

Chapter Four

The Realism of '*iNgoma*': Ritual therapy and Art in Mandla Langa's short stories¹

It was submitted in the previous three chapters that the navigation of alienation is an enterprise of the imagination. The argument is, on the one hand, that the stories of Ndebele show a contesting of depersonalisation in the terms that are reminiscent of African Initiated Christian ritual. Also, through Ndebele's image of black popular Christianity, attention is drawn to the fact that ritual establishes for the afflicted a self-styled sense of belonging. Through such performance elements as running, music, the use of water and corporal punishment, the sufferings that are perceived to be affecting the body are transcended. Matlou and Maseko's negotiations of apartheid through their foregrounding of specific tropes of power, on the other hand, do not overtly reveal ritual. In all these three authors' stories, the primary site of trauma is visited symbolically with the purpose of enunciating psychic healing.

The significance of the 'ordinary' is further discussed in this chapter's focus on ritual therapy in Mandla Langa's stories. It is argued that, having arrived in South Africa from exile where they were serving the African National Congress, the plight of these returnees intensifies on realising the extent to which they and their loved ones have sustained casualties while fighting apartheid. In contrast to Ndebele's stories where an individual generally initiates healing unassisted and alone, Langa locates recuperation explicitly in a social practice that is reminiscent of ritual. As Soyinka argues, ritual is a

¹ Mandla Langa, *The Naked Song and other Stories*, (Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Philip, 1996).

form of art where a performer attempts to reconcile with the environment² in a socially interactive ceremony through, for example, dance, singing, poetry and incantation. Ritual is a solemn context that affords the techniques that “creat[e] the emotional and spiritual overtones that would pervade... the consecrated spot where the divine presence must be invoked and borne.”³

What follows is, first, a discussion of the philosophical issues underpinning ritual in Africa. Then, several instances of alienation, as well as of the rites of therapy and memory-making that Langa’s stories bring to the surface, are investigated. Guilt and redress⁴ are some of the main cases in point of ethical conduct that are examined.

The narrators of Langa’s stories present analyses of the just-returned, angst-ridden black *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldiers. Richard, the Odysseus of the title story, ‘The Naked Song’, for example, experiences manic depression, because he cannot conclude with certainty that his wife who also served as a freedom fighter, is “dead” as a “few [former comrades] were interred in graves without headstones, unknown and unmourned in inaccessible sites” (84). When this story draws to a close, the narrator, Gama the therapist, intends to give Richard “the kind of occupational therapy befitting a musician”. Such a healing session involves playing alongside Richard as he improvises musical performances, “remind[ing]” him of his “mother who had died while [he was]... in exile,” planting in

² Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature and the African World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.1

³ Op. cit., p.5.

⁴ The subject of guilt is pursued at length also in the discussion of Farida Karodia’s stories, Chapter Six.

him the idea that she and the other suffering people were spiritually supporting him throughout his predicament, and that they were “singing their sad songs as they bur[ied] their loved ones cut down at a tender age by our collective cowardice” (90-91).

The quest for the loved one also resonates in ‘Proud Flesh’, the story in which Blade Zungu, another just-returned *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldier, experiences post-traumatic stress disorder that manifests itself through hallucinations (44, 45) and erectile dysfunction. Zungu’s adversity is attributable to the fact he fails to bring to a close his mourning for his sister whose remains he cannot locate. When this story draws to a close, however, Zungu sees a need to see “life... as a gift... short and, hence... to be cherished,” and then recovers from his impotence. Similar to the title story where the therapist intends to foster in his patient a sense of social belonging and so derive moral support from it, Zungu in ‘Proud Flesh’ recovers, primarily because it dawns in him that healing at a broader nationalist space would materialise when “the misguided sons and daughters of the masters of the land,” seemingly the supporters of apartheid, “see that the promised land [is] more livable when shared among the people [across race]”. However, in addition to attributing therapy to a mere oneness in suffering, he argues that “[t]hose who held on to national anthems and monuments and icons which excluded others, would know that a melody is enhanced by more people singing the same song” (46). This socially interactive medium of music also echoes in the solution that the therapist is planning for his patient’s catatonia at the end of the title story, ‘The Naked Song’.

Several stories later in this collection, we have in the concluding story, ‘The Resurrection of the River Artist’, a similar argument that makes a case for therapy as a product of art

that enhances a spirit of communalism. This is the story in which an exiled artist transcends his depersonalisation ironically by insisting on being baptised in a “canal” stained with “oil” and “vile” (133) in London. This story subtly imputes recuperation from manic depression also on an ability to activate remorse in people through “sermons” (118). Similar to baptism, preaching in charismatic Christian churches is a form of art used to stimulate in the worshippers a transcendental experience.

In keeping with the Gramscian notion of popular intelligence implicit in ritual, these stories portray discourse as “the object of desire... not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but... the thing for which and by which there is struggle, the power which is to be seized”.⁵ Notwithstanding the centrality of the quest for power, however, the kind of subjectivity that is being constructed is reflexive. For instance, Langa’s characters also suffer guilt and remorse on being reminded of the fact that their active roles in resistance politics were (at times) complicit in other forms of violence. This drama is apparent in ‘There Are Virgins in the Township’, the story where another just-returned *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldier, Bobo, refuses to make amends for allegedly abandoning his former girlfriend after they had consummated their relationship many years ago, shortly before he had left for exile. Bobo also refuses to perform the ritual of visiting the grave site, that is, a symbolic recommitment to a social order. His unwillingness is caused by the fact that he understands this task in terms of pleading guilty and being remorseful on behalf of his brother, Jonathan, who had

⁵ Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse,” *Untying The Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Robert Young, ed., (London & New York: Kegan & Paul, 1981), pp.56-57.

offended people while Bobo was in exile. Ironically, when the story draws to a close, he stands before an old colleague, Arthur, who threatens murder, because he alleges that Bobo and his brother had cruelly treated a girlfriend (with whom they had been intimate at different times in the past).

