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Sole, Kelwyn

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AUTHORSHIP, AUTHENTICITY AND THE BLACK COMMUNITY: THE NOVELS OF SOWETO 1976

by Kelwyn Sole

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Following the renewal of black cultural activity around drama and poetry in South Africa since the early 1970s, a resurgence of the use of prose fiction has recently begun to take place. In the past decade several anthologies and collections of short stories have been published inside the country, and Staffrider and other literary magazines have fulfilled an important role in disseminating the stories of (amongst others) Matshoba, Ndebele, Essop, Dangor and Maseko to a wider audience. A number of novels have also appeared, the most noteworthy being Miriam Tlali's Muriel at Metropolitan (1975) and Amandla (1980); Ahmed Essop's The Visitation (1980) and The Emperor (1984); Sipho Sepamla's The Root is One (1979) and A Ride on the Whirlwind (1981); Mbulelo Mzamane's The Children of Soweto (1982); Mongane Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood (1981) and Boyd Makhoba's On the Eve (1986).

The 16 June 1976 marked the palpable onset of a period of massive and ongoing political confrontation in South Africa, and it is no surprise that several of these novels deal directly or indirectly with this event and its aftermath. Mzamane's novel, and Sepamla's and Tlali's second novels, investigate the human experiences, reactions and the political activity in Soweto immediately before and after that fateful day in June. Serote's work, while it refers to the 'days of Power' only fleetingly, extrapolates the growth of armed resistance to the white government in the period following the Soweto uprising. The events of 1976 have a powerful implied presence as a fulcrum in this narrative, transforming the agonized subjective narration of Tsi Molope in the first section of the novel into a more objectified focus on the activities of a group of revolutionaries afterwards.

In connection with his novel, Mzamane has remarked:

> "The Children of Soweto is a reconstruction,from an autobiographical perspective,of the events of Soweto in June 1976...I try to convey,in a way that the several accounts by White reporters do not,what it felt like to be one of those involved,and to convey how life in the townships was transformed in its response to the call of the students. The book has been written to preserve the memory of these events,as in the 'tales' of my people I was told as a child. In this 'tale' I see little need to delineate individual character sharply because the community as a whole is the hero. My book is a record of the attempt to create a new collect-

> ive consciousness, for which Black Consciousness in South Africa stands...I have hardly bothered to disguise the didactic purpose of my tale...My story therefore, is another effort to 'tell more of the truth than the historian's truth'.[1]

The Ideology of Black Consciousness

The late sixties and seventies saw the articulation of a combative, challenging ideological and political perspective among the radical black intelligentsia in South Africa: the ideology of Black Consciousness. Black Consciousness stressed inter alia the need for black unity in the face of apartheid, the need for political and psychological liberation and self-reliance among black people, a stress on what were conceived of as positive black values - such as a humanistic and communalistic approach to life - and a preoccupation with the rediscovery of black history and culture, so long denigrated by dominant white ideologies.[2]

From early on in its existence, attempts were made by the black students, theologians and intellectuals among whom Black Consciousness first evolved to link up with the black community, who were seen as both in need of conscientisation and politicisation and crucial, in their support, to the continued existence of Black Consciousness.[3] The ideology of Black Consciousness, as evinced in the programmes of the organisations founded in the early 1970s to bridge the gap to the community (such as the Black People's Convention and the Black Community Programmes), perceived no contradictory relationship between black political and intellectual leaders and their community. The gap that existed was a creation of the apartheid system and could easily be rubbed out by more privileged black people committing themselves to unity and liberation in the name of a shared blackness. Moreover, where class distinctions in the black community were admitted at all, little sense of class antagonism occurred in the early years of Black Consciousness[4] except among a few ideologues such as the poet Mafika Gwala. In their attempts to set up worker organisations such as the Black Allied Workers' Union and Black Workers' Council in 1972, the SASO and BPC initiators worded the programmes in ways which stressed, rather than class interests, leadership and recreational programmes, the need for black workers to realise their potential and dignity, and the 'role and obligation' of black workers towards 'black development'.[5]

All four of the novelists under discussion here admit to being influenced by Black Consciousness at one time or another during this period.[6] It can be argued that their novels systematically put forward and elaborate aspects of this ideology - even if, in the case of Serote, to criticise and eventually move beyond it. In interviews and articles these writers have furthermore a noticeable similarity of preoccupation and motivation. They are all urban dwellers (Sepamla - 'My inspiration is urban, completely urban'[7]), born and brought up in the urban milieu of the Witwatersrand, although Mzamane and Serote both underwent periods of schooling outside South Africa, in Swaziland and Lesotho respectively. Sepamla, born in 1932, trained as a teacher; while Tlali was a student at the University of the Witwatersrand when it was closed to blacks in 1959, and was eventually forced to become a clerical worker. Both of the younger writers - Serote and Mzamane - were in their twenties when Black Consciousness appeared as a force on black campuses, although only Mzamane was a university student at the time.

All four novelists conceive of themselves as having discovered literature and their urge to write in the context of a cultural vacuum occasioned by the Publications Act of 1963 and the bannings, imprisonment and exile of many of the previous generation of black writers.[8] This resulted, it is held, in a general literary ignorance among black people in South Africa; an ignorance which, they point out, has been deepened and extended by the nature of Bantu Education.[9]

These writers found various ways to combat this cultural void. The discovery of books - in particular African writers - is felt to be crucial to their intellectual development. By receiving his education in Swaziland Mzamane notes that he managed to gain access to the writings of banned writers early in his development, 'at a time when they...were beyond the reach of most school kids'[10] and speaks of occasional extra English lessons with Can Themba; Serote remarks on 'the adventurous spirit I had' which allowed him to find ways to read the 1950s generation of writers, as well as the ongoing contact he kept up with literary contemporaries such as Matthews, Sepamla and Gwala;[11] and Tlali and Sepamla speak of the difficulties they experienced in getting access to books, the paucity of stock in township libraries, the relevance of 'open' libraries such as at the University of the Witwatersrand and the significance of the opening of the Johannesburg Public Library to blacks in the late 1970s.[12] Indeed, Serote notes that it was while he was a high school student studying through correspondence that the significance of books, and the fact that they were made by real people, struck him; and Tlali mentions her surprise on discovering her late father's collection of books and finding out that some of her own forefathers had run a printing press in Lesotho.[13]

Two points are further developed from these arguments: firstly, that black writers are thus perforce seeking new directions in their work, without benefit of established literary models or standards. Indeed, there is a definite and even angry turning away from criticism by white commentators at the same time as the dearth of black critics and any form of guidance from the black community is lamented.[14] A search for 'black literary standards' is commenced, and any watertight distinction between art and politics rejected. Secondly, in the spirit of Black Consciousness writers should concentrate on subjects which are relevant to black life and should court a black readership:

> "To the Philistines,the banners of books,the critics...We black South African writers (who are faced with the task of conscientizing ourselves and our people) are writing for those whom we know are the relevant audience. We are not going to write in order to qualify or fit into <u>your</u> definition of what you describe as 'true art.' Our main objective is not to receive ballyhoo comments. Our duty is to write for our people and about them..."[15]

Moreover, as Tlali points out, the implementation of apartheid had meant, by the 1970s, a striking ignorance by blacks and whites of each other's lives and experiences, prohibitive of the forging of a common South African culture.[16] The task of turning towards black experiences and a black readership is therefore also practically more viable.

The present generation of writers, Tlali tells us, must

> "never forget our main task of being engaged in a psychological battle for the minds of the people...If we write for ourselves

> that won't help. We shouldn't be trapped like the 1950s generation of writers who had their books read by a few at the top of the masses."[17]

She further appears desirous of constructing an ideal reader for her books:

> "The black reader in South Africa today,the truly discerning one, demands that the kind of books he reads should reflect his true feelings and make him cogitate. He knows that he must place himself somewhere in the world today: he must decide his destiny. He wants to re-discover himself,to regain his dignity. I am no exception to this rule."[18]

Writing thus becomes a form of political activism, and must be functional in emphasizing the historical continuity of black resistance in the country, as well as acting as a conscientizing force towards bringing about social change.[19] In such circumstances literary form comes to be seen as secondary to the content of the work, which is required to reflect truthfully the experience of black people under apartheid. Any form of writing applicable and available should be used: indeed, Sepamla and Serote are still better regarded in the literary world as poets ('When I look back,' according to Serote, 'I still say I had more interest in being a writer than in being a poet. I would rather be controlled by circumstances than form.'[20]). As Mothobi Mutloatse, anthologist,short story writer and publisher, remarks

> "We see the new writing as part of what is happening. It is a type of writing that is perfectly suited to the times. We need a writing that records exactly the situation we live in,and any type of writing which ignores the urgency of political events will be irrelevant"[21]

This emphasis on the writer's task as being that of reflecting the authenticity of black people's lives in South Africa appears to have two interrelated meanings. The first is the assumption that writing should to a degree come out of personal experience - as in the case of Tlali's first novel Muriel at Metropolitan, written during the late 1960s, which was informed by her work experience in a furniture shop dealing with black customers on hire purchase, under a white boss.[22] The second is the belief that a literature created by an 'authentic' black voice can reveal the truth of what it is like to be black - the truth behind the 'white lies' on which blacks have been fed, and which has resulted in a form of 'false consciousness' among those who have grown to accept their political and moral debasement by the dominant white ideology. This assumption of authenticity by Black Consciousness ideologues implies a teleological vision of the value of any work of literature. Literature should not only play a politically mobilizing role in the struggle for freedom, but should have an ideologically supportive function as well. Reacting to the criticism that black literature and performance spends a certain amount of time 'preaching to the converted', Mzamane asserts that

> "This is somewnat like telling the priest not to remind Christians of the message of Christmas. Anyhow,such poets are looked up to by members of their community,whether the misleading Western enemy critic likes this or not;they are listened to. Poetry in South Africa,as has been noted,is read at funerals,conferences,concerts and private parties,as part of a wider programme of conscientization...it has produced a tremendous impact,especially in the minds of the youth..."[23]

What is further required on a formal level is the author's responsibility, in prose fiction at least, to powerfully and realistically depict the social determinants and surroundings of character and story: 'authenticity' implies a portrayal during the process[24] of the narrative of 'how things went' on a general and personal level.

Finally, in order to become an authentic voice, the writer is urged to take on the mantle not only of conscience but also as spokesperson for black people, whose experiences and desires he or she faithfully records and shapes. The stress is on an organic, mutually dependent relationship: the writer must listen as well as speak. According to Sepamla

> "We have to go to the people...It is the man in the street-how he understands BC-that I feel we must listen to."[25]

In line with the quest for an immediate black response to their work,many black artists in the early and mid-seventies concentrated on drama and evolved a new type of urban performance-poetry to spread their message. The use of prose fiction, speaking generally, is accelerated only by the advent of the magazine Staffrider and the intervention of Ravan Press from 1978 onwards, although published poetry and short stories are present throughout the decade. Several writers have commented on the problems of writing longer fiction and finding a black readership rather than audience. Sepamla notes that Mtshali's Sounds of a Cowhide Drum poetry collection, published in 1971, was mainly read by white liberals because 'black people had not yet found it necessary to spend time on literature';[26] Mzamane scathingly refers to the prohibitive price of books in terms of any possibility for a lower income black readership in a 1977 article;[27] and both he and Serote remark on the lack of leisure time available for black artists and writers to create.[28] Interestingly enough, the novelists here dealt with all opt to use English as their language medium. Various reasons are given for this choice: the unifying potential of the language, the access it gives to a wider world of ideas and an international audience, the association of the vernacular languages with the Bantu Education Department and the fact that they are adapting and using a form of 'African English.'[29]

The re-emergence of black novels by writers working inside the country is now, however, an established fact. The full significance of this shift is rather unclear, although Mzamane spoke a year and a half before the publication of his novel of his own motives for choosing a longer prose form:

> "Four years have passed since the Soweto uprisings. We've had time to ponder over a wide range of issues connected with the events. I feel that a major literary statement,not just a snipe-shot,is now due,which is just what I've tried to do in this work."[30]

Mike Kirkwood, director of Ravan Press, hinted in 1980 that the move towards written literature might be connected to the disintegration of many of the performing writers' groups that had flourished in the mid-seventies, and 'perhaps because the political momentum of 1976 is dying away a little.' Some writers were, he suggested, possibly moving towards individual acts of writing and a concern for technical, rather than simply political, literary concerns.[31] It is noticeable though that most of the black novels published in the last few years are by already established writers, and that novels which deal with the 1976 uprisings form a significant part of this category. It is furthermore noticeable that they often express similar concerns in their fictional treatment of the 'days of Power.' It is the emphases and disjunctures of their concerns, and the manner in which these are put forward, which are of concern in what follows.

The Novels of 1976[32]

The three novels which deal directly with June 1976 have a large degree of similarity in plot structure and thematic preoccupation. Tlali's novel is constructed as an account of the lives of Soweto residents in the year after the uprising. The use of dialogue and the interweaving of several stories of human interest allow her to present a number of areas of black discontent. Mzamane is mostly concerned with the activities of high school pupils who try to organise resistance to the State. His linear narrative is interspersed with digressions, sociological explication and authorial interjections. A socio-historical element is important to both these novels. Sepamla's novel is a more conventional piece of adventure prose, containing elements of popular fiction.[33]

After a brief prelude during the Israeli Embassy siege in Johannesburg in 1975, Amandla describes the events of the uprising mainly through the experiences and conversations of an extended family living in the Rockville area of Soweto. The love affair of Felleng and Pholoso, a high school student who becomes the leader of the Soweto Student Representative Council until his arrest, is one of the main areas of attention of the novel: Amandla ends with their parting and his departure into exile. Several other stories are interwoven with this one: the death and funeral of Dumisani, shot by the police in the first clash between police and students; the attempts of Pholoso's grandmother Mrs Moeng (Gramsy) to save enough money to erect a tombstone on her husband's grave in Braamfontein cemetery; the difficulties her niece Agnes has in her marriage to a drunken husband; the effect the dislocations of the Soweto uprising have on her other niece Nana and her politically articulate husband Moremi; an adulterous affair featuring a black policeman Nicodemus; the political organisation undertaken by a group of students under Pholoso, Pholoso's capture and escape from imprisonment, and his subsequent exile. Into this web of familial experience Tlali places a number of other figures, historical events and issues of discontent and political debate in Soweto at the time.

