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The South African short story and its mediation of the hegemonic tendencies of nationalism

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Chapter Two

Folklore, Memory, and the Realism of Migrancy in Bheki Maseko's stories[1]

In the previous chapter, Joël Matlou's use of image and text in his navigation of black depersonalisation and consequent alienation was discussed as a critical elaboration of and dialogue with what Ndebele calls the "ordinary". From these strategies that are often non-realist in mode, Matlou weaves a sense of self-reclamation that is consistent with the refuge that he implicitly sees in the several non-nationalistic '*back-texts*' to which he regularly refers in his anti-nationalistic stories.

In this chapter, Bheki Maseko's construction of an alternative experience to black migrancy in *Mamlambo and Other Stories* is explored. In contrast to Matlou who confronts this predicament directly as the author, Maseko relies on the fictional narrators whose stories bring to the surface a proliferation of voices that intersect in a manner that reveals blackness as a heterogeneous discourse of power. Mediation in a Maseko story therefore constitutes a complex theme, also because a fictional narrator and an omniscient narrator overtly relate in a dialogic fashion.

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the folkloric nature of Maseko's stories. Then, portraits of power that folklore foregrounds in his stories are examined. It is argued in this lengthier section that Maseko locates in these templates an ability to redefine discourses in self-conscious or interrogated terms.

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[1] Bheki Maseko, *Mamlambo and Other Stories*, (Johannesburg: COSAW, 1991).

"[L]ike other phenomena of spiritual culture… [that] preserve[…] for a long time old forms under new conditions," a Maseko story reads as "folklore".[2] Almost without exception, a Maseko storyline features a hero who imagines the sense of completeness that dominates his memory of his past. This self-portrait is foregrounded in those plots that position action on a hero as he attempts to project a self that harmonises with other multiple (and sometimes interwoven) black responses to the breakdown caused by apartheid.

The setting of "primary orality,"[3] apparent in these stories where the "*skaz*" [4]storytellers thrill the audience with the odysseys and victories accomplished through magic or through ingenuity, brings to the surface the fancied deliverance. Emancipation is implicitly depicted as a reinsertion into the forms of security from which alienation is experienced. Storytelling is clearly aimed at generating pleasure[5] for the narrator and, by implication, for the audiences who, except in a few stories, are also mine migrants. The

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[2] Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, trans. Ariadna Y. Martin et al., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p.13.

[3] For an extended discussion, see, for instance, Walter Ong, *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing Of The Word*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1982), and Craig MacKenzie, "The Skaz Narrative in short stories by W.C. Scully, Percy FitzPatrick, Perceval Gibbon and Herman Charles Bosman" in *Literator*, (Vol.14, No.3, Nov.1993), pp.1-19.

[4] Understood in terms of the "word in living conversation" or in an oral storytelling site, the "skaz," as Bakhtin elaborates, "is oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word". See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, trans., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p.280.

[5] Jacqueline Rose, *States of Fantasy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Compare with Bhekizizwe Peterson's deployment of the phrase "redemptive fantasy" to the South African "kwaito" music in "Kwaito, 'dawgs' and the antimonies of hustling" in *African Identities*, (Vol.1, No.2, 2003), p.197.

image of a successful return trip home after estrangement from it, and of victory over apartheid depersonalisation are some of the "aggregates" and "attributions"[6] that appear in Maseko's "*skaz*" as a way of intellectualising and mediating the migrant experience.

Njabulo Ndebele, an early critic of Maseko, applauds his stories' ability to explore migrancy through the "ordinary". As already discussed in the introductory chapter to this study, the "ordinary" refers to the kind of storytelling that, in eschewing the simplistic reproduction of the surface realities of apartheid, presents people who deal with it in quotidian ways that establish and privilege the new paradigms of self-awareness. Ndebele's introduction of Maseko's collection of stories spells out the nuances of the "ordinary" in forceful terms. Maseko, Ndebele observes, is indebted to the tradition of oral storytelling: "the story as embodying not revealed or confirmed knowledge, but the story as exploration, revealing the frustrations and pleasures of social ambiguity" and showing the audience how "to arrive not so much at answers as at a knowledge of how to arrive at answers."[7]

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[6] Walter Ong uses the concepts "aggregate and "attribution" to designate the expressions and values that recur in narratives of oral cultures to intellectualise experience. For a detailed discussion of orality, see, for example, Walter Ong, *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing Of The Word*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1982), p.38-39.

[7] Njabulo Ndebele, Introduction, *Mamlambo and Other Stories* by Bheki Maseko, p.9.