The stories, 'The Naked Song', 'Proud Flesh' and 'The Resurrection of the River Artist', on the one hand and, on the other hand, 'There Are Virgins in the Township', complement one another in exploring the quest for stability and power in the broader context of the return home from exile. The returning *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldiers in these stories are helped to initiate healing for themselves through art/performance in harmony with other people. Art, in this case, is also a religious experience that enables a person to deal with the history of pain and trauma. These stories implicitly foreground a need to perform ritual, that is, to take a symbolic journey (back) to the primary environment that initiated suffering in order to conquer or come to terms with it and, where necessary, to undertake an obligatory expiation. However, these stories subtly posit reclamation as inane if it does not create a space that allows other people to claim difference in individually fulfilling terms. The latter is explicit in 'There Are Virgins in the Township', the story that argues for discretion in the seizing of power, and also foregrounds guilt as a tool of social rehabilitation.

Emphasis in the discussion of Langa's stories is, therefore, on the socially involved and conscious diagnosis and resolution of spiritual/psychological predicaments through ritual.

Notwithstanding the fact that Gama, the healer in the title story, is a Western-trained psychologist, the centrality of art, performance and the socio-religious space that these stories foreground as the main components of divination and healing suggest that the author experiments with the discourse of ‘*iNgoma*’. In the other stories, the characters who can be considered as contributing to the process of therapy are neither trained in the Western sense nor in any formal African ways of healing. However, these individuals support the afflicted *Umkhonto We Sizwe* returnees in terms that are equivalent to those of Gama who incorporates the mentioned elements of ‘*iNgoma*’ in his approach to therapy. According to Janheinz Jahn, “[d]oing [i]Ngoma is...the ritual unit that defines the institution [of healing].”⁶ The “discourses of healing,” Jahn maintains,

take a number of forms: the evocation of distress and hope before others; prayers to God, ancestors, and spirits; songs both out of the cultural stock at hand as well as original compositions from the wellsprings of individual emotion; highly codified dress; instrumental accompaniment and dance; the evocation and use of materia medica... [because] at issue is the mutual expression of feelings and ideas and the marshalling of knowledge and social networks required to bring about an acceptable solution to the range of ills.⁷

While Jahn in the quotation (above) presents a comprehensive portrait of the discourse of ‘*iNgoma*’, Credo Mutwa makes a clinical analysis of the processes of spiritual fragmentation that makes this discourse necessary, and of its integral element, that is, ritual as elaborated below. This thesis’ focus is on these key phenomena as they reverberate in some of the central motifs in Langa’s depiction of the healing of the *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldiers who have just returned to their homes. According to Mutwa,

⁶ Janheinz Jahn, *Ngoma: Discourses of Healing In Central And Southern Africa*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1992), p.128.

⁷ Op cit., p.xi.

any psychological or psychiatric imbalance results from a disrupted relationship between a human being and God,⁸ because “the [human] soul is in fact an integral part of God and... our souls came into being when God created Himself”.⁹ Mutwa continues to explain that a human being comprises “moya” (soul) and “ena” (self). He argues that while the former splits into two moral poles that relate ideally through balance, the latter “develops as the person develops, out of memories and experiences,” and is responsible for facilitating a healthy communion between an individual and his/her physiology, and with his/her metaphysical realities.¹⁰ Any upset of this balance is a result of “soul loss” that happens either through “magic or hatred”,¹¹ and leads to a physiological and psychiatric or psychological predicament. However, through careful diagnosis, Mutwa observes, “the sangoma [can] use the patient’s visions [and phobias], illusions and delusions as a lever with which to move the patient back to sanity [and convalescence],”¹² because each human mind has the power¹³ that can be moulded in therapy.¹⁴

Integral to the art of healing is a healer’s task of sharpening a sufferer’s “psychic power”, or of “mov[ing him/her through divination] out of his [or her] body”,¹⁵ and this, according to Mutwa, an afflicted patient achieves by paying extreme attention to

⁸ Credo Mutwa, “The Sangoma’s Story,” *Witchcraft Violence and the Law in South Africa*, ed., John Hund, (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2003), p.161.

⁹ Credo Mutwa, “The Sangoma’s Story,” *Witchcraft Violence and the Law in South Africa*, ed., John Hund, (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2003), p.151.

¹⁰ Op. cit., p.152.

¹¹ Op. cit., p.154.

¹² Op. cit., p.156.

¹³ Op. cit., p.158, 163.

¹⁴ Op. cit., p.162.

¹⁵ Op.cit., p.164.

transcending his/her plight. In divination, Mutwa observes, it is imperative for *isangoma* to first “drown out all the other thoughts that [s/he] may be thinking, [and] surround [him/herself, for example] with a barrier of impenetrable noise [produced in a crescendo] so that [his or] her mind powers are concentrated on”¹⁶ the duty on hand. By implication, Mutwa argues, a diviner’s intention is to instil in a distressed person a comparable resolve to temporarily banish the superficial senses of experience or mental occupation in order to will him/herself to a desired difference.

At the climax of this transcendence achieved by suspending an awareness of extraneous realities, a victim becomes a subject, that is, a visionary or poet, and mends his/her spiritual severance from God. Ecstatic singing, and sometimes trance and hollering, and fast-paced dance and acrobatic body movements often to the accompaniment of a furious drumbeat are some of the manifestations of this deliverance. This is a “participation mystique”¹⁷ when, “in times of crisis”, a patient has “move[d] out of his/her body at will”,¹⁸ and s/he reigns freely and victoriously over his/her angst, exorcising it and, in its place, crafting or weaving a broader world beyond his/her predicament, and permeating this new world with reciprocity and spontaneity. “[C]onsciousness must be outside the local corridors of space and time in order for transcendent perception to arise.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Credo Mutwa, “The Sangoma’s Story,” *Witchcraft Violence and the Law in South Africa*, ed., John Hund, (Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2003), p.165.

