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The paradoxes of silenced trauma in Mongane Serote's To Every Birth its Blood

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2015-09-02
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Introduction

A renowned poet of the late South African apartheid era and acclaimed author of what has been called the "literature of combat";[1] Mongane Wally Serote's works deploy an extensive repertoire of genres that reflect his range of interests and skills. Serote engages in diverse pursuits ranging from being a scholar and artist to being an activist and healer. Born in 1944 in Sophiatown before its mass evacuation and demolition in February 1955 under the apartheid government's Natives Resettlement Act of 1954, Serote got involved in political activism at an early age and joined the African National Congress (ANC) during his senior years at secondary school. In 1969 he was detained without trial under the Terrorism Act and spent nine months in solitary confinement. Subsequent to his release, he left for Columbia University to study towards a Masters in Fine Arts degree. Unable to return to the country in 1979, he went into exile in Botswana and worked at the Medu Arts Ensemble in Gabarone with artist Thamsanga Mnyele. Here, he rejoined the ANC underground-structures and received military training in Botswana, Angola and the Soviet Union under the auspices of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK). His political work eventually took him abroad and from 1986 he worked at the ANC's United Kingdom Office for the Department of Arts and Culture.

At the dawn of democracy in South Africa in 1994, Serote was elected as a Member of Parliament and continued to head the ANC's Department of Arts and Culture in Johannesburg. During the tenure of former President Thabo Mbeki's cabinet, he became instrumental in the foundation of Freedom Park, a national monument situated in Tshwane (strategically located adjacent to the Voortrekker Monument which is a quintessential symbol of South Africa's colonial history). Freedom Park honours the heroes and heroines who died in defence of South Africa and the struggle for liberation. This project complemented the ancestral calling Serote was required to devote himself to: that of being a traditional healer. He underwent training to become a traditional, or indigenous African health and spiritual practitioner in 2000. It is as one of the country's pioneer anti-apartheid South African writers of the 1970's and 1980's that Serote became internationally recognised. It is therefore not surprising that his involvement in the liberation struggle informs much of his writings and art.

[1] See Jane Watts, Black Writers from South Africa: Towards a Discourse of Liberation, London: McMillan, 1989, p. 219.

This research project explores the theme of silence in Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood[2] published in 1981. Silence will be explored at three different levels: repressive silences and the effacing of history or pasts by the state; the re-appropriation of silence by the oppressed, and the aesthetics of silence. The focus on silence will engage with its paradoxical nature, particularly the use of silence in Serote's work to explore a range of tactics and negotiated responses used by ordinary people in response to the every-day experiences of trauma in South Africa. Each of these silences will be discussed separately but also engaged with in relation to or in conversation with one another.

Mapping the Contours of Serote's Oeuvre: Thematic Preoccupations and Aesthetic Dynamics in his Prose

Serote's initial public prominence as a poet occurred in the 1970's during the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement and the so-called 'Soweto poetry' movement.[3] In that period Serote's poetry made numerous appearances in South African poetry anthologies.[4] It appeared alongside the works of Mafika Gwala, Oswald Mbuyisile Mtshali and Sipho Sepamla to name but three black poets whose works are regarded as seminal in identifying the Black Consciousness Movement of the 1970's and 1980's. The notion of Soweto poetry was regarded as contentious because of the geographical categorisation it imposed on writers such as Gwala who was not from Soweto.

Black Consciousness has been described as "a philosophy of humanity (*ubuntu*) and national redemption."[5] Publishing in English, whether forced by historical circumstances or out of choice, afforded these poets a large readership making their work accessible nationally and internationally. Furthermore, these poets were interested in how the fabric of language could accommodate representations of black oppression and also depict the prominent features of the vibrant and multifaceted black urban and rural culture that underpinned resilience and

[2] M.W. Serote, To Every Birth Its Blood. Johannesburg: Picador Africa edition, 2004. From here on reference to text pages will be placed in brackets after the quote.
[3] M. Chapman, "Introduction", in Soweto Poetry, M. Chapman, McGraw Hill Book Company, Johannesburg: 1982, p. 11.
[4] See A. Schwartzman, Ten South African Poets (1999), S. Gray, The Penguin Book of Southern African Verse (1989), M. Chapman, The Paperback of South African English Poetry (1986), S. Gray, Modern South African Poetry (1984), G. Butler, C. Mann, A New Book of South African Verse in English (1979), B. Lindfors, South African Voices (1975), B. Feinberg, Poets to the People: South African Freedom Poems (1974), R. Rayson, To Whom It May Concern: An Anthology of Black South African Poetry (1973).
[5] T.H. Ngwenya, "Black Consciousness Poetry: Writing Against Apartheid", in The Cambridge History of South African Literature, D. Attwell, D. Attridge (eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012, p. 500.

resistance. Consequently what stands out in their poetry are evocative uses of traditional oral forms and contemporary township codes and genres such as *tsotsi taal*, the rhythms of jazz and blues, modern poetic forms and protest performance repertoires.[6] In terms of content, the poetry was often an expression of "anger, declamations and warnings about potential danger."[7] Seeped in a "political liberation strategy"[8], the poets made use of myths, symbols and traditional practices to speak of the abject position of black South Africans at the time. They promoted the adoption of a state of mind rooted in self-affirmation and self-respect, without forsaking the importance of "a common conception of a traditional past, which was not without its flaws but which had been erased from the memory of 'enlightened' and 'educated' Africans, who were encouraged to look up to the West for progress and excellence."[9]

As a novelist Serote is counted amongst the major authors of the June 1976 student uprisings- a resistance to Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools- and the demonstrations against apartheids socio-political conditions in general. The works of amongst others, Mariam Tlali, Ahmed Essop, Sipho Sipamla, Mbulelo Mzamane, Boyd Makhoba, Casey Motsisi, Njabulo Ndebele, Mtshali, and Gwala[10] fell within a generation of writings hailed to have spearheaded "the single most important socio-literary phenomenon of the seventies in South Africa."[11] There is no doubt that this was a valiant effort considering there was little black South African literature available in the country after the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960 left a "literary wasteland."[12] The period after Sharpeville saw countless artists including Alfred Hutchinson, Dennis Brutus, Alex la Guma, Mazisi Kunene, Todd Matshikazi, Bloke Modisane, Es'kia Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, Cosmo Pieterse and Can Themba exiled and hundreds of works banned. Post-Sharpeville ushered in the beginning of black protest poetry whose origins have been traced back to the 1930's and 1940's in the

[6] Ibid, p. 518. For discussion on the use of language in Black Consciousness poetry and writing see , Tim Couzen (1978), Jacques Alvarez - Prereyre (1979), Ursula Barrett (1983), Michael Chapman (1980, 1984, 1996), Nadine Gordimer (1973), Kelwyn Sole (1983), Jane Watts (1989), Piniel Viriri Shava (1989), Mbulelo Vizikhungo Mzamane (1991, 1992), and David Attwell (2005).
[7] Ngwenya, "Black Consciousness Poetry: Writing Against Apartheid", p. 514.
[8] Ibid, p. 504.
[9] Ibid, p. 516.
[10] See Watts, Black Writers from South Africa, p. 219. , K. Sole, "The Days of Power: Depictions of Politics and Community in Four Recent South African Novels". Research in African Literature, vol.19, 1976, pp. 65-88.
[11] Chapman, Soweto Poetry, p. 11.
[12]N. Masilela, "Black South African Literature from the 'Sophiatown Renaissance' to 'Black Mamba Rising': Transformations and Variations from the 1950's to the 1980's", University of California: Centre of Black Studies, 1990, p 7.

works of H.I.E Dhlomo and Peter Abrahams.[13] Under the auspicious group of "liberation novels," To Every Birth Its Blood, alongside Tlali's Amandla (1980), Sepamla's A Ride on the Whirlwind (1981), and Mzamane's The Children of Soweto (1982), were products of a much more community-orientated artistic movement where "the struggle itself takes over, as it were, the role of the hero, and it is *its* development, rather than of any particular person, with which we are concerned" (original emphases).[14] Watts considers this a "radical structural change" arguing that the focus on relationships between and amongst families and friends within the liberation struggle shows a deliberate move from a western style novel that focused on "social inter-relationships for its own sake."[15]

Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood develops from a predominantly individualistic focus and shifts its concern to the relationship between the individual and the larger community and "the Movement" or philosophy of the African National Congress. Each of Serote's works requires that the reader remain alert to his discourse on the significance of consciousness that Serote develops through the characters in his quintet of novels (To Every Birth Its Blood, Gods of Our Time, Scatter the Ashes and Go, Revelations and Rumours). A distinctive *revolutionary consciousness* runs through Serote's novels and poetry and finds its articulation in the exploration of apartheid historical oppression and resultant modes of resistance and the aesthetics of blackness, as well as the experiences of trauma, memory and silence. Traces of similar tropes of death and organic regeneration in Serote's long poems *No Baby Must Weep* (1975) and *Behold Mama, Flowers* (1978) can be identified in To Every Birth Its Blood. The most distinct representation of this is found in Serote's poem "Time Has Run Out" (1979).[16] In "Time Has Run Out" the thematic concerns of silence, journeying (both metaphorically and literally), memory and combative resistance parallel those explored in the novel. I will use "Time Has Run Out" to briefly map out some of Serote's major thematic preoccupations, focusing on those that we will encounter in my discussion, later, of To Every Birth Its Blood. Both this poem and To Every Birth Its Blood cover the student uprisings of 16 June 1976

[13] Ngwenya, "Black Consciousness Poetry", p. 511.

[14] Watts, Black Writers from South Africa. p. 219.

[15] Watts, Ibid, p. 219.

[16] M. V. Mzamane, Selected Poems Mongane Wally Serote, Ad. Donker, Johannesburg, 1989, pp 125-134. An extract from the poem was first published in the November 1979 edition of Staffrider, a literary magazine that emerged in 1978 and that became a platform for new black South African writers to explore the 'black experience' in culturally and aesthetically experimental ways. For an elaboration on Staffrider magazine see A. Oliphant, I. Vladislavic, Ten Years of Staffrider (1988).

(Youth Day) - "the days which came and went" and which left "broken droplets of blood which are now splashed/ and are scattered on the streets/ on fences/ and on walls of houses we live in." As in the novel, the poem celebrates heroes who died in the struggle most notably, "makana", "mapetla", "nokwe", "sobukwe", and "hector pieterson", but it also balances images of these major figures with the evoked memories of ordinary people's personal and intimate encounters with colonialism and colonial defeats. The most prominent figure in the poem is Black Consciousness leader Stephen Bantu Biko whose descriptive death is placed alongside the image of the many black brutalised bodies "floating like rotten corpses would on/ water-/ on the memory of the people," thus creating a vivid sense of the scars etched in the minds of those who suffer the loss. This stark imagery is imprinted in the collective memory- "a throb of a memory about the distance we made." This distance is the journey the collective "we," who are the oppressed in apartheid South Africa, have thus far travelled in what is defined as "acts of struggle." The emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement, it is suggested, ushers in an era in which "a new man and woman are born/ who mourn and bury the dead/ who know the price of freedom/ and say so." Such a generation inevitably must "[...] become/ like fruits/ from roots which, spread and spread/ in the mind/ the heart of a people/ who learn science/ who harness every energy/ who knit themselves against thirst and hunger/ where everyone will read and write/ where man, child and woman are eager to learn/ not to oppress/ or exploit another/ where the day and night/ unfold/ each revealing its whistle." African Nationalistic visions such as the "defence of a land", "wars of unity" and "love of freedom" are all, subsequently imbued in the hearts of these youth. As the youth are killed daily by police Serote observes that; "their blood yields strength to us/ remember/ the national memory keeps throbbing and throbbing with/ life/ after deaths/ our staring silent eye/ speaks of national revolutions which we make/ as we ride the turbulous billow of our lives and time/ to fetch our liberation."[17]

A similar patterning of the growth in consciousness and narrative can be seen in To Every Birth Its Blood. Through the novel we are taken on the complex journey towards consciousness and forms of mobilising a movement of resistance against an oppressive system at a period in time when it had unleashed a series of brutal attacks on a community of youth who were determined to see its demise. Once the resistance Movement (symbolic of the principles of the African National Congress) has gained momentum through political organization, it faces challenges from both within and outside of its structures.

[17] Mzamane, Selected Poems Mongane Wally Serote, p.132.

Serote's later novels also evince similar concerns. Gods of Our Time[18] (1999) goes to pains to present, through an array of characters, the necessity to remain clear and focused on the objective - the liberation of black South Africans. It goes into the history of various organizations and the explanation of terms such as "resistance movement" - which represents the structured resistance organised by activists highly dedicated to their cause and the ways trade unions strategically worked towards paralysing the country's economy. Scatter the Ashes and Go[19] (2002) is set in the years that see the diminished rule of a white supremacist system. The soldiers of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) have to assimilate into a country they feel dislocated from after spending much of their adult lives training and fighting from outside its borders in other African countries. Taken into the in-depth operations of guerrilla warfare, we are always aware of the "national consciousness" and "world consciousness"[20] that informed much of the political and intellectual education that anchored these soldiers but that also alienates them in a country that has undergone rapid change in their absence.

Revelations[21] (2010) presents us with characters in post-apartheid South Africa who are grappling with the meanings of terms such as "non-racialism, non-sexism and democratic"[22] while simultaneously having to deal with a democratic state that bears the scars of the devastations that apartheid caused.[23] In an attempt to make sense of the contradictions evident in a growing democracy, Serote suggests numerous points of reference. Key amongst such explanations are what is variously defined as "African culture," inclusive of "Indigenous knowledge, Christianity, colonial culture, apartheid culture, struggle and liberation culture, and whatever we call Western culture."[24] Underlying their grasp is an understanding that stems from MK, that "the promise of life was a revolution, a rebellion."[25] Bra Shope, a central character in the novel, is the lens through which we consider the meaning of the won political freedom, and how characters in the novel choose to remember the struggle for liberation. His art engages with the past through what it illustrates, how it initiates dialogue with its audiences and the spaces in which it is displayed. Again, the theme of memory is engaged with through the evocation of the archive as a space that contains history, and the

[18] M.W. Serote, Gods of Our Time. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1999.
[19] M.W. Serote, Scatter the Ashes and Go. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 2002.
[20] Serote, Scatter the Ashes and Go. p. 14.
[21] M. W. Serote, Revelations. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 2010.
[22] Serote, Revelations. p. 62.
[23] Ibid. p. 119.
[24] Ibid. p. 85.
[25] Ibid. p. 110.

gallery as a space in motion with art works always being assembled and disassembled. In this space the artist takes on the role of griot, maintaining oral history as the ancestors in Africa once did. Here Serote engages with the re-appropriation of past African knowledge systems that become the tool for reading the post-apartheid experience. African ancient knowledge systems become metaphors of insight, revealing silenced African epistemologies and practices through evocations of the ancestors. The major theme in the novel is that of capturing, which is explored through photography. The concern is with what you "capture forever", and what you "leave behind."[26] The lens of a camera becomes the medium through which to "speak forever", or "remain forever silent."[27] The camera is a metaphor for what we can see, what we wish to see, that which we refuse to see, that which we must see, and that which is never seen. The past is explored through photographic images that can either illuminate specific elements of the past that have remained silenced or portray how inaccessible silence can be, here still image are representative of the double layered nature of silence.

