South African Jews sicken me" (129). He continues, "They're hypocrites! I mean look, they say they were killed left and right by the Germans, but here they are, here, helping the Boers to sit on us" (129). This is the first time the Movement's political sentiment, which resides on the street, enters Vukani's home. The first one to object to this revolutionary train of thought is his wife. She quickly retorts, "How can you say such a thing? ... People like Mrs Kaplinsky are very good friends of ours. Some of her best friends are Africans" (129). This objection reveals just how entrenched Mrs Zwane is in the system of apartheid. She easily slips into the "us" versus "them" mindset, saying that the Jewish woman is a good friend of "ours ... [the] Africans." Although not personally friends with her, Mrs Zwane views Mrs Kaplinsky's African friends as

a sign of their own friendship. All “Africans” are apparently the same, being friends with one means you are friends with all of them. Mrs Zwane can no longer see, as her husband can, how “hypocritical” white South Africans under apartheid are. By donating time to the native South Africans, Mrs Kaplinsky and the rest of her race, have relieved themselves of apartheid-related guilt. The oppressed Mrs Zwane, and Vukani’s own parents, cannot place apartheid’s blame on those ‘upstanding white citizens’ like Mrs Kaplinsky. Vukani’s family surrounds itself with people who see the world like they do, preventing Vukani from breaking out of the sphere in which he is trapped.

When Vukani is at home, apartheid’s racism surrounds him. When he escapes to the street, however, he does not fit in with his peers. When his violin is stolen one day at school, he tries to identify a suspect, but is forced to admit, “the whole class seems to have ganged up on me. There are some things that will always bring them together” (134). His statement reveals that he is outside of the group; he recognizes his own alienation, but is blind to what unites the other children. Although he never determines what their uniting force is, he vows to stop playing violin. He hopes that by quitting, he is symbolically ending his emulation of the white man and his ways.

Vukani’s decision to quit violin is motivated by his desire to ‘fit in’ on the street. While this value statement is not one that protest literature would uphold -- it instead wants people to join the community of the street because of the street’s moralistic correctness -- Ndebele includes this story because of its realism. Just

as the Vukani in “Uncle” never completely understands Lovington’s lessons, the Vukani in “Music of the Violin” never realizes how indoctrinated his parents are. Thus, although he does not completely understand the politics behind his violin, he still decides to stop playing it. By doing so, he leaves his ‘white’ home and enters the ‘black’ street. Ndebele creates in “Music of the Violin” a portrait of the ‘everyday,’⁶ a reality where people join the Movement for many different reasons. In “Music of the Violin,” Ndebele breaks from protest literature’s treatment of community, because the conventions could not follow its strict rules and also demonstrate this variety of reasons behind revolutionary action.

“Fools” also utilizes community structures that could not exist in protest literature. He begins with characters that look like the ones in protest literature, but develops them past the boundaries of the genre. Soon after meeting, Zamani judges Zani, snidely remarking, “So, you are the political type? ... You turn everything into politics?” (164). To which Zani counters, “I have seen your type too ... Masters of avoidance. They refuse to see connections between things. And then they condemn us, not out of conviction, but out of a cowardly desire to stay out of trouble” (164). In this brief exchange, Ndebele characterizes each of his two protagonists. The first is a member of the growing Movement, the community of the street, and the second is too weak to join. Zamani is outside of

⁶ Ndebele discusses the ‘everyday’ in literature in his article, “The Rediscovery of the Ordinary.” He writes, “The aesthetic validity of this [protest] literature to its own readership lies precisely in the reader’s own recognition of the spectacular rendering of a familiar oppressive reality” (Ndebele, “Rediscovery” 47-8). He expands, “the aesthetics of reading this literature, for the black reader, is in the aesthetics of recognition, understanding, historical documentation, and indictment” (48).

the community, alienated by profession (government employee) and lifestyle (infidelity). Zani, inside the Movement, summarizes Zamani as “paid to be [a] killer of dreams, putting out the fire of youth” (164). Zani and Zamani at the beginning of this text are two characters recognizable as directly pulled from the genre of protest literature.

Again, however, Ndebele travels past the paradigm of protest literature, allowing Zamani to change his community alliance. Like Panic in *Mapantsula*, Zamani is given the option to traverse the divide between ‘good’ and ‘bad.’ By the picnic at the end of the story, Zamani realizes, “if he [the Boer] lashed at me [Zamani] with his whip, I would have to fight back” (275). He does so through silence, “the silence of years of trying to say something without much understanding” (275). Zamani becomes part of the protesting community, recognizing that for years his government education has prevented his street education. Zani educates him about the goals of the Movement, and Zamani raises his voice in protest, finally certain about what to say.