¹⁷ Steven M. Friedson “Dancing the Disease: Music and Trance in Tumbuka Healing,” *Music Healing in Cultural Contexts*, ed., Penelope Gouk, (Aldershot and Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Limited/Company, 2000), p.68.

¹⁸ Credo Mutwa, op.cit., p.164.

¹⁹ Edward Bruce Bynum, *The African Unconscious: Roots of Ancient Mysticism and Modern Psychology*, (New York & London: Teachers College Press, 1999), p.85.

The significance of performance art in a divination and healing process therefore needs no emphasis. Structured invariably on rhythm, often on rhyme and harmony (or sometimes counterpoint), all forms of art are vehicles that human beings use to create relationships with material and spiritual spaces, and to critically comment on social events. Recuperation materialises from a subject's intuitive sense that s/he is re-tuned to the spiritual and cultural axis from which severance was experienced, and confirms this enhancement when s/he is able to produce a harmonising narrative thereof.

Rhythm is [therefore] one of the great and powerful ordering principles in nature. There was believed to be a hidden consonance between matter, rhythm, harmony and life, of interpenetrating forces and frequencies that bound the universe together. This extended from the stars to human life to the forces in the deepest interior of the Earth.²⁰

According to Harriet Ngubane, the trustees of cosmic harmony and “religious ideology” are ‘*izangoma*’ (singular, ‘*isangoma*’) who “are in a position to innovate or modulate or modify that ideology consistently with what is possible in the context of Zulu philosophy”.²¹

Langa's focus on the images of these returning *Umkhonto We Sizwe* soldiers shows that he has a remarkable insight into the repercussions of forced exile as well as the related predicament of readjustment or rehabilitation. This ingenuity is also suggested in the fact that Langa consistently hints at how these disorders can be resolved by presenting either

²⁰ Edward Bruce Bynum, *The African Unconscious: Roots of Ancient Mysticism and Modern Psychology*, (New York & London: Teachers College Press, 1999), p.94.

²¹ Harriet Ngubane, “Clinical Practice and Organization of Indigenous Healers in South Africa,” *The Social Basis of Health & Therapy in Africa*, Stephen Feierman and John M. Janzen, eds., (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1992), p.374.

the afflicted man or the counsellor being aware that psychical breakdown will be redressed by seizing discourse. In other words, the therapist and the returning aggrieved soldier appear as *dramatis personae* in a session of '*iNgoma*' that this fiction conjures up. The third person perspective that highlights these dramas therefore interpellates the reader into a privileged position of a (psycho-)analyst.

On stage before the reader, as it were, is the convalescence that manifests itself in terms of the Dionysian and a taking of control of the body. In other words, the distressed individuals recover from the sense of lack that has genesis in the apartheid symbolic order the manifestations of which are schizophrenia, hallucination, catatonia and erectile dysfunction. Thus, '*iNgoma*' is not a "text" considered to be mere "rhetoric" that "depart[s] from proper meaning".²² Instead, '*iNgoma*' concerns inducting the afflicted people into the sense of self from which alienation was experienced.

While the characters in Ndebele's stories self-prescribe healing by attempting to wipe out what they consider to be the racial negation that is inscribed on their corporal bodies, it does not seem that Langa's returning *Umkhonto We Sizwe* soldiers consciously perceive their bodies as fundamentally out of kilter with mind or soul. This is despite the same soldiers, especially in the story 'The Naked Song', suffering manic depression, or what *isangoma* would describe as being held prisoner in one's malfunctioning body. Indeed, as the character Gama implicitly observes, the fact is that his client, Richard, is struggling to

²² Harold Bloom, "Poetry, Revisionism, and Repression", *Twentieth-Century Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. K.M. Newton, (Basingstoke Hampshire and London, 1997), p.149.

recover from the dungeons of being a mere puppet of the “nationalitarian”,²³ struggle that fed him the dogma that killing was an unavoidable means towards freedom. Gama elaborates: “[t]here was Abner, who had been pursued by storms, but he was convinced that the path to his house was lined with tombstones”, and Trevor who would “dream that someone who had taken his body was also sleeping in a room which was a replica of his own, and was merely biding his time, waiting for the moment Trevor went into a deep sleep so that he could make the switch” (74).

In the worse case scenario, the figure of an *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldier returning from exile embodies the alienation and the psychological fragmentation that is reminiscent of the schizophrenic (discussed in chapter One of this thesis). Richard is an ex-*Umkhonto we Sizwe* returnee who is taken to consult Gama, the psychologist in the title story ‘The Naked Song’, because of being vexed by post-traumatic stress disorder. Richard could not be present at his mother’s funeral to participate in the ceremonial parting (77), because he was a fugitive. His wife, also an *Umkhonto we Sizwe* freedom fighter when she was alive, died while she was on a mission in South Africa. His predicament reveals itself primarily in speech loss that began apparently after being informed by his former colleagues of *Umkhonto we Sizwe* that his wife, whom he had had contact with four years previously, had died. He is extremely saddened also by the fact that his colleagues knew about this misfortune for four years without telling him (84).

²³ The concept, “nationalitarian”, seems to have been first coined by Anouar Abdel-Malek to refer to the anti-colonialists who saw the “attainment of nationhood” in terms of mere “seizure of colonial state power”. This term has become a standard reference to the petit bourgeoisie who repress difference after liberation. See Neil Lazarus, *Resistance in Postcolonial African Fiction*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1990), p.5.

According to Gama, Richard's trauma designates essentially the difficulty that is indecipherable to the therapist, because he does "not have the benefit of the sufferer's nuance, inflection or cadence of speech, nor [can a therapist] seize on nonverbal clues suggested by a telltale quirk or mirrored through eyes, facial expression or body language" (72). As a result of this gulf, an intervention is necessary to reconcile his physiology with his psychiatric and spiritual faculties.