In Rumours[28] (2013) the "spirit of no surrender"[29] still lives within Keke, a former MK soldier, and when his life spirals into turmoil, he turns to entrenched guerrilla tactics to find resolution. Though living in a post-apartheid society, Keke remains a soldier at war, and becomes a metaphor for those who 'broke' when they returned to South Africa from MK camps outside of the country. In line with the constant theme of memory in Serote's works are the dreams and flashbacks that haunt Keke until he takes a journey to understand the meaning of the pain that remains with him after his return to South Africa at liberation. This novel looks at the experiences of South Africans fighting the anti-apartheid struggle in exile. The relationships forged between the liberation struggle fighters in South Africa and those abroad continue into post-apartheid, and when Keke is at his lowest point, he leaves for Mali with a woman, Ami, to go through a ritual of cleansing. Serote's concern is with exploring the healing of a nation, continent and its individuals. Rumours are presented as the greatest threat to African states and Pan-Africanism. Rumours are a metaphor for ideologies, global systems of influence, internal political and social concerns. Serote illustrates the different outcomes that the spreading of rumours achieves and how within them lie truths that can be damaging to a nation if it does not address them appropriately. As Keke grapples with his

[26] Ibid. p. 81.
[27] Ibid. p. 82.
[28] M.W. Serote, Rumours. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 2013.
[29] This is a philosophy Serote comes across in his training in MK and reflects upon in his non-fictional work Hyenas published in 2000. Serote, Hyenas. Johannesburg: Viva Publishers and Booksellers, 2000. In Rumours Keke draws strength from the principles that underpin this phrase.

past experiences, the nation and indeed the continent are being threatened by rumours. At the same time there is a group from the generation of "born frees" who surface the disturbing racial inheritances from apartheid. In short, the historical periods Serote depicts in all his narratives go deep into the fabric of South African society and leave us with questions whose answers are hinted at through the array of characters that are forever developing to no conclusive end.

The experimentation with genres such as poetry and music, as well as the experimentation with temporality and notions of 'resistance/ consciousness' that Serote undertakes, accounts for much of the critical debates surrounding this work. As I turn to a discussion on the various critiques on Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood, I wish to note here that my focus in this paper is primarily on the development of the theme of silence deployed by Serote and the varied interpretations that can be read through the characters he illustrates in his work, and, not on how Serote's work has been interpreted by scholars. In the body of this paper I refer to only the critical works on the novel that server to further my argument on the paradoxes of silenced trauma. The brief sketch I present below is therefore meant only to present the reader with a broad overview of critical work on To Every Birth Its Blood.

Critical Responses to *To Every Birth Its Blood* and Reflections upon "Time has Run Out"

Of Serote's novels To Every Birth Its Blood has received the widest range of critical responses and engagement. The numerous and divergent critical responses on To Every Birth Its Blood centre largely on "the seeming disjunction (even rupture) between the first and second parts of the novel", and the possible ways of explaining this tension or the resulting problematics that consequently arise.[30] At best To Every Birth Its Blood is said to reflect this disjuncture and, at worst, it makes the narrative incoherent.

[30] M. Titlestad, Making the Changes: Jazz in South African Literature and Reportage, Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2004, p. 194. For critical responses to temporality and the two part novel structure in Serote also see D. Barboure, "Mongane Serote: Humanist and Revolutionary" (1984), N. Visser, "Fictional Project and the Irruption of History" (1987), Annie Gagiano, "Serote's Novel and Visser's Criticism" (1989), and K. Sole, "This Time Set Again" (1991).

Serote's early poetry collections -*Yakhal'inkomo* (1972), *Tsolo* (1974), *No Baby Must Weep* and *Behold Mama, Flowers* - are generally considered as securing Serote's esteemed reputation and evincing his leanings towards Black Consciousness thought. "Time has Run Out" though works in tandem with To Every Birth Its Blood, refusing any fixed reading of Serote's ideological shift. The publication of To Every Birth Its Blood prompted critical responses that often echoed Kelwyn Sole's reference to the narrative structure in the first and the second part as being premised on a "double logic."[31] Such arguments have largely promoted the perception that the novel tries to merge two fictional projects together, one begun in 1975 and interrupted by the student uprising of June 1976, and the other a subsequent response to these events.[32] Other readings of this novel are preoccupied with Tsi Molope (the protagonist in the first part and again at the end of the novel). He is regarded as illustrative of a "fragmented ontology of the oppressed."[33] The latter strand of criticism leads Raditlhalo into a reading of Serote as engaged in "trauma fiction." Yet, Raditlhalo unfortunately retains the linear argument that the work is predominantly realist and focused on documenting.[34] Common amongst all these arguments is the view that To Every Birth Its Blood grapples at one level with the author's shift from Black Consciousness thought to African Nationalist principles. There is also the concurrent argument that the historical events around 16 June 1976 catapulted the country into tumultuous violence and caused a lasting impact on Serote's literary project and the country as a whole. It is not easy to identify the precise shifts in Serote's thought and instead we see in "Time has Run Out" that "as in the novel, there is no simplistic shift from Black Consciousness to an ANC position" as I have illustrated in the above section.[35] What merges the different schools of thought in Serote is the urgent sense of revolution grappled with in both "Time has Run Out" and To Every Birth Its Blood. Indeed "Serote sees no alternative to the inevitable violent and revolutionary transformation of society" and the violent confrontation with the apartheid government.[36] It is therefore germane that we remain aware of this progression in our reading of To Every Birth Its Blood, particularly the extension of the possibilities of black experiences informed, but

[31]K. Sole"This Time Set Again: The Temporal and Political Conceptions of Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood", in English in Africa, 18, (1991), p. 57.
[32] N. Visser, "Fictional Project and the Irruption of History: Monagne Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood", in The English Academy Review, 4, (1987), p. 424.
[33] A. Gagiano, "Serote's Novel and Visser's Criticism", in The English Academy Review, 6, (1989), p. 84.
[34] T. S. Raditlhalo, "'Senses of Silence': Historical Trauma in To Every Birth Its Blood", in JLS/TLW, 29, (2013), p. 115.
[35] S. Frielick, '"Time has Run Out-Period."- Myth and History in Serote's long poems', History Workshop University of the Witwatersrand: Structure and Experience in the Making of Apartheid, 1990, p. 12.
[36] Ibid, p. 13.

not limited, to the envisioned inevitability of combative war. In so doing we are able to investigate the quotidian interactions amongst the people that Serote depicts.

In addition to raising concerns with changes in Serote's ideological and political commitments, other scholars have considered how Serote's work provides a focal point for the critique centring on what Lewis Nkosi calls the 'crisis of representation'[37] in black writing. A part of such a discussion concerns the relation between earlier eras of writing and the post- 1976 generation. There are two eras that can be identified as most influential to the writing that emerged in the late 70's and 80's. It is largely accepted that the disintegration of Sophiatown Renaissance and District Six Renaissance literature was the moment of literary demise in South African black literature. Literature of the 1950's identified as 'Sophiatown Renaissance' is associated with prominent writers from Drum Magazine.[38] Works in this era were characterized by autobiographical writings influenced by African American writers and the Harlem Renaissance. This era forged and established 'national' literatures in South Africa.[39] This was based on the belief of authors such as Ezekiel Mpahlele that "the formation of modern African national literatures had to be realized within the historical and political coordinates of Pan- Africanism and nationalism."[40] The work of this era coincides with the District Six Renaissance lead by so called "coloured" writers James Mathews, Richard Rive and Alex La Guma that aimed its critique at the ideology of apartheid mainly through short stories.[41]

This socio-politically tumultuous era inspired the next literary generation of Staffriders, which emerged in 1978 following the Soweto Youth Uprisings. It is at this time that Ndebele critiqued the black South African literature in his essay entitled "South African Writers Must Create New Insights" arguing it reflected a "descriptive documentation of suffering" that was not unwelcome but problematic in the manner in which the political theme was being dealt with.[42] Ndebele says:

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[37] L. Nkosi, "South African Literature: Resistance and the Crisis of Representation", South African Literature From Popular Culture to the Written Artefact. Second Conference South African literature. Evangelishe Akademie Bad Boll, 1987, pp. 11-13.
[38] Masilela, "Black South African Literature from the 'Sophiatown Renaissance' to 'Black Mamba Rising'", p.1-2.
[39] Ibid, p. 3.
[40] Ibid, p. 4.
[41] Ibid, p. 7.
[42] Ibid, p. 10.

> The bulk of fiction, through an almost total concern with the political theme, has in following this tradition, largely documented rather than explained. Not that the political theme itself is not valid, on the contrary it is worth exploring almost as a duty.[43]

Ndebele suggests that there should be a "deliberate breaking down of the obvious in order to reveal new possibilities of understanding and action." He calls this a "rediscovery of the ordinary," the ordinary here is defined in opposition to the spectacular, which Ndebele argues results in a work becoming a tiresome and intellectually barren read.[44] Rediscovering the ordinary alternatively would function as a "sobering of reality [and] forcing of attention on necessary detail," leading to "a significant growth of consciousness." In this manner the spectacular ceases being a symbol of identifying moral wrong and becomes a "direct object of change."[45] Yet it is precisely a revolutionary consciousness that is the driving force for change in To Every Birth Its Blood. It is the spectacle of the black mutilated body that has people wondering if there was anything else left to lose, (139) and the Movement changing its tactic to combative (Part II). Ndebele is well aware of Serote's work and notes its role in the emerging literature of its time:

> By rediscovering the ordinary, the stories remind us necessarily, that the problems of the South African social formation are complex and all embracing; that they cannot be reduced to a single, simple formulation. In fact, one novel has already attempted an infusion of the ordinary into the spectacle. Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* attempts to deal with the ordinary concerns of people while placing those problems within the broad political situation in the country. In the end, though, the spectacle takes over and the novel throws away the vitality of the tension generated by the dialectic between the personal and public.[46]

I beg the question in this research report whether it is not because of the way in which the public and private are deeply interrelated in the struggle against apartheid, that the spectacle enters the very fabric of black life silencing the ordinary? Furthermore, what possibilities does the predominant theme of silence open up to a reading of To Every Birth Its Blood?, and what is the nature of this silence?

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[43] Ibid, p. 10.
[44] N.S. Ndebele, "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa", in Journal of Southern African Studies, 12, (1986), p. 153.
[45] Ibid, p. 154.
[46] Ibid, p. 156.

In order to explore the different concerns implied in the central questions I have raised above, my argument in this paper proceeds as follows. In chapter one I delineate the modes of state oppression and violence under apartheid and its various manifestations, as well as its effects on the lives of black people as represented in To Every Birth Its Blood. The effects of violence are investigated through a reading of the stereotypes that justify the violence perpetuated on the body, state denials and secrecy, and the psychological effects this has on an individual, family and community. There is also an examination of survival, especially through acts of memory, imagination and self-consciousness.

Chapter two discusses the experiences of three generations under a government notorious for its human rights violations. These are traced and discussed through an engagement with Judith Lewis Herman's work on trauma and recovery. This chapter extends the consideration of forms of survival by paying attention to the ways in which, faced with an existential crisis, a community of individuals use recognition and acknowledgement of shared experiences of pain to continue hoping in the future for liberation and freedom as well as the furtherance of ordinary life itself. This reveals the paradoxical nature of silence in Serote's novels. It will be valuable at this stage to discuss what the author also silences in his narrative. Also investigated is how silence can be appropriated as a defensive tool as well as its contribution to healing and humanising a nation. I am also interested in to what extent women are depicted as custodians of tradition, comforters in trauma, and moral bench markers.

The theme of music as metaphoric of the journey to consciousness guides my discussion, in chapter three, of the aesthetics of the novel and how these help in negotiating and even transcending the forms of silence that are discussed in chapters one and two. The use of music as a mnemonic device is explored alongside its role in the build up to combative resistance. The suggestion is that once music has fulfilled its role of conscientising the individual, the Movement requires the individual to assimilate and take on the required role. This role is the discipline of combat, required of both men and women, in keeping the secrets that anchor underground work. I will consider the ways the Movement comes to appropriate and embody silence in ways that individuals fail to.

The concluding chapter acknowledges that literature plays a pertinent role in taking us (the readers) on journeys into intimate individual, and communal stories and experiences of pain felt over generations. The space that covers these narratives is silence. The various angles the chapters take will be outlined and what cannot be further said remains as such - unsaid.

Chapter One

Typologies of State Silence: Apartheid Instruments of Oppression

When Mongane Wally Serote wrote To Every Birth Its Blood he was in exile in Botswana, grappling with the realities of the aftermath of the June 1976 youth uprising in Soweto. This was a highly volatile era in South African history, marred by large scale arrests, violent public deaths, police brutality, detentions, unaccounted for deaths, disappearances and many people being exiled. It is significant to identify the historical point from which Serote starts the narrative, which he uses as the background of a very vulnerable moment in the lives of the oppressed, but also as one of South Africa's most historically celebrated and narrated moments.

The euphemistic phrase "days of Power"[47] referred to in the text are those surrounding and following the events of 16 June 1976 when the students of Soweto undertook an organized peaceful march against the state's requirement that public schools use Afrikaans as the medium of instruction from 1974. This silenced all other languages that students could be taught in, including their mother tongues. Overall, the uprising was a resistance to the Bantu Education Act of 1953; introduced in 1955 (129), designed specifically for black students as part of a system of indoctrination and regimentation, and entrenching an apartheid ideological framework in the guise of "Christian National Education" that provided an inferior education in contrast to that of their white counterparts. Writing in 1979 in the preface to Education for Barbarism, Patrick Ncube elucidates the aim of this Act; "the primary purpose of Bantu Education is not only to produce a docile black labour force, but also a labour force unable to perceive the social, political and economic contradiction" of "*baaskap*" (boss-ship) rule.[48] The infamous Prime Minister of South African grand Apartheid, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd who, until taking up office in 1958 was Minister of Native Affairs, articulated the rationale behind the policy he was the chief architect of in his Statement on Bantu Education in 1954:

> My Department's policy is that education should stand with both feet in the reserves and have its roots in the spirit and being of Bantu society. There Bantu Education must be able to give

[47] Serote uses the phrases "the Power days" and "the days of Power" interchangeable. I will use both these phrases from the text.
[48] I.B. Tabata, Education for Barbarism: Bantu (Apartheid) Education in South Africa, London: United Movement of South Africa. 1980, pp. 6; 11.

