Chapter Seven

Articulating Localities: Sindiwe Magona’s *Push-Push! And Other Stories*1

Integral to this chapter on Sindiwe Magona’s stories is an attempt to consolidate the theme of self-reclamation that the discussions of the stories of Matlou, Maseko, Ndebele, Langa, Wicomb and Karodia reiterate: how the narratives that portray social formations are taken advantage of in order to enunciate contrasting discourses.

The image of Matlou as an infant on his mother’s back at the end of his journey from his employment in the Rustenburg mines is a forceful reminder of how narratives are adapted and retold in different projects of self-reclamation. Similar to storytelling in Matlou’s stories, the portrait of Teacher Zamani who stoically accepts corporal punishment in Njabulo Ndebele’s title story, ‘Fools’, recalls this study’s attempt to present self-reclamation as an enterprise that is driven by the imagination. The images of his leading characters who expose their bodies to purification rituals in ‘The Test’, ‘Uncle’ and ‘The Prophetess’ are reminiscent of comparable projects of self-actualisation. Read against the intertextuality that the omniscient narrators use to present the masculinity tropes that the former Umkhonto we Sizwe returnees rely on for psychic healing in Langa’s heroes, it can be safely concluded that the stories of Matlou, Ndebele and Langa visualise a post-nationalist South Africa. However, as also evident in the discursiveness that the ‘skaz’ narrators in Maseko’s stories conjure up in order to undermine apartheid, self-reclamation

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This study further went on to examine equivalent discursive practices with reference to Wicomb and Karodia’s stories. The depictions of the ratified subjectivities such as the individual self (in Wicomb’s stories) and the home (in Karodia’s stories) were analysed as porous frameworks of power that subvert essentialist uses. In other words, the argument is that a ‘popular intellectual’ who asserts the self in the secular terms that the “ordinary” suggests also consents to a form of bondedness with a dominant order that s/he attempts to undermine. (This is why this study frequently refers to the drawing in which Matlou depicts his father as an image in his employer’s spectacle lenses. As already argued, Matlou junior is intrigued with the fact that his father’s noble suffering problematises his master’s refusal to become anything other than a callous employer.) It has been argued that the “ordinary” emerges from ‘non-official’ or surreptitious reinsertions into valid historical validities that apartheid attempts to destroy. However, it has yet to be shown how the ruptures with these forms of bondedness are made. It is for these stated reasons that an exploration of Magona’s stories is embarked upon in this chapter.

A brief discussion of how textures of everyday life are drawn upon for nuanced pragmatics in Magona’s stories is first given. The oracle of ‘isangoma’ or diviner, the pyramid scheme, and the 1970s South African black township phenomenon known as the

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'people’s power’ are discussed in the final and lengthier section of this chapter as the cases in point that individuals manoeuvre to construct self-styled but not seceded sovereignties.

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‘The Hand that Kills’ and ‘I’m Not Talking About That, Now’ are stories in which, having abided by the decisions taken at the local black anti-apartheid resistance centres, the main characters discover that they have been tyrants within the national struggle that unintentionally violates family ties, and that therefore translates into an angst-inducing intricacy. A focus on the drama in which characters grow beyond the national struggle is also examined in the story ‘Comrade, Heal Yourself!’ A similar dialectic recurs in Magona’s non-struggle stories, ‘Push—Push!’ and ‘A Drowning in Cala’. These are stories in which the narrators present characters who utilise social practices and beliefs to perform difference experientially even when it ultimately confirms or affirms custom or tradition in an unorthodox way. In all these stories, the narrators foreground characters who reconstruct themselves in ways that transcend their failings and errors of judgment. This central focus is indicative of the fact that Magona acknowledges that forms of bondedness can constrain individuals in enterprises of self-actualisation.

Looked at as a whole, *Push—Push! & Other Stories* privileges the centrality of textures of everyday life in projects of self-reclamation in a manner that elaborately dialogues with *Loving, Living and Lying Awake at Night*, the short story sequence that Magona

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3 Sindiwe Magona, *Loving, Living and Lying Awake at Night*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 2003.)
published five years earlier in 1991. Margaret Daymond’s critique is acknowledged and adapted in this chapter’s exploration of how the “ordinary” is revealed in *Push—Push! & Other Stories*. Daymond describes *Loving, Living and Lying Awake at Night* as “oral tales’ representation of a community’s bonds and a desire for ‘orderliness’.”