Richard is deeply hurt, because he is not certain if his wife is dead or not, whether it is true that she was an apartheid informer as alleged, and whether her fellow combatants had led her into an ambush (84). Indirectly, he feels obliged to go and search for his wife's remains, and then perform the necessary burial rites. In the ensuing sense of the irresolution that manifests itself in a paralysing inaction and speech loss, Richard's torment among his people poses a peculiar metaphysical problem where, on being incarcerated, "[t]he inyanga routinely pricked him with a porcupine quill. This was supposed to expel the evil spirit that had taken over his body... Because in the understanding of the traditional healers, the young man was possessed" (74).

Given his knowledge of Richard's history as a musician in exile, however, the psychologist Gama knows better. He perceives that the appropriate therapy in Richard's case is to exploit his inner resource to invoke for him a means to come to terms with his loss. Gama knows that as a vehicle of therapy, music is particularly relevant, because the sufferer (as it is with the returning *Umkhonto We Sizwe* soldiers in all these stories) is

indirectly called upon to be assertive. Music, especially in the performance of '*iNgoma*', invariably sets an initiate on a course of spontaneity, and is appropriate to a lonely individual who is weighted down with the alienation that originates from the previous dispensation of oppression and exile. As alluded to already in this chapter's introduction of Langa's stories, music (in ritual) motivates in a schizophrenic a release that necessarily positions him/her to restore the boundary between the traumatic (dreamy) past and the present, and to further achieve a sense of closure.

For Gama, emphasis falls on seeing Richard in a feat that recalls, often in graphic details, his atrocious past, and reminds him that he shares it with many people. The psychologist Gama in the title story therefore knows that a session of therapy must be structured in a way that rehabilitates Richard into the society from which he had been severed. The knowledge of communal suffering is one critical prop with which a therapist avails a victim, because people mediate trauma sometimes from the recognition that other people are facing similar (if not worse) predicaments. Through fantasy, Gama uses art to conjure up in Richard a new consciousness to utilise in order to abstract from the data of his past as a jazz artist in exile the comforting knowledge that his trauma is comparable to that endured by other black people. Thus, according to the narrator, Gama would use music

to evoke memory and stimulate [Richard's] imagination... Gama would remind Richard of his mother who had died while Richard was confronting himself in exile... Gama would tell him that... all the women involved in struggle are Nozi. They are there... in the shacks of our country... They will be there at the victory hour, when poverty and strife... are finally eradicated... Some of the sessions would be painful, as when he would let Richard re-experience the trauma, but he, Gama, would make him feel

safe. We will play music together... and improvise. At the end, we'll let ourselves go. (90-91)

The consciousness of common suffering is thus made possible through music. In Gama's view, this collective experience is appropriate to reverse Richard's loss of speech and catatonia, as opposed to remonstrating alone and in angst with the unalterable past. According to Gama, Richard used to tackle manic depression in exile through this kind of performance that consolidates a sense of communalism. At its climax, this resolution is discernible in the form of a trance. Gama recalls:

It was when he straddled the instrument and blew notes that had neither beginning nor end that it was clear that the man possessed and was possessed by his instrument.... When it came, it was as if he had been pulled from a long and endless darkness onto steady ground. (81)

Through a similar presentation, Mandla in Ndebele's 'Uncle' would argue, the musician tells a story of the social world, and permeates it with dialogue and reciprocity or fulfilment.²⁴ Standing at the cusp of history, the artist travels in a controlled environment through a continuum of concomitant emotional deluge back into the past, u-turns, and then emerges into the future rid of excesses.

Similar to a double bass that in jazz music supports a lead singer/player, a therapist allows a client maximum performance space. Related also to the bass that enunciates scale or mode, a healer prompts his/her patient to unfold/express emotionally without any inhibition and within a monitored tone, attitude and tempo. Rephrased, the object of a music therapist is to guide a patient as s/he performs in a way that suggests that s/he

²⁴ See Njabulo Ndebele, *Fools and Other Stories*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), p.78.

seeks deliverance from the harrowing past. This will be achieved when Richard confronts and acknowledges himself as experiencing a similar terror similar to that of other black people whose families crumbled during the resistance struggle. Through such performance, a victim situates him/herself firmly in the present of his immediate people who are also traumatised. By implication, his release of his/her pent up emotions that built up during the tumultuous past through art is a metaphor of the end of the suffering of his people.

In another story, 'Proud Flesh', the narrator explores a "mutual zombification"²⁵ similar to the one that the narrator of 'The Naked Song' introduces through the figure of Richard. In contrast to the title story, however, the plot of the former story develops well after the protagonist's return from exile, and after he had performed the ritual of visiting the grave site. In many African traditions, this ritual also involves the celebrant recommitting him/herself to finding release from specific material and spiritual catastrophes often on behalf of his/her beleaguered community or family members. It would seem that Richard in 'The Naked Song' would benefit from a ritual as defined above.

In opposition to the norm, we learn, however, through Blade Zungu, the main character in 'Proud Flesh' that this ritual is ineffective unless preceded by burial rites. These do not necessarily have to coincide with the (literal) funeral service. The main object of visiting

²⁵ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 2001), p.104.

the grave is therefore to sever, in Achille Mbembe's phrasing, the unpleasant "connivance, familiarity and interchangeability between the living and the dead".²⁶

However, this separation is not possible. In 'The Naked Song', Richard's failure to find peace on his return from exile makes the necessary sense of partition between the living and the dead impossible. This is because, he cannot perform the burial rites for his wife, let alone prove that she is dead, or locate her remains, as he has no reason to imagine her as being either dead, or alive. On thus returning from the grave site, Blade withdraws into a gloomy mood punctuated by incessant crying (38) and vomiting (45). According to Lungi, Zungu's girlfriend, he develops into a violent maniac, and ultimately "a drunk pissing all over himself" who cannot, the morning after, recall the sordid details of the disgrace that he had earned the previous night (33). Lungi is not at all au fait with his distressing knowledge that he is "incapable of reciprocating" her love, because he is experiencing the kind of loneliness that "clawed at him in the midnight hour." "[W]hen they were making love... images of other women flashed before him like apparitions from a past that refused to be obliterated" (37). Despite physically having sex with his partner, "[h]e was lonely himself... [because] he wrestled with the meaning of surrendering one's personality to another" (37). His disorientation is peculiarly gendered, especially when he argues that "[w]omen had this great capacity to give and receive nothing; and men the world over strutted on the sidewalks of time with their shoulders braced against the moment when they would be called to settle the account" (37).