The Children of Soweto is divided into three sections, the first and third narrated by the fictional Sabelo, a high school student who leads student organisation in Soweto until his exile in Botswana at the end of the novel. The first section gives an idea of the inadequacy of Bantu Education and the subsequent student grievances, which culminate in their organising debates and a political structure to resist the imposition of Afrikaans. The second section tells the story of a white insurance salesman caught in the house of a black colleague on the day of June 16, and the family's grudging efforts to save him. The third section, by far the longest, deals in the main with student resistance, led by Sabelo, for a period of roughly a week after the beginning of the uprising. In this short period Mzamane places most of the major historical events of the six-month period after the uprising: the popularising of resistance, the arrest and torture of students, the backlash by Mzimhlope hostel residents, the attempted march through town to John Vorster Square, the assassination of the hated black policeman Hlubi, and the funeral of the narrator's friend Muntu. The action is regularly punctuated by asides and digressions explaining the origins, motives and results of events: in parts the novel resembles nothing so much as a sociological treatise.

A Ride on the Whirlwind downplays the sociological and historical concerns of the other two novels, without losing sight of them entirely. The action begins two days after the uprising with the arrival at Park Station of the guerilla Mzi, sent by the Resistance Movement in Dar es Salaam to kill a brutal black policeman, Andries Batata. He meets with Uncle Ribs Mbambo, his

contact man, and through him the student leader Mandla, who is with a small group of followers directing resistance in Soweto from the house of Sis Ida. Mandla and Mzi form an alliance and together blow up a police station; Mzi subsequently assassinates Batata. Several of Mandla's followers, as well as Sis Ida, are arrested after an accident with explosives at the house. Descriptions of their torture follow. The novel ends with Mandla fleeing into exile and Mzi attempting to persuade a white helper to drive him to Swaziland.

To Every Birth Its Blood

Serote's concerns are rather wider. The first part of this novel, seen through the eyes of Tsi, an inhabitant of Alexandra, is pervaded with hopelessness and despair. Tsi, an ex-journalist who is trying his hand at acting, spends his time aimlessly moving between his friends and the shebeens of the township, or listening to music. Although there are references to his brother's detention and to friends of his who are doing political work, Tsi's life is fruitless and irresponsible. He broods on the traumatic assault he suffered at the hands of the police while he was a journalist. The onset of a new era of black pride and determination (a reference to Black Consciousness) in the township galvanises him into action. He becomes an extension worker at a correspondence school in Johannesburg. The success of his efforts, both in real educational terms and in terms of his own personal life, is shaken by his being interrogated by the security police. On his release he is confronted by the lack of political courage of his American employer.

The second section of the book takes place a year or so later, after the uprisings of 1976, and is focussed through the viewpoint of various characters. These people are all involved in the burgeoning of organised resistance to overthrow apartheid under the auspices of the Movement. In distinction to the anomie and defeat of much of Tsi's monologues, an atmosphere of determination and commitment prevails. The armed resistance against the State is widened by the Movement until the war spreads to the rural areas and surrounding countries. Some of the protagonists such as Oupa (Tsi's nephew, whom we come across as a child in the first section) are captured and tortured to death; others flee to neighbouring countries or return to take up the struggle. The novel ends with South African planes circling over an embattled Gaborone, where Tsi has taken refuge, intercut with the symbolic birth of a child who signifies the hope for the birth of a new post-revolutionary South Africa.[34]

The Conceptualisation of History and Society

All four novels take place to a great extent against the urban backdrop of Johannesburg and its surrounding townships, and delineate the process of mobilisation and violent resistance against the apartheid system that is carried forward in June 1976. All refer to a variety of injustices suffered by black people in the country - Bantu Education, the pass laws, the homelands policy, the lack of housing and amenities in the townships, the antisocial and violent behaviour endemic to township life, and the feeling of hopelessness apartheid engenders. There is a striking sense, however, of the events of 1976 marking the beginning of a process which will herald in a 'new life', despite any suffering that may occur. This change will be the result of the active resistance of the community, spearheaded by a vanguard of schoolchildren and activists: 'we are in that moment when nothing

is left unquestioned' (TEB p 243). Each novel can be seen as an expression of this determination, as part of the struggle of a black South Africa infused with a sense of political destiny. The young lawyer at Dumisani's funeral makes this clear:

> "South Africa is a signatory to the Human Rights Charter. Yet it is true that the whites of this land deliberately and consciously deny the blacks that right to freedom...Like the Boers at Slachtersnek, we give our pledge today that we shall never lay down our arms,we shall never rest,until the truth prevails - until a just,peaceful society for all emerges here in our land..." (A pp 77-9)

The Afrikaners (who are most often depicted as actively opposing this quest for freedom), despite their own nationalist struggle in the past, are shown to be unable to match this 'truth' with any moral and human values of their own. In Sepamla, for instance, Colonel Kleinwater of the security police recognises that the uprising marks the birth of a new era in the country, but his response is rather jaded and half-hearted ('Ag,I wish I could retire to my farm, Vergenoeg. I am tired.' ROW p 227). In general, the whites can only respond with brutality, fear or vacillation to the upsurge of black nationalist fervour the novels embody.

There are differences of style and register between the four novels and, except possibly in the case of Sepamla, within the novels themselves. All four, however, can finally be described as desiring to give an authentic and mimetic portrayal of events. Despite the predominantly realistic mode employed in all the novels except in sections of Serote, they can nevertheless be seen not only as attempting to mirror the social history of the period but also as trying to aid a political denouement through the conscientisation of their black readership. The similarities in their themes reflect similar political concerns. The authors, free to select from a range of available historical episodes, incidents and settings, tend to select and interpret the history in suggestively similar ways. Sometimes the political proselytisation is direct: the device most often employed here is authorial interjection, discussion between various characters where political viewpoints are expressed, and the quoting of pamphlets and speeches made at debates and funerals. An item which is perceived as symbolic of the white system, such as a PUTCO bus, can also initiate wide-ranging discussion among spectators (A pp 117-28). In Sepamla and Mzamane a closeness to and identification with the action of the novels on the part of the authors can sometimes be noticed. The political debates may provoke heated disagreement and portray real differences of perception, as in Amandla. But the difference of views expressed by the characters does not, finally, constitute any basic challenge to the ideological thrust the reader is left with. There is one incident in A Ride on the Whirlwind of a far-ranging criticism being made of the organised resistance to the Sophiatown removals in the 1950s; but the person who makes them, the shebeen owner Noah Witbaatjie, very quickly turns out to be a police spy. The novels therefore explicate and naturalise the inevitability and correctness of black political aspirations. While the reader may identify with these aspirations, the manner in which liberation is supposed to happen and the way South African society is imagined are still worthy of attention.

One of the central concerns is a retrieval of black history. Constant reference is made to the figures and events of past resistance: the Sofasonke party, Sophiatown, Mandela, Sharpeville, Kadalie and the ICU, May Day and so on. At times elderly people, such as Gramsy and Makolo Magong in Amandla, function as individual examples of the history of black resistance and for-

titude. Through Tsi's monologue, Serote traces back the collective history of a township and community, Alexandra, in the 1950s (TEB pp 28-30). The uprisings of 1976 are consistently referred to as a continuity of previous black resistance.

Black suffering is traced back to the encroachment of whites: in terms of harassment such as pass raids ('For men knew the meaning of these raids;they deplored their own impotence in the face of them and they cursed the day the last impi was routed by whitey' ROW p 95) and in terms of the reasons for June 16 itself ('Looking back in time we can usually tell to the very minute when it all started; the day Dingane's forces were routed at Blood River, the day of Bulhoek, Sharpeville and so on' COS pp 77-8). Furthermore, spiritual and cultural roots are mobilised as an active and ever-present force in the contemporary struggle for freedom. Thus Pholoso, we are told, is saved from the police by a combination of his badimo (ancestors) and Gramsy's prayers: and Sepamla's manner of description of Mandla the student leader and Mzi the revolutionary planning the assassination of Batata is striking: we are told that their voices 'droned in the room like the small home-made drum in a religious ceremony' (ROW p 122). Other examples of this conceptualisation are numerous.

However, implicit and explicit criticism of the older generation of parents for their lack of commitment occurs. Neo the student activist expresses this succinctly when he observes that if 'they'd devoted more of their time to the overthrow of the System first instead of trying to carve themselves a comfortable niche in this faggot-ridden country, we wouldn't have been in this mess' (COS p 114).[35] The parents may well identify the songs the schoolchildren sing as being the same ones they sang before the banning of the ANC and PAC, but we are left in no doubt that the younger generation leads the struggle within the townships: Mmane Marta says to Gramsy "We're in the hands of the children now. They are as good as our parents" (A p 35). In terms of their concern with armed revolutionary struggle, Serote and to some extent Sepamla go further than this. Serote is perhaps the most discerning in making distinctions in this thematic area, most noticeably in the difference that emerges between Tsi's father's defeated silence and Ramono, Dikeledi's father, who is prepared to go to jail for his work in the Movement.

The Urban Community

All of the novels are focussed around and, with the partial exception of To Every Birth Its Blood, almost entirely take place in the urban milieu around Johannesburg. The despair and squalor of the black townships is juxtaposed to the technology and comfort of the central city; and their interrelationship - ghetto to industrial giant, labour to capital - stressed. In the words of Serote, Johannesburg is the 'Golden City' that belongs to whites, serviced by its surrounding townships, the 'Dark Cities' that belong to blacks. Soweto, though it may well be a 'monster' (ROW 162), houses a disparate community of black people. Thus, the way in which this urban landscape is humanized in the novels is noteworthy. All of the works under discussion depict an urban community in place, despite the insecurity of apartheid laws. The writers comment on the divisive effects apartheid laws amd migrant labour have on family life and any confidence blacks can have in their permanence in towns, but most of the important characters deployed in the novels form part of that stratum of the black community which is more or less permanently urbanised, even if they do still have links with rural life (references to the fact that parents send their children away from Soweto to relatives during the school

uprising are made, for instance, and Serote makes a political rural-urban link through the village of Walmanstadt). This is in contrast to what Vaughan tells us are the concerns of Mtutuzeli Matshoba in some of his contemporaneous fiction.[36] It can be argued that this is a portrayal that occurs seldom in black South African novels in earlier periods, elaborated only in the short fiction and autobiographies of the 1950s as a backdrop to the activities of the characters and authors. In terms of previous novels, The Marabi Dance as well as some of the work of Abrahams, la Guma, Rive and Boetie can perhaps be seen as making similar conceptualisations. Much previous long prose fiction by black writers before the 1950s has dealt with the city as a sink of vice and temptation, destroying the unwary and generally temporary visitor or migrant worker from the rural areas: a theme which still prevails in some vernacular novels in the 1960s and early 1970s.[37]

Inhabiting this urban milieu is a welter of people who individually may not be known to the authors but nevertheless are part of the community they perceive as their own. The protagonists move against a backdrop of urban dwellers who are identified as belonging to a diverse yet communal world existing simultaneously in time to the actual events of each novel, but with a reality outside it and familiar to many black readers.[38]

> "As always there were many cars on the road because Soweto takes the beat of its own heart from the tense activity of throbbing Johannesburg: the butcher,the vegetable dealer,the grocer,the factory-hand, the window-washer,all these and more hurry into town in the morning and as the day stretches east to west and its shadows west to east Soweto trickles back into its own hole." (ROW p 148)

This familiar yet faceless community can function as a place where both fictional revolutionary and real novelist can hide their activities and draw inspiration from 'the people'.[39]

The landscape in which this 'imagined community' operates is spatially specific. Fictional activity takes place in a detailed real world: Sepamla's Uncle Ribs, we are told, lives in Mncube Drive, Dube, Tlali's Gramsy at No. 5035 Rockville and Moremi's family in Lekhooa Street; the characters in To Every Birth Its Blood move along familiar Alexandra streets such as Selborne, Hofmeyr and John Brandt; and most of the action in Amandla takes place in the meticulously described area around Vundla Drive, Moroka.[40] Many of the characters could, indeed, be the people next door.

Black people are shown to be part of a racial brother- and sisterhood stretching far beyond immediate family or ethnic interests: the extended family in Amandla seems in fact to be the link mediating the individual characters' relationships to the larger community, as well as the social arena where the generosity and warmth postulated for the black community can be seen already in action. Here the personal and the political are fused, as the anti-ethnic voice of teacher Moremi points out: "Who bothers who anyone's great or great-great-grandfather was in a heterogeneous cosmopolitan town like Johannesburg or Soweto, where in one family all are fused into one?" (A p 163; cf. TEB pp 235-6).[41]

The greed and avarice of the apartheid system are counterposed throughout to the humanism of the black characters. Sis Ida, for example, is put forward as apolitical but prepared to house and feed the student leadership due to her quintessential caring nature. When she is imprisoned, she even sees her white interrogator as 'a baby, 'n melkpens' (ROW p 190). Even when the (fictitious) Jabavu Police Station is bombed in the same novel, the nearby residents come to assist the dead and wounded despite their hatred of the police. This humanism is met by incomprehension and brutality on the part of

most whites, as in the confrontation of Sis Ida and Colonel Kleinwater:

> "He stared back at her as if intent to cow her. She was convinced this encounter between them was a re-enactment of the many confrontations between Soweto and the men from the other side of the world. The law-enforcer would never understand any explanation of her humanity." (ROW p 130)

This human empathy encourages and allows a degree of communal assistance in the townships. Thus, when Sis Ida is about to be arrested her neighbour MaMatime is prepared to care for Ida's grandchild as if it were her own: and the same empathy drives Tsi's neighbour in To Every Birth Its Blood to lie to the authorities on Tsi's behalf when they come on a permit raid. In the final stages of this novel, when the planes are blockading Gaborone, Tsi suggests that human beings must finally outlast and triumph over technology, for 'we know - as they roar above our heads - that since we are human and they are not, we can wait and they cannot. They cannot fly and wait' (TEB p 367).