Ndebele's reading of the imaginative in Maseko's stories is reiterated in Mike Kirkwood's location of Maseko's style in the late 1980s "popular culture [of] South Africa".[8] A characteristic feature of this "culture", Kirkwood maintains, is apparent in its

> engage[ment of] South African audiences and readerships at the level of cultural tactics: drawing on the past, and projecting a liberated future, they also locate the pulse of the present. … [I]n the first place, the works offer *counsel*: that is to say, they invite the practical test of the audience-reader's own experience in a relatively unmediated way. They envisage a world in which one can intervene rather than… a world which can only be questioned for the fugitive, ever-problematic 'meaning of life'.[9]

Kirkwood further distinguishes this culture in terms of its resurfacing of "story-telling", among others, as an "older cultural form" that enables the "transferring [of] personal experience and [the] enriching [of] the collective bond of community".[10] He also contends that the future that this culture depicts reveals, for instance, other "social agents" who reconstruct themselves via the everyday practices[11] that "forg[e] new continuities with past epochs of cultural resistance".[12] Ndebele sums this argument up well when he says that Maseko engages "the rational and non-rational [elements in order to] constitute the canvass of completeness", or "a single sphere of reality", or "th[e] living continuity between the past and the present".[13]

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[8] Mike Kirkwood, "Literature and popular culture in South Africa," in *Third World Quarterly*, (Vol.9, No.2, 1987), p.657.

[9] Op. cit., p.658.

[10] Op. cit., p.659.

[11] Op. cit., p.669.

[12] Op., cit., p.657.

[13] Njabulo Ndebele, *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture*, (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), p.51.

The significance of the discursive in those '*skaz*' where blackness is asserted in terms that foreground tropes of power is therefore explored. These forms of authority are obvious in, for instance, a storyline that presents the male migrant who is returning home to Malawi with his fiancée after she had used magic to keep him in a relationship with her ('Mamlambo'). The motif of the odyssey is apparent also in another story where the fictional narrator tells the story of his colleague who returns home from incarceration in a mental asylum for tending to be schizophrenic ('A Two-Day Adventure'). This sense of heroism recurs also in a "*skaz*" in which the narrator imagines himself in a traditional Zulu stick-fighting contest with a racist bigot in iNkandla, a village in Natal Midlands ('The Darkest Hour of Our Age'), and where the fictional narrator tells the story of how he evaded the curfew established in terms of the Group Areas Act ('The Darkest Hour of Our Age'). In all these stories, narration is intended to avert a "dilemma of discontinuities", a "contradiction" or crisis of alienation that manifests itself in a migrant's "dress… [of] a motley patchwork of colour".[14] Given these patterns,[15] that is, the oral setting, single storyline, the odyssey, and (often) the centrality of magic, a Maseko story reads as folklore.

However, this is folklore that presents a "life world… where individuals' existence unfolds in practice; it is where they exercise existence — that is, live their lives out and

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[14] Chabani, N. Manganyi, *Looking Through The Keyhole: Dissenting Essays On The Black Experience*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981), p.128.

[15] Compare with the "mnemonic patterns" that Walter Ong defines as the thoughts that recur in oral narratives in recognisable shapes such as rhythmic patterns, "repetition or antitheses," "alliterations and assonances," "epithetic and other formulary expressions," *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing Of The Word*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1982), p.34.

confront the very forms of their death". In this "entanglement"[16] in the dominant discourses that are being contested, and from which portraits of emancipation are constructed, paradoxes prevail in the form of "an interlocking of presents, pasts, and futures that retain their depths of other presents, pasts, and futures".[17] It becomes evident that feminist and patriarchal, or collective and individual, or real and mythical orientations, for instance, do not follow linear and mutually exclusive trajectories. Instead, (ideological) positions are pliable, temporal and reflective of the fact that political practice or tradition is realigned to benefit individuals whom it marginalises. This is where self-imagining takes place through a "poach[ing] in countless ways on the property of others". As De Certeau observes, this use of discourse "is devious, it is dispersed, but it insinuates itself everywhere, silently and almost invisibly, because it does not manifest itself through its own products, but rather through its ways of using the products imposed by a dominant order".[18] Maseko's heroes, therefore, slot into discourse in terms that are reminiscent of what Michel Foucault calls "join[ing]," or "continu[ing] the sentence [already] started," or "lodg[ing] without really being noticed,"[19] or surreptitiously and through aping, because discourse operates through a "principle" "which permits construction, but within narrow confines".[20] Therefore, resistance needs to be understood not in terms of the dichotomies of power/powerlessness, or sanity/insanity, or innocence/experience, or centre/margin, because it must

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[16] Achille Mbembe, *On The Postcolony*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), p.15.

[17] Op. cit., p.16.

[18] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), p.xii.

[19] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," *Untying The Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Robert Young, ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 1981), p.51.

[20] Op. cit., p.59.

> necessarily be caught up in the very metaphysical categories it hopes finally to abolish; and any such movement will demand a difficult, perhaps ultimately impossible double optic, at once fighting on a terrain already mapped out by its antagonists and seeking even now to prefigure within that mundane strategy styles of being and identity for which we have as yet no proper names.[21]
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> Mamlambo is a kind of snake that brings fortune to anyone who accommodates it. One's money or livestock multiplies incredibly. This snake is available from traditional doctors who provide instructions regarding its exploitation. Certain necessities are to be sacrificed in order to maintain it. Sometimes you may have to sacrifice your own children, or go without a car or clothes. It all depends on the instructions of the doctor concerned (133).