²⁶ Filip de Boeck, "Beyond the Grave: History, Memory and Death in Postcolonial Congo/ Zaïre," *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*, Richard Werbner, ed., (London & New York: Zed Books, 1998), p.50.

Blade's musing about the male-female relationship primarily echoes his anxiety about his ability to procreate especially within wedlock. In his Zulu context, childbearing recalls what the Nuer peoples in Sudan understand as "procreative immortality".²⁷ Indeed as evident in the conclusion of this story, the ability to sustain an adequate erection to make love, and presumably to impregnate, is consistent with the preservation of identity within the social and family memory spaces. It is, therefore, implicit that Langa's preoccupation with the Odysseus figure originates also from a concern with the fact that exile tends to hamper the establishment of the nuclear family, especially as an institution of (biological) lineage. While it is imperative to argue for the significance of restoring the balance between the living and the departed through the ritual of visiting the grave site, it is also crucial to note that cosmic balance is a broader framework in which a mortal mediates the prospect of death by also privileging childbearing. In this case, immortality would be guaranteed for Blade in 'Proud Flesh' through facilitating reproduction, a factor that apartheid severely compromises, especially where a man is fleeing the repressive police state, or in exile without his wife or girlfriend, or under the extreme anxiety that hinders virility, if not the male cell motility. A similar angst seems to have followed Blade back from exile to the new South Africa. Thus, his ultimate recovery from impotence registers in him in terms of an abating of "the savage tremors" and a transcendence of the storm (46). These (cosmic) chimera metaphorically depict his previous erectile dysfunction and, by implication, the sense of nothingness that he has of himself in terms of his

²⁷ Sharon Elaine Hutchinson, "Death, Memory And The Politics Of Legitimation: Nuer Experiences Of The Continuing Second Sudanese Civil War," *Memory And the Postcolony: African Anthropology And the Critique of Power*, Richard Werbner, ed., (London & New York: Zed Books, 1998), p.60.

understanding of Zulu nuclear family space and cosmology.

At the level of metaphor, procreation echoes a musical piece where a (male) player projects a self in the memory spaces of his immediate and extended family. By implication, he therefore thwarts his alienation, and secures the lines of communication with the “cosmic entirety”.²⁸ Thus prior to his recovery from erectile dysfunction, Blade’s disorientation manifests itself also in “dreams... hard and unattainable, shadows that danced and remind[ed] him [again] of the bones” (45). Uttered in moments of anguish, the notion of the bones is reminiscent of the resolution that Africans claim to apprehend after either the pouring of libation during a ritual celebration, or after a throwing of the bones during divination. In the expression “*marapo go beng*” (“bones to the benefactors/the ancestral progenitors”), however, the notion of the bones signifies peaceful rest or sleep. Lost in the ephemeral shadows, he is as bothered as the shaman who attempts to “comprehend the workings of the hearts of men and their gods” (45). It is revealed to him that “the use of necklaces on informers” “was wrong... barbaric and repellent” (40). In this analysis, however, Blade magnifies his own dejection so that he is trapped as an individual in the serious errors that his people committed in the past while facing ethical dilemmas. One such predicament has to do with the necklacing of people considered to be sell-outs during the anti-apartheid struggle between 1970 and 1980.²⁹ In addition to his depression emanating from a sense of loss, he also believes that he is

²⁸ See Wole Soyinka who speaks of people’s constant apprehension of their assumed/felt relationship with their ancestors, and with their impending progeny. *Myth, Literature and the African World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.2.

²⁹ Refer to Chapter Seven of this study for a discussion of the notion of “the people” in Sindiwe Magona’s stories.

trapped in the collective past that he cannot alter. He therefore shoulders what translates to him as the black collective guilt, as well as his own individual grief over the loss of his sister Nomusa who is apparently buried in an unknown grave. He therefore realises that “he could never really finish the process of mourning” (36). Frustrated, the cumulative effect of trying to “comprehend the workings of the hearts of men and their gods became a living thing that sapped his energy... [so that h]e was no different from a man with an *ilumbo*, a ravaging disease which confounds the best healers” (45).

Similar to a session of therapy in which music is a central feature such as in ‘The Naked Song’, Blade’s recovery from erectile dysfunction means that he stands at the cusp of history, confident or certain that he relates through reciprocity with his departed ancestors and with his child whom he hopes is about to be conceived. Hence, as he ejaculates, he shouts “yebo! yebo!” (46) In its isiZulu context, “yebo!” is considered to be a sign of affirmation, rather, an act of surrender before the ancestors, and this is further emphasised during divination rituals by a client in the call-and-response consultation that is known to be an invocation of the ancestors and Divinity. “Yebo!” is also indicative of a necessary male symbolic order that helps Blade recuperate from a series of schizophrenic lapses while his girlfriend is lying awake next to him pining for his “companionship of healing and solidarity” (45).

The story, ‘Proud Flesh’, presents the return from exile as a quest for the loved one in which the hero also seeks to master the required penile erection in order to make love and

procreate and, thus, enhance his “existence within the cyclic consciousness of time”.³⁰ By contrast, the story, ‘There Are Virgins in the Township’, explores this main theme from a different point of view. In the latter story, the quest to establish a self within the vast cosmic space does not strike the protagonist as depending on visiting the grave site because, in his view, this ritual is equivalent to a nemesis. Bobo, the protagonist, “dread[s the] possibility of being rebuked for neglecting a son’s duty,” and he “feared the things such a visit would evoke in [him]”, because he thinks that it would make him feel “like someone participating in a game with arbitrary laws, where winning was losing and vice versa” (109).