The only way this community can be destroyed, as Serote implicitly warns us, is by selfishness, cynicism and greed. It is this self-interest and lack of empathy which makes the streets of Alexandra so dangerous and violent, as it is isolation from the community which explains, in part, Tsi's anguish ('I have never walked with crowds. I walk into them' TEB 5). Such a response on the part of blacks is seen as overdetermined by the inhumanity of the apartheid system which continually threatens, and sometimes destroys, black community (TEB pp 54, 71, 219). The inhumanity of apartheid is seen as part and parcel of commercialisation and capitalist growth - the technology of the 'white man's machine'.

> "At last we hit Pretoria. Many black faces and white faces,like ants,knowing nothing about laziness,or hate,or joy,but engaged in building forever. Cars,many cars,turning,hooting,screeching, traffic lights changing their colours."(TEB p 95)

The Role of the Media

Part of the way this modern urban community imagines itself is through the media, which facilitates communication and contact with a wider world. Media have played an important role in developing black political identity in South Africa for decades and, in the case of newspapers, for over a century. A constant theme, then, is the abnegation characters in the novels feel for the dominant white ideology fed to them by the newspapers, as well as their distrust for the ambiguous role played by some black journalists at the time of June 1976. They can, however, not do without the information of South African and world affairs thus provided nor even the reports of the progress of events in Soweto.

The reliance on information and communication to facilitate the sense of a wide community of black people in a socially complex and dispersed society comes up again and again. The student activists in Soweto are often to be found engaged in reading the newspapers; Sis Ida only gets to know of the death by torture of the student Roy in the same jail in a newspaper she reads upside down on a policeman's desk; and the news is one of the few things which can temporarily halt the frequent political discussion in Amandla:

> "Their long digression was interrupted by the one o'clock time signal on the softly-playing radiogram against the wall,and they

immediately stopped and listened to the news." (A p 198)

The township people may well trust the rumoured more than the printed word, as Mzamane suggests. However, in a modern urban community the size of Soweto they cannot do without both oral and printed media. Furthermore, all four novels stylistically make use of billboard headings, newspaper headlines and reports - both fictional and edited from actual reports - as a means of conveying information of political events in the novels themselves. Mzamane for one claims that his simulated and real newspaper reports are to give an idea of what it felt like to be one of those involved, in a way white newspapers could not.[42]

In Serote's case, it is demonstrated that blacks should attempt to gain access to and use these frameworks for more progressive ends. Serote, after the disgust Tsi feels when he sees the story of his assault appear 'in some corner,on page two' describes the political use Dikeledi can put her 'Window on the Township' column to; and Mzamane mentions that actual black journalists such as Percy Qoboza and Aggrey Klaaste were eventually detained for trying to convey the black point of view in the World. The printed word is also a constituent of the struggle in Soweto in other ways. These novels show the extent to which leaflets were used as a means of conscientisation by the students themselves.

The Principle of Exclusion

The novels do not include everyone in the postulated black community. The most obvious candidates for exclusion are whites. The white policemen and township officials portrayed are almost uniformly callous in their dealings with blacks, a fact often borne out in real life. Other whites, such as Ann Hope in A Ride on the Whirlwind and David Horwitz in To Every Birth Its Blood, are shown as sympathetic to the 'black experience', but the black characters deal even with them with some suspicion and mistrust. There is a sense in all the novels that whites do not form a homogeneous bloc: nevertheless their economic and political position is such that blacks are forced, we are told, to view them in a certain way. For instance, although Ann is serving as a conduit for funds for the revolutionaries, her desk shines with the sweat of the cleaner (ROW p 150). Tsi, who is friendly with the journalist Anne, still informs her that he has contempt 'for her symbolic self' (TEB p 122). The message is clear: attitudes may differ, but in general the battle lines between black and white in South Africa are set.

All the whites depicted are either agents of the system or well meaning but vacillating middle class white liberals. There is one exception - the lift man in the building where Tsi and Tuki work, who is an 'insane racist' (TEB p 129) intent on sniping arguments with the black journalists. It is not particularly surprising that this representative of the white working class is racist: such is often the case. What is surprising is the fact that in all the four novels this is the only time, along perhaps with the commercial salesman trapped in Soweto in The Children of Soweto, that a white character escapes from the liberal/State official/Afrikaner choices usually made by the authors; and definitely the only time when a lower class white figure emerges not perceived in terms which link him or her directly with the State.

Liberal whites have access to privileges, opportunities and social networks blacks do not. Thus, for instance, Mandla, Mzi and the students come to Ann Hope and the 'Bishop' for money on several occasions, although they have 'no faith in the white man' (ROW p 149). In addition, sympathy between whites and blacks, when it exists, is most easily conceived of in sexual

terms, as in various incidents involving Anne, Ann Hope and David (TEB pp 156,206; ROW p 149). It is realised however that whites cannot be argued away, even if they are 'settlers' and 'three million die-hard fossils' (A p 123; TEB p 326). Two incidents in the novels illuminate an attitude of ambiguity to whites. Pholoso tries to save a white man he has kidnapped when the white man is discovered by an 'amorphous multitude' of blacks who kill him; Sipho in The Children of Soweto hides his colleague Johannes Venter, albeit reluctantly, in a coal-box behind his house in Soweto to save him from a similar angry mob (from where he eventually emerges with his skin blackened with soot, a description with symbolic overtones). Pholoso realises that although he tried to save the white man, he will be blamed by the authorities for his death. What may be significant in this is the implication that it is the better educated, more articulate and radicalised sections of the black community which at the same time lead the black revolt against apartheid and whites and, in a sense, mediate between the two racial enclaves and interpret them to each other. Finally, too, the journalist Anne, Ann Hope and David do become involved in minor ways in assisting the black revolution. The subsequent vacillation in feeling by Mzi towards Ann Hope at the end of A Ride on the Whirlwind is symptomatic of an inconclusive attitude towards whites (although this is deployed by Sepamla principally as a recognition of sexual attraction). There is a desire moreover that South Africa will, some day, become a non-racial country and that racial obsessions should then disappear: as Pholoso observes on his way into exile, "after our liberation, Africa will be through with settlers. Only people will live here, that's what we want...EQUAL PEOPLE!" (A p 291).

The importance of non-collaboration with the State in any form is frequently discussed and usually condoned in the novels, although Moremi in Amandla argues against the Unity Movement perspective as put forward by Killer. In line with this, there is another group of people excluded almost by definition from the ideal of black collectivity. These are the informers, community councillors and policemen with whom, we are reminded, the black community is riddled. Some black policemen may be secretly disloyal to the whites they serve - Sergeant Ndlovu in A Ride on the Whirlwind is an undercover agent for the Resistance Movement, and Sergeant Rampa is admiring a picture of Shaka when he is killed during the raid on Jabavu Police Station - but most are seen as a 'venom' which must be removed from the community:

> "...the big-mouthed quislings like the witchdoctor who came to speak nonsense on the radio the other day. All of them must disappear from amongst us. They are carrying passes like us in Soweto and other townships - and yet they are on the other side of the fence. How come?" (A p 134)[43]

The assassination of a black policeman(and, in the case of Serote, four white policemen in a separate incident) forms a crucial constituent of all four works under discussion. The hunting of Andries Batata is perhaps the most important theme Sepamla puts forward; and the death of Hlubi in The Children of Soweto and Nicodemus in Amandla occur as important events late in the stories, just before the flight of the student hero into exile. These typified black policemen are without ambiguity, mere adjuncts to white authority:[44] they decorate their houses with Voortrekker wheels; they relate to white policemen as autograph hunter to rugby hero (A p 133; COS p 185). Mpando in To Every Birth Its Blood is shot, appropriately, in a shebeen toilet, and his spilled brains mix with the urine - a comment on the lack of self-knowledge of blacks who support the system (TEB p 263). Even Nicodemus, who in some ways is more sympathetically depicted by

Tlali, is killed in a three-way shoot-out: presumably because, as an adulterer, he also transgresses the other social grouping Tlali holds up as exemplary in her novel, the family.

Political Organisation and Leadership

Thus what these novels portray is both a black community in place and a community which still has to be mobilised and unified for political action. The question of leaders and their relationship to the masses in an increasingly socially and politically differentiated society underlies the social depictions of the novels. Given their politically normative nature, the issue of organisation is an essential preoccupation of the narratives, and is tackled as a key issue by all the novelists. This is done in a manner which is most available to the novel form: through those characters who are involved with this very question in the course of the narrative in their role of political activists and leaders.

The way in which these leaders emerge however is interesting. As has been observed,[45] the guerilla Mzi comes across as a Byronic figure, isolated from the people he has come to serve - although Sepamla's attitude to his arrogance and love of violence does seem slightly ambiguous. Mandla, however, is completely overawed by him ('For Mzi was to him little short of a god' ROW p 34) and indulges in clandestine action with him from which the other members of the student group are excluded, a fact which breeds considerable resentment among them. Moreover, the reader gains the impression that Mandla's handful of followers are responsible for nearly all the anti-State activity in Soweto.

While this disjuncture between leader and people is most obvious in Sepamla, the two other novels which deal directly with Soweto 1976 display a muted similarity. The position of leadership enjoyed by Pholoso - his name means 'saviour' - appears to be natural, stemming from his responsible and charismatic personality. He is a school prefect who is nicknamed 'Moses' by his followers. When he addresses students in the hideout underneath the church, his attitude resembles that of a schoolteacher ('I was rather disappointed that we in the "A" centre do not read enough of the books I put at your disposal for circulation' A p 83). The other student leaders are portrayed in like terms: Dumisani is mourned on his death by Moremi as a 'real gem of a boy. He would have become a real scholar. I used to be proud of his English essays' (A p 23). Thus the leadership emerges in these narratives as a small activist core of better educated young people who act on behalf of, but often with little political consultation with, 'the people'. The principal role they see for themselves is as the purveyors of the truth of liberation to the inhabitants of the townships, who are shown to be variously sympathetic, vacillating, apathetic or frightened. Both Tlali and Mzamane are at pains to demonstrate the organisational efforts made by the core group, and refer to the way in which their fictitious student leadership set up funds, help families and mobilise other students. These references obviously have a strong mimetic quality to real circumstances. Yet even Sabelo, the narrator of The Children of Soweto, has a degree of political wisdom and sophistication which makes him appear rather distant and manipulative in his dealings with others. Indeed, the decision to take part in political activity and risk arrest is itself shown to be transformative - as for instance Bella is transfigured by her experiences in detention in the same novel - and the rightness of student activity never in question. Political means are described, but they are always subordinate to ends. Political strategies are portrayed as already in place and obvious: and the

political goals of the leadership overshadow and justify any type of action taken.

The point is not that a degree of secrecy and vanguardism did not happen or was not inevitable at the time, nor that the novelists are not to an extent reflecting this trend accurately. The point is that it appears, from the historical accounts available, that the process of conscientisation embarked on by the students was itself contradictory and only partially succesful. The demands of the student leaders vacillated between those just concerned with education and wider social and political demands: neither was there anything but a fairly rudimentary form of political organisation in the townships before and during the uprising, due at least in part to police harassment and lack of continuity of leadership. It appears that none of the ANC, SASO or the BPC were prepared for the events of 16 June, although student leaders such as Motapanyane, Mashinini, Seatlholo and Montsisi have given differing accounts of the influence of the ANC on their activities.[46] Attempts to widen the revolt to the wider community also met with varying degrees of success: there was little or no attempt to mobilise compound workers around issues of importance to them on the part of the students, for instance, beyond expectations and calls on them for support. Slogans around specific worker needs were rare in both student and ANC pamphlets, and no attempts were made to bring lower class black people into the process of organisation and leadership. Thus, in a situation where the mood of revolt quickly spread both in Soweto and around the country, the causes of such widespread dissatisfaction - such as spiralling costs, unemployment, rises in rent and transport prices and inflation - were often downplayed vis-a-vis student and ideological issues (overcrowding in classrooms, Afrikaans, the poor quality of education, black dignity, and so on).[47] Sabelo in The Children of Soweto eventually analyses the problems that occurred during the uprising and admits that one of the real unsolved dilemmas was the lack of available grassroots, countrywide support.

The Absence of a Working Class

The novelists, in naturalising this process of leadership, ignore important questions of democracy and leadership which are still ongoing in South Africa today. The attitude to black workers is particularly striking. This tends to be dismissive. Thus, the teachers Pakade and Phakoe

> "...needed a constant reminder that we weren't the moegoes they sometimes took us for. They couldn't treat us as if we were raw amagoduka straight from Umtata or Thoko-ya-ndou just newly arrived in the city. We didn't vote Mangope either." (COS p 19)

and Joe, Agnes drunken husband, says in repentance

> "some of us thought it was silly going on with school instead of working and buying nice clothes. I regret it now that I was so stupid. Look at me today - a lousy factory-worker!" (A p 203)

Workers are seen as sheeplike, easily frightened, underpoliticised and more susceptible to the lure of homeland governments. Very rarely are they allowed to express their views in any of these novels. Their political problem is that they are 'out of touch with developments', as in the case of the attack by Mzimhlope hostel dwellers on the residents of Soweto (A pp 153-4; see also COS pp 220-1). Their role is to be inspired by the courage

of the students, as in the case of the window-cleaner who sees and joins the student march on John Vorster Square, ignoring his shouting white boss in the process ("He can call until his voice is hoarse,for all I care... Besides,my name is Ginyibhunu,not Jim!" COS p 233).

It is easy to criticise this attitude with the hindsight of the subsequent development of a militant trade union movement in South Africa. But one should point out that since early 1973 militant worker activity had been visible and on the upsurge in the country, and that this stereotype of the underpoliticised 'ordinary' black South African was already not in complete accord with events. Thus, this lack of attention to the working class is indicative. This observation remains true even if one accepts that, to a limited extent at least, black people in the townships have an immediate 'black experience' and racial consciousness available to them because of crowded, pan-class living conditions.[48] (One could further argue, too, that such a statement is very general, and begs subsequent scrutiny of the actual groups of people living in specific townships,and the extent to which neighbourhoods within these townships have geographies of class).