Zani also becomes a dynamic character. On the surface, he seems to falter in his community allegiances; the scene includes Zamani standing and fighting also depicts Zani as he “turn[s] and [flees]” (274). Despite his strong moralistic convictions, when Zani’s moment of resistance finally comes, he backs down. Instead of a sign of faltering community allegiances, however, his flight reveals his age; Zani is, after all, only a teenager. It is easier, from his perspective, to encourage resistance in others, than to participate in protest. However, despite his

flight, Zani is certainly still a member of the community of the Movement; in a reversal of roles, he has taught Zamani to protest -- something Zamani would never have done without Zani's tutelage. Neither generation can participate in acts of protest without the other; Zani's generation does not have enough life-experience to stop fearing the white man, and Zamani's has too much life-experience to fear the white man's retaliation. Ndebele's ultimate message is that a complete community must contain all generations; only with the knowledge each generation brings to the table can the community unite to defeat a beast as large as apartheid.

Ndebele creates in *Fools and Other Stories* something that does not exist in protest literature. He constructs dynamic characters that can choose to change their allegiances. Lessons they learn in the course of the stories are enacted by the end. Protest literature, with its strict good/bad community structure, does not allow such movement; texts open and close with the same characters, giving the impression that little has transpired during the course of the collection. If protest literature can seem static, Ndebele avoids this impression through his use of mobile, fluid communities.

Dynamic Characters Creating Power

The main difference between Ndebele's *Fools and Other Stories* and the protest literature of the 1980s is Ndebele's use of dynamic characters. His characters have the power to change themselves over the course of the stories:

they demonstrate ways that it is possible to educate themselves and switch between communities. It is this dynamism that allows them to realize and embrace their own power at the end of the short stories.

“Uncle” is the story with the least dynamic character; because the protagonist is a child, life altering realizations, such as a birth of consciousness, are hidden behind ordinary coming of age moments. Vukani is a young boy who learns from his uncle and eventually becomes aware of the community’s potential. The story is simple and realistic. Coetzee calls it “the least satisfying” of the collection, continuing, “the child’s-eye view turns out to be merely the external view, the easy option” (38). This condemning review is unfair; it ignores the skill that writing from a “child’s eye view” demands of Ndebele, as well as the import of such a coming of age story for a child who will be a young adult after Soweto. As all his community’s members arrive at his house with the common purpose of creating music and enjoying themselves, Vukani awakens to the community’s power. His uncle is playing the trumpet, leading the entire community in song and spirit. If music symbolizes the Movement, a trumpet the Movement’s history, and the lead musician the Movement’s leader, Vukani learns he has the power to lead a party through learning an instrument, to lead a community through learning its history.

In “Music of the Violin,” Vukani changes from a boy who follows his parents’ apartheid-oriented lead to a young man who learns to think for and stand up for himself. When he finally challenges his mother, declaring he will stop

playing violin, the omniscient narrator describes his reaction: “He felt free. There was a vast expanse of open space deep inside him. He was free. He could fly into the sky” (150). The reader takes Vukani’s “free” feeling and links it to the idea of freedom -- freedom from the violin, from his white-dictated education, and from the “white black woman” (146) who is his mother.

His mother is also a dynamic character. The text’s ending is ambiguous, as her “wail of the bereaved” (151) haunts both her family and Ndebele’s readers. Throughout the text, she parrots the cry of the government, calling “township people ... animals. Absolutely raw. They have no respect for what is better than they” (149-50). Although she too lives in a township, she sees herself as better than the African “savages” (150). She disapproves of Vukani’s friends and prohibits relatives from visiting in an effort to keep herself separated from the street. She explains to the now street-oriented Vukani, “Either you please the street, in which case you are going to be a heap of rubbish, something to be swept away, or you please your home, which is going to give you something to be proud of for the rest of your useless life” (151). It is unclear whether she uses “useless” here out of anger towards a son who has disobeyed her, or out of recognition that black lives in South Africa are prohibited from amounting to anything.