In the story, ‘There are Virgins in the Township’, there is, thus, an intimation that human beings should define themselves horizontally, that is, by establishing friendships (read relationships) (92-93). Central to this story is the tension between Bobo and Arthur, Bobo’s his old acquaintance before the exile years, on the seemingly trivial but far-reaching trespasses and oversights against a former girlfriend, Zodwa, to whom Arthur is now married. On returning home after “decades” in exile, Bobo learns while held at gunpoint by Arthur that Jonathan’s sins must be atoned. According to Arthur, Jonathan, Bobo’s brother, had cuckolded Arthur while he was impotent and in the process of seeking therapy. Arthur’s bitterness is also intensified by the fact that, prior to leaving for exile, Bobo had abandoned his then girlfriend Zodwa, the woman with whom Jonathan

³⁰ In this elaboration of the phrase “cosmic entirety,” Soyinka’s emphasis falls, however, on the mortal’s apprehension of their transient nature, and on the fact that they constantly ‘reinsert’ themselves in their portraits of the cosmos through ritual performances, that is, in order to avoid falling into a metaphysical limbo. *Myth, Literature and the African World*), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p.2.

had a romantic relationship while she was engaged to the impotent Arthur. Also in Arthur's view, Bobo was, after making Zodwa lose "her virginity," responsible for making her subsequently go "wild" and "[fu]ck anything with a penis" (112).

In this story, Langa implicitly makes a case for guilt as a form of empowerment. Bobo's intention to pursue Zodwa despite his full awareness of her now being married to Arthur suggests that Arthur can command little respect from Bobo, possibly because he thinks highly of himself by virtue of his experience as an activist in exile. Arthur's holding of Bobo at gunpoint humbles and forces him to interrogate the extent to which he, as a relatively privileged participant within the nationalist discourse, constructs women as subjects and utilises them as trophies inaccessible to other men. An example of this 'inferiority' is Arthur who has never fought the struggle from exile, and who has (had) a history of sexual malfunction.

To Bobo's relief, Arthur does not carry out his threat to shoot Bobo. Neither does it emerge as true that he had already killed Jonathan (114). Arthur demonstrates his capacity to avenge himself through a ability to plan murder, and balks at it but without explicitly offering Bobo mercy (because Arthur merely walks away from the confrontation immediately thereafter (116)). This story does not foreground the kind of transcendence that is achieved exclusively through intercourse and, by implication, via procreation. Far from it, the narrator presents grief and guilt as an interwoven imperative that, if heeded, must mend the relationship between the likes of Bobo and others who are not the elite in terms of the nationalist story/narrative. By implication, the interplay

between a sense of remorse and of pain is an important factor in a people's striving for the ultimate harmony with God. Here, for instance, a woman is accorded an unmediated freedom to (dis)articulate herself (critically) in relation to a man's establishment of the necessary tropes of masculine power against the colonial modernity that he experiences as emasculating.

In the episode in which Arthur is wielding a gun, and another that is discussed below, Langa implicitly submits that ritual therapy impresses in an anguished person a relationship of empathy with people who are in distress or a capacity to undergo sorrow with them, albeit vicariously. In other words, an afflicted individual unwittingly transcends his/her plight by paradoxically assuming the role of a therapist. Consistent with the cleansing rituals in many African cultures, denying oneself forms of sensual pleasure in these stories is therefore a sufferer's way of harmonising with the social world that is in distress.

Indeed, with specific reference to the conclusion of the story 'The Naked Song', virility is not a causal variable of psychological balance and, therefore, of communion with God.

Instead, Langa argues, abstinence³¹ from intercourse, albeit perhaps in a temporary form,

³¹ Harriet Ngubane argues that "[t]o attain her status, [*isangoma*] undergoes various forms of abstinence and withdrawal from society, avoids contact with sources of pollution such as death, and passes through other experiences that likewise enable her to achieve contact with the sacred realm of the ancestors. She [*isangoma*] thus reaches a state of purity that she maintains by recurrent observances, and endeavors to live up to the general expectation that she will behave in a moral and upright manner. See Nguabane, "Clinical Practice and Organization of Indigenous Healers in South Africa," *The Social Basis of Health & Therapy in Africa*, Stephen Feierman and John M. Janzen eds., (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1992), p.370.

enhances recovery from spiritual (and psychological) predicaments. Strictly in terms of this perspective, to refrain from sex is considered to transcend mere intimacy or male muscular agility and penetration. At best, the narrator of the title story presents virility as mere muscle flexing, and argues that it can be an embarrassing eruption of desire in public or on solemn occasions. The psychologist Gama leads by example, because he conquers “a hot flash of lust” as he has vowed abstinence from sex. (In this new mission, Gama knows that “he couldn’t afford to complicate his life further” (75)).

The closing story, ‘The Resurrection of the River Artist’, relies on different media to explore the theme of ritual therapy, but also does so inter-textually. When this story begins, Jomo Khumalo, the protagonist who has just taken over his father’s role as *igosa* [church elder?] and preacher (116), is battling with “raw sexual tensions... remembering ... instances where women looked desirable in the throes of religious passion or when they wept during a funeral” (117). When this story concludes, Khumalo is in the river with “the converts” (146) obliviously contemplating “paint[ing] pictures that had lain submerged in his mind [in order to] gladden the hearts of young artists who need[ed] inspiration and hope” (147), as opposed to seeking power for its own sake. Similarly, commitment to the healing profession in the title story, ‘The Naked Song’, takes over the protagonist-healer’s attention, renders him docile and philanthropic, and ready to dispense therapy. His girlfriend understands his mission, and thus she invites him to her bed, but quickly adds that they “don’t have to do anything” (91).