Sepamla, for instance, uses a discourse of 'the people' throughout his novel. Even Serote, who is most at pains to show the spread of resistance from a small group of Alexandra activists to urban and rural South Africa generally, mentions the domestic servants, street sweepers, bus drivers and others who take part in the national strike begun by students that he postulates at the end of his novel simply under the rubric of 'parents of the children' - although later the mineworkers also join the strike (TEB p 360). Serote demonstrates a commitment to socialism, and emphasises the need for discipline and responsibility in the struggle for liberation. Implied criticism of African socialism can be discerned in his novel (TEB pp 103-4), and the ravages of underdevelopment are not confined to South Africa, thus suggesting a wider analysis of neo-colonialism ('Bontleng reminded me of Alexandra' TEB p 348). Both Tlali and Serote open up their novels to key debates in which issues of race and class are seen as factors and, in the case of Serote at least, where different economic systems are foregrounded for discussion ('She wondered how this system could be destroyed, what system would replace it' TEB p 232)

Serote further shows the inconsistencies of this struggle - it cannot, for example, solve problems in personal relationships. The role of the revolutionaries is to learn as well as to teach: Oni realises that an old woman with whom she talks is one of 'the people who have kept the faith, who have made certain that the struggle is forever assured of its victory, when those who carry it forward follow the correct line' (TEB p 284). Earlier in the novel Boykie shows a similar perception:

> "A few well-organised people have to challenge the power of the settlers,while the people watch,and if you convince the people that you know what you are doing,they in turn will lead the revolution" (TEB pp 78-9; see also A pp 90-1)

The process of politicisation to Serote is a natural, unproblematic one. Black people are, with the exception of functionaries of the system, potentially at one in their political demands and can be easily accommodated under the auspices of the Movement, for 'the Movement is an idea in the mind of a people' (TEB p 327). The Movement is consistently described in natural, organic images: as thunder, as water flowing from a dam, as an old tree spreading its roots, as moving wind or a reflective sea.

All of the novels can be criticised for a tendency towards ready made solutions and a facile conception of the availability of the people for immediate and successful revolt - a tendency which, it can be suggested, deny

the very principles of popular struggle which they strive to depict. When commenting on Serote in this regard, it must be pointed out that in many ways he is least culpable of this in To Every Birth Its Blood. However, he downplays the contradictory nature of the social totality available for political mobilisation. His forging of a liberated black nation is based to some extent on the retrieval of a true consciousness and the laying bare of the machinations of the 'mad men' in power in South Africa (TEB p 290). He describes a process of political mobilisation which, while impressive in a fictional account of this nature, is not completely adequate. A concatenation of events he describes - student boycotts, attacks by the Movement on key installations, bombings, retaliatory attacks by South African security forces on neighbouring countries, news blackouts (TEB pp 359-61;365-7) are remarkably exact as regards actual events in South Africa since the book was published. Yet in the light of debates and struggles around strategies, goals and grassroots democracy in internal oppositional politics in the last few years, as well as with regard to disagreements between adherents of Black Consciousness and non-racial organisations - disagreements which, fuelled by the State as they may be, have nonetheless spilled over into animosity and killings - Serote's blanket political assessments and projections into the future can now be seen as premature. The issue of 'putting oneself in the hands of the youth' which the other three novelists do not question can also be subject to some scepticism a decade after the Soweto uprising, in the light of groups of siyayinyova existant in the townships at present, seemingly out of the control of any political organisation; and a tendency on the part of some young people to use undemocratic methods of political persuasion of a violent nature, most horrifyingly in the use of the 'necklace'.

The Question of Gender

An equally arresting set of inconsistencies in the depiction of an equal community in these works is those to do with the question of gender. On the one hand the stereotype of the loving and supportive wife and mother recurs, as do acknowledgements of the strength and resilience of old black women. However, although younger women appear as part of the inner circle of activists, in Mzamane and Sepamla at least they have an unproblematic relationship with food and the kitchen. This can be seen in an incident involving Bella, deputy treasurer of the SRC, and Nina, the secretary. In the midst of a fierce discussion after a political meeting, Bella's mother brings those assembled food and asks only Bella and Nina to help in the kitchen (COS p 104). Woman's succouring role is not questioned: when Nina goes to hide in Bra P's house he jokes that he has inherited a bride and excellent cook and compliments her on her cooking, causing her to blush (COS pp 173-4). While it can be argued that Mzamane is here simply putting forward an authentic portrayal of Bra P's character, there does appear to be an unconscious element to some of his depictions. This is most noticeable in Sabelo's ruminations in exile at the President Hotel in Gaborone

> "...sipping cold Castle lager,and watching pretty Batswana women with their well-padded buttocks shaking to a sensuous rhythm,with their breasts like watermelons and some of the most fabulous legs I have seen,walking up and down the Mall below,on my lap a copy of God's Bits of Wood." (COS p 244)

The female activists also have a surprising ability to be caught and tortured, with particular attention to detail in Sepamla (Bongi's frayed bodice is ripped off, 'exposing the fullness of her turgid breasts and pointed teats to the beastliness of the two cops' ROW p 157). One of these episodes of torture is especially remarkable for its unconscious Freudian undertones (ROW p 182).

Tlali on the other hand is certain in her depiction of the importance of women to communal life, and the difficulties they face. She has spoken at great length in articles about the spiritual and material oppression black women face, and how these experiences cannot be shared by their white counterparts.[49] In Amandla she shows them as capable of decisive action, both with regard to drunken husbands and in terms of the wider struggle. In one of his speeches Pholoso notes that women must not be confined to the kitchen; while they cannot join the inner core because it is difficult for them to move around without being molested (sic), they can form women's groups. In response a number of projects are initiated by the women - small gardens, education and self-defence groups, and so on. Yet it can be said that women's major role in Tlali is still with reference to men and the family. Moreover, the romance between Felleng and Pholoso is represented in an extremely romanticised way:

> "Even the bullets of the Boers will never stop me from coming to you. You are like a prize. I must fight to get you. You are like a whole package of...of...what shall I say? A package...of sweetness...of bliss. And to think that you are all mine...You are Mother Africa - and how I love you!" (A p 71)

Serote, again, is the most consciously questioning in his assumptions about the role of women, and in removing them from their traditional roles. Onalenna, Dikeledi and others are fully active in the Movement, often performing the most dangerous tasks. Yet Serote's descriptions of women are all idealised, with the exception of the shebeen queen Hilda. It has been pointed out elsewhere that tendencies to idealise or denigrate female characters, to treat them 'either as victim or as goddess',[50] are opposite poles of the misrepresentation of women in African literature.

The Preoccupations of a Radical Intelligentsia?

The purpose of the above fictional representations are, I would argue, both mimetic and political. On the one hand, these novels describe and extrapolate from political and social life in South Africa today. On the other, a community of black people is being naturalised and called into action by both the fictional activists in the novels and by the novels themselves. In constructing this community, the novelists to some extent ignore its social cleavages and contradictions. A process of structuring of social identity and political morality is indicated by these books, from the point of view of a radical urban intelligentsia denied access to political rights and seeking to identify with and conscientise other blacks in a struggle for freedom. Historically, this is a group which has been denied access to State power and now, in a racially repressive society, sees the need to align itself with and appeal to lower class blacks in populist terms.[51]

While workers are not focussed on in the novels in active terms, the black middle classes are. In A Ride on the Whirlwind, 'bourgeois' blacks such as Dr Kenotsi and Papa Duz are usually referred to by Mandla and Mzi in contemptuous terms, but are nonetheless useful to them for their money and transport. Kenotsi finds 'the children's revolution...sucking him into

its core irreversibly' (ROW p 206). Mzamane makes a distinction between Chabeli and Rathebe, who in six pages are typified as having all the accumulated vices a community councillor or black businessman in South Africa could possibly have, and Bra P. Bra P is a conspicuous consumer, an enigmatic figure and a lover of good jazz. Whereas Chabeli and Rathebe are egocentric and misanthropic, he is a man of the people, possessing the rare quality of ubuntu (humanism) (COS p 153). He advises and assists the student activists. He has contacts everywhere, inside and outside the country, and even manages to get Bella out of jail. It is hinted that he had something to do with the murder of a reporter who bears a striking resemblance to the historical figure of Henry Nxumalo. This reporter has made the mistake of moving from exposés of white labour and prison outrages to exposing organised black crime, for, as Sabelo observes, 'many people pointed out... it is one thing to expose the true and proven enemies of the people and another to turn in one who is black and struggling like yourself' (COS p 89). Social class is seen, particularly in this novel, to be largely defined in terms of one's relationship and connection to the State. The close relationship of the radical anti-apartheid intelligentsia to the people is represented as inevitable. Indeed, the 'right' approach to politics will render this class invisible among the people. The case of Ramono in To Every Birth Its Blood comes to mind. In an interesting digression, his existence as a landlord in Alexandra in the 1950s is described - he is a 'tough but just' landlord, who advises his tenants on marital and other problems and who makes his decisions collectively. His wife advises their wives on health problems (TEB pp 219-20). This short passage can, without too much fancy, be related to the social attitude and placement Serote wishes people like Ramono to accept.

Serote emphasises the 'respect' people who have taken part in political action engender in the community, and the rediscovery of dignity and self-worth of his protagonists who are shown scant respect in a racist milieu. An ambiguous attitude to organs of public life is shown, by him and others, as the characters' faith in courts, lawyers and other supposedly impartial institutions is constantly shaken. As the novels progress the reader's attention is drawn to the racial bias of these institutions: one of the most poignant moments in Serote is when Boykie, as he is assaulted by a policeman and his camera smashed, shouts: 'you should remember that you are nothing but a public servant, stop pushing me around!' (TEB p 80).

References to education and scenes including books and the act of reading abound. A preponderance of film and literary references occurs in Mzamane, sometimes used as a form of metaphor ('We've no time for guys who want to play at Macavity the Mystery Cat here' COS p 43). While it can be argued that this is true to type for his student protagonists, books are also seen as crucial to the process of self-education and political education. Characters in the novels read Fanon,[52] Mao and other political writers: memorably, Oupa comes across a comrade reading Lenin's 'What Is To Be Done?' in the servants' quarters of a white house near Harrow Road. Not only reading but the right reading is shown to be essential: Tsi criticises his sister for reading stupid romances; and Oupa, on reading Ramono's speech in the dock, advises the others 'Every one of us must make a cutting of this speech and read and study it. It has lots for us' (TEB p 238). Indeed, such is the unconscious authorial stress on the written word that Oupa's capture and subsequent death in detention are the direct result of a police search finding a booklet of the Movement in his pocket.

These observations on the importance of books and reading by these writers are crucial, as they also have resonances in terms of literary form

and audience. The choice of the novel as a preferred form to portray the events of Soweto 1976 by these writers needs to be subject to scrutiny[53], particularly in the light of their avowed desire for a black audience. It could be argued that 'the formation of a knowable and known community, in which common habits of thought, social customs, aspirations, and values might be discerned' is a typical area for the novelist[54], and that such a concern in these novels to some extent dictates this choice. Furthermore, Mzamane has pointed out that there are problems of scale associated in presenting a subject as broad as Soweto 1976 which points towards the use of the novel.[55] However, in a country where a mass black audience for newspapers is only a few decades old, and where literacy is still anything but general (let alone proficiency in English), such a choice precludes consumption by many lower class black people.[56] Working class people still use mainly oral means as a form of cultural expression: and, in recent black literature, the performance of poetry and plays still holds considerable sway. Nevertheless, the growth of prose fiction seems to reflect a change in reading patterns among younger black lovers of literature at least.

Narrative, Realism and Social History

Despite their stylistic differences, all four novels discussed attempt to reflect, personalise and (in the case of Serote) extrapolate from the uprisings of June 1976. As Mzamane has noted above, he wished to tell more of the truth than the historian's truth and counteract dominant white versions of the event. Of the writers we are concerned with here, he is not alone in this: Mzamane speaks of Sepamla's anthology of poetry prompted by the experience of 1976 (The Soweto I Love)

> "in which he fulfils the role of historical witness. 'I'm an historian,' he says, explaining his role in the context of Soweto and its aftermath, 'and I've only scratched at the surface so far...blacks have been silent for too long.'[57]

In terms of The Children of Soweto, Mzamane also observes that 'my use of newspaper reports...is not due to creative ineptitude or simple iconoclasm; it is done on principle. The separation between aesthetics and politics, fiction and fact, is one of the fundamental dichotomies the novel seeks to *overcome - in the spirit, I might add, of Brecht's epic theatre*'.[58]

It is simplistic though to expect these novels to accurately reflect the events of 1976 on a one-to-one basis. In this they are not alone: it has been pointed out that the historical accounts of the period published so far tend to be inconclusive and to sometimes make ideological points at the expense of a more sober analysis. Moreover, official, newspaper and popular versions of the uprising have all run into considerable difficulties attempting to account for and interpret this event - difficulties enhanced by the sheer weight, proximity and disparity of available information; the suppression of information; and the diverse political positions and conceptual frameworks employed, which tend to influence what questions are posed and what social aspects are focussed on.[59]

As disciplines, history and literature contain differences of expectations, codes, conventions and methodology. They are themselves historical practices, subject to some extent to their own generic limitations. History is generally more concerned with validation in its method of inquiry; it needs to be adequate to the material researched and presented, while creative literature can in some instances simply concern itself with an approximation and symbolic appropriation of social detail, and foreground aesthetic and political concerns. As Mzamane notes:

> "I don't think it matters much,though,whether my references to real people are identifiable. I don't think this has made my readers in East Germany,where the novel has been selling very well, appreciate the core issues at stake less. But the black people of South Africa,who are my primary target audience and on whose painful memories these painful events are indelibly imprinted, will,of course,turn back and say: This reminds me of so-and-so. Oh! is that the true significance of their actions? Is this,then, another way of looking at what happened to us? Others may even say: No,this is not how it happened. Heated controversy is sparked. Resolution. Action. It is a popular history,you see, written from a particular political perspective,which may be illuminating to some people,which may or may not sharpen the political perceptions of others."[60]

Historians desire to be far more rigorous and painstaking in their mobilisation of empirical data, while the accuracy and complexity of novelists' social backdrop is not always assumed to be of primary importance. History concerns itself with falsification in a way literature does not. Thus, while we cannot say that either works of literature or historical studies can ever completely define and illustrate what is 'true', the explanatory nature of history ideally requires that functional and causal explanation support each other and that the combination is epistemologically legitimate.[61] Furthermore historical analysis has strong reference to paradigms: in the process of its explication categories are produced either implicitly or explicitly which allow the reader to grasp differences in the social process and framework being described.[62] In this process, the best history is not reductive in its explanation and abstraction, although it is selective.[63]