This is how the title story commences. The protagonist Sophie Zikode is battling to keep a boyfriend and so decides after finding one, Jonas, to consult Baba Majola who offers her a "sticky concoction" and instructs her to "rub her whole body with it before her boyfriend called on her," and "to put [this concoction] under her pillow when they slept together". Later that night, Jonas "was awakened by something peculiar," and both were shocked to discover a snake "under the pillow" (135). Having accepted responsibility for this embarrassment, and after confessing to her boyfriend that she intended to keep him forever in love with her, they decide to consult a diviner. After identifying this snake as *mamlambo*, the seer instructs them to dispose of it to any naïve or innocent person, and it so happens that he is one of Sophie's ex-boyfriends who had left her unceremoniously. When the story concludes, Sophie is on her way to Malawi (142) with Jonas after getting rid of *mamlambo*. Presumably, her experimentation enabled her to achieve her dream.

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[21] Terry Eagleton, "Nationalism, Irony And Commitment," *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said, eds., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p.24.

At first glance, the theme of self-reclamation does not seem to be apparent in this brief summary of the main story.

Consistent with this story, and indeed with this collection's main subject of memory making, the introduction quoted above establishes storytelling covertly as restorative in orientation by virtue of being a reason for social gatherings. This story's details about the different ways in which people perform various ritual(s) (sacrifices) to invoke emancipation, or to manipulate and negotiate the regular or established ritual sacrifice performances to deal with a range of adversities, mirror the existence of different audiences who are familiar with the subject of narration. In this tradition, textual material is continually altered to carry and express people's diverse fantasies. This obviousness is emphatic in the fact that the narrative is told by a "homodiegetic narrator," that is, one who exists within the cultural setting that the story is sketching.[22] The existence of the interlocutors, suggested in "you", strengthens the believability of the life that the story portrays. Hence, the storyteller observes that the myth is accessible through dialogues and conversations, and this is apparent in the primary sources/trajectories of the myth found in the oral milieu that the narrator identifies: "'Some say,'" "'It is said.'" In other words, the retelling of a well-known legend is suggestive of an enterprise on memory carried out in different ideological contexts.

However, the narrator's voice is a mere conduit for another intention that becomes apparent in a strategy that is reminiscent of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls "parodic

[22] Mieke Bal, *On Storytelling: Essays in Narratology*, (Sonoma, CA: 1991), p.89.

stylization."[23] From this perspective, the notion of gender is constructed in line with the sense of moral rectitude with which the black (neo-)traditional patriarchal orders associate and from which difference is sought. Indeed, the story can be seen as an "[i]deological-intellectual space" that "relates to the symbolic framework within which social interaction is conducted, and [to] the space within which norms are set for legitimate purposes".[24] When burdened by his alienation from home and the commensurate freight of experience or depression, for instance, the migrant '*skaz*' in this story turns to the ingenuity that he assumes to be pervasive in a black woman whom he fancies will always keep the home fires burning and, by implication, also affirm what he regards as his legitimacy as the family head. This is because he implicitly sees her innocence as ethically convenient (if not superior), that is, compared to the weight of experience that his departure from home engenders in him. Whether in the rural outpost or in the formal modern industry, it seems a male migrant reasons that a black woman is likely to ingeniously utilise or manoeuvre the social practices to enhance or affirm a nuclear family as a social principle. In the case of this story's male narrator, he thus reconstructs himself by projecting his ideal of a nuclear family through what he indirectly sees as her willingness to fight and to keep her family intact. In other words, he appropriates her resourcefulness, and thus temporarily and fancifully circumvents the migrant reality that makes marriage or the prospect of it bleak. Thus, he fosters/champions equity in a social space that proscribes gender equality.

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[23] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p312.

[24] Mamphela Ramphele, *A Bed Called Home: Life in the Migrant Labour Hostels of Cape Town*, (Cape Town & Johannesburg, 1993), p.5.

In this story, magic is presented as a sign of the ownership of the intellectual property that is subject to the preservation of social identity. This agenda is recurrent in those stories that articulate the construction of social cohesion/bondedness. It therefore seems laudable among the (feminist oriented) migrant audience for Sophie Zikode, a "beautiful woman with a beautiful body; neither young nor fat" to manipulate magic and "keep Jonas forever" in love with her after she had been disappointed in her previous relationships (134). The use of magic is, therefore, not to be considered to be a force of darkness or evil. On the contrary, magic is a gallant disruption of the collusion between the knowledge of beauty and power. In other words, the migrant audience of the story who experience their exploitation as being rooted in a racist system are intrigued with Sophie's ability to connive with and also gain an upper hand on patriarchy without paralysing its figurehead in the form of the black male. This narrative angle thus rescues the narrator from directly making himself the centre of his story, an act that would confront him explicitly with the data of his exilic and migrant reality as well as his desire for power in exclusively masculine terms. Instead, the fictional narrator constructs radical innocence through a portrait of a woman, and endows her with the ingenuity that, in his view, is appropriate for sustaining marriages. This re-presentation is of course informed by a preservation of the male symbolic order that has roots also in traditional culture.