Reminiscent of Ndebele’s analysis of Yashar Kemal in *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, Daymond argues that the renewal of these social ties in the narrative structures of Magona’s *Loving, Living and Lying Awake at Night* is reflected in the monologues of black women characters who negotiate “the[ir] plight… under apartheid” by “talking to each other about their circumstances, their actions, their needs and dreams, their histories and their futures” via “inscribed vocalisation” and “spoken writing”. This is where, for example, “women’s gossip” “serves as a screen for the production and circulation of a “knowing otherwise.” As implicit in the popular intellectuals in the stories discussed in the previous chapters, the phrases of the “inscribed vocalisation” and “spoken writing” call to mind Ndebele’s conception of the “ordinary”, central to which are ‘non-official’ discursive practices. Daymond adopts these expressions in order to analyse the ‘*skaz*’; “the face-to-face interaction between the narrator and the audience of a performed tale”

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5 Reminiscent of Ndebele’s analysis of Yashar Kemal in *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary*, Daymond argues that the renewal of these social ties in the narrative structures of Magona’s *Loving, Living and Lying Awake at Night* is reflected in the monologues of black women characters who negotiate “the[ir] plight… under apartheid” by “talking to each other about their circumstances, their actions, their needs and dreams, their histories and their futures” via “inscribed vocalisation” and “spoken writing”.

6 Margaret Daymond, Op., cit., p.335.
that is key to *Loving, Living and Lying Awake at Night*. In Daymond’s view, this
narrative style is made apparent in a characteristic plot structure in which the narrator
who “speaks before a mostly silent but active audience of one” “evokes… the narrative
practices of an oral community that uses tale-telling as a means of purveying its wisdom
and rules of conduct”.

By contrast, *Push—Push! and Other Stories* is not narrated by ‘skaz’ storytellers.
However, Magona’s foregrounding of the ‘non-official’ spaces in *Loving, Living and
Lying Awake at Night* is recalled in a continuation of this preoccupation in her earlier
collection of stories, *Push—Push! and Other Stories*. This is where characters are heard
and seen constructing semblances of sovereignty that complement those social discourses
that have been found to be repressive of or unable to foreground quotidian practices.

In all the stories in this collection, Magona suggests that social identity is an indisputable
“neighborhood” that indirectly authenticates the vibrant sense of how people see
themselves, or what they are capable of becoming, although this becomes obvious often
after they have defined themselves discursively within their collectives. In affirming
custom or rules, or common practices, individuals preserve a sense of what Appadurai
calls the “here and now” that, for example, “[the apartheid-engendered] conditions of

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anxiety and entropy, social wear [attrition?] and flux, ecological uncertainty and cosmic volatility”

Shils’s phrasing of this dialectic is apposite:

[...]he need to be connected with the past, which is present in varying degrees in recommendation and reception, is sometimes intense among those... who are in search of traditional beliefs to which to attach themselves, to ‘create a past’ for themselves which will legitimize them in a way just being themselves in the present [as in being part of ‘the people’] will not allow them to do.10

A thrust of Shils’s argument is, therefore, that an individual establishes a niche within an existing order via “locality”. Appadurai defines “locality” as a “complex phenomenological quality constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts.”11 Elsewhere, “locality” is defined as “a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of a feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects.”12 “Locality” is a locus that a person initiates to re-define his/her “here and now”. An “ideological state apparatus”, what Althusser defines as a social institution that interpellates individuals as subjects,13 is shown in the

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13 According to Louis Althusser, ideology is dependent on what he calls the “ideological state apparatuses”. He argues that these are reliant on coercion and violence that interpellate individuals as subjects. He does not see these sites of social cohesion constantly being mediated. See Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971),
discussion of Magona’s stories below to be porous, that is, in a way that suggests that “spatial localization, quotidian interaction, and social scale are not always isomorphic”. These are stories in which characters find themselves privileged because they see themselves in terms of social practices and beliefs and, in the process, also adopt critical and nuanced positions while interacting with and discursively using these mores.

This exploration of Magona’s stories will argue that difference in her stories is produced by taking full advantage of the utility value of what the existing cultural stock allows (whether deliberately or unwittingly) via “diacritics”, a de facto and fragile legacy of plurality, or what Appadurai aptly phrases as “difference in relation to something local, embodied, and significant”. Difference in this case is a “heuristic device,” that designates “a contrastive rather than a substantive property of certain things”. In other words, difference “highlights points of similarity and contrast between all sorts of categories” such as the rank and file, and the petit-bourgeoisie or elite who lead the struggle in Magona’s stories.

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The introductory paragraph of the opening story of Magona’s collection, ‘A Drowning in Cala’, succinctly encapsulates the discursiveness as it has been stated in the theory section of this chapter:

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‘These things happen,’ they said and accepted the verdict of the sangoma… and understood. How could they blame anyone? ‘Are we gods that we can be such masters of our feelings that we can completely erase grief and fear?’ (17)

In this story, the principal character’s family is cautiously reflecting on how they were seemingly led on a wild goose chase by the ‘sangoma’ or diviner who had advised against mourning the death of a son after he was last seen disappearing into the river. The sangoma had assured the family that the boy was “not dead” but that “[t]he people who live[d] beneath the river [had] taken him” (6). To the family, the ‘sangoma’s’ view at first makes sense, because the boy was familiar with this river in which he used to swim “since he was knee high” and “knew it [river] left and right” (3). Thus they believed her when she said that the boy would be resurfacing alive from what she had spoken of as a sojourn with the ancestors (6). According to the ‘sangoma’, offering alcohol and an ox in sacrifice “at that very spot where [the boy had gone] down” (12) would touch “the river gods” (11), and therefore ‘reverse’ the tragedy. Unfortunately, the distressed family had initially accepted literally the ‘sangoma’s’ idea that the ancestors had summoned the boy to the riverbed “to make him theirs that he may help all people beaten down by troubles” (6). When, however, the body of the boy surfaces stone dead several days later, various people begin to wonder how the ‘sangoma’ had failed to decipher the truth.