> its complete expression and there it will be called upon to perform its real service. There is no place for him in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour . . . for that reason it is of no avail for him to receive a training which has its main aim as absorption in the European community. Until now he has been subject to a school system which drew him away from his community and misled him by showing him the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze.[49]

It was against these words and the structures built around them that black South African students marched to Orlando Stadium in Soweto where the march was meant to culminate in a rally. The student uprising resulted in an onslaught on unarmed township students by state police who opened fire and shot the first of hundreds of victims that day. The image, in which Hector Pieterson is seen in the arms of fellow student, Mbuyisa Makhubo, and with Pieterson's sister screaming alongside them, has become the quintessential image of South African student resistance. These events inform many of the thematic concerns explored in To Every Birth Its Blood and the context against which the narrative should be read, yet the overt documentation of the violence of the uprisings is not directly presented to the reader. Presented in flashbacks, this volatile period remains strategically important as a definitive symbol of state violence and the suppression of resistance. As such 16 June 1976 is a historical period that has become part of the grand narrative of South Africa's history of oppression and resistance. Serote pursues the socio-political and economic sources of oppression that lead to this moment and the continuation of structural and other forms of violence in the aftermath of the bloodbath.

To Every Birth Its Blood is an anti-apartheid novel revolving around Tsietsi Molope, his nuclear and extended family, friends, his community of Alexandra and, by extension, the Black oppressed in South Africa. The text is set in two periods of grand apartheid, the first are the latter years of 1960 and early 1970 when we meet Tsi unemployed and living in Alexandra township. Tsi narrates his life predominantly through past memories of his childhood, adolescence and young adult life. His varied experiences as a black person under the rule of apartheid position Tsi against the apartheid system but also strongly illustrate his bonds and connections to a community of marginalised South Africans. The second period consists in the weeks after 16 June 1976. The force of resistance under the sway of black

[49] Statement by H.F. Verwoerd, "Bantu Education: Policy for the Immediate Future" Minister of Native Affairs, The Senate of the Parliament of the Union of South Africa, 7th June 1954.

youth takes a central position at this stage in the novel and the complex web of characters introduced earlier by Tsi move into modes of combat. The political activities of a group of young members of the Movement take us into a revolutionary atmosphere filled with detailed accounts of missions, deaths and operations in exile. The birth of a child on the final page of the novel is symbolic of the inevitable demise of the apartheid regime and ambiguous future of a liberated South Africa.

The Nature of Oppression: Space, Violence and Trauma

In essence, Serote humanises the ensuing battle from the "days of Power" to the subsequent months after the episode- taking the reader into the intricate lives of a township community of oppressed individuals, dissecting their daily experiences. The novel is initially narrated in the first person by the protagonist Tsietsi Molope who although born in Natal is resident in the township of Alexandra. A former journalist and aspiring photographer, we meet him working for Takalane[50] Black Theatre, and spiralling into alcoholism. After landing a job with an educational organization, McLean, he moves to Dube with his wife, Lily. The story then shifts into third person narration, with Tsi returning again towards the end, just before leaving for exile in Botswana. Tsi is our lens into the hardships, joys, struggles, pains, anxieties, fears, hopes and relationships of black South Africans in the late 70's and early 80's. Tsi's journey is presented through flashbacks, childhood memories, dreams and nightmares, making it difficult to trace a linear trajectory of Tsi's story. Each recollection or experience is enveloped by an immense pain, and the mood is that of melancholia as Tsi analogically weaves his life-story and that of the community.

In one of Tsi's earliest memories, he describes the suffering his family goes through during their eviction from Sophiatown:

> The police had been there, gun, dogs, saracens, trucks, bulldozers, everything that spelled the defeat of all those people, who after they realised that Sophiatown was the only choice they had to build a home, raise children and come to when they were weary, set to build it with all their strength. The bulldozers had come, and wiped their homes off the face of the earth. (51)

[50] I am inclined to think this is the Tshivenda word for 'be happy', correctly spelt Takalani.

Tsi grows up with a range of anxieties and the hardships stemming from living in Sophiatown with his mother and father. As a child he says:

> I used to sit next to the stove, on the floor, dreaming, looking at my mother as she was preparing food for us, listening to my father as he talked to her; I had feared, cried, and wondered with them about all that was happening. (51)

These emotions form part of the daily life of the family. Subsequent to the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 the family spend hours each day engrossed in the daily paper searching for names of those lost or injured in the shooting. Tsi clearly recalls:

> I remember how, every night, after Sharpeville, we used to sit, my brother, my father, my mother, all of us reading what happened in Sharpeville, and looking, waiting to know if we could recognise names from the long list of the dead and the injured. Every night we did that. (51)

Tsi's psyche is shaped by such tortured childhood memories and his mental disposition is framed by the creation and destruction of black spaces in and around the city of Johannesburg.

The history of the creation of townships was part of the blueprint of what the Johannesburg city would become, from a major mining centre at the onset of its creation, to a fully apartheid city, and beyond that. Keith Beavon outlines a map of the early city as follows:

> By 1904 the geographical foundations of modern Johannesburg were complete. The functional zones of the central business area were in place. The east-west separation of those less well-off English- and Afrikaans- speaking white residents was drawn. The social parting of the southern suburbs by the arcs of mining land was distinct. The lower-density northern suburbs, radiating out from Parktown Ridge, were already staked out for the upper-income groups. The African people not already 'locked up' in mine compounds had been placed in a

> Location beyond the municipal boundary, and the other dark-skinned minorities were tolerated provided they remained in tightly defined ghettoes and in the servants' quarters of white households.[51]

At a time when so-called non-whites where growing in numbers in a city that required their labour, the Peace of Vereeniging Act[52] ensured all its "white" "full" citizens the benefit of living in the city through the right to vote, while excluding all other races from this privilege. The demolition of Sophiatown was a harsh example of the helpless position of the oppressed who could not possess any land and so could be torn from it at the whim of a government intolerant of black presence. Another such township, Alexandra, where most of the first part of the narrative is set, and where Tsi's family is relocated to, is described as such in the novel:

> Alexandra is a creation of schizophrenics like Jan Smuts; it is a makeshift place of abode, a township - that is, black people live here. Live here only if the whims of the Verwoerds are still stable to that end. (26)

The juxtaposition between Alexandra and Johannesburg gives a clear image of the disparity between the two and a sense of the unequal position of black people as against that of South Africa's "white" citizens:

> Alexandra is one of the oldest townships in South Africa, it is closely related to Johannesburg. From the centre of the Gold City to the centre of the Dark City is a mere nine miles. Where one starts the other ends, and where the one ends, the other begins. The difference between the two is like day and night. Everything that says anything about the progress of man, the distance which man has made in terms of technology, efficiency and comfort: the Golden City says it well; the Dark City, by contrast, is dirty and deathly. The Golden City belongs to the white people of South Africa, and the Dark City to the black people. (25)

The apartheid state created the spaces of black living, places of planned obsolescence where black people would forever yearn for better and reach points of alienation and resistance when these yearnings were frustrated by the limitations imposed upon them. Not only is one

[51] K. Beavon, Johannesburg- the Making and Shaping of the City, University of South Africa Press, Pretoria, 2004, pp. 78- 79.
[52]This act signified the end of the Second Boer war in 1902 between the South African Republic and the Republic of the Orange Free State, on the one side, and the British Empire on the other.

built against the other, the lives lived in each segregated space speak of the level at which oppression penetrates into the very fabric of social life and relations. The architecture of apartheid is structural, legal, social, economic, political, and personal:

> The Saturdays and Sundays of Alexandra roar, groan and rumble, like a troubled stomach. The same days in Johannesburg are as silent as the stomach of a dead person. The weekdays of Alexandra are those of a place which has been erased; in Johannesburg, week days are like a time when thousands of people arrive in a place at the end of their pilgrimage - nothing is still, the streets buzz. (25)

Alexandra, pushed to the margins of South African society, is crawling with police to keep its residents confined to the township lest they overspill into the white city spaces. Heavily armed police often turned each attack on the oppressed into a public spectacle and the private space of the home got turned into a place of confrontation. Hence the private becomes a space for public and private resistance. Thus, the distinction between the public and private spaces belonged only to those white citizens who could claim a private space at all, sheltered from the state, and a public space, where they could openly engage with the state protected by a set of civil rights that facilitated the contact between the 'private' individual and the 'public' state.

Working together with the ordering of space and the movement of black people was the politics of racial categorizations.[53] The distorted logic of race classification under the apartheid Population Act of 1950 is saturated with and sustained through the creation of racist stereotypes. The stereotypes, in turn, work against the racial "othered" by proffering 'rationalized' arguments "for psychosexual fear, economic or social disparities; for cultural exclusion; or for political entitlement."[54] These stereotypes work in a system of classification that is based on the need to epistemologically place phenomena into categories of value. David Theo Goldberg explains:

[53] I am drawing on David Theo Goldberg's elaborations on race: "The concept of race crept into European language in the fifteenth century, and its scientific and popular usage peaked in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries...racism is generally considered to be discrimination against others in virtue of their putatively different racial membership...The various redefinitions of race, and transformations in the technologies of racial classification and recognition partially reflect and are reflected in the differing forms assumed by racism since Enlightenment" D. T. Goldberg, "The Social Formation of Racist Discourses", in Anatomy of Racism, D. T. Goldberg (ed), University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1990, p. 295.
[54] Ibid, p. 297.

> The impulse to classify data goes back to at least Aristotle. Yet classification is established as a fundament of scientific methodology only as function of the "*esprits simplistes*" of the seventeenth century and Enlightenment. With its catalogues, indices, and inventories, classification establishes an ordering of data; it thereby furnishes systematicity to observation. Yet it claims also to reflect the natural order of things. As such, this ordering of representations always presupposes value: Nature ought to be as it is; it cannot be otherwise. The seemingly naked body of pure facts is veiled in value.[55]

The black body is thus degraded through the principle of gradation within a racial hierarchy that deems it as inferior in skin colour, shape, size, height, features, hair texture, et cetera. The overriding notion, ultimately, is that the body becomes representative of the value placed on a race's presumed rationality, philosophy, aesthetics and religion.

In a country where the horrors committed on black people are sanctioned through the above ideology, the most accessible outlet of frustration is directed at the very same oppressed black person who is within closest reach. Algerian psychologist Frantz Fanon, writing on the self-destructive consequences of an oppressed people who internalize victimization and are confined to defined spaces, observes that:

> The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people. This is the period when niggers beat each other up and the police and magistrate do not know which way to turn when faced with the astonishing waves of crimes [...] While the settler or the policeman has the right the livelong day to strike the native, to insult him and make him crawl to them, you will see the native reaching for his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive glance cast on him by another native; for the last resort of the native is to defend his personality vis- á-vis his brother.[56]

The township, built to separate and exclude its black residents from the larger city, is heavily monitored and controlled by not only the state police who constantly harass people for permit payments but also, township gangsters. The police spontaneously open fire in the streets, claiming the lives of black people at will, but equally dangerous are those within the township who contribute to its violent nature. In attempting to recollect his thoughts on his

[55] Ibid, p. 301.
[56] F. Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, Constance Farrington, Trans. New York: Grove Press. 1968, p. 52-54.

past Tsi admits, “My memory of Alexandra, as I knew it when I was very young, is sharp and blunt and sharp,” (26) and goes on to describe this opaque, and at times vivid, picture as follows:

> Alexandra was pitch dark at night in those days. And there were the Spoilers who made sleeping a terrible inconvenience. I do not know how the Spoilers broke down doors, but they did, and then they took everything; wardrobes and the clothes in them, tables, money, even lives. They were feared. There were the Msomis, equally brutal, more efficient and better organised. The Spoilers and the Msomis brought the movies out of the movie houses into the streets of Alexandra, for real, guns, blood and all. There were the police. They came on horseback, in fast cars, in huge trucks, and shot for real; they came in Saracens and with machine guns and banged on doors, shouting ‘Afrika, Afrika’. Alexandra met them in song, rallies and demonstrations. There were beer raids. The pass raids. (26)

At the centre of the multiple horrors depicted in this passage is the black body, ordered, restricted, controlled, and exposed to incessant violence. It is in this sense that the apartheid regime worked through racist institutions that incorporated formative principles and spatial architecture whose social functions served to perpetuate the beliefs and acts of racism through daily encounters of alienation and violence.

Tsi, though, is no stranger to violence, having been involved in a violent gang as a teenager, an involvement that took the life of a member, Lekeleke, and had Tsi sent to Lesotho, rendering him absent from the streets of Alexandra for a year (94;60;61). Tsi tries to avoid such violence once he comes back, to the extent that he refuses to acknowledge it. As he walks the streets of Alexandra at nightfall with his friend Moipone, they witness a man being killed and Moipone feels the need to investigate. The following conversation ensues:

> ‘They killed him,’ Moipone said at last. ‘Let’s go see.’
>
> ‘You want to eat him?’ I said, becoming angry.
>
> ‘No, but maybe we know him.’
>
> ‘Fuck it, if we knew him, we should have gone to him before they killed him.’ (8)

Turning his back on the violence, Tsi initially adopts the tactic of avoidance, yet this does not make the horror non-existent, nor does it keep either of the two friends safe from harm, Moipone himself is later murdered by Lucky, someone known to Tsi. (113)

Ordering Oppression: The Language of Emotion

Tsi's experiences as a township child, adolescent, and adult, continue to be informed by his social position (and that of all black people he knows and knew) in relation to the system of apartheid. The vulnerable inscription of those oppressed, who face state sanctioned assaults by the police, is the fabric that weaves black daily experiences. In our first encounter with Tsi he is dealing with the anguish stemming from the disappearance of a loved one. His brother, Fix, is in jail after being caught by the police in their usual ruthless hunts for any members suspected of involvement in the Movement against the apartheid state. Tsi grapples with the state's refusal to provide the family with information on Fix's detention under the Terrorism Act of 1967. He says to Kgoli, the shebeen queen's daughter, who is surprised at Tsi's inability to answer a series of questions on Fix's imprisonment: "I have no way of knowing, no one can ask, see, or talk to anybody about him. That is the law he is arrested under." (32) Realising the totalitarian nature of the state and its institutions, especially the Special Branch, Tsi's thoughts take him into fits of anxiety; "Fix, shit, what was happening to him. All the stories I read, all the tragic stories about political detainees falling from stairs, jumping out of the windows, committing suicide under strange circumstances, were unleashed, they flashed past me and I wondered where Fix was." (32) Indeed one of the apartheid governments' deadliest weapons against people was its refusal to make information available on where detained people were held; what they were charged with; what conditions they were detained under, and what had happened to them. As Judith Herman notes in her work on trauma and recovery; "Secrecy and silence are the perpetrators first line of defence."[57] What this did was to force family members and loved ones into a perpetual state of anxiety with questions that tormented their imaginations as to whether a member "picked up" (77) was still alive. This included always avoiding mention of the absent relative's name:

[57] J. L. Herman, Trauma and Recovery: from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror, Basic Books, 1992, p.8.