'The Darkest Hour Of Our Age' also memorialises migrancy by portraying it discursively. When this story begins, the first person narrator introduces the '*skaz*' storyteller as Bafana Nkhonza, "a [fellow] hostel dweller from Block 8" (120) who narrates directly/live to his fellow hostel inmates. Prior to Bafana's narration, the hostel setting in which Bafana is a resident is described as being populated by a horde of men

severed from their traditional background, because they are "doing their [own] washing, or preparing their breakfast, while others are already drunk, having started on the bottle since the early hours of the morning" (119). A suggestion is made that the state of being inebriated in "the early hours of the morning" as well as the performance of such chores as cooking and doing laundry are inconsistent with the migrant's sense of how he sees/wants to see himself.[25] Also according to the first person narrator of 'The Darkest Hour Of Our Age', the hostel context intensifies this humiliation by accommodating in each house "sixteen men", and denying them privacy so that they "strip in full view" (119) of one another.

It is therefore no coincidence that, when the story opens, a group of migrants are arguing about the value of carrying an "ID" (119). This debate is then interrupted by Bafana who proceeds to narrate his encounter with the apartheid police in their violent enforcement of the "pass system".[26] None of the inmates interrupts him throughout his narration as he details a typical biography of a black man who, at the age of eighteen, drops out of high school and swells the ranks of the exploited black labourers in the metropolitan areas of Johannesburg or other major city centres. (Arguably, apartheid would not have survived for very long had it not involved dispossessing blacks of their ancestral lands and

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[25] For a comprehensive discussion of what is perceived as the emasculating consequences of migrancy, see, for example, Mamphela Ramphele, *A Bed Called Home: Life in The Migrant Hostels of Cape Town*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 1993).

[26] "This is a practice that was initiated in terms of apartheid's "(Urban Areas) Consolidation Act of 1945… to control the influx of Africans into urban areas and to control their conduct while there." John Dugard, *Human Rights and the South African Legal Order*, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), p.74.

regulating the state provision of education in a racist mode.[26]) At regular intervals in this story, Bafana emphasises that the South African labour industry is a racist institution that imposes numerical and pseudo-ethnic appellations on black men. When the story closes, he responds with glee to his fellows' inquiry of the outcome of his brush with the law by saying "here I am, alive and kicking" (130).

Innocence and experience intertwine in this story in which Bafana redefines himself against his current adversary, that is, migrancy. There are three main episodes in this story that foreground this interweaving. The first is an incident where he acquiesces to his father's plea to enter the police van to be arrested for not having permission to be in a designated area in terms of the Pass Laws (123). The second event is a sequel to an act of bullying and aggression in prison by a gang leader whom Bafana describes as a "small [arrogant] fellow who went around the cells looking at us as if we were some cheap material" (124). After being bailed out by his father for contravening the Group Areas Act, and once "[o]utside prison", Bafana bursts into tears on "thinking of what I could've done to [this fellow inmate] if I could've laid my hands on him" (125). The third occurrence concerns Bafana's encounter with a person whom he describes as an "arrogant white boy" who "must've grown up with girls or behind his mother's apron" who threatened to "send [Bafana] back to the homelands" if he didn't "find work in three days". In Bafana's view, this official "should still have been at school." Bafana further notes that he wished they were "back at Inkandla where a boy could challenge any other boy to a two-stick fight to settle a score, and vows that he "would've taught [the white

[26] See, for instance, Sharon Stichter, *Migrant Laborers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.179.

boy] not to take other people for his grandmother… [by] knocking the bad blood out of his silly head and taught him respect!" (127) The braiding of the three incidents serves to highlight the inequities of the apartheid system which effectively emasculated otherwise virile young black men. In all three, the challenge to nationalist hegemony is, at once, retrospective and imagined.

Bafana fully understands the manifestation of his depersonalisation as a migrant. In his opinion, brute force is the only fitting response to being bullied. This awareness is implicit when he sheds tears on contemplating what he would have done had he "laid [his] hands on [the arrogant fellow prisoner]". (125) The irony of this narration is that Bafana indirectly invites his audience to commend him for claiming the moral high ground, and to fully appreciate the contradictions that are involved in negotiating apartheid. For instance, his allusion to stick fighting constitutes a paradox that he implicitly feels he must insist on because it helps him to visualise a nuanced portrait of the terms that spell out his sense of depersonalisation and deliverance. His father (and all black father figures) as well as the other (male) migrants enter the contest through Bafana's reconceptualising of a black family. As opposed to the mere nakedness that the hostel environment reduces them to (119), the migrants who are listening to Bafana's story find an alternative through his biography of chivalry. However, such invocation paradoxically brings into sharp relief the intellectual deficiency of the sense of power that Bafana mobilises. In the place of aggression, he thus develops a self-orientation that is self-critical and therapeutic where, for example, he experiences catharsis at the thought of his ability to express his justifiable outrage through an imaginary meting out of grievous

bodily harm.[27] Hence he sheds tears later at the thought of what he would have done had he "laid" his "hands" on the "small [arrogant] fellow who went around the cells looking at us as if we were some cheap material".

Another story, 'A Two-Day Adventure', locates the discursive via a strategy that blurs the polarity of sanity and insanity that informs the decision on whether one qualifies to be regarded as a legal (and moral) persona. This story can be seen as a variation of 'Mamlambo' and 'The Darkest Hour of Our Age', stories that transcend the dichotomy of innocence and experience through which the notion of rectitude is fixed in a category of knowledge that is often used to exclude.