Of all the returning *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldiers whom the narrators focus on to argue for ritual therapy, the artist Ethan Bundu in the concluding story, 'The Resurrection of the River Artist', is the only one who single-handedly transcends his sense of anguish and goes beyond a mere sense of emasculation. As an artist (as opposed to being schizophrenic), it does not seem that he has to physically return to Africa in order to come to terms with the fact that it is also a "field of contestation".³² The backbiting and jealousy that he saw pervade Africans in exile, for instance, haunt him. This is despite the fact that he knows that African artists battle with a sense of powerlessness mainly because they rely on the white curators' patronising stamp of approval. Neither does his continued stay in exile offer him the solace that he is desperate for, especially as evident in his perpetual drunken state (130), in his loneliness and his ominous emaciation. As the narrator observes, Bundu's "bony fingers wrapped around the glass, and the grey, balding head supporting a thin neck spoke of an epidermal struggle to contain a skeleton that was impatient to emerge" (129).

Unlike Richard in 'The Naked Song', Blade in 'Proud Flesh' and Bobo in 'There are Virgins in the Township', Bundu accelerates the momentum of the plot in the story in which he is a principal character mainly through his sophisticated ability to express his depersonalisation and to insist that baptism is the resolution (133). As implicitly argued in the title of the story, 'The Resurrection of the River Artist', Bundu's prescription of healing points towards a context where an act of labour is emphatically consistent with a

³² David Attwell in Sue Marais's "Getting Lost in Cape Town: Spatial and Temporal Dislocation in the South African Short Fiction Cycle," *English in Africa*, (Vol.22, No. 2 October, 1995), p.39.

thinking process or the imagination. Such victory eludes, for example, Richard in ‘The Naked Song’, Blade in ‘Proud Flesh’ and Bobo in ‘There Are Virgins in the Township’. Estranged from his motherland, and its material landscape with which he and his fellow Africans establish a phenomenological bond, baptism signifies for Bundu a stubborn process of entrenchment with his own body. This form of grace also redresses his sense of marginality that he had not been able to relate to except in compromising foreign terms that patently radiate the history of his humiliation as part of the black race. By contrast, Richard in ‘The Naked Song’, Blade in ‘Proud Flesh’ and Bobo in ‘There Are Virgins in the Township’ resolve their post-traumatic stress disorders through the assistance of other people. His demand that he be baptised in the industrial waste-soiled canal running across London is a symbol of his attempt to loosen the terror of colonial alienation and the exploitation that violates his ability as an artist, or what the storyteller terms “inspiration, a direct line to... own, personal god” (147).

Bundu’s resourcefulness highlights an individual in direct communion with the principle of creativity and growth. This giftedness also receives a substantive clarification through Jomo Khumalo, ironically, a self-confessed failure in the world of art. Despite his admission, he escapes becoming totally distraught by arguing that “his disgrace and failure in the artistic world spurred him to embrace religion,” because “religious rituals [are] part of artistic activity”. Thus similar to Bundu who when this story concludes transcends his despondence through baptism, Khumalo evolves for himself a sense of self-reliance whose mode is improvisation. Hence he poses as a Baptist, because he believes that “his real strength” is in the “total immersion” of worshippers in water, and

that “he could deliver ringing sermons whose depth of feeling and insights into the dark stirrings of the human heart struck a resonant chord with the most hardened transgressor” (118). Earlier on, the chief deacon, Hedges, had suspended Khumalo’s father from the church after “one of the women [he was baptising] had been swept away by the water”. In Hedges’s view, Khumalo senior “was not equipped to execute this task” which proved ultimately to be a “celestial vote of no-confidence” (139) in him. As if reinforcing Hedges’s analysis, Khumalo senior later fails to “exorcise the evil spirits out of a young woman,” a “herculean task” considering that she was “pregnant” (140). In his colleagues’ eyes, he was a failure.

The popular intelligence that Bundu displays in his usage of symbol to assert a familiarity with and, therefore, the right to reside in England as a citizen reverberates in Khumalo Jr. When the story begins, he is posing as “*igosa*” or deacon. In keeping with the new congregation that he believes ought to be headed by his father, the new *igosa* is walking barefooted (116), a practice that reinforces an individual’s appeal to piety in this African Initiated Christian background.³³ The meta-text or template of this memorialising is God’s instruction to Moses that he takes off his shoes when treading the holy ground. In this new environment, worshippers cultivate spiritual fulfilment and self-reliance by extrapolating biblical texts onto the immediate time and space. This is a cue to Khumalo’s deployment of the spontaneity and resolve that elude Bundu in his earlier inability to reconnect with his god, that is, prior to his baptism in the drainage canal in

³³ See, for instance, Jean Comarrof, *Body of Power Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

London. In other words, Khumalo fully understands and supports his congregation's reading of the liberatory ethos in the mundane acts and material through and by which he interacts.

The highlight of Khumalo's subsequent triumph over his own alleged failure as an artist is in forging a dialogue with people in turmoil, by specifically assisting them to make indigenous their relationships with themselves, that is, beyond their depersonalisation. Albeit functioning effectively as a therapist, Khumalo has a patient's inside perspective because of his past experiences as an artist deeply troubled by a sense of failure (118). Bundu's consultation of Khumalo junior is, therefore, consistent with a patient who is seeing a therapist. Bundu is also a mirror of the shadow figure that Khumalo junior had just overcome, that is, as a self-confessed failure in the arts, as already stated. Also in his predicament, Bundu resembles Khumalo senior whose dignity Khumalo junior intends to shore up. By immersing Bundu in and bringing him out of the water several times, then loudly declaring on his behalf that he had renounced his sins, and then finally pronouncing on God's behalf that Bundu is a newly welcome celebrant of the "the royal fellowship of the sanctified" (134), Khumalo junior coaxes Bundu into responding positively to his inner voice that implicitly instructs him to assert redress for himself.