It can be argued that the ‘sangoma’ communicates in a way that attempts to guide the concerned family to come to terms with the dreaded possibility that their son may be dead. Initially, the bereaved family fails to decode the euphemisms that the ‘sangoma’ uses in order to cushion the painful reality of death. Thus when the ‘sangoma’s’
prediction does not come to pass, the family begins to search for explanations elsewhere. For instance, they chastise themselves for having presumed that they could outwit death by performing a ritual. However, the reader implicitly understands this self-rebuke through the dialogue of other characters who are not central to the storyline: “Why had nobody told Zengele a sacrificial beast must not have even a fleck of black? ‘The left eyelid of that ox he used was black… So what do you expect when people will be that careless?’” (18) Rather than castigate the ‘sangoma’ as a mere sham and aberrant and, thus, face an uncertain future without an organising ethical backbone, the family that is mourning imputes this seeming failure to what they allege to be their vice and mediocrity. Hence, the narrator meticulously details the gradual decline of the family in question into a self-critique that, as argued below, is also therapeutic.

Attention is first given to what the family realises to be their own inability to exercise foresight at the most critical time, or in their failure to ensure that the offered sacrifice is not left unguarded and therefore vulnerable to the boys of the nearest boarding school who immediately pilfer the liquor offered to appease the ancestors. The family’s thoughts are conveyed by a community member: “the river spirits had been affronted. In their displeasure, they had left the boy in the water unprotected and… he succumbed” (17). In line with this reasoning, the bereaved fall from the innocence of what is accepted as a social norm into a bewildering site of creative experience. Indeed, this sense of “failure is not an access to a diverse ontological order, to a something beyond differences simply
because… there is no beyond”\(^{18}\). This is why, as the narrator remarks, they “grop[e] in painful confusion” (17). However, this disorientation is only a metaphor for a temporary but enriching digression; the aggrieved ultimately brings closure to the ordeal by seeking refuge in the idea that death is part of the incomprehensible that is best left unquestioned. Any attempt to gain control over death or destiny leads to the state of experience or the fall from grace that is exemplified in the fact that the family is perplexed by the realisation that they (unwittingly) tried to initiate a new identity completely seceded from that which the ‘sangoma’ recommended when she prescribed a specific ritual. In the narrator’s view, however, the afflicted family’s initial inclination not to let go or not give up on the possibility of finding their son alive is understandable albeit retrogressive or useless in terms of helping them to find closure. The community’s register and vocabulary expresses this entrapment aptly and in a way that foregrounds the growth from innocence to experience: “Whoever had not been able to kill the sorrow in the heart… had been incapacitated only by a great, great love. A mother’s tender heart for her only child? A young lover’s inexperienced heart? A father’s doubting heart? How could they ever know?” (17-18)

The clientele who consult the ‘sangoma’ ultimately utilise her service not to abide by its literal meaning, but to use this prescription to articulate and thus affirm a difference of their own construction. In other words, the ‘sangoma’ represents a patronage from which the principal character’s family would rather not completely sever themselves, despite

seeing the necessity to do so. (By contrast, the Prophetess in Njabulo Ndebele’s ‘The Prophetess’ is a ‘figure head’ that ‘devolves’ the healing practice in ways that encourage individual virtuosity. The prophetess’s freeing of a client to undertake a free but guided spiritual excursion in Ndebele’s ‘The Prophetess’ guarantees virtually no angst. As also noted in the discussion of the relationship between the character Uncle and his friend in Ndebele’s ‘Uncle’, the self is reclaimed via a performance of music within the specified or prescribed scales. A comparable form of leadership in sessions of therapy was made evident in the exploration of how the psychologists in Mandla Langa’s stories rehabilitate the distressed Umkhonto We Sizwe soldiers who have just returned from exile suffering post-traumatic stress disorders. 19) As is evident in Magona’s ‘A Drowning in Cala’, the authority that the distressed family seems to have does not guarantee an autonomy that is absolute where they are happy following the ‘sangoma’s’ prophecy to the letter, or where they freely ignore it on the grounds that it is impractical and illogical. Magona suggests that healing is possible when the bereaved make meaning of the ‘sangoma’s’ divination without any condescension. Ultimately, it is neither a question of whether the ‘sangoma’ told a lie, or the truth. What is relevant is that the bereaved initiate a self-styled way to cope effectively with their predicament. Indeed, one of the objectives of ritual is to initiate and foster a dialogue between the affected people and the metaphysical world with which they relate (often) through anxiety. (As argued later, with reference to Magona’s struggle stories, she implies that the modern proletariat in the national liberation struggle inherits this complexity, and that the characters often fail to rationalise it for resistance purposes.)