But first, this is how the first person storyteller of 'A Two-Day Adventure' introduces Vuma, the "*skaz*" narrator who later narrates his '*Bildungsroman*':

> Vuma and I had grown up together. He dropped out of school while we were still doing our primary education and went to try his luck in industry. He did not work for very long before he became mentally disturbed. Many believed that Vuma had been bewitched by people who were jealous because he had a steady job and wore expensive clothes. Vuma's problem was not a permanent one. Sometimes he became normal and went back to work. But no sooner had you grown used to his sanity than you would come across him in tattered clothes, his hair unkempt, mumbling away to himself. (103-104)

The setting up of the polarity of madness and sanity in social discourse poses a nuanced challenge for Vuma, a man whose schizophrenia coincides with seasonal change. "Vuma

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[27] Compare Bafana's self-awareness with the one that Albie Sachs refers to in his expression of concern that 'the multiple ghettoes of apartheid imagination continue to haunt South African resistance literature'. See Sachs, "Preparing Ourselves For Freedom," *Spring is Rebellious: Arguments About Cultural Freedom*, Ingrid de Kok and Karen Press, eds., (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990), pp.19-29.

lost his mind in autumn when the leaves fell from the trees. This meant that whoever had bewitched Vuma had used the power of leaves. And when trees shed their leaves in winter Vuma also shed his sanity" (104). Coupled with the already quoted observation that "Vuma had been bewitched by people who were jealous because he had a steady job and wore expensive clothes" (103), an inference can be drawn that the elements are conspiring with human beings against an individual's health, bewildering the people as to what the appropriate therapy should be. During relapse, Vuma's family takes him to Venda in the tropics, that is, away from the relatively high latitudes of his Soweto home in Johannesburg. Taking the patient away to the tropical region in Venda where the effect of autumn is not as severe and dramatic is the most reasonable, albeit difficult, option of therapy.

Vuma's predicament can be traced to the colonial context: "[b]ecause [of being] a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?'"[28] His insanity reverberates across various black people's experiences who on confrontation with the alienating modernity such as migrant labour, family disintegration, and forced removals, suffer acute depression on a regular basis (and sometimes) to the point of abusing alcohol/drugs. (Often evident in the poverty-stricken backgrounds similar to those of Vuma's fellow migrants, serotonin and dopamine are common denominators in the body fluids of the people in question. For better or for worse, these substances affect people's emotions

[28] See, for instance, Fanon's analysis of schizophrenia in colonial Algeria in his *Wretched of the Earth*, (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p.200.

differently, that is, intensify either their happiness, or depression.[29] Being predisposed to madness, however, Vuma is not impaired, at least not in the classical sense of mental derangement where the afflicted person "los[es the] mind" as well as "those faculties that distinguish us as humans from other animals—the ability to think rationally, the ability to distinguish the true from the false… right from wrong… to share experiences — everything really that makes us ourselves".[30])

Vuma admits to his plight in suffering what his people term "mental illness" (104) without being angry at this cataloging, because his recovery depends on his being able to re-establish himself in line with what his people define as sanity. On the strength of (his understanding of) this verdict, Vuma has virtually no grounds to feel maligned, because a person who is judged to be insane is not denied all forms of rectitude. His narration of his biography thus reveals him also consenting to the medical finding that his family makes of his affliction and, in a sense, also discloses him defending his family's view of his predicament. He is not incensed, implicitly because he is convinced that that the appropriate psychotherapy for him is the ostracism, the primary objective of which is ostensibly to heighten in him as a patient the urgency to rehabilitate or to help him entrench himself as a patient in the black political "here and now".[31]

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[29] Refer, for example, to Christopher Frith & Eve Johnstone, *Schizophrenia: A Very Short Introduction*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.83.

[30] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," *Untying The Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Robert Young, ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 1981), p.146.

[31] Terry Eagleton, "Nationalism, Irony And Commitment," *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said, eds., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p.24.

Throughout his narration of himself as a patient, he portrays himself in a way that suggests that he develops the ability to confirm his sense of reality while in Venda in terms of the units of time and space known or established in his home: "The place [that is, Venda] was so quiet that one could not tell Sunday from Monday" (104). The emphasis on Vuma's ability to recover from insanity also recurs in the fact that he is portrayed as relying on the sound of the train to reconnect with his home in Johannesburg while being confined in Venda. He makes a case for his own sanity by utilising his sense of hearing to locate the railway station in preparation for his eventual escape from the mental institution in Venda a day later (105). His dependence on the train, that is, on a metaphor of racist labour practice, to conceptualise the map of South Africa, and of his home and family, is indicative of the fact that he inserts himself into the broader black and family ethnoscapes that apartheid threatens.

As migrants away from home, Vuma's audience have a graphic sense of their possible fates in rural homes, and may be apprehensive at the thought of rejoining their nuclear families. After all, as Matlou indirectly submits, such audiences are likely to be apprehensive of falling into "*sauwe*"/"*sabubi*", the sense of alienation and amnesia that, according to the Northern Sotho and Batswana, befalls an individual who acts contrary to ethics or the norm. (Matlou, of course, adapts this terminology to describe the experience of being a racially exploited mine labourer during apartheid.) However, the theme of the odyssey in Vuma's story upends this anxiety by virtue of re-conceptualising and reaffirming the right and dignity of the home. Thus, in contrast to being a reminder of black negation where black men are transported into the deep and dark underground to

labour for meagre earnings, the train is a metaphor that reunites Vuma with his family in Soweto, even while he is still confined in Venda for alleged mental derangement.