Equally unclear is the meaning behind the sound of her wailing. She could be crying over her son’s empty future, a future she sees as ruined since he stopped playing the violin. The wail could also symbolize her ultimate understanding of apartheid. She mocks her daughter, exclaiming, “That’s how

it's planned. That we be given a little of everything, and so prize the little we have that we forget about freedom" (147). Her outburst produces silence in her guests as the accidental, and unexpected, truth of her statement weighs on all in the room. Perhaps her final wail, then, is not for her lost son, but for her lost self. As long as she praises and uplifts the white man and his government, she will never make something of herself. This wail bemoans the years and money wasted trying to earn freedom from a government that will never recognize her. The wail symbolizes the freeing of her own soul, making her character more dynamic and pitiable than Vukani. He chose to give up something he never really had; his mother, on the other hand, tried for years to earn her freedom through the wrong techniques. Instead of joining the Movement, she supported the government. Through the mother's tears, "Music of the Violin" becomes an "anti-apartheid" story.

The final story, "Fools," is the most clearly "anti-apartheid" story in the collection. Whereas the other stories skirt the issue of apartheid, insinuating its presence through living conditions and daily life, "Fools" confronts the government head on. Zamani's ultimate alignment with the Movement demonstrates to readers that one is never too old or too indoctrinated to join the community of people devoted to their own liberation. As he is being whipped by the Boer, Zamani realizes that he had "crushed him [the Boer]" (276). "I had crushed him with the sheer force of my presence," he reflects, "I was there, and would be there to the end of time: a perpetual symbol of his failure to have a

world without me” (276). Merely by admitting that his people have always belonged to African, Zamani joins the history of people fighting back. The Boer can whip Zamani, but the Zamanis of South Africa will always exist. Zamani narrates, as the Boer walks to his car and drives away:

There he went: a member of a people whose sole gift to the world had been the perfection of hate. And because there was nothing much more in them, they will forever destroy, consuming us and themselves in a great fire. But the people of the north will come down and settle the land again, as they have done for thousands of years. (276)

There are two groups of people in South Africa, Ndebele implies, the Boers who will forever aim to destroy, and the African people who can never be destroyed. If one side will never win and the other side will never lose, which side, Ndebele asks in “Fools,” is the side to support?

Zamani has himself become Ndebele’s final dynamic character; he goes from apathetic to empathetic, becoming a soldier in the “long walk to freedom” that Nelson Mandela writes about.⁷ The straightforward nature of “Fools” gives the rest of the stories in the collection meaning. Without “Fools,” the collection could be about coming of age in any society. With it, *Fools and Other Stories* becomes an “anti-apartheid” piece of literature. Ndebele creates a resolutely “anti-apartheid” tale simply by depicting the lives of ordinary people under apartheid.

⁷ One of Nelson Mandela’s memoirs, entitled “A Long Walk to Freedom,” was begun in 1974, nine years before the publication of *Fools*, during Mandela’s imprisonment on Robben Island.

Conclusion

Ndebele would write in 1994 that, the “protest tradition ... reveals what seems ... to be the characteristics of a socially entrenched manner of thinking” (Redefining 60). When it appeared, following Sachs’ complaint that “culture is a weapon of struggle,” Ndebele’s statement took its place in a great debate about what “post-anti-apartheid” literature should look like.

Ndebele’s own stance against protest literature, however, evidently took root many years before this debate. His first collection of short stories, *Fools and Other Stories* does not fit the mold of traditional protest literature, instead becoming a complex collection of stories that hints at the themes behind protest literature without conforming to its established expectations. Ndebele wrote that these expectations:

prompted a rhetoric which emphasised the moral embitterment of the oppressed. The rhetoric began to dominate the consciousness of the actual mechanisms of their own oppression. In other words, the rhetoric of protest began to replace the necessary commitment to engaging the forces of oppression through paying critical attention to the concrete social and political details of that oppression. (Redefining 63)

This ideology is evident in protest literature; authors write texts that serve as callous displays of the wrongs against black South Africans, without necessarily promoting resistance. In *Fools and Other Stories*, Ndebele addresses this by creating characters such as Vukani’s parents in “Music of the Violin” who have literally become blind to their oppression. He also creates characters, such as Zani, who are aware of the Movement and urge others to join, as well as characters, such as Zamani, who seem oblivious to apartheid all together. By

tracing such a broad spectrum of South African experience, Ndebele avoids using *Fools and Other Stories* as a so-called 'soap-box' for protest. Instead, its stories represent daily life and encourage readers to become aware of the Movement. This allows *Fools and Other Stories* to function as art in a society that typically produced only political protest.