On the other hand, works of creative literature function much more obviously through metaphorical, symbolic and allusive procedures. An immediate example of this comes from To Every Birth Its Blood, which is less concerned with sociological explanation than, for example, Mzamane is. In place of explicit diatribes against the politically biased or useless role of the newspapers before and during at least the early stages of the uprising, Serote simply describes a World billboard his characters observe in passing: 'Pantie slitter shot' (TEB p 201). In this innuendo the voyeuristic and sensational concerns of a section of the South African press is brilliantly crystallised (and even more tellingly, the billboard described was, to my memory, a real one). Literature also may not only seek to display one meaning but many meanings: ambiguity is a deliberate literary device, although in my opinion only Sepamla makes use of this technique consistently (although it could be argued that this may also mark an ambiguity on his part to some of the implications of the Soweto uprising[64]). In terms of the specifics of literary convention, symbol and metaphor are also marshalled in these novels, despite the predominantly realist mode employed. On an immediate level, this may be as a result of a fear of censorship (Sepamla: 'South Africa has taught us to speak in metaphors'[65]). But February has also remarked that simple descriptions of certain objects such as Hippos can serve a deeper, more symbolic meaning in South African literature, where 'The Hippo becomes the state = Afrikanerdom = apartheid'.[66] This can be seen, for instance, in Tlali's use of burning municipal offices as symbolic, to the characters in the novel, of the way in which the apartheid regime is being challenged. In a sense, too, as literary artifacts both Serote's and Sepamla's novels (and to a lesser extent Mzamane's and Tlali's) consciously act as synecdoches, allowing description of the part to stand for description of the whole[67]: Serote has said that 'Alexandra was for me a definition

of the way blacks lived in our country as a whole'.[68]

Literature, especially novels, nevertheless has an ability to penetrate into psychological processes, and lay bare motivations, responses and desires in a way history has only been able to do by reference to cultural determinants and subjective elements via, for instance, oral testimony.[69] The allusive nature of literature can in certain circumstances probe more to the heart of things than sociological or historical studies: Engels' observation that he learnt more from Balzac than 'from all of the professed historians, economists and statisticians of the period together'[70] is illustrative. Accurate depictions of social life can even sometimes be discerned in works of literature despite their authors' opinions, conscious intentions or ideological affiliations (although it is all to easy to transform this argument into an idealist notion of the intrinsic 'truth' of art: I would argue that ideological and social determinants still play a large part in setting parameters for literary work). Indeed, in an historical account of 1976, Brickhill and Brookes' Whirlwind Before the Storm, the notion of the existence of a Soweto 'community' is often taken more for granted than in the novels themselves, despite the novelists' desire to demonstrate unity and community.[71]

In studying literature, one finds that it is polysemic - the interplay of meanings and literary devices employed never point simply in one direction, but have several possible interpretations and readings[72]: while this is also the case for historical data, it is less obvious in subsequent historical analysis, which tends to concern itself with hypothesis and proof. In other words, the historian amasses data in order to reduce it to a pattern, while the novelist elicits detail in order to authenticate a symbolic order in the construction of which he or she is implicated.[73]

While literature displays its own institutional history as a genre and set of assumptions on the part of the reader, the concerns of novelists dealing with historical events are related to the concerns of historians in a skewed but interesting manner. One of the tasks the novelists under discussion have set for themselves, as has been demonstrated, is to set history to rights from a black viewpoint. In ways which are not necessarily strictly analogous to historians, novelists concern themselves with matters of research, selection and falsification. Mzamane's researching of newspapers to increase the air of authenticity in his novel is a case to point.[74] And the black writers, while not engaging in a methodological process of verification and falsification, are involved in an ideological one: one of the express purposes of these novels is to call into question social being and received interpretations of history among black people in terms of a counter-ideology of black pride and self-worth. Moreover, the novels show a selection of historical facts and events and a (sometimes unconscious) ignoring of others; a hierarchy of social events in which the fictional characters move are deemed by the novelists to be essential and significant to what they are trying to say. Lukacs, for one, holds that all realist novels indulge in such a process of selection, abstraction and specificity, in that they aim to reproduce cognitively the objective historical essence contained behind mere sensate appearance, and believes that the lives of individual characters should be portrayed as part of the entire historical dynamics of their society.[75] And, as Jameson notes,

> "The originality of the concept of realism...lies in its claim to cognitive as well as aesthetic status...the ideal of realism presupposes a form of aesthetic experience which yet lays claim to a binding relationship to the real itself, that is to say, to those

> realms of knowledge and praxis which had traditionally been differentiated from the realm of the aesthetic,with its disinterested judgments and its constitution as sheer appearance."[76]

Similarly, in history of a 'realist' nature (such as Marxism) there is a commitment to the belief that knowledge is the knowledge of objects or processes that exist independently of thought.[77] Both 'realist' literature and 'realist' history are concerned with the relationship of individuals and social groups to a real world which, while not knowable outside of the historian's or the writer's organising perceptions, nevertheless exists independently of them. In history, indeed, critique of the adequacy of historical models and theories can be based on a 'realist interrogation of categories': any historical work which seeks to appropriate social reality must be measured against that reality in order to ascertain whether it is adequate or overly reductionist and simplistic.[78]

The matter cannot however be left there. Literature and also history which lay claim to realism in the sense used above are not as innocent of artifice and ideological construct as the name suggests. This is true in the case of historical analysis despite its subjection to a rigour of scientific method and convention not usually associated with literature. While objects can be held to exist independently of interpretation, claims to knowledge necessarily presuppose the activity of interpretative thought and historical agency on the part of the thinker. Literary realism can never be as complex as the real history it mimes and gestures towards, but neither can historical analysis: reality in both cases is processed through other modes of representation and forms of cognition as they are actualised by the organising perceptions of the novelist or historian. Analytical realism is not only mimetic but also normative: it does not, as historical empiricism and what has been called 'naturalism' in literature do, concern itself simply with attempting to set forward disparate and unconnected events and facts.[79] History aims to condense and explain, and contains ideological proclivities. There is no such thing as an unmediated 'fact', nor a neutral historical method available to historians, of whatever kind. In other words, methodology itself can never be used as a means of sidestepping prior substantive commitments to an ideological and ethical position, even if such commitment may alter or expand as a result of investigation of the real world.[80]

> "empirical interest and procedures are partly the product of theoretical,moral and ideological predilections. It is true that research would temper these predilections. But research is not just a matter of using the tools of empirical method and discovering factual nuggets."[81]

Empirical evidence obviously makes a difference to the judgments of the historian, but it is a relationship of constant interplay and modification vis-a-vis prior hypotheses and modes of perception. The various histories of 1976 are not simply about recording the past any more than the novels are. In all cases we can say that they are not only mimetic and normative but also anticipatory and often directly political, for 'we are not talking just about the deaths of children and why they died: we are talking about the lives of future generations and how they are going to live'.[82]

Furthermore it would be overly simple to regard these novels as being in a facile relationship of 'fiction' to the pre-existing and immutable 'facts' of 1976 and/or its historical accounts. Several theories of literary narrative and realism give such a premiss of comparison and difference between, in Rimmon-Kenan's words, 'story' and 'text' central position in their analysis, or speak about the relationship between the literary text

and the corresponding real history which enhances its illusion of reality.[83] In historical novels, the 'actual' history which is played out in idiosyncratic ways in the text is a rich source of comparison and will assist in gauging the obsessions and silences of the author, and is consequently an indicator of ideological position. Indeed, fictional narratives about historical occurrences in particular demand an assumption of mimesis on the part of the reader, even if it is granted that the novel can only approximate the actual historical events referred to.[84]

Yet this dualist model is misleading. For

> "what narratologists refer to as the basic stories or deep-plot structures of narratives are often not abstract,disembodied or subsumed entities but quite manifest,material,and particular retellings - and thus versions - of those narratives, constructed,as all versions are,by someone in particular,on some occasion,for some purpose,and in accord with some relevant set of principles."[85]

The view that a basic story or historical fact exists independent of any teller or occasion of telling and therefore of any human purposes, perceptions or interactions is erroneus. Knowledge of past events is usually not narrative in structure or given in storylike sequences, but rather tends to cohere around imprecise recollections, scattered pieces of verbal information, visual images and the like; all of which will be organised, integrated and apprehended as a specific set of events only in and through the very act by which they are narrated i.e. written down or told.[86] History, both oral[87] and written, has itself a narrative, structured dimension, which should warn us that

> "There is a point where the emphasis on sensibility,on the moral consciousness,on the validity of human experience becomes the sole object,and the subject,of historical disclosure...this overestimates the transparency of sources and the purposive integration of human subjectivity and agency. Experiences are not unities which necessarily cohere. Nor do they confer upon historians (or poets) privileged access to the nature of social reality."[88]

Therefore it can be said that the observation that the novel has very real connections to other forms of discourse such as journalism, documentary and history needs to be taken seriously.[89]

What is further of interest is <u>how</u> novelists, and historians, reconstruct an historical event or set of social relationships in process in their work. One can examine some of the strategies employed by the novelists, for example, in their drive for realism: for their realism is after all a literary construct. In this process a knowledge of the social determinants surrounding the author is imperative. Serote, for instance, was not resident in South Africa in 1976 but was a fine arts student at a university in the United States; while Mzamane, employed as an academic in a neighbouring country, was only briefly in South Africa during 1976 but nevertheless gained a great deal of insight as the Chairman of the Soweto Students' Relief Committee in Botswana set up to co-ordinate the activities of organisations catering for refugees, which put him in close proximity to the students and their recollections.[90] Tlali had a close personal experience of the process of events:

> "I've introduced my own plot and the characters are fictitious. But I'm writing from a very real experience. There were so many people involved. So many families affected. It tells of "their state of insecurity,"the harassment,the losses and deaths. The book doesn't end in a cloud of death - there are debates as a

> result of the riots. These made us aware of the feelings of the people. And the question of our children - we have their lives to worry about."[91]

Clearly, by time her personal experiences emerge on paper, they are coupled with and partly shaped by her social and political concerns and desires.

In historical accounts too, the facts are always selected, shaped and perhaps distorted by the historian who observes them. The use of narrative techniques is a constant, irremovable presence in historical exegesis: one can point to the constant use of narrative description in Whirlwind Before the Storm, and a rhetoric of continuity, of consciousness constantly being further raised and mass mobilisation actualised:[92] one can point to the partisan and emotive use of language in Hirson's Year of Fire, Year of Ash and the rather disjointed and clumsy narrative style of Kane-Berman in Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction. In addition, while all history uses narrative to some extent as a literary structuring device, its presence is most obvious in forms of biographical and narrative history. Recently, radical historians have again begun experimenting with different forms of presentation, including expressly literary and audio-visual techniques, partly as a means of emphasizing human agency.[93] The use of narrative, it is frequently pointed out, should not however be an end in itself but a way of illuminating wider questions and sets of social relationships which go beyond the particular story and its actors:

> "The estranged symbiosis of action and structure is both a commonplace of everyday life and the persistent fulcrum of social analysis...Consciousness of the problem of structuring as a primary concern of the historian does not displace narrative as an appropriate mode of professional discourse. On the contrary it is likely to emphasize the special force of narrative as a rhetoric adapted to what one is trying to say."[94]

The relationship between facticity, story-telling and structural analysis is therefore not a simple one.

It is easy to become glib at the narrative and other similarities between historical analysis and writing,and fiction dealing with historical events. Philosophers of history who reduce historical texts to mere literary artifacts, while encouraging important criticisms of empiricism, eventually must adopt a position where the reality of historical processes become shrouded in doubt.[95] Literary analysts who perceive literature as simply a free play of signifiers, as well as the recent spate of novelists in the U.S.A who believe, along with E.L.Doctorow, that 'there is no fiction or nonfiction...There is only narrative. We have it in us to compose false documents more valid,more real,more truthful than the true documents of the politicians,the journalists or the psychologists', adopt eventually an extreme historical relativism where, in effect, radical gestures on the page are seen as the epitome of political action.[96] Both are forms of idealism.

In literature, theories of narrative as simply a free play of signifiers (as in post-structuralism) and the documentary approach of (for instance) Lukacs are opposite poles of the hermeneutic process: the latter stressing the mimetic nature of novelistic presentation and the former insisting on the distance of all language from what it claims to represent. Focussing on either pole at the expense of the other leads to incomplete analysis by the critic.[97]

It is consequently more fruitful to regard narratives not only as structures but also as social acts, responding to a set of material conditions in technical, creative and ideological ways: as Birchall points out, 'in talking

of the death of the author and the self-producing text, we neglect to see that all literature derives from a choice'.[98] The realism and gestures towards mimesis in these novels should not obscure their normative aspects. There seems to be a desire in this prose to develop new ways of public behaviour and morality and new forms of character-identification associated with the formation of a combative black secular conscience. They do not merely attempt to provide information about social life but also constitute new surfaces of public morality on which certain types of human behaviour are shown up to be acceptable while others[99] (such as that of the black community councillors and informers) are not.

An examination of not only the preoccupations but also the silences of these novels is instructive. All of them mix predominant elements of realism with other modes of discourse, an obvious one being the symbolic use of names to apply attributes to certain characters, along with the fictional use of real people. Here we are left in no doubt which characters the authors approve of (Muntu, Mandla, Nkululeko, Pholoso, Tandabantu, Ann Hope - the lastnamed also being a real person) and which they do not (Noah Witbaatjie, Matlakala, Deputy Minister of Education Johannes Onsskwiel). All of these novels refer to political incidents of the 1970s and particularly to the period around 1976 which seem to have pervaded and continue to haunt the consciousness of black South Africans: the death of Tiro; the fall of Ahmed Timol from the security police section of John Vorster Square; the Bantustan question (Transkei was to become the first 'independent' homeland in October 1976); the Geneva talks between Vorster and Kissinger, and others. Again, these events are sometimes referred to in passing and sometimes fictionalised as part of the narrative. In To Every Birth Its Blood, for instance, it is Oupa who falls from the tenth floor of John Vorster Square; while Nkululeko, who teaches Sabelo in The Children of Soweto for a while, is obviously meant to be Tiro. Conversely, the agency of the black working class is one obvious area of silence. There are others: Mzamane's reluctance to describe the violent results of the refusal of an apolitical black worker to heed the student stayaway call is one example, especially in the light of graphic foregoing descriptions of police torture (COS pp 182-8;220-1). Too much space given to descriptions of the lack of a natural solidarity would, certainly, impede the political thrust of his novel. A similar point can be made about Onalenna's bomb in Serote's novel; which, while symbolising the beginnings of a new psychological and political dispensation, hurts nobody and only damages cars (TEB p 271). What killing there is by the Movement in this novel is described as purposive, and therefore morally condonable within a framework of the wanton brutality of the State being resisted by the humanistic, democratic upsurge of the people. In this fashion the actuality of violence is downplayed and smoothed over.