19 See chapter Three of this study.
‘A Drowning in Cala’ is narrated from the third person point of view that also registers many voices without privileging one above the other in a condescending way. Nor does this perspective favour a particular opinion against other alternative positions (as enunciated in the social setting). Thus the suggestion is that the ‘sangoma’ did not lie. Nor was the bereaved family duped. While it appears at first that the communication between the ‘sangoma’ and the family in question seems tangential, no one gives the impression of suffering anguish when it is revealed at the end that the ‘sangoma’ did not imply that the boy was not dead. Instead, the disparity between what the ‘sangoma’ meant and the original interpretation by the bereaved becomes a moment or site of calm reflection. This is where what was perhaps supposed to be a frustrating sense of failure is (if neither deliberately ignored, nor ingeniously elided) celebrated indirectly for affirming a people’s belief in the incomprehensible nature of death. And here, as argued already, the narrator relies on similes drawn from the euphemisms that people use in their day-to-day interaction. These euphemisms portray people in a way that makes them unravel the “articulations in which concepts… appear linked by inherent logical relations… [when they are in actual fact] bound together simply by connotative or evocative links which custom and opinion ha[ve] established between them.”

In another story that explores a comparable dialectic to ‘A Drowning in Cala’, ‘Push-Push!’, the narrator presents her fictional community as bewildered after losing their

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money in a pyramid scheme, “push-push!” This is a self-enrichment enterprise that functions allegedly through mere contribution: “‘You put your money into the common fund and, as others put theirs after you, their money pushes yours up and up and up and up—till it gets to the very top!’” (27) This story hinges predominantly on a dialogue that is apparent in the voices of those who are overly optimistic and those who are extremely suspicious of the motive of the architects of this venture. This conflict pits the narrator’s father against her mother. The narrator’s regular support for her mother who finds her husband stupid for being cynical about “push-push!” is very clear from the start. However, the storyteller’s presentation of her community as being polarised between those who are gullible and those who are pessimistic changes to a non-antinomian one when the story concludes.

Magona’s revelation of what push-push! means to the people is indicative of their ability to participate in a spiritual expedition: how to confront a sense of helplessness and weaknesses unprepared. As noted, the narrator’s father’s response to his wife’s musing about how the people lost money in a pyramid scheme in ‘Push-Push!’ suggests that he thinks that this enterprise is cursed: “‘Serves them right too, I said then and I will say it now. Serves them damn right’” (38). His analysis appears valid because, for instance, Grandpa Goba, one of the people who “was handsomely rewarded for” investing money in the scheme and was looking forward to throwing his daughter a glamorous wedding, threw himself into his burning house the day before the wedding. It appears that he decides to kill himself because he realises that he was made rich at the expense of his fellow men and womenfolk who lost their wealth. There are other incidents that the
people see as being of equivalent apocalyptic proportion where “[a] man tried to drown himself in the Vlei,” “[t]he number of couples separating or divorcing was so significantly higher than usual… that people remarked: ‘Is [the pyramid scheme] not a plague that has come?’” (37)

It is the narrator’s family that Magona uses to refract her vision of how self-reclamation is achieved using textures of everyday life. Similar to the bereaved family in ‘A Drowning in Cala’, the family in ‘Push—Push!’ rationalise their blunders without arguing that these signal mediocrity, and this is evident when they sweep the memory of how they lost their money under the carpet until “[y]ears later” when the narrator accidentally recalls the incident. It is as if silence is a metaphor for the taboo that the family in question uses to escape the embarrassing and angst-inducing realisation of their fall from grace until they are spiritually mature. Indeed, admitting immediately to their fallen state would mean that they have a catastrophic sense of loss to deal with. An example of this sense of crisis is the one that incites Goba to commit suicide. In contrast to the narrator’s mother who, speaking much later, imputes their loss of money to “that foolishness that cost half of the people here their money” (38), the rest of the story presents the events that led to the fiasco in question in terms of the oracular that the family would rather not question, because they fear falling into a bewildering predicament such as the one that drives Goba to kill himself.

The purchasers of pyramid scheme shares in this story seem to understand this enterprise as a social discourse that makes a sense of self possible. This is why, when the story ends,
the investors articulate difference in terms of spiritual growth on realising that the venture was a mere scam. As performed by the bereaved family in ‘A Drowning in Cala’, ritual sacrifice initiates a similar simulacrum of maturation.