Ironically, Khumalo's resolution to become "*igosa*" is reiterated in Bundu's array of "woodcuts, etchings and five or six oil pastels," his production prior to his lapse into the manic depression that manifests in him as physical frailty, alcohol abuse and "infirmity." In the same way that water ultimately forges his recuperation from dejection during his

baptism, water in Bundu's art cascades in small measures, seems to woo "a woman with prominent breasts [to] bathe," perhaps in celebration of her imagined celestial bliss with God, and counterpoints the background of repression that he captures through the spectacular metaphor of sterility. This is the image of a "bulldozer raz[ing] a shack", and the sorry sight of "[c]hildren racing across a flooded street" (135). The patently voluptuous woman character in his art articulates his recuperation from his crushing loneliness, as well as from the depression that seems to emasculate him by repressing his libido and, by implication, that of the other *Umkhonto we Sizwe* exiles and returnees. Bundu's art suggests that he enters into a dialogue with South Africa armed with a pervasive sense of optimism, as well as a sense of confidence in his ability to realise gratification without relying exclusively on the gendered nature of the discourse of intimacy and national liberation that Richard, Blade and Bobo display respectively in the stories 'The Naked Song', 'Proud Flesh' and 'There are Virgins in the Township'. However, far from suggesting an essentialist link between the land/material space and identity, 'The Resurrection of the River Artist' foregrounds the artist devolving to other people the same power to create. This transfer is apparent in Bundu's art that depicts a voluptuous woman taking a "bath" seemingly in celebration of the fact that she is not inhibited. The woman protagonist in his art contrasts starkly with the male patients in the other stories whose recovery manifests itself exclusively in the necessary erection, and further seems to build transcendence exclusively around this principle.

A distinguishing feature in the therapy that both Bundu and Khumalo foreground is the porous boundary that subsists between the predicament of being ill, and the obligations of

being a therapist. The interaction between both is pervaded by a seamless interweaving, with the effect that it is not immediately apparent that a therapist manages consultation necessarily from a position of power. Technically, Langa portrays this interaction in 'The Resurrection of the River Artist' by investing the suffering person with an ability to diagnose himself, and to act on the resolution that he deems fit for his problem, so that he does not have to be patronised, or depend on any shadow other in order to bring about redress, nor fall victim to a process of interpellation.

Langa captures one such instance through Khumalo's conversion, an action that presents him as a victim who taps his inner energy, and then manipulates it to administer to his quest for balance. It is this symbolic exorcising of his depersonalisation that makes him conclude that in relation to his role as a Baptist, he is a mediocre artist. To the observer, an image of a patient who self-diagnoses and further heeds his/her own self-dispensing, echoes ritual where the boundary between a healer and a therapist collapses.

A variation of this paradigm is the Dionysian character in Bundu's art. In the act of imploring divine intervention, or as a celebrant in search of glory, she ironically overshadows her plight because her "bath[ing]" in showers is symbolic of the fact that she experiences the immanence of divine intervention. She embodies and blurs both roles because she is the only one character on stage, as it were, posing paradoxically in supplication and celebration of the gratification that she apprehends. Seen through the desperation and loneliness suffered by Blade Zungu in 'Proud Flesh', Bobo in 'There Are Virgins in the Township', Richard and Gama in the title story, it can be argued that she

also transcends loneliness because her voluptuous showering has masturbatory overtones, suggesting that she achieves fulfilment without outside intervention, or without the erection and penetration that in 'Proud Flesh' is the protagonist's hallmark of power.

Langa further develops this paradigm of intimacy that severs the notion of intimacy from physical intercourse in the conclusion of the story 'The Naked Song'. The healer and the patient in this story are literally two distinct characters. However, their roles collapse into one as soon as the psychologist Gama (who is also a returning *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldier) caves into anguish as a result of agonising about his patient, the returning *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldier in the grip of post-traumatic stress disorder. Despite concluding that he would use music to heal Richard and restore him to a fully communicating person reconciled with the past, Gama nevertheless collapses in empathy: "Hot tears sprang into his eyes and streamed freely down his cheeks" (91). In this way, Gama characteristically becomes a sacrificial goat who wilfully attempts to intercede between his client and his destiny. Such close proximity speaks also of the therapist's modesty and social commitment, and also implies the possibility of the afflicted person recovering of radical innocence, that is, in the case where being a patient means being a transgressor.

Performance and plastic art, as well as the improvised ones such as weeping and bathing that help balance the emotional with the spiritual, are indicative of the readily available modes that Langa implicitly argues propel a patient beyond distress. By virtue of demanding action of an angst-ridden returning *Umkhonto We Sizwe* soldier in the form of

self-expression, these strategies indirectly help him/her to assert him/herself in line with the right to independent thinking and to resist extraneous orders. Unwittingly then, an afflicted person, who emerges from the repressive and emasculating apartheid past and from exile, ascends to a potent and strategic position to pursue fulfilment through a kind of logocentricity that initiates an alternative symbolic space but is hardly replete with self-reflexivity. Judging by the dominance of the male figures, as well as the reflexivity that the narrators show, it stands to reason that discourses of self-assertion cannot be taken at face value, because they are sites of ideological contests.

This chapter has argued that the portrait of the returning *Umkhonto we Sizwe* soldier serves to cohere and unify this short story collection. The argument is that Langa presents these activists as being afflicted with schizophrenic related conditions that find resolutions through African-oriented ritual therapy. Perhaps the concept “patient” is not an accurate one to use in order to refer to any of these soldiers who emotionally, intellectually and imaginatively engage with predicaments of the return from exile. As already argued, ritual in Africa privileges artistic experience, because it involves freeing the corporal body from a spiritual/existential subsidence. However, acknowledgement has been made of Langa’s cautioning that a critical reflection must pervade all forms of phenomenological self-assertion. Following the black national liberation struggle that the majority of Langa’s stories foreground as hegemonic, a need to look for the strategies of self-reflexivity to participate in the various post-colonial struggles cannot be sufficiently emphasised.