CONCLUSION

“Part of the freedom we have won is the freedom to live with uncertainty. In the hard days (and as much as we long for the idealism, commitment, and comradeship of those times, we should never forget how hard they were: the pain, the collapses and betrayals, the relentlessness of the state towards us all and the relentlessness of ourselves to one another and to ourselves), we could not live without certainty. Everything had to further a single, glorious goal. The very unity across barriers and submersion of self accomplished in pursuit of that goal, was foundational to its ultimate realisation” (Sachs, “Foreward” viii).

At its core, this thesis is a project assessing the validity of protest literature in a period of political uncertainty. It analyzes three key texts and one film, looking at them through the lens of a developing genre. Chapter One argues that Mongane Wally Serote’s *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1975-1981) maps the birth of the genre. It shows how the Soweto Uprisings shape literature that arises out of black South Africa during the 1980s. The Chapter coins this literature “protest literature,” and establishes a paradigm by which to understand it. The paradigm includes five conventions: America, family and generation, graveyard and funeral, community and the ultimate birth of consciousness.

Chapter Two examines Miriam Tlali’s *Amandla* (1980), which demonstrates the paradigmatic conventions of the genre at its height. Although this book was published before *To Every Birth*, Tlali began writing it five years after the Soweto Uprisings, proving that the genre was a natural result of the Uprisings, and that it developed across South Africa in a short period of time.

The genre's decline is mapped in Chapter Three, which analyzes Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogotlane's film *Mapantsula* (1988). *Mapantsula* begins to break out of the conventions which were established in *To Every Birth*, and which flourished in *Amandla*. The final chapter looks at Njabulo Ndebele's *Fools and Other Stories* (1983). Although this collection of short stories was written during the height of protest literature, it was written by one of the most important scholars of the "post-anti-apartheid" period. Thus, the collection seems to curtail the genre of protest literature, looking instead towards the future and a new version of South African art.

Through an understanding of the rise and fall of this genre, I set out to answer four main questions. The first was, "What was the function of protest literature in a society where the government controlled every aspect of daily life?" I found that protest literature in South Africa provided writers with a voice. Like Tlali explained in her late-1980s article, "Quagmires and Quicksand," writing is about "our lives ... I write about how we live, our feelings, our aspirations and so on" (96). It allowed writers to create a reflection of reality while they interpret and catalog their own understanding of apartheid-era South Africa. Protest literature functions as an outlet for free expression; under strict pass and censor laws, it was easier to smuggle novels across borders and into homes than to gather for mass education of the people. Ultimately, protest literature became an author's personal Site of Resistance against apartheid.

Because protest literature was easier to smuggle into the country than mass scenes of protest, it became an effective way to motivate large groups of people. I wanted to examine whether protest literature attempted to prevent itself from being banned in the first place. I asked, “How did protest literature encourage protesters while simultaneously smuggling itself through censor boards?” Protest literature invented ingenious ways to include resistance in texts. It created scenes of resistance and protest based on daily South African life. For instance, writers included funerals in their texts to reference the political funerals of the period. Thus, readers related to these scenes and the text as a whole, leaving it motivated to join the Movement. The motif of the “everyday” also reminded and forced readers to locate overlooked or ignored oppression in their own lives.

Based on the premise that protest literature was written to motivate readers, the third question was, “Was protest literature merely agitprop, written as propaganda? Or was each individual work published because of its intrinsic literary value?” I think the truth lies somewhere in between these two extremes. Protest literature was certainly written with a “single, glorious goal” in mind (Sachs, “Foreward” viii). However, a novel’s political agenda is not mutually exclusive with its artistic value; a novel written as propaganda does not automatically become worthless. For instance, the novels and film examined within this thesis are all examples of excellent writing. Authors may be motivated

to write by outrage or frustration, but their time with the novel crafts it into a work of art.

Finally, I asked whether, because of the political climax in the 1980s, there was limited time and leisure to produce art. To motivate protest, were these artists and writers forced to quickly throw together a novel or film, get it published as fast as possible, and immediately circulate it among the right circles? In other words, “How did the politics of the anti-apartheid movement hinder the production of nonpolitical fiction?” I found that the politics of the period ushered political art to the forefront of writers’ minds. All realistic art must arise out of reality; when reality is as horror-ridden as black apartheid-era South Africa, it is impossible to write a realistic portrayal of society without including elements of the politics that overshadow the land. Even in *Fools and Other Stories*, which Ndebele uses to navigate away from the conventions of protest literature, apartheid casts its shadow over the characters in the text. They live in an oppressed society, and their oppression is evident in their conversations, their education and their communities.