Realism, then, is part of an author's strategy of depiction, and can be subject to ideological study. The authors of the novels do, partly as a result of their greater interest in story-telling than analysis, not speak overmuch of some of the main reasons historians have given for the immediate response to the revolt on the part of the broader population of Soweto: rents, housing, inflation and so on (although they are not completely silent on these issues). Equally, some of the historical accounts show insufficient use of analysis: Brickhill and Brooks' acceptance of the student leadership as 'the bearers of the past' and assumption of an ease of mass mobilisation and community identity has been mentioned before and is a case to point. However, although at times the novelists manifestly do not provide a more authentic picture than the histories - Tlali's and Mzamane's acceptance of the myth that the massacre by Mzimhlope hostel dwellers was the work of 'Zulus' is an example[100] - they do

also sometimes look into areas of human and social experience where academic analyses are silent. Mzamane for one gives graphic examples of the importance of religion and gangs in township life and culture,[101] a subject only fleetingly present in most historical accounts, and emphasizes subjects often underplayed,[102] such as the student organisation leading up to 16 June, and student methods of acquiring petrol.

The process of fictionalisation in these novels is fascinating, and should finally be looked at. The Children of Soweto can serve as an example.[103] Mzamane notes that he compresses the time sequence of actual events, but he does so with great attention to detail. The description of the funeral of Muntu (whom he says typifies Everyman) on 20 June in the temporal sequence of the novel closely resembles the actual[104] funeral of Jacob Mashabane on the weekend of 23-24 October of that year. Two separate marches on Johannesburg by Soweto students, which took place on 4 August and 23 September, are fictionalised as having occurred on days following each other, a technique which allows the author to both keep up narrative tension and stress the continuity of resistance. For a similar reason, the shooting of students by police is remarked upon by the Minister, Jimmy Parkes (a thinly veiled portrait of Jimmy Kruger) as having 'left him cold' - a statement in reality made about the death of Biko in 1977 (COS p 96). These two incidents are joined in a novel configuration seeking, in my opinion, not so much to create new meanings out of them as to show the implacable sameness of State repression. The pamphlet from the Transvaal Chamber of Industries in the novel is a shortened but word-for-word facsimile of a real pamphlet dropped in Soweto during October,[105] and the brutal policeman Hlubi refers to 'Hlubi' Chaphi,[106] a Detective Sergeant who was shot dead in 1978. The statements made by fictional characters such as Colonel Fierce and Hlubi during and after the Mzimhlope massacre are precisely those reported on by newspapers as having been made by the Commissioner of Police of the time, General Prinsloo, and an unidentified black policeman.[107]

In this sifting of history, a process of selection, typification and even inconsistency occurs. Sabelo's headmaster Kgopo transmutes by the end of the novel into a Mr Kambule Mathabathe,[108] the latter name an amalgam of the surnames of the principals of Orlando High and Morris Isaacson High at the time of the uprising. Chabeli and Rathebe are excoriated in a passage (COS pp 153-9) where they both typify the 'sell-out' and are fictionally endowed with the activities and possessions of a handful of real Soweto councillors and businessmen of the time, presumably to promote a feeling of authenticity and recognition in the readership within particularly Soweto.[109] Of interest too is the relation of author to narrator in this novel. Sabelo's father is a churchman and his mother is a nurse, the professions followed by Mzamane's parents. This allows novelist to don the mantle of central political character in the events of the novel, and facilitates the assumption of the political correctness of the author's standpoint. Formally, it also assists Mzamane's desire to write of a collective community by dint of of a first-person narrator, for this narrator is of central political significance in the story and, consequently, may be presumed to legitimately speak for 'the people'.

Reception

What remains problematic about the statements of black writers desirous of a larger black audience is the extent to which, among some critics of their work, this readership is now assumed rather than investigated: and the extent to which the mantle of popular writer is now assumed as naturally belonging to the politically conscious writer. Various means the writers use to get

'closer to the people' need to be studied, such as Tlali's column in Staffrider between 1978 and 1981 under various names ('Soweto Speaking', 'Voices from the Ghetto'), in which she interviews Soweto old age pensioners, pedlars, greengrocers and the like. Mzamane's placement of the narrator of his book of short stories Mzala as the 'son of a minister, very much a centre of social life' [110] is both in accord with his real upbringing and a explanation for Mzamane's assumption of popular voice in the book.

The popularity of performers such as Ingoapele Madingoane in the period after 1976 and (more recently) the UDF poet Mzwakhe cannot be denied, especially among young people. However, in their attacks on playwrights such as Kente and Mhangwane in the early 1970s, Black Consciousness thinkers show an awareness of the audiences these 'apolitical' playwrights were managing to attract. There is in Black Consciousness commentaries of the time a tension between moral dismissal of their lack of politics and envy at their popularity. This earlier awareness of the need to actively become popular does not now seem as pressing among some black writers. The role of popular spokesman is instead regarded as fixed and incontrovertible, and a similarity occasionally assumed between the role played by the modern urban artist and that played by the artist in an older, less socially diverse society. Thus, according to Mzamane

> "In The Children of Soweto, the community as a whole is the hero. As a chronicler, I chose the role of the traditional griot, who is the custodian of his people's oral tradition, their verse and songs, their history and culture of resistance." [111]

The desire to both provide a realistic picture of the people of Soweto and South Africa and assist the identification of a black readership in a collective experience is discernible through some of the writers' formal techniques. Tlali and Mzamane transcribe (and sometimes translate) conversations between characters at times in Sotho and Zulu; Mzamane uses freedom songs and poems by poets such as Serote, Mandlenkosi Langa and Lefifi Tladi which will be known to at least some of his black readership: the force of the resonance effect of black South African poetry in a different literary context would, I suggest, reinforce the political and emotional message to the reader. Other techniques to demonstrate authenticity can be seen as well, such as Serote's attempt to transpose the cadences and sequences of African languages directly into English (especially visible in the first section of the book) and Mzamane's (in my estimation rather ponderous) attempts to characterise his students' language with literary references, malapropisms and the use of Latin.

The attempt to display a collective experience in these novels is also interesting. Mzamane has spoken of his desire to make the community the hero through a politically central first person narrator; Tlali focusses on the community through one family and makes efforts throughout Amandla to present the viewpoints of many characters through debates; and Serote shifts viewpoint between his characters and, towards the end of his novel, uses montage to show the countrywide spread of political insurrection and the speed with which events occur. Glegg is possibly correct, as a result of these factors in To Every Birth Its Blood, to observe that in a very real sense the Movement is its hero. [112]

The blend of journalistic and fictional techniques to varying degrees in these novels place unusual demands on the novel as a literary form, and in addition challenge traditional assumptions of novelistic value on the part of the reader and critic. This is reflected in a prevalent uncertainty on the part of critics how to deal with these books. Clearly, a clear demarcation between 'fact' and 'fiction' and a watertight compartmentalisation of

literary genres are not always important to the novelists: Tlali for example has made use of the same quotes from the South African parliament in the 1940s in one of the debates in Amandla and in one of her own articles about censorship and political repression in South Africa.[113] As the 'methodological individualism of the novel's typical form'[114] is under attack to some degree at least in all the novels except A Ride on the Whirlwind, much of the subsequent commentary about these novels seems to be somewhat misplaced. Many critics have remained dogmatically steadfast in their (unconscious, usually) assumptions of the novel as basically individual-centred and concerned more with the denouement of individual characterisation and emotional states than with the social world in which all novels occur. They cannot, consequently, deal with these novels on their own terms. Mzamane, often the most sociologically rich of the novels, also tends to have been least highly regarded by literary critics; this has often been on the grounds that 'literature' is not 'journalism', which ignores the close historical connection between fiction and journalism in black South African writing as well as the possibility of slightly different generic assumptions of the novel outside those of classical European realism.[115] Thus, Ndebele dislikes The Children of Soweto because 'I found no independent narrative line that permits any reader involvement beyond the act of recognition' and believes Amandla succeeds partly because it has a love story to attract the reader's attention:[116] some critics have had difficulty relating to To Every Birth Its Blood because, after the first section dealing with Tsi, it moves into a more collective mode.[117]

It is a moot point however whether, eventually, the novel allows a collective viewpoint to emerge free of the organising perceptions and ideological predilections of the individual author: if so, it can be argued that such 'subversion' of the author's intentions will as often as not be unconscious or, at best, only partially fulfilled. While the works under discussion seek to disrupt the emphasis on the individual and an ideology of white supremacy, their use of various situations, individuals and events serves to reinstate a new, black- and community-orientated, vision of order, incomplete in some respects but nonetheless gestured towards. This problem can be seen even in Serote's novel (to my mind both technically and politically the most radical of the novels under discussion). While Serote depicts the contradictions between the personal and political and the existence of vacillating, apolitical individuals meticulously, his political activists are all viewed monochromatically - they all aspire to the same political programme, and we (and them) are required to take for granted the correct methods and strategies to achieve their goal. Furthermore, they are all held up as exemplary figures in a political sense, whatever their personal foibles may be. There are subsequently elements of closure and partisanship in Serote's novel which need to be recognised.

In terms of the climate for a local reading public for these novels, any change in reading patterns must be related in some manner to the emergence of an indigenous publishing industry of an 'alternative' nature in the 1970s, as evinced in the emergence of Ravan Press and David Philip in 1971 and Ad Donker in 1973. According to some of the publishers involved, this initiative was the outcome of the discovery that there was a South African market available for inter alia South African literature and radical history. This resulted in a new type of publisher, aware at the same time of their social and commercial responsibilities.[118] Attempts have furthermore been made throughout the decade by black writers to set up their own publishing houses - such as BLAC Press in Cape Town and Sable Books in Johannesburg - of which by far the most successful and enduring has been Skotaville Press, set up in 1982

by the newly formed African Writers' Association and staffed by ex-employees of Ravan.[119]

Both co-directors of Ravan Press (Mike Kirkwood and Mothobi Mutloatse) stressed on many occasions in the period after 1976 that their publication of black literature was merely playing a facilitating role, responding to the burgeoning of literary activity and writers' groups after 1976. The natural, organic relationship of publishing house to black writer and black writer to black community was emphasised: the publisher's role being to a large extent that of low pricing and widening of distribution so that the potential reader would always have literature available 'on his doorstep or near his elbow in the train or on the bus'.[120] Nevertheless the publishing houses, while indeed responding to increased demand,[121] seem to some degree to have played a normative role, especially politically, in proselytizing certain assumptions about literature; a tendency Mutloatse has carried with him to Skotaville Press and which is most immediately discernible in their motto 'To Build a Nation'.[122] Among these assumptions are: a stress on the authenticity of black literature and the organic relationship between writer and community/reader, and an emphasis on the existence of a unified culture of resistance in the townships.[123] Literary standards were regarded with deep suspicion, as a white or academic construct, and Staffrider emphasised that its literary standards were not set by its editors, but by the writers' groups and workshops who sifted through their own material, criticised their own participants' work and selected material for submission to the magazine.[124]

There is at least some validity in the opinions put forward during the time: they cannot simply be regarded as ideological constructs. There was a noticeable expansion of black literature and performance from the early 1970s onwards, and particularly post-1976. However some of the claims seem in retrospect overblown. In the 1980s the pace of expansion of black literature has slowed: thus, Kirkwood's optimistic statement in 1981 that there was an 'incredibly rich writing practice in South Africa at the moment with all kinds of different elements in it' is transmogrified, by 1984,to Jaki Seroke's (of Skotaville) sombre comment that 'the morale in the arts at present is at a low ebb. People are more concerned with survival than with creativity. But there has been progress - more people are taking their writing seriously'.[125]

Indeed, the move in Ravan Press in particular at present seems to be back towards an assessment of literary standards, and the explicit question of the creation of suitable literary standards. This trend is also noticeable among some black writers, such as Farouk Asvat, Dangor and Ndebele. Mike Kirkwood comments in 1983

> "When Staffrider started in 1978,in the wake of the events of 1976,we made it clear that it was above all a vehicle for the wave of new writing that came out of that period. The magazine was welcomed,but some critics regretted that strict standards were not being applied in its choice of material. Making a contribution to the creation of appropriate literary and cultural values is what the new Staffrider will be about."[126]

The acceptance of the novel, in my opinion, alters the relationship of black writer to black community in ways which have not yet really been acknowledged. As Mzamane pointed out in 1977, the form demands organisation of the writer's leisure time and a milieu which allows a certain amount of security and space for reflection for its completion.[127] The position of professional writer mitigates, though, any easy assertion by novelists of their immediate political relevance and impact on the basis of the writing alone. When this is unacknowledged, unresolved contradictions emerge:

> "For many of us, the events which broke out in Soweto in June 1976 caused a great deal of soul-searching. Two or three years previously I had decided to drop creative writing for a while...Then Soweto exploded in our faces. How could I continue along the subtle path, when they were shooting my kid brothers and sisters openly in the streets, in broad daylight? My quest was complete. Only the right serene setting "to recollect my emotions in tranquility" was lacking. I found just such surroundings as I wished for along the Cambrian coast in the tiny university town of Aberystwyth, Wales..." [128]

The basis of a writer's political activism cannot be fruitfully assessed, I would suggest, on the basis of their ideology and writing alone: Lukacs' dogmatic and static assertions are the logical conclusion of a radical critic reading off political implication and literary worth by formal means alone. As far as the writers under discussion are concerned, their work in literary and political organisations is relevant - Serote's association with the Medu Art Ensemble in Botswana in the early 1980s; Sepamla's editorship of New Classic and S'ketsh' during the 1970s, and so on. It is noticeable, in fact, that the distinction between black writers and performers and political activists is now wider, generally speaking, than it was in the early 1970s: a certain amount of specialisation has occurred, all the more obvious when it is remembered that several literary and dramatic figures were also prominent in leadership positions in political organisations (such as Mafika Gwala, Strini Moodley, Saths Cooper, Mthuli Shezi and Mathe Diseko)at an earlier stage.