> All of us, in conversation whipped up by the glimmer in my mother's eyes, had come to accept that Fix's name was a way of refreshing an unhealing wound [...] The only hopeful news about Fix we read from the eyes and faces of the Special Branch, who now and then came to ask for a pair of trousers, or for Fix's middle name, or mine, or Ndo's or my father's, or to say: 'Your son got mixed up with communists; punishment for that is severe.' That meant that Fix was still alive. (112)

The apartheid regime worked under what Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan calls "structural violence" which he describes as:

> the most lethal form of violence because it is the least discernible, it causes premature deaths in the largest number of persons; and it presents itself as the natural order of things [...] it fosters institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal violence ... [and] pervades the prevailing values, the environmental, social relations, and individual psyche.[58]

As Herman perceptively states; "the more powerful the perpetrator, the greater is his prerogative to name and define reality, and the more complete his arguments prevail."[59]

Another example that supports such perspective relates to the character John, the manager of 'one day dry cleaners' in the township and a close friend of Tsi. When John ruminates on the absurdity of the state's proclamation that it was not in a state of crisis and that it had everything under control, he knows that this is what drove many he knew to madness:

> in those days when some of his countrymen had gone mad. He had listened to the Prime Minister say that people who thought there was a crisis in South Africa were out of their minds. John wept that day [...] many, many people were dying because there was no crisis in his country. (136)

What is striking here is the dismissive language that denies the truth of oppression. It is

[58] H. A. Bulhan, Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression, Plenum Press, New York, 1985, p. 155.
[59] Herman, Trauma and Recovery, p. 8.

illustrated in the novel not only at the level of the state, but similarly, such illusionary propaganda also filters down to the language of ordinary citizens of the state who assume the roles prescribed by the state. In her article "Affective States," Ann Stoler draws attention to the politics and social consequences that result from the emotional dimensions that are most often brushed over or ignored in colonial historiography. She suggests that when racism and atrocities are sanctioned by the state, each member on the side of the dominant and ideologically superior race attaches to them not only justifications of economy and necessary evil. They go further and in fact engage in "sensory regimes" embedded in "feelings" and "attachments" that allow for a "disaffection" towards the ideological inferior.[60] Stoler draws from anthropologist Janis Jenkins' theory "that states do more than control emotional discourse, they attempt to 'culturally standardise the organization of feeling' and produce as well as harness emotional discourses within it."[61] When Tsi and the lift man, "an insane racist" (105) share the lift, the racial confrontation between them is embedded with emotion and hatred: "His job, as a white South African, was to remind me that I am a kaffir, and I had taken it upon myself to remind him he was a settler." (103) Both have been educated by the state on "the proper distribution of sentiment and desire."[62] This conflict goes further than the conduct between Tsi and the lift attendant, it also permeates a conversation with his white colleague who is in the lift with them. To Tsi's contempt, his colleague gets into a heated argument with the lift man on his behalf, "perhaps thinking I was speechless, as kaffirs should be" (130); they "went on, like fire and grass in rage and destruction, talking about me, about what one should say about or to me."(103) Each white person takes it upon themselves to express deeply, the correct conduct or language to speak in. Stoler observes: "Sentiment mattered not because it was in conflict with reason but because it demanded specific sorts of reason that indicated social knowledge of expectations and a rich evaluative vocabulary of social critique."[63] An "affected" apartheid regime operated at the most intimate level with its "white" citizens and "black" non-citizens regulating, at the most basic level, emotional relations between and amongst the races.

A Mapping of the Mechanisms of Oppression

In trying to come to terms with the precarious and dangerous position of black people, and their desire for emancipation from apartheid, black people drew on Black Consciousness.

[60] A. L. Stoler, "Affective States", in A Companion to the Anthropology of Politics, J. Vincent and D. Nugent (eds), Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 9.
[61] Ibid, p. 9.
[62] Ibid. p.9.
[63] Ibid. p. 9.

Serote draws on Black Consciousness and gives us what Clingman calls a "deeply historical" narrative, offering a "specific kind of historical evidence, allowing a particular kind of history to be written."[64] Black Consciousness became known as a movement devoted to conscientising the youth who were faced with a dire situation. The complex process to creating a committed consciousness faced many challenges, especially in moments when resistance meets a fierce state. Clingman articulates this in the following excerpt:

> Whereas the dominant impression of Black Consciousness was one of assertion- of the confident achievement of dignity through the liberation of the black psyche and of a return to black cultural roots- the poetry shows the devastatingly honest self-inspection of vulnerability and wounding by oppression, the knowledge of which, it seems, had to preface any revival.[65]

The process involving the "knowledge" of "vulnerability" is confronted by Black Consciousness through the understanding that "The word black, which until then was synonymous with devil, was prefixed with 'I am ...' and suffixed with 'I am on my own.'" (113) This necessitated knowing one's past, since "somehow it seems important to know where you came from, what happened; it seems important to link you to the present, so you can order the future, which is supposedly built for you." (50) This we can say, arises from a thought linked to the question Boykie poses as he and Tsi are pulled over a second time by the police: "What the hell do we do when things are like this?" (71) After Boykie and Tsi have suffered assault by officers for witnessing a police murder on the side of the road from Hammanskraal, Tsi narrates:

> He [Boykie] said that with a controlled voice. It was a voice saturated with memories, a voice brimful of and spilling with despair, it was a voice determined to live, determined to die if need be, if indeed the cycle would be broken, once and for all. Again, the lights of the car behind us glowed on our heads, casing shadows before us, pushing the darkness ahead of us, only slowly as in a controlled death, a death meant to teach the victim all that is intrinsic in pain, in suspense, in uncertainty. (71)

[64] S. Clingman, "Literature and History in South Africa", in Radical History Review, vol. 46, 1990, p. 156.
[65]Clingman, Ibid, p. 156.

With no knowledge of what the next moment held for them, Tsi says:

> We were lost in the night, and the drama of our time was this time set again. It was not just another story to be written and submitted at some headline. It was us who were the issue of the drama, of the vicious hatred white people have managed to have against black people. (70)

This hate culminates in a "display of power" meant to instil fear in Tsi and Boykie who are "beaten to submission," to a point where they are unable to identify themselves or identify with one another. (72; 66) The history of this repetition over generations has Boykie saying:

> You know that it is only in our memory that this is our land. We imagine that we have a home, we know that in reality, if there was a quick way that these settlers could wipe us out, they would, and if they did not need our labour they would. (78)

Boykie and Tsi's acknowledgment of their vulnerability goes further. A necessary level of self-introspection is presented by Boykie. Although he sees the importance of the principles of Black Consciousness thought Boykie is the greatest critic of the Organisation. He pinpoints early in the text the necessity for Black Consciousness to expand beyond only conscientising the individual to taking up the future task of rallying the oppressed masses behind influential leaders:

> What I am saying is that no matter what comes, or rather, who comes and professes to be with the people in fighting for our rights, they have to convince this whole nation that they have the power to do so [...] 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. (66)

It is clear from this passage that the knowledge and education about the history of oppression or self-affirmation is not enough, people need to be mobilised into a movement of resistance, if there is to be any change from the current situation that is increasingly made difficult by

men such as Lerato, a Bantustan chief, who chooses "this lovely package" (62) given him by Verwoerd.[66] Lerato who allows himself to be "used [...] at the expense of a whole people" (62) thus becoming a "sell-out", is said to have "the past to back him that we will never succeed [...] the jails tell that story, death lists, even the graveyards can tell that story very well." (65) Boykie reminds Tsi: "The reason why those people, the old ladies, are crawling is not that they are afraid of him, they are aware of the power behind him." (65) Tackling the creation of Bantustans and the increasing support given to them by homeland chiefs thus required a movement that would complement the Black Consciousness philosophies advocated by Boykie.

Another such critic of the Black Consciousness championed by the youth is freedom fighter and intellectual Michael Ramono, whose daughter Dikeledi has worked tirelessly "for the right to talk about blacks, not 'non - whites'" (203) in South African newspapers. Her father's unwelcome response to what she prides herself in, is a cautionary note to the youth: "I want you to understand that colour here must not be the issue. Once we get to understand that, then we can talk on, but I am afraid that you have put too much emphasis on the colour question." (203) Serote was quite aware of the importance of not blurring the line between hate and race. This is apparent in the following interview with Charles Villa- Vicencio and Mills Soko:

> He [Serote] recalls being in Botswana in 1980 and hearing a report on the morning news bulletin of armed ANC operatives holding 65 white hostages in a Silverton Bank in Pretoria. The ANC, in its submission to the TRC in 1998, indicated that when the armed guerrillas were confronted by the police "on their way to carry out a mission" they took refuge in the bank. According to witnesses, the ANC cadres informed the hostages that they had no intention of harming them, while explaining that the police were likely to storm the bank. When it happened, it left two hostages and three ANC cadres dead. Serote reflects back on this incident where, he explains, the importance of discipline was instilled in him. "It

[66] The creation of Bantustans came from the unilateral decision by the apartheid government to implement the concept of separate development in the early 60's. The creation of Bantustans was delineated according to ethnic categorisation. The idea was that the black population was made up of "nations" and that each was entitled to an independent homeland with citizens, a level of autonomous power was given to the chief as well as an allocated budget. In addition to displacing people from their homes, cutting them off from significant rituals like those linked to family and communal shrines, the land encampments amounting to 13 per cent of the countries rural land were largely unsuitable for agriculture and were meant to hold a population that amounted to seventy per cent of South Africa's diverse cultural groups.

> reminded me of the height of the bar of responsibility that I had as a soldier and the importance of an oath I had taken while undergoing training as a guerrilla fighter, never to kill white people simply because they were white… I thought of my grandmother, remembering her warning that I should never allow the poison of vengeance to enter me. The Silverton incident motivated me to recommit myself only to use weapons in pursuit of a new consciousness within which the dignity and rights of all South Africans would be respected. I resolved that day never to lose sight of this bigger and nobler objective. It was this that took me increasingly into the sphere of arts, culture and the use of language as a vehicle for changing the mindset of a nation."[67]

The devotion by Serote to this understanding of non-racialism shifts the struggle in the novel from an elimination of oppression purely at a racial level to envisioning a humanised South African. Serote's work does not only wish to present the realities of black life at the time but more than this: it scrutinises this world from the vantage point of one who is experimenting with the novel genre. The path to consciousness the nation goes through in Serote's narrative is not simply through depicting a black oppressed people moving from a space of complete victimisation to an awareness of the necessity to free themselves from an oppressive and dehumanising state system; it is in fact a complex process. What makes undertaking such a task all the more difficult is the distance from which Serote wrote - in exile.

Imaginative Flight: Trauma and Memory

The two part novel can be read as one part weaving into the other instead of as a disjointed thought process, where one is abruptly halted and the other comes in to try and make sense of ruptured time for a people thrown into unprecedented violence.[68] Rather, we can consider the fractured time in Serote's narrative as representative of the unreliable nature of memory. This is clearly identified by Tsi when he says "memory is an unreliable mirror. It shifts and shifts, now and then emphasising the dramatic, now and then leaving out details, now and then flushing out details at surprising moments." (26) Memories are interspersed in many flashbacks and nightmares of Tsi's time in solitary confinement. When he visits Tshidi soon after his release from prison and she shakes him from a dream, screaming, after revisiting his

[67] C. Villa-Vicencio, M. Soko, "Mongane Wally Serote Poet, Soldier Healer", in Conversations in Transition: Leading South African Voices, C. Villa-Vicencio, M. Soko (eds), David Philip, Cape Town, 2012, pp. 244-245.
[68] Visser, "Fictional Projects and the Irruption of History", p. 67.

time lying on the "floor of shame and eyes that had pierced me, pushing me into accepting that I belong to shame, by pulling my balls, almost tearing them off." (92) Locked in this nightmare, Tsi is reduced to impotence, feeling emasculated he says Tshidi sees "how hollow of a man I am." (92) The unreliable nature of memory coupled with the daily experiences of victimization by black South Africans makes a complete water tight narrative almost impossible, irrespective of the conscious deliberation of it pursued by the author or not.

We need here to also factor in that Serote is writing from exile where the experiences he pens are based on second-hand accounts drawn from newspapers and testimonies. It is these second-hand accounts that he had to organise into a logically coherent narrative. He says of the distinction between writing a novel and a poem:

> Poetry can be condensed and the writer can use imagery very extensively, which means you can remain obscure, perhaps unclear, but give a feel of what you want to say and it can be identified. But while you can do that with a novel, in truth it cannot be recognised as a novel. A novel depends a lot on logic, on creating a logical process of development.[69]

Writing a novel, then requires the ability to reveal clearly the difficulty of illustrating a full picture of a narrative fragmented by nationwide traumatic moments in the "days of Power". The events Serote is removed from physically will certainly be blurred and will need imagining in a way that is not beholden to 'realism' or linearity. Part of what Serote does from his distant position is to come up with imaginative ways of handling capture and torture by the state, something he was not unfamiliar with, after having been in solitary confinement for nine months, himself.

Despite the value Serote gives Black Consciousness, he does not forsake the real individual battles of those who come into direct contact with the official authorities of the state and the psychological effects oppression had on the black psyche. This is despite his belief that the achievement of conscious thought is meant to free the oppressed from the imagined space imposed and defined for them. When hours after Boykie has uttered the anguish of their

[69] See K. Sole, "This Time Set Again", p. 4. Sole takes this from M. W. Serote, "Serote: a tough tale". New Nation, 1988, pp. 1-7.

vulnerability and Tsi lies beaten, broken and humiliated in a prison cell outside Pretoria; Tsi evokes the imagination and memory as weapons of survival in an attempt to claim his humanity back from the clutches of apartheid's cruel manifestations.