Somewhat reminiscent of Karodia’s approach to ‘home’ as the site of struggle, Magona portrays the black national struggle as another example of a social interactivity between “neighborhoods” and “localities”. South Africa’s late seventies and mid-eighties produced “necklacing,” a form of discipline and punishment in which the perpetrators put a petrol-drenched tyre around a victim’s neck, and then torched the accused for collaborating with the system of oppression. Those who initiate “[n]ecklacing” are convinced that it is a product of the sovereignty of the “people’s power.” “One of the components of people’s power,” it is argued, “are people’s courts… whose aim was to enforce a new morality, a people’s morality that conformed to the political ideals of their liberatory projects.” Magona is, however, interested in examining how a quotidian tapping of the struggle discourse such as ‘the people’s power’ initiates new ethical challenges. The struggle narrative in these stories is, therefore, a phenomenon that is...
understood from heterogeneous practices, that is, those that do not operate exclusively through interpellation. An array of forces interacts in a non-linear fashion to produce/generate a complex entanglement.

Chabani Manganyi offers an interesting analysis of an appearance of this dialectic. A need to unmask a “false consciousness”, Manganyi maintains, pervades a sense of social bondedness in the black national struggle contexts. He implicitly defines “false consciousness” as a “central dilemma in the psychology of subordination both in its infantile (natural) and adult forms”. He argues that it is apparent “as the fear of losing ambivalence ([or] subjective violence) for violence as social act,” because “ambivalence is predicated and sustained by violence against the self to placate once and for all the alternative in favour of objective violence against the representatives of authority”. Manganyi elaborates, stating that this dilemma “consists of the proverbial smile of the colonised, the expressionless face in the wake of intense provocation”, and may be resolved through “acting out,” that is, an impulsive carrying out of destruction that is not aligned to the “conscious thoughts and feelings”. Manganyi continues that the “act” is a “product of a chronic, silent and secret anguish,” and that “[o]nce… committed the subject experiences a perverse kind of purgation since both the impulse and its consequent act are universalised”. It is this new predicament that Manganyi sees as a

transcendence of a “false consciousness” that perpetuates colonial subordination.

However, Magona is concerned with the “reveries” that surface even as the individuals negate their indifference by embracing “the people” or by pledging allegiance to this bondedness through “acting out”. According to Manganyi, “reverie” refers to

a product of a psycho-analytically informed imagination grappling with fragments of a stream of consciousness. Fragments of this kind are useful to the extent that they mirror for us the kinds of existential dilemmas which confront members from subordinate groups.

In the story, ‘The Hand That Kills’, for instance, Lunga sees the act of magnanimity in terms of two polar moral values that he at first seems to balance well. Initially, he is not averse to being raised by Mr Walker, as “the son I never had” (129). On the other hand, Lunga sees his upbringing in terms of white racist patronage when he is with his militant black colleagues. The latter attitude is borne out in Walker’s implicit ignorance when he argues that “carrying a pass [is like] carrying an ID book” (134). Lunga remembers that he was apparently content to be part of the street sub-culture whose self-definition incorporated a clearly articulated sense of ritual. One such ritual is obvious when his colleagues assign him, in his view, to murder Walker because he represented to them the “white suburb[an]” oppressor against which blacks struggle during apartheid. His colleagues call the “mission” that they assign him “baptis[m] in the fire of action” (137). They appropriate Christianity, and then make it carry and express the authority that they would rather not see questioned. Perhaps this act of poaching is intended to prevent the

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possibility of the soon-to-be murderer plunging into anguish, that is, after committing the act. In place of the Xhosa initiation or rite of passage into manhood, or the Christian grace of confirmation, Lunga’s colleagues orient him “into black young manhood” (131), a disposition of aggression that is thought to be an effective adversary against colonial alienation. He and his colleagues reason that Walker and his ilk deserve to be killed, allegedly because they fail to see the state and the law as racist. When facing capital punishment for homicide, however, Lunga begins to understand that he had never harboured any (political) intention to commit his hand to the murder, although this is contrary to what he had been professing to his peers. As Lunga later finds out, the main irony of his interaction with the black youth whom he met and befriended through their common opposition to apartheid is that they do not share the warm affection that he has across race with Mr Walker privately at their home.