If writers view their job as revealing reality, mirroring truth back onto a society, then protest literature was a completely valid form of art in South Africa’s anti-apartheid struggle. Sachs’ 1989 “Preparing ourselves for freedom” was perhaps written in an effort to advance the intellectual background of his country. He wanted to escape a potentially labyrinthine furrow of literature and

push his country's cultural imagination into new territory to compliment their soon-to-be-new flag.¹

Sachs' call to end protest literature was a necessary step in ending the pain of apartheid and moving forward into a new South Africa. Indeed, this new country would have new realities to face, and new realities to reveal to its audience. However, Sachs' speech unnecessarily called protest literature "trapped in the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination" (Sachs, "Preparing 239). Like Ndebele before him,² he levied too harsh a critique on the genre. Rather than being trapped in a "ghetto," protest literature motivated the people, which in turn pressured the government, and eventually helped bring apartheid's collapse.

To achieve these ends, protest literature did not demand a complicated art form. Rather, it flourished with simple structures, stories and language. Regardless of their education level or ability to critically analyze literature, to raise support, it was imperative that all readers understand the texts. In addition, subject matter had to avoid abstraction; people reading the texts were reading as pleasure, not career. They did not have time to analyze complex symbols and deeper meanings.³ Protest literature became easily relatable Sites of Resistance against apartheid in a period of nationwide unrest and political uncertainty.

¹ A new flag was adopted on April 27, 1994, the day of South Africa's first free and democratic elections. The flag represents the new South Africa; it is well supported by the people and the government.

² Ndebele writes, protest literature "can have devastating effects on the capacity of the oppressed to develop a creatively analytical approach to their predicament" (Ndebele, "Redefining" 63).

³ Again, Sarah Nuttall's research comes into play here. After discussing the "ease" of books which her subjects found appealing, she says, "the most revealing [interview] involved a discussion about South African fiction, in which it was again the emotions such books evoked

If I were to continue this project, I would like to place the tradition of South African protest literature in the context of protest literature from around the world. I would also like to examine what has come to be known as “post-anti-apartheid” literature, as it transverses to post-apartheid literature following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.⁴ Literature of these two categories, I predict, embraces some of the ideals of protest literature. For instance, Zakes Mda’s *Heart of Redness* takes the history which protest literature spends so much time teaching, and places it in the text itself. He conflates the story of the coming of the whites in the Xhosa-settled Eastern Cape with a modern day story between a white man and a black woman. For the first time, readers actually can experience the history, as writers begin to literally incorporate it into literature.

Ultimately, *writing* protest literature became outdated on April 27, 1994, the day of South Africa’s first democratic elections. That day, a new country was born; with this birth, there arose new issues that writers must now take on, interpret, and regurgitate for their readers. Consequently, the production of protest literature did, indeed, need to end.

rather than the texts themselves that was focused on” (91). These women, studying towards their second degree, a Diploma in Education, all wanted to read books which were easy, and which affected their emotions, rather than demanded their time and thought.

⁴ The TRC was a set of hearings that took place in South Africa after 1995. They were established to open forums for discussing apartheid-related crimes. “The TRC promised amnesty to any individual guilty of ‘gross violations of human rights’ who offered full and truthful disclosure of his acts, and whose offenses were deemed politically motivated” (Linfield 21). In charge of the commission was Archbishop Desmond Tutu (then Cardinal). His daughter, human rights activist Naomi Tutu, explains that the commission had three committees: the Human Rights Committee, responsible for hearing stories from victims and survivors of both liberation movement abuses and government abuses; the Reparations Committee, who decided what the government owed the victims; and the Amnesty Committee, who had the power to grant amnesty to the people who provided full disclosure of their crimes. (Tutu, “Truth and Reconciliation”).

On the other hand, the *reading* of South African protest literature will never become outdated. It functions as a picture of society, shared by the people rather than the government's public relations experts. The genre provides a naked glimpse -- stripped of its government-issued makeup, it discloses the pockmarks of reality -- of a brief, yet vital, moment of resistance against an oppressive regime. Cultural sociologists, historians, and literary critics can access protest literature as a principle Site of Resistance against the overarching apartheid regime.

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