In a state of unconsciousness Tsi reaches out to his imagination. His flight clothes itself in the apparition of his grandmother and the words she pronounces to him:

> Child you must know, in the darkness of your past, where you came from, and in the faint future where you are going, that you were issued by lions which bathed in the fire that made the lightning, that dared the clouds to join and curl into the blood of man, that you were like the plants, so merged with the soil, and water, and wind, and the sun and the moon, that your past is so scattered, nothing could hold it, that you have a future to build...One day you will have to remember that you are alone, among other people, and that you have a journey to make. (73-74)

Toni Morrison reminds us that what is important is "to dwell on why [the memory] appeared in that particular way."[70] The consciousness Tsi's grandmother opens for him allows Tsi to come to grips with the "journey" he now has to take. It is in this state, which is almost impossible to comprehend, that those who experience trauma need to have a past to claim as their own; a past that protects them from the prospect of annihilation. Herman explains that the greatest threat and fear resulting from a traumatic experience is that in the moment of trauma one faces the loss of a past, making it inaccessible in the present. She draws from the Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry a definition of psychological trauma that it is a feeling of "intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation."[71] The voice of Tsi's grandmother anchors him and makes him responsible for his continued existence.

Herman continues that "traumatic reactions occur when action is of no avail." In that moment, "when neither resistance nor escape is possible, the human system of self-defence becomes overwhelm[ed] and disorganised."[72] The power of the imagination meets its greatest challenge here, where the body is unable to appropriate its basic instincts to protect itself. The

[70] T. Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing", in Thought, 59, December (1984), p. 385.
[71] Herman, Trauma and Recovery, p. 33.
[72] Ibid, p. 34.

imagination creates a self-defence that re-imagines a self that existed before the trauma. To fight the prospect of annihilation, the past is summoned and retold within a specific narrative of reaffirmation and re-creation to protect Tsi from complete extermination. The past, the present, and what is to come in the future, are collapsed into this one horror and, for Tsi, it is in this collapsed time and space that it is revealed where he stands, "scattered" (73), and to collect his past he has to take the "journey" (74) forward, as does every black oppressed person, who realises s/he is "alone" (74). It is only once s/he sets forth on this journey that s/he will be able to find those s/he must take the journey with.

Another example of the power of imagination and memory presents itself in the relationship between John and his lover Nolizwe. There is little we are told of John besides the biographical sketch Tsi gives us, and when the narrative turns to focus on him, his relationship with Nolizwe is already a memory, cut abruptly by her death. John recalls watching her from behind the veranda pillar on the day she was shot:

> Her gait became distorted, she slowed, twisted this and that way from the impact of the bullets which were piercing her body; she spread her arms, and then she stood very, very awkwardly in the middle of the street, alone, face to face with the killers, and like a sack, she went down head first, face into the earth, and was still. (136)

John's memories of Nolizwe are most vivid when he moves within spaces and occasions where he "looked into the eyes of people who knew him and used to know Nolizwe." (137) While delivering the dry cleaned clothes to his customers, the streets he drives through resurface images of her death. The memory of Nolizwe is alive and even interactive in John's imagination, when he wills her presence into being. Helplessly missing her, he believes his heart has turned to "steel" making him assume the character of a deadly man. This is where his imagination takes over and he imagines Nolizwe laughing at him and soothing his heart with her wit as she responds, "How can you be helpless when you are deadly?" (138) Memory is, in this moment, linked to the imagination in an empowering relation. Morrison tells us "memory (and the deliberate act of remembering) is a form of willed creation."[73] The pitfall of loneliness from the loss of a loved one becomes the very space where the wings of imagination grow and fly from the previous void of silence.

[73]Morrison, "Memory, Creation and Writing", p. 358.

Although the memory and the imagination are formidable weapons for the individual, the greatest threat posed is the inability to tell the story of suffering and pain. In the case of Tsi he is unable to gain an audience to share his humiliation. Martin Kopf tells us that "traumatic memory urges its own narration."[74] In the process, the "dialectic of trauma" arises, where there is "conflict between the desire to tell and the will to deny."[75] When Boykie and Tsi part after a week in jail together, Boykie "said nothing, just took out his bag and left." This makes Tsi feel "terrified by my aloneness, among the many many people...feeling betrayed."(97) This is the betrayal of one who, because of their shared shame, finds it difficult to recognise another and their collective experience of trauma and suffering. Where Tsi had wished to tell Lily everything he had gone through, "Now I could not bear to relate what had happened to anyone. It was my secret." (97) Tsi's traumatic experience is not so much a hovering horror because he does not recollect what happened, but because he does not have an audience to relate his tale to. What Tsi "experiences is a biological level" of trauma yet the articulation of this experience requires a transcendence from the biological to the narrative.[76]

John on the other hand has an audience but refuses to open up and talk openly about Nolizwe's death. "If ever anyone dared to talk John made it clear that that had nothing to do with him."(144) Dikeledi is lead to interpret John's unwillingness to speak as self-pity, and asks "if John thought the other people, who had also lost loved ones, did not feel the pain too. Why, they went on with everyday business. Besides, it was not healthy to be so quiet."(144) She does not pose this remark directly to John though but asks it of their friend Vuki, in this manner acknowledging the impossibility of expecting John to carry on as if the loss had not occurred. Indeed everyday he is in the streets of Alexandra he relives the issues of the "days of Power" that made the life of Nolizwe and many like her so easily disposable, forcing him to find a way to live with Nolizwe's death. The violent encounter that silences Tsi takes us back to a realisation of the reality he was already aware of from the opening of the narrative that "another time was coming when we would have to be in the streets again."(1) John knows that, "One day they would have to talk about Nolizwe" even though "now they never did."(144)

[74] M. Kopf, "Trauma, Narrative and the Art of Witnessing", in Slavery in Art and Literature: Approaches to Trauma, Memory and Visuality, B. Haehnel, and M. Ulz, (eds), Frank and Timme, 2005, p. 48.
[75] Ibid, p. 48.
[76] J. Mitchell, "Trauma, Recognition, and the Place of Language", in Diacritics, 28, (1998), p. 124.

Chapter Two

Consequences of Being Silenced

The previous chapter explored the tactics used by the state to break the oppressed and to impose forms of silence upon them. The discussion will now shift to considering the more ambiguous and paradoxical experiences of distinct forms of silence amongst members of the black community, especially those across generations. I will investigate how silence is used by the older generation to shield the youth who are meant to usher South Africa into war and ultimately a revolution. The deliberate act of remaining silent or withholding specific painful experiences requires some consideration of the implicit vulnerabilities in relationships across generations. Such vulnerability is implied in Kevin Quashie's notion of the quiet that I will use in my concluding reflections on the crisis of interiority that is visible within the intimate relationships between characters and generations in the text.

The Contours of Paradox

What is passed down from one generation to another are hopes, fears and an unknown future. These are informed by various forms of courage, betrayal and protection respectively. In the novel the allotted site where two generations meet is the graveyard where the young and old bury their loved ones. Making his way to this grandfather's grave on a Sunday morning Tsi observes:

> Women, some in fresh black mourning clothes; all of us, for some reason, wearing casual clothes- men trying to walk straight, holding spades and rakes; children, forever children; now and then playing, now having to follow the elders, now being scolded; families holding to each other by freshening the graves of their beloved, weeding the sides of the graves, a hymn, a desperate prayer, whispers, the wind, the silence of the dead. (11)

A strong sense of community is forged in this space where sounds meet silence, where the living reconcile the pain of living in "desperate prayer" with the deceased. We could think of the cemetery as what Foucault calls heterotopias which are existing spaces imagined or

created as "absolutely different from all sites that they reflect and speak about"[77] and mirroring a shared utopia. There are five principles that define heterotopias: (1) they appear in various forms within all societies (i.e., crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation), (2) heterotopias serve a very specific historical function and, depending on the synchrony of the society in which they occur, can have one or another function determined by the required use of the heterotopias, (3) "the heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several sites that are in themselves incompatible", (4) heterotopias are linked to an absolute break in traditional time creating their counterpart heterochrony, and lastly (5) heterotopias are predominantly exclusive and require rites of passage for those who enter them.[78] Principles two and four are directly connected with the site of the graveyard. In relation to the text the cemetery functions both as a meeting point away from the volatile violence unleashed in both public and private spaces of black life, and it also breaks from the everyday stringent times people's lives are ordered through (that is, times that they should be at work and when they are to be out of the city and back in the township). The silence of the cemetery creates a tranquil mood which evokes the presence of what cannot be seen:

> The silence here is graceful. The silence sounds like the song of the birds, of trees, of the wind; something about the silence of this place suggests, makes one suspect that God, or maybe the dead, are looking at one, listening to one, about to talk to one, just about to do it - but they never do. (11)

The first time we hear of Fix is when Tsi is at the gravesite, asking his grandfather if he knows about Fix and where he is. In a sense Tsi is trying to find a way of asking himself this question, to have the conversation he keeps at bay through his drinking escapades. The quiet graveyard, away from the township of Alexandra that looks like a gravesite itself, affords Tsi space to reflect, yet this leads to his internal struggle. This "other city"[79] of quiet death unsettles Tsi who has come to find ways of negotiating a space for himself amongst the crammed spaces of the township. The noisy township of struggle and violence where Fix comes from is juxtaposed with death which transmits sounds from what we could call nature's musical instruments. Morose and unable to go further than simply seeking answers to the question of Fix's disappearance, Tsi is caught between fighting his thoughts and pulling himself out of his alcoholism. The unfamiliar peaceful quiet meets his questioning,

[77] M. Foucault, "Of Other Spaces", in Diacritics, 16, (1989), p. 24.
[78] Ibid, p. 24- 26.
[79] I am referring here to the graveyard. Ibid, p. 25.

the answers of which remain in an inaccessible heterotopia. The stillness depicted in this excerpt suggests that anyone who listens to it can begin to hear more than just audible sounds. Tsi senses this but is unable to reach this stillness. The inability is embodied in the words "just about to," almost able to find stillness. Yet, Tsi remains caught up in the turmoil of the noisy life of Alexandra. The stillness that could have offered Tsi an alternative avenue to his opaque and restless thoughts is instead offered in words of courage meant for Fix, by "the old man Zola" (17) as they both walk back into the streets of the township. The old man warns of the difficulty of the journey that lies ahead for the youth:

> Son, your brother is in great trouble, he must be a man to be able to meet the demands of that place. They will break him, many were broken there, young men, their heads were broken forever. Children should not play there. (14-15)

The late 70's and early 80's were a time characterized by great fear and terror caused by the apartheid regime, when the ideology and system of apartheid entered a serious historical crisis and began to disintegrate. Then, the regime held on for dear life and fought its last bloody battles with the people of South Africa. Though speaking before this time, the old man is warning Tsi of what lies ahead. Fix is later sentenced to imprisonment on Robben Island and we are given no indication of the length of sentence he is to serve there. By relaying these words to Tsi, the old man Zola is passing down knowledge of the struggles of his generation. The supremacist 'white' men who have taken hold of the country and the violent extents to which they will go to crush those they fear will only intensify. The jail colloquially called the "cooler" where Fix is held is a reminder of instilled fear through torture and long periods in solitary confinement. The valiant battle against a brutal system is met head on in the prison, a place where people are "broken forever."

The old man Zola is unable to reveal his own experience in prison to Tsi as he would be unable to understand the meaning of it. Instead he offers Tsi a symbol of hope, fruit bought from a horse-drawn cart. He says: "Chew this. It must be sweet, oranges are good for your health," deferring sharing his experience of imprisonment with Tsi. (17) The hope is that the old man Zola will never have to share this unmentionable experience with Tsi.

The old man Zola's unwillingness to speak of his torture at the hands of his interrogators creates a definitive distance between him and Tsi. This manifests itself as the unmentionable, a silence. On the one hand we can read such silence as social death. On the other hand, this space of the unspoken is characteristic of ambiguity, that is, the ambiguity of paradox. To consider the former; Pablo Neruda's poem *the Word* [80] traces the etymology of language and expression through metaphors of blood and the word or the spoken: "The word/ was born in the blood, / grew in the dark body, beating, / and took flight through the lips and the mouth." The power of speaking is illustrated as greater than the force of nature "thunder" and its impact on life is an immense "cataract" of never ending "falls," travelling through generations and across lands. The word is the human race's "inheritance," the "wavelength which connects us." As words take on meaning "Everything was births and sounds-/ affirmation, clarity, strength, / negation, destruction, death" and the word embodies the essence of life as the "hereditary goblet which receives/ the communication of the blood-/ here is where silence came together with/ the wholeness of the human word,/ and, for humans not to speak is to die."[81] The very tool of communication between the old man Zola and Tsi is destroyed by his unmentionable experience, that is, an experience that is rendered silent and through silence.

What the old man Zola could not say to Tsi, Tsi learns from his relationship with his own father, who is of the same generation as the old man. These two elderly men embody two different kinds of positions taken in the struggle. The old man Zola, though beaten, still feels deeply about the fight the next generation have to take on, passing down words of strength to them. On the other hand, Tsi's father stands for the beaten and broken, and is left holding on to every word from African leaders such as Kaunda, Nyerere and Nkrumah. Tsi reminisces:

> long ago, he used to walk fast, wake up early in the morning, work late into the night. Now something had happened to his movements. His back bends forward, he walks slowly, almost dragging his left leg. He still reads the newspaper, every morning, and every evening. But now, unlike long ago, he reads it all by himself, in the bedroom, surrounded by silence. (51)

[80]P. Neruda, Translation by Alastair Reid http://agslibris.wordpress.com/about/.
[81] Neruda, Ibid. Web page http://agslibris.wordpress.com/about/.

When Tsi's father abruptly withdraws Tsi does not know what has led to this. The effects of his withdrawal present themselves only in silence. His father's silence defines his relationship with his children, making him almost absent from the lives they live out on the streets of Alexandra and Johannesburg, in the prisons, and stumbling from one shebeen to another. This almost total absence characterises his deliberate inaccessibility. As a father he is symbolic of betrayal. This betrayal leads Tsi to questioning his father's role in the struggle, the role his mother reveres his father for:

> My father never seemed to know anything about us. He had long given up [...] He seemed adamant. He seemed to know what he was doing. Sitting there reading the newspaper, and looking at us, above his strange, twisted glasses, in his silence. I began to feel that my father felt threatened by our presence [...] his silence now and then terrified me. I wondered how one could be so silent. When we came home, all of us, and were crowding our mother, talking and talking, sometimes fighting, he would move, go to his room and be there alone. His years had gone, my mother would say. He built a house for us. He fought, with his hands, mind, eyes, ears, feet, he fought to make a future for us. Which future? My mother never answered the question. She always walked away. I wondered what my father would say if once I dared ask him, what future he had built for us. I wondered what he would say. Fix's future? Ndo's future? My future? (49)

The defeated gait Tsi reads in his father is only familiar to him once he has gone through an encounter common to oppressed South Africans at the hands of state police. As Tsi drives to his parent's home after being released from prison he becomes that which he always loathed in his father, but also, what terrified him about his father's silence. Unable to wrench himself out of the void created by what his father takes alone to his room, the only conclusion Tsi's thoughts come to leave him helpless, "I realised now that all I needed was quietness. There was nothing that could re-orient our minds. We had been beaten, defeated. I accepted that." (68) By accepting defeat, Tsi wishes for an inaccessible 'quietness,' a space that could offer an alternative to the defeat he has accepted.