This dialectic of blackness is pithily captured at the end of the story when Vuma sums up the significance of kith and kin in enhancing psychological stability, and when he also notes that the quality of the therapy that the family/social psychiatric provides equally depends on a patient's (blind) appreciation of such intervention. (Similar to Matlou's motif of the goatskin bag, [32] the home is overtly also a social space, the guarantee of power which Vuma activates in order to redress his plight, albeit in a way that ultimately confirms what seems at first to be against his right to a home.[33]) Thus his willingness to return to his home is a main factor that emphasises a need to consistently marshal caution, that is, the better to appreciate people's efforts at deciding what an appropriate psychotherapy is. His parents' sending him to Venda affirms him in a way that suggests that they know that "strange powers not held by any other may be attributed to the madman's speech; the power of uttering truth… of seeing in all naivety what the others' wisdom cannot perceive".[34] As a principle, Vuma argues, the family is a site in which a patient's (psychological) adversity renders the parental obligations to a patient (child) problematic, that is, in a way that impresses in a parent a sacrifice that may conflict with what a patient may consider to be acceptable parenting. Hence, Vuma observes after his mother had asked him where he had come from when he reached home unexpectedly,

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[32] See Chapter One.

[33] Similarly, Chapter Six of this study discusses the home as a site of the 'postcolony'

[34] Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse," *Untying The Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, Robert Young, ed., (London and New York: Routledge, 1981), p.53.

"'Vuma, my child are you all right?'… She embraced me for a long time. I felt her chest pulsating and knew that she was crying." (116) Her uncertainty is also expressed when she goes to "forewarn" (ibid.) her husband of their son's return. It seems she reasons that her son, who has just returned unexpectedly, is angry that his parents had sent him away to Venda, possibly against his wish. It appears, therefore, that she intends to prepare her husband to treat their son with a required diplomacy.

The desire for power in the discursive terms that are apparent in 'A Two-Day Adventure', 'The Darkest Hour of Our Age' and the title story via the motif of the odyssey recurs in religious overtones in another story, 'Some Breeders for Sure'. As already noted in the discussion of 'A Two-Day Adventure', a home is a discourse into which individuals slot surreptitiously, because, outside it, power is inconceivable. In the context of apartheid's bulldozing of black subjectivities, especially of the gross violation of the black corporal bodies, however, Maseko's 'Some Breeders for Sure' appears to argue that blackness can (only) be asserted through irony. This ratification of discourse recalls Achille Mbembe's interpretation of the (his)story of Jesus Christ's ability to defeat evil through anathema. According to Mbembe, the body, in this case, becomes a symbol of itself impervious to corporal punishment, especially when inflicted by the oppressor.[35] Mbembe explains the ability to withstand "pain, suffering and unhappiness" as "freeing the subject from various kinds of inhibition, [and hence] allow[ing] him/her a capacity for ecstasy inachievable under ordinary conditions"[36]

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[35] Compare with the discussion of teacher Zamani's stoic acceptance of punishment on his body in Njabulo Ndebele's 'Fools' in the following chapter, Three.

[36] Achille Mbembe, On the Postcolony, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), p.212.

This drama of salvation through "ecstasy in suffering"[37] is explicit only in 'Some Breeders For Sure'. This is the story in which the Afrikaner farmer, Koornhof, fatally assaults the migrant Witbooi who came from Venda (89) for alleged livestock theft. Distinct from the other stories, Maseko here depicts migrancy in its worse case scenario of an apartheid era farm that is rampant with racial abuse. When this story opens, the omniscient narrator presents Koornhof violently interrupting "Piet and Witbooi, his brother-in-law" while they are having a "contented chat over a calabash of sorghum beer" "in Piet's shack" (83). This disruption of an oral storytelling context is a metaphor for the demolition of a platform for mobilising fantasies of power. The body thus becomes its own text when given up for anathematic purpose to the sadist. The fictional audiences to whom the "*skaz*" storyteller narrates seem to understand brutality in religious terms, that is, as a reminder of the racial depersonalisation, the terror of which the narrator loosens through the kind of retelling that foregrounds passive resistance.[38]

According to the narrator, Koornhof attributed the disappearance of his goats to the stranger, Witbooi, as soon as he came to Koornhof's notice. On the basis of this suspicion, Koornhof enlisted the help of one Willem (later on referred to by Piet as "Cowboy" in the story), and together they began to inflict harm on Witbooi until he died. Throughout this physical attack, Witbooi professes his innocence in vain, and he does not retaliate. When the story concludes, Piet waylays Koornhof armed with a shotgun, and

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[37] Achille Mbembe, On the Postcolony, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001), p.212.