Another irony that is revealed in this story is the notion of “white-man father” (137), a designation that the black youth use to reveal apartheid’s classification of human beings in perverse and ambiguous terms. Despite the fact that the intention is to be derisive, the phrase “white-man father” expresses, from another viewpoint, a synthesis between whiteness and blackness, a notion that is concretised in Lunga being raised by Mr Walker. Articulated by the black boys who are basically demanding racial equality before the law, however, “white-man father” signifies, ironically, a reconsideration on their part of the value of drawing conclusions about people merely on the basis of the racial identities imposed on them by the government.
In illustration of perverted logic after killing Walker, Lunga attempts to dissociate his body which pulled the trigger from the intention to murder. According to the storyteller, Lunga comments on the realisation that he had just killed Walker: “And then, the stupid gun went off” (139). In other words, Lunga castigates that which he commits ‘unintentionally’ or without principle, so that he can still hold on to the image of his ideal self. In reality, he is complicit in an inhumane act. Magona appears to present remorse as a “reverie” that enables Lunga an ethically complex perspective of himself where, according to him, his body, as opposed to his rational self, becomes a site that he symbolically cleanses through chastisement by viewing it as objectifying his sin/fall from grace. According to Magona, compunction is a preserve of the creative that develops as a “diacritic” of a new context within what is considered the people’s justice. As demonstrated in Lunga’s sense of guilt after committing murder, contrition is also a mark of reason, and of “local and embodied difference.” Penitence is presented as valuable, because it highlights the extraordinary that governs and directs people towards a painstaking understanding of how their contribution and allegiance to the struggle creates new and fundamentally complex circumstances. (The character Lunga differs from Ndebele, Langa and Wicomb’s characters who attempt to reconcile, and not polarise, their bodies with their minds/spirit. 28) This is why he “[c]radles[s] Mr. Walker… and slumped onto the cold, unyielding floor, unseeing eyes staring into nothingness, mouth wide and dry as the desert, body bereft of feeling” (139) immediately after killing him.

28 Compare with the (semi-)ritual healing performances in Ndebele, Langa and Wicomb’s stories in Chapters Three, Four, and Five, respectively, of this study. In these authors, the protagonists’ mission is to reconcile, and not polarise the corporal body with the mind/spirit.
Lunga’s “[c]rad[ling]” of Walker is a metaphor of a submission to guilt, and not to his youthful ‘neighborhood’.

Through hindsight, and as he awaits possibly capital punishment, Lunga recalls that he viewed initiation “into black manhood” in terms of carving a niche where he would establish himself as an autonomous subject. Magona problematises reclamation (via initiation) by having Lunga imagine himself as a person who was capable of mediating the black struggle’s ritual of manhood with ingenuity and compassion, and without earning his colleagues’ wrath (138). For instance, in contrast to what he apparently understood to be his colleagues’ definition of being opposed to racism, Lunga remembers that he had not gone to Walker’s house and their home to kill him (137). He felt that his comrades did not “understand the pressure he had felt himself under,” nor anything “about fighting to gain the[ir] respect” (138). His aim was to “borrow” “a few of Mr Walker’s possessions… [t]hings he hardly ever used,” “return” “with the loot without [Walker’s] permission; tell eager ears how he had made the white man grovel, plead for his life. And how he had terrorised him into submission” (138-139). Lunga had hoped that his lie would convince “his comrades, show them he was as capable of bold action as the next person” (138), and therefore earn their respect without their knowing that he had not killed Walker.

Lunga’s introspection as he awaits sentencing reveals that he was aware that there was no overlapping in terms of ethics between the private spaces of his home, and of the public
street that decided the syllabus of the “black manhood” into which he was being initiated. Thus he was content to return to the home that he shared with Walker, because it was the primary space of socialisation that his colleagues would not offer him, despite Walker’s patronising tendency. Lunga belatedly confirms his allegiance to Walker when facing sentencing by noting that his hands “had no anger when they [committed the murder]” but “fear… at its rawest” (135). “[F]ear” reflected an appropriate reaction to the horror that he was about to unleash on his newly defined family, that is, a microcosm of the envisaged non-racial public that his colleagues unwittingly demanded when they sarcastically called Walker Lunga’s “white-man father.” What Lunga’s comrades did not know was that he did not cherish identity when it was defined in biological terms, and when these were referred to in order to (dis)qualify his membership of a family. As is obvious in Lunga’s intentions, he utilises the struggle context to initiate a nuanced semblance of bondedness that is racially porous and replete with radical innocence.

Magona’s focus on the tragic drama in which Lunga grows experientially beyond what his colleagues prescribe for him resonates in another story, ‘Comrade, Heal Yourself!’ This is the story that features the protagonist, Masondo, whose inadvertent but sophisticated interpretation of the struggle’s rhetoric makes him act beyond expectation when he pursues a formal Western education while he and his “comrades” were shouting “LIBERATION NOW, EDUCATION LATER!” (54) Indeed, his interpretation signifies a maturity that competes with the sovereignty of the “people’s power”, and earns him the ire of his colleagues in the struggle. Masondo and Lunga in ‘The Hand that Kills’ are comparable in the sense that they covertly restructure or reposition the struggle discourse
to provide opportunities where individuals are free to think and assert themselves independently, and without being judged as being dissident.