What remains unspoken between father and son / children grows strong and, assuming a definitive presence, takes on the form of a character that each individual has to deal with at some level. The revelation of this unfolds before Tsi in the following manner:

> Wherever I had been, before, I had seen something similar to what I was becoming. I did not believe it, there was no way that I could, until one day I saw it in my father's face. He became silent. I heard the silence in me [...] It was tangible, it had colour, it had smell, it was familiar; there was no way I could not recognise it, it had been with me while I was still learning how to hold my cock and pee. It was here now with me. (111)

The number of times the word silence appears within the text sees it take on multiple characteristics and definitions at once. We are bombarded with the word on almost every page of the text either as an experience contained within or as inhabiting the space, creating the atmosphere within that given space. When Tsi consciously keeps the story of his time in solitary confinement from his family, it is born from an understanding that the circumstances that define silence between his father and himself do not allow him to speak of his imprisonment with his father. Tsi is pained by the truth "there was nothing I could talk to my father about, if I could not talk to him about what had happened to me in the past seven days. There was no way I could talk to him and not hurt him, or kill him. I had no courage to hurt or kill him." (85) The silence that protects is one that has obligations to loved ones. It is born from what Tsi learnt at a young age and is familiar with, the presence of what cannot be articulated. Assuming the role of protector, Tsi has to bear the angry, taunting questioning hurled at him by his mother, father and sister. Tensions around unanswered questions about Tsi's disappearance surface through small family matters that lead to altercations. Examples are the shoes Tsi promised his sister Mary and the spanner his brother Ndo had not returned with his father's car. His parents can only blame Tsi for having "no law for living," (87) they could not bear to know where he has been and he cannot summon the courage that would break them by telling them. (81-7) Though Tsi has identified and articulated a very real and painful emotional dimension of oppression, the family struggles with the concealed nature of silence.

Male Figures Rendered Absent by Silence

The distant space of quiet where Tsi's father is unreachable is also the only place they can have a relationship together. When in that space Tsi felt, "I began to understand what kept

him so quiet [...] But then, that was just the beginning, it was just an understanding, I trembled to know, I had my own journey to make."(85) Both characters have to take the journey into the unknown separately. In the hidden and subliminal, people make attempts to build and bind relationships amongst themselves, which the apartheid government was notoriously successful at breaking. The success of the destructive and alienating process of shattering relationships is evident in examples of intimate relationships in the text.

One of the most difficult pains to articulate is that of absence. Within intimate relationships between characters, this pain surfaces through the physical body. Tsi's mother carries the load of her husband's *almost* absence rendered through his silence. This silence is a heavy load she carries on her limping leg, Tsi narrates that: "she too had a heavy step, as if her body was too big for her leg." (52) Old man Zola relates to Tsi the anguish his absence in prison caused his wife: "[...] when I came back the old woman was weary. She was tired. It was only the heart which kept her, her body had long given in, she was tired. Two weeks after I came back, when they brought my banning order, she died." (14) The absence of the old man Zola from his home caused strenuous anxiety and worry that were unbearable for his wife, such that, "it was only her heart that kept her," faith in his return, and when he returned she let go of the life she had held on to while waiting. We hear the agony this causes in old man Zola's admission, "to be defeated is a very painful thing." (16) The old wear the defeat on their sleeves, the physical ailments the old suffer can be read as metaphors of this defeat. Indeed Tsi narrates:

> These old people had, with all their strength, with all their lives, tried to build a future for us, but everything was against it. The eyes of the old people, their voices, their movement, even the way they chose their words to talk to us, or the way they would now and then hold our hands, had an end, and admonishment about it. (53)

The last of the older generation's efforts in fighting the war against apartheid is depicted in the character of Michael Ramono (one of the twenty five accused members of the Movement sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment on Robben Island) and the speech he leaves the youth with. (189) Ramono embodies the theme of absence from the family symbolised by the years he dedicates to striving to reach "the oasis," the visions of the Movement:

> It took some years for Ramono to realise one of the truths about working towards the oasis: that one may reach it, or one may never see it. White laws had reared him and, like a chicken now walking on the ground, now in the air held by the claws of a hawk, Ramono had vanished. (180)

As community members arrive at the Ramono's home on the evening of his sentencing and Grace receives them, she enunciates what Ramano's imprisonment means to the family and community in these few words, "He is not dead but he is not available to us." (194) Our introduction to Ramono is through a symbol of his absence - the overalls the state police have come to demand the family send to him in prison. Grace, his wife, informs their daughter Dikeledi of this requirement. Emotion engulfs Dikeledi and she snaps at her younger sister Mpho before retreating to her room where she bursts into tears, unable to face her mother and sister for the remainder of the evening. Suffering this loss triggers the pain of Morolong, the son of the family kicked out of his father's house when he refuses to further his schooling. Fear grips the family as they wonder where Morolong is. Without consulting her husband, Grace looks for him "in jails, morgues, hospitals, at all the garbage places of South Africa." (197) Seated with her daughters on either side of her despairing over the absence of these men, Grace contemplates how, "[...] both had been snatched from her, from them." (197) The relationships between woman and man, child and father, and mother and son are predominantly defined by the trope of absence, another form of silence within the community of oppressed South Africans.

Limited Women and Silence as Agency

It is important that I distinguish between the silences that Serote deploys through the experiences of his characters on the one hand, and silences his work reveals as a result of his difficulty to articulate them, as a writer, on the other hand. I do not aim to solve this problem here, instead I will flesh out some of the evident limitations in the character development of women in the narrative and read them alongside women as masters of a disciplined silence imbued with revolutionary consciousness. The latter responsibility includes protecting what is known through silences and withholding information that has the potential to endanger

lives. There is of course always a risk involved in keeping secrets; that one might fail to keep them and then vital information could land in the wrong hands endangering the lives of many.

Exploring the positions women occupy in Serote's work will give us a glimpse into the indistinct separation between the public and private space and the challenges that this poses for a writer attempting to illustrate the Movement in the most favourable light. Women are paradoxically represented in ways that limit what could develop into a more nuanced exploration of character, and they are also given the difficult task of being agents of silence, keeping secrets for the Movement. On one level women are given the roles of being custodians of tradition; apparent examples are the characters of Mmampefo and Tsi's grandmother who are the bearers of knowledge that the state has deliberately effaced from South African history and they are there to impart such knowledge as a guide to the youth. Mmampefo, an old woman from Walmanstadt who is pivotal in the underground work of the Movement, goes to pains educating a young man, Themba, on the meaning of going underground. She equates the Movement to a snake in motion, defying the sense of touch (255) and therefore its enemies. In the conversations between Tsi and his grandmother, she often evokes the force of nature thus ingraining a metaphor that later comes to represent the Movement. Ann McClintock tells us that African Nationalism, much like its Afrikaner counterpart, was "the production of conscious reinvention, the enactment of a new political collective by specific cultural and political agents."[82] This would not have been as widely successful had it not been for the "mothers of the nation, the womenfolk as a whole who are the titans of our struggle"[83] who faced attacks not only in the streets of the city and township but also, blatant intrusions into their homes by police forces. In response:

> Women organize[d] increasingly as the militant protectors of their communities and activist children, and as a consequence the image of the militant mother, the revolutionary and political mother, began to enter official ANC rhetoric.[84]

In these black communities the figure of the mother extends far beyond the nuclear or even extended family. It reaches out to the youth within the greater community, and more

[82] A. McClintock, ' "No Longer in a Future Heaven": Women and Nationalism in South Africa', in Transition, 51, (1991), p. 114.
[83] Ibid, p. 116.
[84] Ibid, p. 116.

specifically in this case, those undertaking dangerous tasks and missions for the Movement. These elderly women and "mothers of [the] revolution" (116) amass the knowledge of old times, struggles and legends and are moral bench markers for the youth.

Another relationship between a young woman and an elderly woman presents women as always waiting for the return of a male companion. In her lonely and frustrated longing for Yaone, an arts student studying under scholarship at an American institution, Onalenna tries to draw strength from the elderly neighbour who experienced the bygone era of Sekhukhune and the war between the British and the Boer that ushered in the era of Boer independence. (226-229) Despite the age difference between the two women, they share the common experience, of being thrown into the abyss of waiting for their men to come back to them. A similar example of the weight women have to bear can be found earlier in this chapter where I discuss old man Zola's wife who, after waiting for his return from prison, finally lets go of the life she felt she had had to hold on to for so long, waiting.

The domestic space reveals itself as the space women are generally confined to. Indeed, women like Tsi's mother and his sister Mary remain predominantly present in the domestic spaces of society. (52; 83; 88) It is most evident in the first part of the narrative, where Serote does not so much exclude women from the political or public space, but he gives them the same gendered archetypal roles in these spaces as writers such as Osmane Sembene, Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o have been criticised for. Serote's women become part of the normative narrative space tightly held by men, a recurring feature that Florance Stratton reminds us goes as far back as, but is not restricted to, the Negritude movement of the 1930's as articulated by Lèopold Sèdar Senghor.[85] Variations of these stereotypes are present in Black Consciousness and African Nationalism, to name just two schools of thought Serote engages with in To Every Birth Its Blood. The domestic space is also where women play the role of comforters in dealing with trauma. Tsi's lover Tshidi and John's girlfriend Nolizwe, are the only women who get to hear the narratives of the torture their men go through and what it does to their sense of manhood. These men are only able to be transparent and vulnerable in the safety of their women who pose no threat to them.

[85] See F. Stratton, "Periodic Embodiments: A Ubiquitous Trope in African Men's Writing", in Research in African Literature, 21, (1990), pp. 111-126.

Despite the protective and supportive roles women are given, it seems as though no one is spared the injustices of racial oppression. What is presented of women in the second part of the narrative gives them a more nuanced character. We witness how Dikeledi and Onalenna courageously take on the mission of blowing up a parking lot in central Johannesburg. Here women appear in the public pace in an act of resistance, the enormity of the risk taken is captured in this contemplative moment:

> Oni was thinking that the parcel Oupa had given her was a powerful parcel indeed. Twenty cars damaged beyond repair. Nearby windows shattered. It was proving difficult to get all this under control. All this what? She began to shake a bit. If they caught up with her, if they did, surely she would never come out alive. They would kill her, as they had killed others. She wondered where Oupa was. She felt alone now. She wished she could talk to someone about all this. But she could not. (221)

Oni and Dikeledi go on to become instrumental in future tasks including taking down the infamous blue Granada transporting the leading police squad from "the Power days" Major Viljoen, Colonel Van Niekerk, Major Van der Merwe and Colonel Van der Linde (242), as well as doing underground work around greater Johannesburg.

Denied Expressiveness - The Crisis of Intimacy and Interiority within Generational Relationships

Numerous examples that illustrate the impossibility of normal relations between characters and families are dotted throughout the text. Granny and Themba, a member of the Movements underground operations, struggle to mend their relationship after it is destabilised by Themba's sudden and unannounced departure from the country to go into exile. Thoughts about how much is left in the spaces of the unknown hover over what is left unsaid between Themba and Granny. Themba's mind drifts into thoughts about where Tuki and Oupa are and what will become of the future, embodied in his son Fidel. The abrupt departure of Themba and Granny from one another is saturated with profound loss. This pain is born from "their silence." (237) Themba's sudden absence from his family creates a void Granny tries to fill

by marrying Georgie, yet even his presence is not certain. Georgie gets injured as the South African government stages cross-border raids into bordering African countries that are said to harbour terrorists and that the apartheid government is adamant it will defeat. Onalenna's body tremors at the longing for Yaone, as does John's each time he thinks of the absent Nolizwe from his bed sheets. (224,153)

In the relationship between Ndo and Ausi - Pule, it is the visible bruises on Ausi - Pule's face, from beatings meted out by Ndo, that speak to his absence from the home and nights spent on the streets of the township drinking. Excluding this latter example of generational relationships, the listed examples are illustrated after the "days of Power." Following the "days of Power", relationships take on more of an unstable and bleak character that is indicative of a lost innocence and 'play' within relationships. Unlike their parent's generation, the youth is torn apart by a moment that forms its own relationship; after the blood had been spilt and people had cleaned it off from the streets, "A relationship had been established; time was to nurture it." (139) Dysfunctional generational relationships speak to the crisis of intimacy which is a result of the absence of privacy explored in chapter one.

In his work The Sovereignty of Quiet, Kevin Quashie argues against the overt depiction of "black culture" as predominantly defined by resistance. Defiance inevitably comes to epitomise "blackness" or black experiences, thus leaving no room for what he terms "quiet." In the introduction and first chapter "Publicness, Silence, and the Sovereignty of the Interior", Quashie revisits the momentous image of Tommie Smith and John Carlos, each with a black-gloved fist in the air, heads bent and quiet as the American anthem is sung to their first and third places respectively in the 200 meter Olympic race in 1968, Mexico City. In re-examining readings of this iconic image of the African American Civil Rights Movement Quashie asks: "How is it that they [Smith and John] are largely icons of resistance, and that vulnerability and interiority are not amongst all the things we are encouraged to read on their image?"[86] Quiet is the concept that Quashie develops to answer this question. Readings of this image as that of two "soldiers in a larger war against oppression"[87] acknowledge "the exceptional role that black experience has played in American social consciousness"[88] yet, "blackness, which is often described as expressive, dramatic or loud [...] is not a term of

[86] K. Quashie, The Sovereignty of Quiet - Beyond Resistance in Black Culture, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 2012, p.3.
[87] Ibid, p. 3.
[88] Ibid. p. 3.

intimacy or human vagary but publicness."[89] The publicness is embodied in the "politics of resistance, where black subjectivity exists for its social and political meaningfulness rather than as a marker of the human individuality of the person who is black."[90] The shortcomings of resistance, "not nuanced enough to characterise the totality of black culture or expression," can be overcome through quiet which Quashie argues "aims to give up resistance as a framework in search of what is lost in its all encompassing reach."[91] This reach is investigated in the tropes double consciousness (Du Bois), dissemblance (Darlene Clarke Hine), doubleness and masking in the poem "We Wear the Mask" (Paule Laurence Dunbar), and signifying in Their Eyes Were Watching God (Zora Neale Hurston). All these deployments are all concerned with the inner life and expressiveness of blackness.[92] Collectively their short coming is in the assumption they make that blackness is exclusively public. "This assumption is troubling because it ties black expression to the concepts with which to understand expressiveness, resistance becomes the lingua franca of black culture."[93] Quiet, described as "the inexpressible expressiveness [...] is a metaphor for the full range of one's inner life – one's desires, ambitions, hunger, vulnerability, fears."[94] It is part of the inner life or interior, a space of social value not "determined entirely by publicness,"[95] but rather by its sovereignty. Characterised as expansive, voluptuous, creative, impulsive, dangerous, and indefinable, it is said to be "something more chaotic"[96] than intentionality or consciousness which are closely linked to silence. The definition of silence is read against that of quiet, the distinction being how silence "denotes something that is suppressed or repressed." Quashie goes on to elaborate how, like quiet, "silence can be expressive, but its expression is often based on refusal or protest, not the abundance and wildness of the interior [...] Indeed the expressiveness of silence is often aware of an audience, a watcher or listener whose presence is the reason for the withholding - it is an expression which is intent and even defiant."[97] Though the act of silence is intent, I would argue, it is not always an expression of defiance. In silence, which is conscious and deliberate (whether willed action by the self or the corollary of being caused to be silent), an awareness of the lack of interiority exists. This awareness is the realisation that interiority cannot yet be expressed. The luxurious description of the characteristics of quiet cannot yet be fully expressed.