It would seem that for black South African writers, serious creative writing has always had implications for social and political issues. Yet, as Mphahlele has commented, creating an imaginary world can never be an effective substitute for social action. Comparing political problems and fictions about society is an indubitably oblique way of seeking a solution for them, and 'the tendentious recreation of reality is only a metaphor for its actual transformation.'[129]

It is to some extent possible, though, to subject the actual readership of books, and these novels in particular, to closer scrutiny. On a general level To Every Birth Its Blood appears to have been the most popular inside South Africa, and, of the novels published by Ravan Press, The Children of Soweto appears to have had the least success.[130] This is a rather innocent statement as it stands, however: Serote's novel is the only one of the four which has never been banned in the country, while Mzamane's is the only one that remains so.[131] These observations beg the question however of the actual regional, class and racial constituencies for these novels: and it should be noted that all four are now available to overseas audiences under different publishers' imprints.

Conclusion

The four novels under discussion do seem, in many ways, to create a more authentic and immediate impression of some of the issues of 1976 and its aftermath than historical accounts or works by white writers. It is doubtful however that any novelist, in South Africa or elsewhere, can lay claim to expressing the 'authentic' experience of their society at any point in time, despite what sometimes amounts to penetrating insight. Taken to a logical conclusion, authenticity demands a completeness of experience that no novel, written from an individual viewpoint, can possess. The assumption of authenticity depends on a shared assumption that novels accurately reflect social life and that they are written from as close to personal experience as possible.[132] The fact that all forms of novelistic realism are literary constructs is given little attention. The community to which the individual author belongs is assumed to

be transparent and wholly accessible to his or her experience: the community is therefore believed to be without social cleavage or contradiction.

The desire for an authenticity that combats European prejudices is endemic to modern African literature, for good historical and ideological reasons. Nevertheless, the danger of readers assuming the completeness of fictional claims to authenticity can be shown with reference to many responses to African literature.[133] 'Authenticity'has become the catchword of a post-colonial intelligentsia which is at the same time trying to challenge racist interpretations of Africa and naturalise its own legitimacy to lower class African people.[134] The authenticity which is advocated stresses a (rather vague) 'commitment' to Africa and its people and formally implies that the essence of African literature lies in its mirror/conscience function. It foregrounds realism as a preferred mode of writing, and seeks to naturalise the experiential relationship of writer to community.[135] The close similarities here to black South African writers who challenge apartheid and stress black unity should be obvious. However, if this authenticity cannot be taken for granted,as I have argued,the literary analyst is left with two immediate tasks: to historicise and socialise the figure of the author and his/her motives, formal choices and social surroundings; and to historicise and socialise the preoccupations, silences and modes of organisation in the texts and performances themselves.

Three of these novels end with the exile of their chief protagonists, and To Every Birth Its Blood also reaches its conclusion outside of South Africa. Despite the ambiguities of such endings, it appears that this is however an exile which does not depict defeat but a need for regroupment and reflection before returning to the fray. With the partial exception of Sepamla, there is a strong feeling that the struggle for liberation of an awakened black South Africa will proceed whatever happens to the individual participants. What emerges is the sense of a new-found black confidence not to accept present day South African society as unchangeable, and a readiness to risk everything for freedom.

Recently there has been a shift in black oppositional politics inside South Africa, in its more radical aspect, towards debating questions of class and stressing the primary importance of the black working class in the struggle for liberation. Of the writers here discussed Serote, for one, had by the late 1970s moved away from a Black Consciousness perspective towards a more class-orientated approach in line with his allegiance to the ANC.[136] The course of his novel, written between 1975 and 1980, to some extent reflects this shift in perspective.[137] In tandem with this, his insistence on a black audience and black political viewpoint, which he stressed so often during the early 1970s, has altered somewhat; commenting in 1980 on the audience he envisages for an earlier volume of poetry, he said

> "It's directed at Africans in particular. Look,I don't simply want to write for the colours of skins. I want to try to understand the complex issue of the scale of privileged positions in South African society,which includes the white,the Indian and the coloured - I have been called a 'kaffir' by all of them. This is complex,but I have become increasingly aware that it is the Africans who hold the tools of liberation in South Africa."[138]

Mzamane, too, has more recently used elements of a class discourse in his statements and perceptions.[139] Neither is the role of the writer as popular voice and conscience seen as merely in effect with the struggle against apartheid: it is projected forward into a future under an independent majority government:

> "In most countries today the true needs of the people are very often more honestly and faithfully reflected in the works of that country's committed writers,themselves ordinary citizens (with perhaps slightly more guts,sensitivity and talent than others) than in the official government proclamations and pronouncements. As a result,it would be to the advantage of any government,trying to formulate sound policy in the interests of the majority of its people or to gauge their popular appeal,to study its creative writers very carefully."[140]

These novels can be contextualised as having a moral and didactic purpose.[141] They belong to a challenging new black literature in South Africa. That they have been so considered by the white authorities is without doubt: three of them have, at one time or another, been banned inside the country. They form an important milestone in black South African literature, and cast light on the 'forced next stage' to the black liberation paradigm 1976 in South Africa represented, when Black Consciousness ideological and cultural concerns began to give way to wider questions of political organisation, armed struggle and socialism. They should be regarded as part of the thrust by a black intelligentsia to mobilise and unify a black community against the strictures of apartheid and the strength of white culture. It is, on the other hand, against the possibility that such a counter-hegemony and ideological discourse can itself be used to legitimate a new group in power and deny class and other cleavages of power within and outside this mobilised black community that they must be tested.

NOTES

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1. M Mzamane 'The Uses of Traditional Oral Forms in Black South African Literature' in L White/T Couzens (eds.) Literature and Society in South Africa Longman, Cape Town, 1984a pp. 158-9
2. For a fuller discussion,see S Nolutshungu Changing South Africa David Philip, Cape Town, 1983 pp. 151-65 and K Sole 'Identities and Priorities in Recent Black Literature and Performance: A Preliminary Investigation' Paper presented to the Conference on Economic Development and Racial Domination, University of the Western Cape, October 1984 pp. 3-12
3. The goals of the BCP were clear in this regard. See B Hirson Year of Fire, Year of Ash Zed Press, London, 1979 p. 85
4. See for instance M Gwala 'Towards the Practical Manifestations of Black Consciousness' in T Thoahlane (ed.) Black Renaissance Ravan, Johannesburg, 1975
5. See B Khoapa (ed.) Black Review 1972 Durban, 1973 pp. 27,123
6. M Serote 'The Nakasa World' Contrast Cape Town,31 1973; M Serote 'Feeling the Waters' in M Chapman (ed.) Soweto Poetry McGraw-Hill, Johannesburg, 1982 pp. 111-2; M Mzamane 1984a op.cit.; S Sepamla 'The Thrust of Black Writing Since the Mid-Sixties' in E Mphahlele/T Couzens (eds.) The Voice of the Black Writer in Africa Wits University, Johannesburg, 1980ap.25; Seroke interview with Serote 'Poet in Exile' Staffrider Johannesburg, 4,1 1981a; Seroke interview with Mutloatse, Sepamla, Tlali 'Black Writers in South Africa' Staffrider 4,3 1981

7. A Herber Conversations Bateleur, Johannesburg, 1979 p. 140

8. M Mzamane in M Daymond/J Jacobs/M Lenta (eds.) Momentum University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1984b p. 301; Sepamla in Mutloatse/Sepamla/Tlali op.cit. p.41; Sepamla 1980a p.26; M Tlali 'In search of books' The Star,Johannesburg 30/7/80; Serote 'Panel on Contemporary South African Poetry' Issue 6,1 1976 p.25

9. Sepamla in Herber op.cit. pp.138-9; Mzamane introduction to his Mzala Ravan, Johannesburg, 1980 p.vii; Tlali 'Remove the Chains' Index on Censorship, London, 6, 1984 p.22

10. Mzamane 1980 pp.viii-x; Handan/Myesgin interview with Mzamane Staffrider 6,1 1984cp.39

11. Serote 1981a p.30

12. Tlali 'In search of...' op.cit.; Serote 1981a p.30; Sepamla 1980a p.26; Sepamla quoted in 'Writers and Repression' Index on Censorship 5,1984 pp. 28-9

13. Tlali 'In search of...' op.cit.

14. Sepamla in Mutloatse/Sepamla/Tlali op.cit. pp.42-3; Serote 1981a p.31

15. Tlali 1984 p.26

16. ibid. P.22

17. Tlali in Mutloatse/Sepamla/Tlali op.cit. p.43. The difference in perception of these writers from the 1950s generation is quite striking: 'Akuphuzwa! Crikey. Where and when will all this madness end? Black Power? Fine. Fine. A good ideal. But why turn this good ideal into the cantankerous idea of Black Plunder...Will Black Sense take over from Black Power? We want to see things shaping up nicely and going on smoothly. This is the time. Let's deliberate. Think in terms of progress not retrogression' (Casey Motsisi, on the students' 1977 'no drinking' campaign. M Mutloatse (ed.) Casey & Co. Ravan, Johannesburg, 1978 p.69

18. Tlali 'In search of...' op.cit.

19. Tlali in Mutloatse/Sepamla/Tlali op.cit. p.43; Mzamane 1984b pp.303-4; Mzamane 1984c p.39; Serote 1981a pp.30-1

20. Serote ibid. p.30

21. Mutloatse in Mutloatse/Sepamla/Tlali op.cit. p.42. Cf. Sepamla: "You cannot make people read if you do not relate to their world. We are creating an audience for ourselves. Those who come after us will look at other qualities which we've ignored' ibid. p.43. See also Sepamla 'The Frankfurt Book Fair: Impressions of a First Visit Abroad' Rand Daily Mail,Johannesburg 8/10/80

22. 'Muriel Tlali is a woman for every literary season' The Voice,Johannesburg February 27-March 4 1980

23. Mzamane 'Literature and Politics Among Blacks in South Africa' New Classic Johannesburg, 5,1978 p.55

24. M Schipper 'Towards a Definition of Realism in the African Context' New Literary History,Charlottesville, 16;3 1985 p.564

25. Sepamla in Mutloatse/Sepamla/Tlali op.cit. p.43

26. ibid. p.41

27. Mzamane 'The Short Story Tradition in Black SA' Donga,Johannesburg, 7,1977a pp.1,8

28. Mzamane 'The 50's and Beyond:An Evaluation' New Classic 4,1977b pp.25-8; Serote 1981a p.31

29. Sepamla 'The Black Writer in South Africa Today: Problems and Dilemmas' New Classic 3,1976 pp.20-1; Sepamla 'A Note on New Classic and S'ketsh'' English in Africa,Grahamstown, 7,2 1980b p.85; Tlali 'English Unites Us' Index on Censorship 6,1984 p.24; Mzamane 1978 p.43. For a discussion on debates over the use of English or African languages in South Africa,see R j'Mathonsi 'Black Writers of SA Plan Their Cultural Revolution' New African,London August 1981 p.91

30. Mzamane correspondence to the former editors of Donga, 19/8/80

31. N Visser interview with Kirkwood 'Staffrider:An Informal Discussion' English in Africa 7,2 1980 p.25

32. Mzamane The Children of Soweto Ravan, Johannesburg, 1982; Tlali Amandla Ravan, Johannesburg, 1980; Serote To Every Birth Its Blood Ravan, Johannesburg, 1981b; Sepamla A Ride on the Whirlwind Ad Donker,Johannesburg, 1981. All references to page numbers will be from these editions,and will be in future in the text

33. D Barboure 'Mongane Serote: Humanist and Revolutionary' in Daymond/Jacobs/ Lenta op.cit. pp.171-2

34. In terms of Serote's symbolic ending,see Mutloatse's extended metaphors of political liberation as 'labour' and the 'dispossessed people' as 'vigilant midwives' to this process in his introduction to M Mutloatse (ed.) Reconstruction Ravan, Johannesburg, 1981 p.2

35. Cf Aggrey Klaaste's remarks about 'coward parents' in Weekend World at the time, quoted in J Kane-Berman Soweto: Black Revolt,White Reaction Ravan, Johannesburg, 1978 p.126

36. M Vaughan 'Literature and Politics: Currents in South African Writing in the Seventies' Journal of Southern African Studies,London, 9,1 1982 p.128

37. See the summaries by Scheub and Masiea in B Andrzejewski/S Pilaszewicz/ W Tyloch (eds.) Literatures in African Languages Wiedza Powszechna, Warsaw, 1985 pp.493-649, and many other sources

38. A similar focus comes into being with the Latin American and South-East Asian novels simultaneous with the rise of local nationalism. B Anderson Imagined Communities London, Verso, 1983 esp. pp.28-40

39. Such as Mzi ROW pp.179,229

40. Among certain readerships,geographical names,not necessarily followed by descriptions,will in novels guarantee a reference effect in themselves. Schipper op.cit. p.570

41. Readers can and may refuse the inevitability of the black community postulated,but offered descriptions of families are harder to deny. ' No such condition is as physically available as a family' R Williams Writing in Society Verso, London, 1984 p.243. See also the remarks by Serote 1981a p.31

42. Mzamane 1984a p.159

43. A reference to Credo Mutwa's radio broadcast in support of the army in Soweto,which led to his house in Diepkloof being burnt down

44. Steve Biko: 'I must state categorically that there is no such thing as a Black policeman. Any Black man who props up the system actively has lost the right to being considered part of the Black world...They are the extension of the enemy into our ranks! Quoted in Hirson op.cit.p.295

45. N Visser 'Victor Serge and the Poetics of Political Fiction' Social Dynamics,Cape Town, 11,2 1985a p.13

46. See Hirson op.cit. pp.178,251-2; F Molteno 'The Uprising of 16th June: A review of the literature on events in South Africa 1976' Social Dynamics 5,1 1979 pp.72-3

47. See D Harris 'The Anatomy of a Revolt' Paper presented to the History Workshop,University of the Witwatersrand,February 1978