[38] The twin themes of narration and ritual are discussed at some length in Chapter Five of this study.

kills him. Prior to this act, Piet had agonised about the possibility that the shotgun was not loaded (89), and had also pondered his ability to kill (88). In what is evidently a postscript according to the thrust of which this story is to be interpreted, the narrator introduces dramatic irony. He remarks that Witbooi's pregnant wife "[s]omewhere in a rural village of Venda" is "anxiously awaiting the return of her husband [the] next weekend," and is anticipating, not knowing that he is dead, that "the baby would be born" when he comes home at the end of the month (89).

Death in this story is a mark of the release of primal energy similar to that which the many discourses of resistance associate with martyrdom. Accordingly, martyrdom is considered to radiate and revitalise a collective with a freedom-fighting mode.[39] Suffering in this story signifies a symbolic victory over colonial power, or a sense of supremacy that is made apparent by the fact that Witbooi has no confession of theft to make. Witbooi's death, indeed, constitutes "poetic justice";[40] it prevails over his assailants' attempt to arrogate to themselves moral rectitude.

Similar to anathema, Witbooi's non-violent reaction gestures towards a difference that calls the bluff of racial arrogance. This is because he continually refers his attackers to his "baas" for a character reference: "Please, my baas… phone my baas… he'll tell you… I'm no tsotsi [thug]" (85). In this appeal, he ironically expresses confidence in the superiority of his employer whom he calls "baas," and conflates this trust with the one that Koornhof and Cowboy debase as they violently attempt to extract a confession of

[39] The chapter on Farida Karodia, Six, presents a critique of martyrdom.

[40] Mike Kirkwood, "Literature And Popular Culture In South Africa" in *Third World Quarterly*, (Vol.9, No.2, 1987), p.668.

guilt. Hence he calls them all "baas" without discriminating. Also by implication, Witbooi unwittingly postulates a different kind of memory that indirectly calls for a (problematic) bondedness between himself as victim and the perpetrator. Witbooi therefore indirectly signals a precursor to the ethic of Ubuntu that almost two decades later came to dominate the drama of transition from apartheid to a non-racial South Africa.[41] Also consistent with the primordial energy that he radiates/exudes through dying without resisting, he is a symbol that expands the nucleic parameters of the family to incorporate people from diverse racial orientations. This inclusiveness resonates also in the fact that Witbooi is ignorant of the knowledge that he has impregnated his wife (89) and that he is about to become a father.

In contrast to the other stories that explicitly introduce the '*skaz*' and use its construction of tropes of power in order to memorialise migrancy, 'The Night of the Long Knives' is narrated from the omniscient perspective that relies on social dialogues and conversations in order to provide intertextual readings of the masculine authority that the "*skaz*" narrators (in the discussed stories) invoke to upend the horror of migrancy. This is a story about four women and a child in a confrontation with a group of black male "beheaders" (50) that terrorise children and women while the men/husbands are away. The implication is that the men folk are away on migrant labour contracts. According to one perspective within the community, the perpetrators "give these heads to ghosts who promise to give them money in return". Also according to rumour in the society, however, the "ghosts never give them money but demand more heads… [and as a result the beheaders] go on killing people" (51). The storyteller evidently constitutes an

[41] Refer to the Chapter on Farida Karodia, Six, for comments on Ubuntu.

audience by constructing the plot in a way that bears evidence to the people's vocal disagreement about the reality of ghosts, about the relationship between a belief in ghosts and whether such belief mirrors reality, and about whether the act of beheading suggests people's communion/covenant with ghosts (51-52). These intrusions resonate with the audience's intimate knowledge of the personality traits that are evident in the beheaders of the story and also reveal an adaptation of local belief in nuanced local terms.

For example, one of the perpetrators, Dambuza, conjures up deadly terror, because, as the narrator remarks, "[i]f the victim knew Dambuza he wouldn't have bothered crying his head off" (47). Being aware of his audience's familiarity with the popular construction of ogres or anti-human figures, the storyteller implicitly expects this audience to enter vicariously the consciousness of a victim in question, and then act out an appropriate response. This rhetoric is also suggested in the narrator's comment that "[b]uctchering a man was to Dambuza the same as slaughtering a goat" (47). In many African (traditional) communities, people perform ritual sacrifices to placate the ancestors when it is deemed that a particular individual has acted anti-socially or sacrilegiously. In a majority of such instances where a goat is slaughtered, human beings are not expected to feel sorry for the sacrificial offering, but to be grateful that it is presumed to be accepting of the punishment that was destined for the performers of the ritual. However, the audience of this story is expected to sympathise with the ritual gift, that is, the goat, rather than with the "beheaders" whose cruelty is presented as excessive and gross to be propitiated.

It is evident from the critique that the trope of masculinity receives in the '*carnivalesque*' that Maseko interrogates the essential link that the migrant folklore unwittingly makes

between social ethics and male power. This appraisal is obvious in the fact that carnage in this story is not only a part of a male (and colonial) socialisation, but also a result of the trauma of the kind of upbringing that involves racist prejudices. Violence, therefore, does not seem to have any potential to enunciate any significant greatness such as is evident in Witbooi's death in 'Some Breeders for Sure'. Hence, in the second section of 'The Night Of The Long Knives', Maseko presents women as the custodians of family and cultural values and as the avenues through which these standards are negotiated and phrased. (A dialogue with the title story, 'Mamlambo', and indeed with the theme of motherhood in Matlou's stories, is quite apparent.)