[89] Ibid, p. 4.
[90] Ibid, p. 4.
[91] Ibid, p. 5.
[92] Ibid, pp. 12- 24.
[93] Ibid, p. 20.
[94] Ibid, pp. 22, 6.
[95] Ibid, p. 6.
[96] Ibid, p. 21.
[97] Ibid, p. 22.

Tsi only manages to glimpse the expanse of his interiority in a moment when he learns that what he feels for Lily is not limited to his desires, but evokes the emotion of joy and further still laughter, tears, uncertainty, bewilderment, and struggle. He explains that, “While I sat there and watched her, within the silence that our presence, our togetherness created, I fell into a joy, a thing which expressed itself in excellence, in completeness, and because it felt almost too complete, I did not know what it was.” (58) The vast expanse of interiority touched upon here can neither be defined nor fully expressed. Tsi’s thoughts lead him into the depths of uncertainty where the expression of what is interior is synonymous to taking a journey, which is cut short by Lily’s inquiry on the wellbeing of Nomsisi, Fix’s girlfriend who Tsi finally visits and checks up on after Fix is detained. Lily’s exasperation after exclaiming, “Tsi, this is a horrible country” (58) exposes how “Vulnerable.” and “Hopeless.” she suddenly seems. The limitations of expression are what create a greater need for expressiveness. This quest is elaborated by Tsi as follows:

> We together, locked like that, by time, place, blood, and a moment of life, by sweat, and by all that makes us think and wish we could know each other, love each other, care for and respect each other; if we were now, once more, to rise, to move closer to each other, in fear, desperation, uncertainty, moved by a sadness, helplessness, hopelessness, by a wish to know what it is we could do, we were capable of doing: so that, once and for all, we would be with those we love, those we have as our families, to begin a journey. Where, where does a river begin? We were born, we had come to be witness of life, distorted by time and by place. *Everything that we could claim* immediately left bloodstains on our fingers. Here we go again ... Fix. Pule. Moipone. Old man Zola. Where does the river begin, on its journey to the sea? Where does the river begin? (59) (Emphasis mine)

What is meant to be personal and private, intimate and interior - “Everything that we could claim” - is unfathomable and unrecognisable since in the very moment of claiming, it “immediately left bloodstains on our fingers.” Reaching into and searching for the interior only takes Tsi into existential questions, all of which circulate around a longing to “know each other, love each other, care for and respect each other” but are not fully possible without the freedom of interiority. While Qaushie’s notion of quiet is not only intriguing but also necessary in understanding the complexities of human experience under oppression, quiet interiority as expressed in this passage is precisely what is being fought for.

Hope in the Future Generation

My argument, thus far, is that the battles in "the Power days" left the township, in a sense, with what can be termed a silence of mourning. This deliberate silence draws a distinct line between the oppressed and the perpetrator of oppression, the apartheid government. (139, 155,218) The trope of mourning is a layered one. It reveals a community sensitive to the pain of the consequences of having a loved one taken in by police and the grief for those who have fallen before them in the very streets that they walk. Serote presents us with characters who are trying to come to grips with an absurd state, contemplating where they are as an oppressed people and how they are to proceed after a repeated and ongoing "crackdown." What makes these characters complex is not their lives as such, but the relations they have with one another as a collective that is fighting for liberation against apartheid.

Herman articulates a sharp understanding that the results that an experience of trauma may further catapult an individual's crisis:

> Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love and community. They shatter the connection of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience.[98]

Herman argues that when a traumatic experience leaves the survivor with a "sense of a self [that] has been shattered...that sense can be rebuilt only as it was built initially, in connection with others."[99] To build this self the community needs an astute understanding of the experience of loss. The fear of annihilation grips the community into a tight silence, enabling it to build a wall around itself. The wall is to keep those who are vulnerable protected. It is also part of the arsenal needed to keep the hope for a brighter tomorrow alive. The hope for such a future is imbued in the youngest generation, who are the most courageous and yet vulnerable and that the enveloping silence needs to guard.

[98] Herman, "Trauma and Recovery", p. 51.
[99] Ibid, p. 61.

Formed relationships between generations are informed by a different silence to generational relationships. Just as old man Zola cannot share with Tsi his experience in prison, other characters keep similar personal narratives from the younger generation. The character of Oupa, Mary's son and Tsi's nephew (third generation in the narrative) gets seriously involved in the Movement as a young leader. Oupa shows extensive knowledge of the struggle and the past battles that came at a heavy price. While these larger and more distant narratives are easily accessible to him, personal narratives involving close family and friends are kept from him. When Dikeledi and John refrain from telling Oupa the details of John's months in detention, they are allowing him to go on with his activism. The determination of those such as Dikeledi, Onalenna, Tuki, and John, who had gone through the "days of Power" with hope, strength and ferocity turns into a withering flower at the memory of all those who were no more but remained ever present: "Some were in exile. Some had gone mad. Some had become traitors. Some were just- silent." (204) This generation had faced the crackdown of the fearful apartheid government and were faced with tough decisions: to continue the struggle, to give up or give in to what seemed like a never-ending nightmare. After "the Power days" had passed, "Now here was Oupa talking calmly and confidently about the certainty of victory." (204) The unspoken stories of pain and humiliation at the hands of the enemy, never told to Oupa by his grandfather, uncles and close friends all seem to boil and surface through him. He can be read as the hope that articulates the hidden voice of the traumatic experiences his community goes through. Oupa symbolises what Mitchell argues are "expressions of feelings rather than meaning."[100]John tells us: "We could say, terrible as that might be, that there was hope for Oupa." (156) It is these "feelings" that have him fight in the frontline and see him confidently approach Dikeledi and John to join him in the Movement despite their age differences and the scepticism shared by both his seniors who, having once attempted, and failed at what he is asking them to risk their lives for again- fighting *fearlessly* against the apartheid regime.

Although it is evident that an attempt is made by the older generations to be the buffer between the youth and the knowledge of personal narratives of torture and pain, the youth are not spared the immediate brutalisation of the black body, similarly experienced by previous generations. Instead, they become a reminder to others that lives will be lost and bodies broken in the struggle for liberation. It is the broken body of Oupa followed by multiple

[100] Mitchell, "Trauma, Recovery and the place of Language", p. 132.

scenes of movement and deaths of cadres, as if triggering the members of the Movement into motion, that takes us directly into the operations of war.[101]

It is easy for readers to get caught up in the fast tempo Serote sets the character lives to. The difficulty thus far has been that silence has remained a response to a system of oppression. This response sees its greatest effects in intimate relationships. Silence, being a hidden and internal response or reaction to oppression, renders the one silent inarticulate. Intimate relationships are defined by this silence that is shaped by what cannot be spoken about or cannot be articulated. Although this silence may be overwhelming, the text moves to an imaginative consciousness that transcends this uniform mood. Discussed in the following chapter are the numerous readings of musical pieces interwoven within the narrative and how they articulate what words cannot.

[101] Illustrated are the detailed capture, brutal torture and death of Oupa. Parallel imagery is shown of the rapid movement by the surviving characters, and finally short scenes depicting the bombings in Zimbabwe, Botswana and Tanzania as well as the assassination of Mandla. pp. 237-262.

Chapter Three

The Poetics of Music

This chapter will consider music as the voice of conscious articulation through which sentiments previously impossible to communicate are enunciated. What will be discussed is the attempt to communicate what is underneath, that which is unseen and obscure to others. I will also look at the ways musical intonations represent creative ways to communicate these hidden feelings and expressions amongst the community of Alexandra. I will investigate the prominent role of music as a medium used by Tsi who is in search of knowledge about his past that he hopes will give meaning to his oppression and his journey to emancipation. We will enter this complex process through examples of Tsi listening to music which, in this instance works as a character, giving him, and us, access to manifestations of silence in the domestic space. I will look at the expression music affords the community through a reading of funeral songs that give birth to the meaning of mass mobilisation. Although what may come forth through the use of music as a medium of 'voicing' may prove limited, music remains the greatest competitor of silence. An equal competitor of silence that I present in the final section of this chapter are selections of poetry.

Serote infuses jazz, blues and freedom songs into To Every Birth Its Blood. Jazz is a musical genre that critics have shown most concern over in the novel since it is cited the most in the novel and also plays a very prominent role in the development of the narrative. Most of the jazz and blues we are introduced to in the text comes through Tsi. Jazz is highly influential to Tsi in his years of youth, living in Alexandra with Lily before his appointment at McLean and their move to Dube. The specific roles of jazz in the text can be explored through the use of lyrics, the poetic expressions used to narrate, and the sensory and thematic significance that the act of listening to jazz enables.

Jazz is often read alongside "its source,"[102] the blues. Both share a definitive character of resistance stemming from their response to the dehumanising institution of enslavement in the Americas. Throughout their histories, jazz and blues have retained this element of

[102] J.U. Jacobs, "The Blues: An Afro- American matrix for Black South African Writing", in English in Africa, 16 (1989), p. 12.

objection and struggle against various forms of personal and social alienation.[103] Although much attention has been paid to arguments concerning the definition of jazz, a distinctly remarkable spirit of devising creative ways of surviving inspires its sound. Writing on liberation sounds (blues, jazz and gospel) William McClendon explains that:

> Black music of exuberance is closely related to the spirit of resistance and struggle. Concepts of black liberation are strengthened by music that is mind-expanding, sophisticated and exhilarating. Moreover, it is personal, intimate, erotic, discreet and tasteful. It reveals in its rhythms and harmonies that it is not a music of grief and despair, but is symbolic of steps which blacks take to remove themselves from disabling emotional distress and spiritual debilitation.[104]

The African American and South African jazz referenced throughout the text is from the highly volatile period of the 1960's defined by the Civil Rights Movement in America. In South Africa a similar atmosphere prevailed in response to the apartheid government's increased repression that resulted in the banning of opposition and incarcerations of activists. This repression and the violence it unleashed would define the regime for another thirty four years. South African resistance novels set against urban and township landscapes have, as one of their greatest influences, Afro-American inspired intonations of jazz and blues. These works reflected not only urban cultural constructs but also jazz and blues, both defined by their ambiguous nature, "arising out of a tension between circumstances and possibility and often initiated by personal disaster."[105] Johan Jacobs argues, "Jazz is a music of protest and the performance metaphor best suited to a body of protest writing."[106] This is a concept Jacobs draws from David Coplan who views the performer as a cultural broker- "a kind of entrepreneur in situations of acculturation, and a leader in the adoption and creation of innovations."[107] Performance in this context is defined as "a social instrument for ordering experience and bringing identities and values to life"[108] and it is valued for its "effectiveness in integrating human experiences and in the meaning it is able to give to other levels of

[103] Music was created and played by African slaves working on plantations in the Americas. Jazz has a long and complex history that has made scholars and critics find defining it increasingly difficult. See S. DeVeaux, "Constructing the Jazz Tradition: Jazz Historiography", in Black American Literature Forum, 5, (1991), pp. 525-553.
[104] W.H. McClendon, "Black Music: Sound and Feeling for Black Liberation", in The Black Scholar, 7, (1976), pp. 21.
[105] J.U. Jacobs, "The Blues", p. 10.
[106] Ibid, p. 13.
[107] Ibid, p. 7.
[108] Ibid, 7.

reality."[109] Three artists identified in Jacobs as conscious evokers of black musical performance are Bloke Modisane, Serote and Es'kia Mphahlele whose works he defines as "the literary equivalent of such performance; and the writers themselves as cultural brokers active in creating images of changing social reality, adapting the old forms to new contexts as vehicles of new meanings, and projecting their senses of artistic personality as metaphoric realisation of the consciousness of their society in a long tradition of black American and South African performers."[110] Serote therefore writes into the novel a musical poetic style that serves a very specific role in his work, and as such, sets the contours for reading the role of music in To Every Birth Its Blood. Music in To Every Birth Its Blood is a performative expression of what is veiled by silence. Music is the medium for performances of feeling, emotions, searching, meaning and movement.

Lyrical Expressions as the Mnemonic Mouthpiece of Conscious Articulation

In the opening page of the novel Tsi is entering his house together with Lily yet his thoughts are on the streets they have just walked in from. Unable to communicate his agony over how "most things about this earth want you to run, want to make you weary, want you to faint," (3) Tsi turns to another medium to articulate what he cannot say to Lily, the music of Nina Simone. Let us consider the moment when Simone's lyrics "Streets full of people all alone" resonate throughout the house. (3) This intertextual reference assumes the reader is familiar with Simone's song and its meaning. This reference is the clue to the nature of the thoughts Tsi fails to express. The lyrics that follow those quoted from the text read: "Roads full of houses, never home/ a church full of singing, out of tune/ Everyone's gone to the moon."[111] We are not given a sense in the lyrics as to who "Everyone" is; they are defined by their absence. A process of absolute reversal has taken place; "when life had begun/ Everyone went to the sun," the inverse defines the present times where "Everyone's gone to the moon." This is narrated in a folkloric tone beginning with "You see a long time ago [...]," an inscription of knowledge by the lyricist emphasising the contrasting times and the effects of these. The only images of "Everyone" we are given are eyes, hands, mouths and arms,

[109] Coplan in Jacobs. Ibid, 7.
[110] Ibid, p. 8.
[111] The following references to the song are from the lyrics found on this webpage. (Songwriters Kenneth King, Published by Marquis Songs USA) viewed on 02/16/2014. http://www.metrolyrics.com/everyones-gone-to-the-moon-lyrics-nina-simone.html, 1965.

emptied of expression by "sorrow", and "debt." Mouths that would have spoken are "full of chocolate- covered cream" and arms that could have held life "can only life a spoon." Simone expresses a sombre emotion with clarity through these lyrics; a state of helplessness Tsi embodies but has not yet found the words to share. The lyrics of the music become the mnemonic mouthpiece of conscious articulation.