48. M Gwala 'Staffrider Workshop' Staffrider 2,3 1979 p.56. In the year and a half after January 1973,for instance,there were over 300 strikes in South Africa involving 80,000 black workers. Hirson op.cit.p.88

49. Tlali 1984 p.26. Racial experience is therefore ultimately seen as more binding than notions of feminist unity. See also Mutloatse's comments in Mutloatse 1981 op.cit. pp.3-4

50. M Mortimer 'A Feminist Critique of the Algerian Novel of French Expression' in D Dorsey/P Egejuru/S Arnold (eds.) Design and Intent in African Literature Three Continents, Washington DC, 1982 p.37

51. Tlali notes that, while working in the furniture store,'I was actually between two fires...clashes with the whites on the one side because of the type of work I do,and on the other side with my own people because they mistook me for someone who is prepared to try and get as much money as possible out of them' Arts & Africa No.267, BBC African Service transcript (London)

52. Fanon is consistently cited in Black Consciousness pronouncements in the 1970s and early 1980s, from at least the time of Biko's and Pityana's use of him in their essays in H van der Merwe/D Welsh (eds.) Student Perspectives on South Africa David Philip, Cape Town, 1972

53. Mzamane suggests it is a more 'serious' form,and criticises his previous book of short stories Mzala as 'groping' Mzamane 1984b p.302

54. D Rabkin 'Ways of Looking: Origins of the Novel in South Africa' Journal of Commonwealth Literature,London, 13,1 1977 p.28

55. Mzamane correspondence to Sole, 28/7/86

56. In 1980,roughly a third of black people in South Africa over 15 were still non-literate in their own language. L Wedepohl A Survey of Illiteracy in South Africa Centre for Extra-Mural Studies,University of Cape Town, 1984 pp.9-10

57. Mzamane introduction to Sepamla Selected Poems Ad Donker, Johannesburg, 1984 p.15

58. Mzamane correspondence to Sole 28/7/86

59. Molteno op.cit. p.55;T Lodge Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945 Ravan, Johannesburg, 1983 pp.330-6

60. Mzamane correspondence to Sole 28/7/86

61. G McLennan Marxism & the Methodologies of History Verso,London,1981 p.66

62. The comments of R Philipson 'Literature and Ethnography: Two Views of Manding Initiation Rites' in K Anyidoho/A Porter/D Racine/J Spleth (eds.) Interdisciplinary Dimensions of African Literature Three Continents,

Washington DC, 1985 pp.180-1 that the social sciences are paradigmatic and literature syntagmatic is too hasty,because there are at least two types of narrative (historical reports and twice-told tales)that may in certain circumstances serve as paradigms for the narrator. B. Herrnstein-Smith 'Narrative Versions,Narrative Theories' Critical Inquiry, Chicago, 7,1980 p.228

63. R Johnson 'Reading for the Best Marx:History-Writing and Historical Abstraction' in R Johnson/G McLennan/W Schwarz/D Sutton (eds.) Making Histories Hutchinson, London, 1982 pp.161-2

64. See,for instance,his poem 'Queens/Kings' in Sepamla 1984 pp.95

65. Sepamla 1980a p.27

66. V February review of Sepamla's The Soweto I Love in E Jones (ed.) African Literature Today No.10 Heinemann, London, 1979 p.257

67. I am indebted to Nick Visser for this point

68. Serote 1981a p.30

69. Victor Serge: Historical work does not satisfy me entirely...it does not allow enough scope for showing men as they really live,dismantling their inner workings and penetrating deep into their souls' Quoted in Visser 'The Novel as Liberal Narrative:The Possibilities of Radical Fiction' Works and Days, Illinois 3,2 1985bp.21

70. Quoted in L Baxandall/S Morawski (eds.) Marx/Engels on Literature and Art International General, New York, 1973 p.116

71. See,for instance A Brooks/J Brickhill Whirlwind Before the Storm IDAF, London, 1980 pp.222,237

72. F Moretti Signs Taken for Wonders Verso, London, 1983 p.22

73. S Gray 'Leipoldt's Valley Community: The Novelist as Archivist' Paper presented to the History Workshop,University of the Witwatersrand,February 1984 p.5. I would disagree with some of Gray's assertions,though,in terms of ff.85 below

74. Mzamane 1984a p.159

75. E Lunn Marxism and Modernism Verso, London, 1985 pp.78,118

76. F Jameson 'Reflections in Conclusion' in Aesthetics & Politics Verso, London, 1977 p.198

77. McLennan op.cit. pp. 31,66. As with Marxist history,so with Marxist literature: "Traditionally in one form or another (Realism is) the central model of Marxist aesthetics as a narrative discourse which unites the experience of daily life with a properly cognitive,mapping...perspective" F Jameson The Political Unconscious Methuen, London, 1981 p.104

78. Johnson op.cit. p.179; McLennan op.cit. p.75

79. See the remarks by Lukacs on Zola vis-a-vis Balzac: "These social problems are posed by Zola,too. But they are simply described as social facts..." G Lukacs 'Narrate or Describe?' in Writer and Critic Merlin, London, 1978 pp.113-4

80. F Jameson Marxism and Form PUP, Princeton, 1971 p.161

81. McLennan op.cit. p.90. 'If history were about the authentication of sources only,it would be methodologically equivalent to antiquarianism or,more interestingly,espionage' ibid. p.105

82. Molteno op.cit. p.55

83. e.g. S Rimmon-Kenan Narrative Fiction Methuen, London, 1983 and S Chatman Story and Discourse Ithaca, New York, 1978

84. Culler speaks of the 'double logic' of narrative assumption. 'These two logics,one of which insists upon the causal efficacy of origins and the other of which denies their causal efficacy,are in contradiction but they are essential to the way in which the narrative functions. One logic assumes the primacy of events;the other treats the events as the products of meanings' J Culler The Pursuit of Signs Routledge & Kegan Paul,London, 1981 p.178

85. Herrnstein-Smith op.cit. p.218

86. ibid. p.229

87. Hamilton points out that the Manichean conception of the existence of a 'public',written history on the one hand,and a social history of'oral testimony/personal experience'on the other,is not sustainable. Paul Thompson's rather overblown claims for oral testimony in The Voice of the Past OUP, Oxford, 1978 can be criticised on these and other grounds, valuable as the work is. See C Hamilton 'Ideology and Oral Traditions: Listening to the 'Voices from Below' Paper presented to the Workshop on PreColonial History, UCT, July 1986 pp.6-15; Popular Memory Group 'Popular Memory: Theory,Politics,Method' in Johnson/McLennan/Schwarz/Sutton op.cit.; R Phipps 'The Problems of Using Life-Histories and Biographies as a Valid Source of Sociological Information' Paper presented to the ASSA Conference, Durban, June 1986 and McLennan op.cit. pp.116-9. It can be observed that historians can use oral testimony selectively to lend weight to previously decided opinions,a problem that Brooks/Brickhill and Hirson occasionally seem close to committing

88. McLennan op.cit. p.117

89. R Fowler Linguistics and the Novel Methuen, London, 1977 p.1

90. Mzamane correspondence to Sole 28/7/86

91. M Tlali 'You can't just sit back' Rand Daily Mail 19/6/79

92. cf. ff.71

93. E Hobsbawm 'The Revival of Narrative: Some Comments' Past & Present,London 86,1980 pp.3-5

94. P Abrams 'History,Sociology,Historical Sociology' Past & Present 87,1980 pp.8-9

95. See McLennan's discussion of Hayden White,Mink and others op.cit. pp.76-87

96. For further discussion,see B Foley 'The Pseudo-Politics of Epistemological Rupture:The Ideology of Textual Radicalism' Unpublished MLA Paper, 1983

97. Jameson 1977 op.cit. pp.198,204

98. I Birchall 'The Novel and the Party' in F Barker et al (eds.) 1936: The Sociology of Literature University of Essex, 1979 p.113

99. I Hunter 'After Representation: Recent Discussions of the Relations Between Language and Literature' Economy & Society,London 13,4 p.407

100. cf.Brooks/Brickhill op.cit. pp.215-23; Kane-Berman op.cit.pp.113-4

101. This lack is remarked upon by R Rathbone 'The People and Soweto' Journal of Southern African Studies 6,1 1979 pp.130-1

102. For a commentary on the rise of NAYO,SASM and the Action Committee before June 16 see Hirson op.cit. 100-5,175-80;Brooks/Brickhill pp.80-92

103. Mzamane 1984a p.159

104. COS p.218; cf. Kane-Berman op.cit. pp.33-4

105. COS p.222; cf. Kane-Berman pp.115-6

106. Rand Daily Mail 27/6/78

107. COS p.226-7; cf. Brooks/Brickhill pp.216-7

108. COS pp.8,210

109. Another reason for this fictionalisation is possibly to avoid libel. Notice the strong resemblance to the 'mayor' of Soweto in the late 1970s, David Thebehali,and the businessmen Motsuenyane,Maponya and Tshabalala

110. Mzamane 1984b p.301

111. ibid. p.304:but he also views his work as an amalgam of Western and African influences 1984c p.41

112. J.Glegg review of To Every Birth Its Blood, Staffrider 5,1 1982 p.34

113. A. p.220 cf. Tlali 1984 p.24

114. Visser 1985a op.cit. p.13

115. An interesting case to point is Jordan Ngubane's assertion that his novel Ushaba contained inter alia sociological explication because it resembled the Zulu umlando,where the European break between fact and fiction is not expected. P Nazareth 'Ushaba as an African Political Novel' English in Africa 5,2 1978 p.57

116. N Ndebele 'Turkish Tales,and Some Thoughts on S.A.Fiction' Staffrider 6,1 1984 pp.46-7

117. See,as examples,N Ndebele 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary:Some New Writings in South Africa' Journal of Southern African Studies 12,2 1986 p.156; A Dangor review of To Every Birth Its Blood, Staffrider 5,1 1982 p.48; C Clayton 'A wrenching of talent' Rand Daily Mail 4/1/82; K Ngwenya 'When one is alert to freedom' Sowetan 14/12/81

118. A Donker 'English-Language Publishing in South Africa' English in Africa 10,1 1983 p.34; P Randall 'An Overview of South African Publishing in English' in S Gardner (ed.) Publisher-Writer-Reader:Sociology of Southern African Literature University of the Witwatersrand, 1986 pp.13-4

119. K Ngwenya 'Skotaville Takes Wing' Drum,Johannesburg July 1985; J Kitchener 'Building a Reading Nation' New African,London,December 1984

120. Mutloatse introduction to M Mutloatse (ed.) Forced Landing Ravan, Johannesburg, 1980 p.6. See also editorial to Staffrider 1,1 1978; Visser interview with Kirkwood op.cit.; M Kirkwood 'Publishing under Siege' South,London 7,1981; and Mtshali interview with Kirkwood/ Mutloatse '..White literature is'empty,lacks the black experience'' The Star 4/7/80

121. After the second edition of Staffrider circulation was up from 3,000. A wider readership could be assumed,according to Kirkwood,as every copy had several readers. Ravan estimated that 90% of the readership was black,and half the copies were sold in the Reef/Pretoria area. Visser interview with Kirkwood op.cit. pp.26-7

122. Mutloatse: 'Our books are read by people living in mine compounds,the students and the police.It proves wrong the myth that books are read by a certain section of the community. We are concerned with giving information and making some people literates. The onus is on us as a black publishing company' Ngwenya 1985 op.cit.p.51. This is somewhat at variance with Seroke's statement the year before that many black people don't read books because 'they don't have time and they don't take books as something that builds you as a person' Kitchener op.cit. p.32

123. See Mutloatse 1980 op.cit. pp.3-4,editorial to Staffrider 1,1 1978 and M Kirkwood 'Exploitation of race has led to'unity culture'' Rand Daily Mail 29/7/80

124. 'Critics Wanted' Staffrider 2,3 1979 p.58

125. 'Ravan: letting the cats out of the bag' Rand Daily Mail 13/11/81; H Wilson 'Breaking into print' Rand Daily Mail 6/9/84

126. T August 'Staffrider is working towards new horizons' The Star 8/9/83. See also remarks by the editors of Staffrider and The Classic in Wilson op.cit;F.Asvat 'A critical look at black SA writing' Sowetan 26/6/81

127. Mzamane 1977b pp.25-8

128. Mzamane 1984b pp.302-3

129. G Cornwell 'Evaluating Protest Fiction' English in Africa 7,1 1980 p.52

130. 5,000 copies of Amandla were published in 1980,and by 1984 these were sold out,although an initial enthusiasm for the book quickly tailed off. 4,000 copies of Serote's novel have been sold in South Africa since 1981, and the book is about to go into its third printing. Of 3,000 of Mzamane's books printed in 1982,some 200 remain unsold. Many thanks to Ravan Press for making these figures available;and a Bronx cheer to Ad Donker who,in Sepamla's case,refused (these figures are all for Southern Africa)

131. A Ride on the Whirlwind was banned between 11 September 1981 and 4 June 1982;Amandla was banned in 1981 and has only recently been unbanned; and The Children of Soweto has been banned since 23 July 1982

132. C Belsey Critical Practice Metheun, London, 1980 p.2

133. Schipper op.cit. pp.560-1; White criticises this in L White 'Literature and History in Africa' Journal of African History,London 21,1980 pp.539-40

134. See the remarks in C Searle 'The Mobilisation of Words' in G Gugelberger(ed) Marxism & African Literature James Currey,London,1985 p.159

135. See E Ngara Art and Ideology in the African Novel Heinemann,London,1985 pp.2-38; and the remarks on the views of Achebe and Soyinka in S Simonse 'African Literature Between Nostalgia and Utopia' Research in African Literatures,Austin, 13,4 1982 pp.453-4

136. See for instances the views in M Serote et al 'Politics of Culture:Southern Africa' Medu,Gaborone 5,2 1983

137. For this point I am indebted to Stephen Clingman

138. Chapman interview with Serote in Chapman op.cit. p.114

139. See his remarks in Mzamane 1984c p.40

140. M Mzamane 'The People's Mood: The Voice of a Guerilla Poet' Review of African Political Economy,London, 18,1980 p.40

141. Irony generally has a serious and/or didactic purpose. See Jameson 1981 op.cit. p.160 and M Berman All That Is Solid Melts Into Air Verso, London 1983 p.14