The biography of one of the "beheaders", "Jan" (nicknamed "Slang" [snake] by black people "because of his snakelike eyes" (48)), provides a clue to how this story critiques the tropes of power that seem necessary in the imagining of victory against migrancy. Slang's biography provides a useful entry; he "left the farm [his home] and went to Newcastle" after being beaten by his mother "for playing with the 'native' Vusi against her wishes". (49) Seemingly hardened by his mother's racist attitude, Slang joined a gang of dagga smuggling black men, and was arrested, convicted and served a sentence for this crime. On being released, he returned to the farm to find that his parents had passed away. His only remaining relative, Oom Hennie, "bluntly told Slang that he was old enough to look after himself… [and so he] never saw Oom Hennie again, or his two cousins" (49). The childhood and nuclear family from which Slang is alienated as well as his strained relations with his mother constitute a crisis for him. His estrangement from his mother is analogous to the other black migrants' alienation from the forms of bondedness such as the nuclear families. (ibid.) Slang is a fit candidate for ritual

cleansing. In other words, he needs to be reconciled with the family as a social principle in the same way that Vuma in 'A Two-Day Adventure' appreciates the "pleasures and frustrations of social ambiguities" on his return to his family in Soweto from a psychotherapeutic treatment in Venda.

It is implicit in the story's climax that an appropriate redress for Slang should reconcile him with childhood innocence. This is evident when, while he and his colleagues are waiting for the suitable moment to pounce on a group of "[f]our women and a child," the narrator remarks that "Mehl'emamba ["Snake eyes" — nick-name given to Slang] desperately wanted a baby and the price was high". (53) Slang's aim is also apparent when the narrator notes that Slang was devastated when Dambuza, one of the beheaders, suggested "[t]here are four women and we are four… [s]o each of us can get rid of one" (53). Slang seems set on murdering the child not because this might be a physically less demanding task. In his flawed and perverse thinking, murdering an infant means symbolically putting an end to a childhood that encapsulates terror through the memory of a harsh and racist mother. While his co-conspirators are willing to renounce the persons dearest to them, their wives maybe (perhaps for the purpose of maintaining the snake mamlambo, the fortune bringer in the title story), Slang would rather sacrifice a reminder of his childhood, probably because it reminds him of the episode growing up in a farm when his mother punished him "for playing with the 'native' Vusi" (49). This is why motherhood seems for Slang an indomitable menace that he would rather not confront. Thus the "beheaders" manage to murder all their targets except MaMbokazi who survives the attack carrying her baby on her back. In other words, her relationship with the child "pressed on her breast" (56) mirrors through irony a fundamental principle

that Slang is set on violating, albeit at his own peril. Just before being attacked, her baby began to fiddle and cry intermittently and would not rest at ease until its mother went to sit outside the hut. The other women victims do not heed this premonition and are thus fatally caught unawares inside the hut. Throughout the assailants' subsequent search for MaMbokazi, her baby remains quiet.

The image of a child "pressed on her mother's breast" is reminiscent of the innocence that Matlou attempts to capture for the benefit of the anguished migrant and homeless men. As in Matlou's stories in which he returns to his mother's back having wondered wildly in *'sauwe'* or '*sabubi*', the reunification with the mother also spells security in Maseko's story, and does so also in terms of memory, that is, as a family narrative. In contrast to Matlou, the portrait of the child plays a dominant role in sustaining this sense of security. One of the women comments, "[c]hildren have an instinct for feeling things we cannot see," "[a]nd they react to it by crying". (54) Without the advantage of a history with motherhood in which symbiosis reigns supreme, Slang and, by implication, the other black migrants, degenerate into mere instruments of torture. In relation to the other stories of Maseko that this chapter has discussed, the heteroglossia of 'The Night of the Long Knives' reveals an adaptation of fantasy in the terms that accentuate complexity and self-reflexivity overtly.

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This chapter began with by asserting that a Maseko story reads as folklore where the "*skaz*" narrator appropriates tropes of power discursively. Throughout this chapter, these images of authority have also been investigated for collusion with the dominant orders through which power is negotiated, and for mapping the spaces in which an individual is

better positioned to appreciate "the frustrations and pleasures of social ambiguities".[42] 'The Night Of The Long Knives' thus serves a convenient conclusion of the discussion of Maseko's stories that present "experience [being] intellectualized mnemonically".[43] In Maseko, this negotiation of power reveals memory to be overtly a complex "entanglement" from which new meanings and identities come into being. Subtly, this entrapment reveals a problem that, as indicated in the discussion of the textual narratives that the "*skaz*" narrators use to depict the black experience, concerns what constitutes resistance. In other words, strategies of mediation are complicit with the adversary that is being contested. Eagleton observes: "[a]ny politics that has a transformative power has to envisage, if in a negative way, the freedom and self-autonomy that would make such politics unnecessary."[44]

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[42] Njabulo Ndebele, Introduction, *Mamlambo and other stories*, by Bheki Maseko, p.10.

[43] Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing Of The Word*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1982), p.36.

[44] Seamus Deane, Introduction, *Nationalism, Colonialism, And Literature*, *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson and Edward W. Said, eds., (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p.4.