The plot of the story, ‘Comrade, Heal Yourself!’, also implicitly identifies the national struggle as polyphonic. Chiefly, the narrator presents the encounter between the murderers and the victim as fraught, because the culprits erroneously assume that the struggle is opposed to independent thinking. Ironically, the one who chants the slogan “Liberation first, Education later!” unwittingly suggests that s/he has matured beyond the ‘Bantu’ education system the aim of which was to restrict critical thinking. Indeed, Masondo unreflectingly understands the struggle as not only non-racial, but trans-racial in orientation. At this level of thinking, “Education” and “Liberation” are not mutually exclusive. (However, his education alienates him from his peer group. He is therefore not trusted, because he is perceived as a member of the petit-bourgeoisie and also because he appears prosperous.) He has always been free to pursue actively (for other ideological aims) the shunned Bantu education, despite the fact that his colleagues understood him to be saying the opposite.

Masondo thus responds with silent bewilderment on being asked to account for how he became a medical doctor when they were shouting “Liberation Now, Education Later!” His localised reading of the liberation struggle necessarily singles him out as an oddity or a sell-out, and he consequently suffers for failing to calculate and expose the fact that this discourse is a complex phenomenon in which meaning is reliant on articulation. The rest
of the story presents, in a linear and documentary plot, people violently objecting to the plan to bury Masondo’s body in their township. There are, in addition, a series of successful acts of intimidation of the people who intend to give his remains a proper burial. He fades from social memory, because no one mourns his death. (In Langa’s story, ‘The Naked Song’, the failure to mourn the loss of the loved one and to perform ceremonial burial rites leads Richard, the Umkhonto We Sizwe soldier who has just returned from exile, to experience the manic depression that manifests itself as catatonia.\(^{29}\))

Another story in which Magona shows the black national struggle to be fraught with multiple acts of enunciations that manifest in ‘technologies of interactivity’ between ‘neighborhood’ and ‘locality’ is ‘I’m Not Talking About That, Now’. When this story opens, the narrator presents one of the principal characters, Mdlangathi, who in turn presents the youth as being presumptuous about social morality and ethics. According to him, the youth is “curse[d]” (66). As one form of evidence of this “curse,” Mdlangathi cites a “group of boys” (67) who force an intoxicated old man to drink disinfectant and thereafter push a feather down his throat in order to induce peristalsis (68). “Three weeks” (69) into the consumer boycott, Mdlangathi’s son, Mteteli, and other youth attack his mother who was returning from purchasing some groceries for her family. According to the narrator, the youth happily “[s]tamp[ed] and kick[ed] at her food so that everything

\(^{29}\) Compare with the analysis of one of the causes of schizophrenia in Langa’s story, ‘The Naked Song’, discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.
got thoroughly mixed up with the sand and with other food items… All those things, mixed together, became nothing” (76).

The “curse” that Mdlangathi attributes to the youth’s behaviour is ironically a metaphor of the different articulations that the rest of the story foregrounds through variations in order to probe the complex trajectory of the struggle. This dialogic context is also reflected in the fact that Mdlangathi frequently veers off his narrative, because he attempts to calm his agitation with what he presents as “the gross lack of respect of today’s young people” (66). His wife, who is listening to him, feigns lack of interest, because they are facing a financial crisis, and also because their son is in league with the rest of the youth who now claim moral authority by policing boycotts of white commercial enterprises (69). She is also preoccupied with the hypocrisy that she finds pervasive within the semblance of unity that her community celebrates through the consumer boycotts: “People sprouting eyes at the back of their heads so that they could go and curry favour with the comrades; giving them information about others, especially those with whom they did not see eye to eye about things” (70). Understood as a popular equivalent of schizophrenia, “curse” in Mdlangathi’s view designates an error of judgment of which an individual is unaware, and that manifests itself through an overzealous and violent subjection of all people to conformity. 30 Hence the title of this story, “I’m Not Talking About That, Now,” conveys a sense of a set of principles that the

30 “Curse” in this case is not the malady that manifests itself in patients during seasonal change. This phenomenon was discussed in the exploration of Maseko’s ‘A Two-Day Adventure’. See Chapter Two of this study.
culprit assumes the victim to be aware of, and so invokes them in order to counteract a possibility of invalidating the alleged wisdom that the perpetrator claims.

As in ‘The Hand That Kills’, death also marks the conclusion of the story ‘I’m Not Talking About That, Now’. Mdlangathi, the angry father, knocks down his uncouth son for insisting on his entitlement to be fed by his parents (82), and for (validly) arguing that the sacredness of this right is not contingent on his insensitive and indiscriminate conduct. As already explained, this disrespect is evident in Mteteleli destroying his mother’s groceries that she had purchased in contravention of the boycott. Ironically, both the father and the son define rights in terms of what culture and tradition bestow, as opposed to what interventions the individuals make to render more meaningful the specific cultural practices. An example of this mediation is evident when Mteteli insists on being provided for, and when he acknowledges to his father that this insistence is not tantamount to a declaration of a fight with him (82). Neither Mdlangathi nor Mteteli sees their invocation of social morality as indicative of their complicity in violence. Different “localities” and not justice pervade the purpose of these parties that claim to affirm and defend the black integrity that they see from different perspectives.

Of all Magona’s stories, ‘The Widow’ is the only one in which marriage features as a metaphor of a centre from which competing authorities become evident and interact in a perverse way. In this story, the protagonist David marries Anne Carmichael while both were actively involved in the African National Congress underground structures. When the story concludes, Anne swaps David’s insulin with poison, and he dies after
unsuspectingly injecting himself. The discussion below reveals that the narrator portrays the marriage between Anne and David as based on competing articulations and ‘heuristic devices’ that depart from a defiance of apartheid.

Throughout the story, the narrator portrays this union through dramatic ironies, and implicitly makes a case for it as a discourse that is interspersed by contradictory ‘localities’ or intentional activities that have nothing to do with the love that they profess for each other as spouses. This is evident in Anne’s angry outburst at David’s announcement of his intention to file for divorce on the grounds that their marriage had been “a lie” (121). Another proof of this disparity is his argument that he wants divorce so as to “make amends” to the “desperate” black woman with whom he has had four children (122). We learn implicitly from her outrage that she had married David in order to make up for the lack of love and power that, in her view, she was apparently denied when she was a child growing up. For instance, the narrator says that Anne grew up “[a]n only child… alone in a household of affluence… her parents too preoccupied with their lofty station in life to have room in their hearts for a shy and gawky little girl who was unfortunately neither cute nor pretty” (119). Because she was “[t]he child whose tears the mother had never wiped away, whose grazed knee she had never kissed better,” Anne found refuge among the “black nannies [who] rocked” (121) her. However, she evidently develops a love-hate relationship with this latter experience of refuge, especially when she sees the woman for whom David was intending to leave her as “not… another woman, no; but… a black peasant” (123). In her view, David’s intention to file for a divorce was going to “bring disgrace to all of us” (123), that is, her family as an entity
that is allegedly superior in racial and class terms. It stands to reason that, in marrying David, Anne thought that she was marrying a recognisable other, that is, one who was opposed to apartheid and white domination, but not good enough to be her equal.

Ironically, David reciprocated Anne’s apparent dishonesty, and was quite happy to play along. He could never have been committed to her when he was seeing/intending to see another woman primarily because of her blackness. It seems that Magona undermines his allegation that he “want[s] to do the right thing by [the black mother of his children]” (122), because the sincerity that he alleges is triggered by what he calls the new “government [that] has finally taken a leap into the twentieth century” (122). In the same way that Anne is denying him a divorce, David defends his decision to file for it by appealing to the morality of the new nation. In his view, people fit squarely into moral pigeonholes. Irrespective of the fact that Anne is ambivalent about black people, Magona portrays him in a way that suggests that he does not have any justification to caustically dismiss her as “[t]he big liberal, hot shot academic, going about condemning the Nationalist Party and its dehumanising policies” (122). His arrogance is also evident in his notion of marriage because he makes it a racial issue in order to create and appeal to what he presents as its unquestionable authority. In alleging that blackness is his reason for wanting to go back to the black woman with whom he has children, he ironically also strips marriage of the basic human affection. He is therefore portrayed as being as hypocritical as Anne.
Similar to Lunga’s plight in the story ‘The Hand That Kills’, the conclusion of the story ‘The Widow’ foregrounds Anne’s remorse and guilt for having violated the sanctity of her nuclear family. In both stories, the narrators highlight Lunga and Anne experiencing turmoil, and this is indicative of their desire for deliverance. In both scenes, confusion manifests itself in terms of the failure of the conscious will to manage the physiological or muscular faculty.

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This chapter has discussed the centrality of a ‘knowing otherwise’ in Magona’s portrayal of practices that produce difference via “locality”, a “complex phenomenological quality constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts”.31 The ‘ordinary’ is evident in this contest for power where existing discourses are adapted and interrogated. As already shown in the examination of ‘A Drowning in Cala’ and ‘Push-Push!’, the first form of this “diacritic” is considerably uninvolved with the racial struggle while the second is apparent in ‘The Hand that Kills’, ‘Comrade, Heal Yourself’, ‘I’m Not Talking About That, Now’ and ‘The Widow’. These are stories that feature people awakening to the fractures that are endemic in a bondedness geared at furthering the racial struggle. In both the struggle and ‘non-struggle’ contexts that Magona examines, the “[r]elations between the individual… and [socio-]political life… comprise criss-crossing and dynamic mediations, reciprocally and untidily transforming each other.”32 Also in these settings,

32 Anne McClintock, “Fanon and Gender Agency” in *Rethinking Fanon: The*
the individuals discover themselves in certain social “positionalities”\footnote{Stuart Hall in Jennifer Daryl Slack’s “The Theory and method of articulation in cultural studies,” Stewart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies, David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, eds., (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p.120.} that provide opportunities for localisation within and beyond specific “neighborhoods.” Magona’s fiction is arguably more sophisticated than the stories discussed in the previous chapters, because she tends to problematise the “ordinary” in order to assert the inherent dilemmas of self-reclamation under oppression.