The presence of Lily juxtaposed against the "streets full of people all alone" presents a contradiction that is so stark that it makes Tsi want to "weep." (3) Very little is said between Lily and Tsi in this scene besides her asking him what he will have to drink. Most of what Tsi offers is a detailed illustration of Lily's image and her movements within the room they have made their home. The sound of music welcomed by both drowns out what sounds *could* be heard but which are instead suppressed by Tsi who can neither voice nor cry. Language and expressive sounds are muted and create a silence that is filled by music. With music as Tsi's metaphoric voice, he shifts the responsibility of communicating to something not only external to him, but involving its own processes of meaning making.

Tsi's reliance on music to communicate is repeated in a similar manner when he rides on the wavelength of music, his emotions shaped by it; "I have always tried to talk to my Baby with music." (5) Dependent on music to relay his thoughts to Lily through Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela's 'Woza.' Tsi reveals, "I thought, Ausi Miriam has her way about this." (5) However, in this instance, they prove insufficient for the task, only leaving Tsi sad and feeling the distance between him and Lily grow as arguments between them lead to lengthy periods of silence. Tsi's mind instead turns to question where Miriam and Hugh are, two musicians amongst many in exile at the time, yet another form of the fracturing relationships between people, and between people and home. Loflin tells us that "Jazz as a music of exile is a repetition within the history of African American jazz: for the history of jazz is the history of exile; its incorporation of African and European music is the result of exile. It is the music of those who, in some fundamental sense, are homeless."[112] Despite calling upon music to communicate the unspoken and turning to its artists to elucidate complex emotional

[112] C. Loflin. 'Jazz, James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues", and Mongane Serote's "To Every Birth Its Blood"', in Migrating Words and Worlds Pan- Africanism Updated, H.E. Hurley et.al (eds), Trenton: African World Press Inc, 1999, p. 147. The complexities of imagined and constructed boundaries between home and exile, and the processes, whether physical or imaginative, of leaving home and creating this space in a different place are explored by Bhekizizwe Peterson in his 2012 inaugural lecture entitled "Riding the Cadences of Black Transnationalism: The Lives and Art of Peter Abrahams, Es'kia Mphahlele and Miriam Makeba," (University of the Witwatersrand).

processes, Tsi is left with little resolve. We could read Tsi's mind moving to thoughts of Makeba and Masekela as symbolic of the trope of exile. Unable to communicate, Tsi is exiled from an interpersonal relationship with Lily. Tsi cannot fully access the musical "way about this" that Makeba could offer him.

Already we can see the high level of dependency Tsi has on music as a medium of communication and the difficulties of this reliance. In developing this argument I will now look at how the significance placed on jazz considerably elevates its status and alters the tone the narrative takes.

The Character of Jazz

In his investigation into the use of jazz Loflin does a comparative reading between To Every Birth Its Blood and James Baldwin's Sonny's Blues as works that speak to the relationship of "borrowing"[113] between African and African American literary traditions. The former text is said to have been informed heavily by the character, themes and transformative potential of music depicted in the latter.[114] Loflin extends Keith Byerman's[115] argument that Sonny's (Baldwin's main character) language fails to express jazz music, presenting us with the understanding that "narrative tries to become jazz; to create meaning in the ways that jazz creates meaning" in Baldwin.[116] Loflin says "Baldwin and Serote simultaneously try to *explain* jazz and its effects and also try to *be* jazz for their readers, [they] try to create the same effect as jazz through the language and rhyme of their text" (original emphasis).[117] He argues they effectively achieve this through a use of "sentence fragments, repetitions, rhythmic phrasing, and pauses [...] to try to re-create in language the rhymes and patterns of jazz."[118] This is an informative argument when looking at the poetics of one of numerous examples that involve the protocols and significances of listening to jazz:

[113] Loflin, Ibid, p. 142.
[114] Ibid, p. 143.
[115] K. Byerman. "Words and Music: Narrative Ambiguity in Sonny's Blues", in Critical Essays on James Baldwin, F. Standley, N. Burt, (eds), G.K. Hall, Boston, 1988, pp. 198- 204.
[116] Loflin,op.cit. p. 144.
[117] Ibid, 144.
[118] Ibid, p. 144

> Fuck Coltrane. He was beating. Beating like the old woman of old, beating corn. Beating grass. Building a future. I want to know about you. Coltrane, beating, beating. Kneeling. Coiling. Curling. Searching from scratch, as if he had had no journey whatsoever in his life; Coltrane, starting from the beginning, as if a newly-born baby, trying, finding, searching a future, searching the past that we all know so little about. (50)

Writing an experience of listening to jazz inscribes a jazz temporality into the narrative. Tsi's narration takes on the tempo of the music distinctly characterised by a jazz poetic similar to this excerpt. In his article "Early Jazz Literature," Ryan Jerving describes jazz literature as "writing about jazz or writing that aspires to the formal or ideological condition of jazz."[119] The former refers to the structure of jazz music, and the latter the role of jazz as conscious resistance music. Through Serote's appropriation of jazz we see how this can be extended to writing that incorporates jazz notes, tones and lyrics to illustrate the complexity of black experiences. Uncertain about the future with a sense that there is some fundamental knowledge he should know but that is missing Tsi puts on Buddy Miles' record, "the guitar started screaming, the humming voice, like the ocean, vast, troubled in its calm, came in: 'Be on my side and I will be on your side, Baby.'" (5) Tsi seems unable to comprehend what is before him. It is left to the guitar, the humming voice, the ocean, the lyrics, and Coltrane's beating to brave the journey of expression and "trying, finding, searching a future, searching the past that we all know so little about." (50)

The use of jazz and the adaptation of language to it in the text, as well as the role Tsi prescribes for it, affords jazz a significance in the narrative that we can equate to a character. When Dollar Brand's music is played in the household space, it is clear the music is the central character:

> Dollar would stalk the house, bombard it, rise high and high, go low, in that journey Dollar takes, sometimes as an ant moving, moving, on and on, climbing on a thin grass as if it were a huge fallen tree trunk, moving back and forward as if seeking something which he himself does not know, moving on and on, at times like a tiger, agile, beautiful, ferocious, stalking, knowing, planning and ready for the final attack. Yes, Dollar would dominate the silence and my brother now and then, in his quiet way, would talk to his wife, to his children, to me,

[119] R. Jerving, "Early Jazz Literature (And Why You Didn't Know)", in American Literary History, 16, Winter (2004), p. 649.

> saying how futile it was to be himself, to be a man, to love, saying sometimes everything is so beautiful it frightens. Sometimes I would read poetry to them. I would feel them as we moved together, Ausi-Pule holding her son by the hand, trying to keep him quiet as he demanded attention. She would kiss him, lift him up, hold him to her bosom, and suddenly we would all be aware of Dollar pacing, paving all sorts of things, and when the record ended, it would be like the house was sighing. (20-21)

The musical ambience fills the family space and fights an unseen battle, building up momentum as it assumes position "for the final attack" that is to "dominate the silence." The played piano piece grants us entrance into the intimate relationships within the family space. Acting as a hidden knowledge and awareness veiled by the normality of the family's activities, Dollar's music envelops the family home and leads each one on the journey s/he takes as the metaphoric ant that will be followed by each member in the family who have their moment of expression, until Dollar is again heard. It is through listening to Dollar that the family has to negotiate what the music invites from them individually. Ndo communicates anguish in his "quiet way," Tsi reads poetry out loud to everyone, and Ausi - Pule lulls her restless son lovingly. The music listened to is no less complex than the lives it touches, Tsi tells us of the ease and difficulty Dollar's music communicates:

> Sometimes it made us sleep well, through many treacherous nights. Sometimes it caused us trouble, for we tossed and turned in bed, and in the morning, when we met again, the trouble would still be written on our faces. Sometimes it was hard to listen to Dollar. There would be no nerve, no courage to even suggest that we start to listen. (21)

In his inaugural lecture which focussed on the treatment of Black transnationalism in Cultural Studies and Postcolonial Theory, Peterson explores the lives and art of Peter Abrahams, Es'kia Mphahlele and Miriam Makeba. For the purposes of this report, I am interested in Peterson's use of the notion of polyrhythms which he appropriates to explore and extend what he calls the "poetics of the crossroads" - a negotiation by Black South African intelligentsia and artists of two imperatives namely:

> responding to the challenges unleashed by the social upheavals and changes brought about by colonialism and the industrial revolution while, on the other hand, having to find equally

> effective ways of rethinking or negotiating their relationships to chiefly classes and power, whose indigenous forms of governance were being shaped into neo-traditional ones under colonialism. In a sense they were compelled to simultaneously explore the past and the future.[120]

The concept of polyrhythms is understood as a metaphor to explain the relation and interactions between self, experience or ideology, and art. Peterson explains that the musical practice of polyrhythms reveal, "the complex and infinite possibilities that are possible between the relations, conjunctures and disjunctures that link the personal biographies of artists, the historical and social conditions that inform them, and the creative works that they produce."[121] When Tsi and his brother Ndo's family listens to Brand they are entering a space consisting of a "simultaneous existence of more than one rhythm or factor that comes across as synchronised, as inhabiting the same space, time and tempo."[122] Yet the piece played is heard as a dynamic but distinct beat that changes in tempo and even transcends the musical space to allow responses by those listening. Peterson tells us that "Despite the synchronous template that organizes the various rhythms, it does not foreclose the possibility that some beats will be out of sync or marching to their own rhythm."[123] Listening to Brand each member takes their own individual journey, able to do so as an experience of expression through music. Brand's beat does not only go "out of sync" here but creates space for the rhythm of each individual before the sound returns to focus on the music's own rhythm and tempo. The relationship between sound, music and a community will be returned to later on in this chapter.

Journeys of Historical Retrievals and the Limits of Music

In as much as jazz might, in my opinion, offer opportunities and tactics to voice insights and commitments under the banner of silence, some scholars are of a different view, as in the case of Michael Titlestad who has reflected on Tsi's relationship to music and silence. In his collection of essays on jazz in South African literature, Titlestad works from Johan Jacob's argument that the first and second part of the novel can be read as the mapping of call- and-response form that is typical in jazz and that inserts Tsi as the "cultural broker in performance

[120] Peterson, "Riding the Cadences of Black Transnationalism", p.20.
[121] Ibid, p. 21.
[122] Ibid, p. 21.
[123] Ibid, p. 21.

... improvising in solo flights in a construct which takes its form from contemporary black music and all that influences it in South Africa."[124] Titlestad considers this a reduction of jazz performance saying the "*metaphoric* subject position undervalues the capacity of participants to interrogate and redefine creative practices." (original emphasis)[125] In stretching the notion of improvisation Titlestad investigates the role of silence in jazz music as a creative "acoustic engagement with nothingness." Titlestad elaborates further saying that in this "acoustic time and space [...] Molope seems constantly to organise his apprehension of the world and imagine its possibilities through listening to the way that music can overcome the nothingness of silence."[126] My perspective, as noted, is one that does not regard silence as tantamount to or signifying "nothingness." My view is that the silence that the music is playing into is not representative of "nothingness" but a manifestation of a deliberate and systematic strategic response to overcome the silence that is desired by the oppressive apartheid government.

The journeys that music takes Tsi on reveal his struggle in arriving at the knowledge of one's oppression by another. Music torments Tsi as it makes him aware of the confinement of the space he lives in. Within the four walls of his one roomed house: "Suddenly, Nina Simone's voice became a hammer, pounding and pounding on my head, shoulders, pounding and pounding me to a pulp. I dared not to listen to it, I dared not lie down to rest. The walls of the room began to stalk me, to crowd me." (22) Restless and feeling caged, Tsi takes to the streets of Alexandra and into the music of the township and the sounds of life abuzz. In the streets Tsi avoids confronting his internal frustration and can simply be a participant in something larger than the self-absorption of his suffering. Later when Lily is home, Tsi enters into Abbey Lincoln singing on a Max Roach release. The question of news on Fix's disappearance surfaces against the background of Lincoln's voice singing "Members don't get weary" (23) filling the sombre mood of the room. Fix's detention is an overbearing anxiety we have dealt with in chapter one and two. It is the greatest reminder to Tsi and his community of how familiar and common his situation is. Roach interjects a message of strength which cannot be used as such by the members who, in this context, can be read as the members of the Movement. Even as Tsi tries to escape the claustrophobic room, he returns to it and the music that fills its four walls. He cannot escape it as what he seeks is a

[124] Jacobs, "The Blues", p. 14.
[125] Titlestad, "Mongane Serote's To Every Birth Its Blood: Historical Limitations of Improvisation", p. 196.
[126] Ibid, p. 197.

knowledge found between the notes and lyrics. He consciously reaches out to press play and listen out for the messages encrypted in these sounds.

Jazz music enables Serote to illustrate the complexity of black life as an act of resistance or constant confrontation with a policing state. It breaks the linear trajectory of the narrative even as it remains clear in the narrative who the enemy is and who the oppressed are. Tsi takes a journey as "Musicians [assemble, recognize and unravel] trajectories of expressive meaning across a city of historically constituted possibilities."[127] Through listening to Miles Davis featuring, amongst others John Coltrane, Tsi is taken through an imaginative transcendence from his individual ground level to a collective state of possible combat, similar to that of the jazz track. In a country where apartheid, and indeed the colonial powers have systematically attempted to wipe out the history of black people, music aids Tsi in his acts of historical retrieval and reconstruction. Yes, the political and historical genealogy Tsi is searching for proves limited as he cannot fully reach the meanings the artists are themselves in the process of making. Tsi gets no answers from the music whose meaning he tries to access, yet neither does he get answers by going about his life avoiding engagement with the Movement. The role of music considered here is an indication of the necessary stages in the journey to consciousness. Music plays this significant role in To Every Birth Its Blood. This is best expressed by Tsi himself when he tells us "I began to become aware that between the melody, harmony, and rhythm of the music that now and then filled my house, from Hugh, Dollar, Nina, Letta, Miriam, Kippie, Cyril, Magubane, Coltrane, Miles [...] between their melody, harmony and rhythm, when the pants are down, the silence is there. This is not easy to find. It is heavy. I could no longer listen to the music that had taught me so much!" (111)

Interestingly, Titlestad argues Molope can use the space of "nothingness" to "manipulate meaning to act out and act up below the threshold of authority's vision with a pedestrian's liberty ... *within* and *as* a matrix of creative intervention, and at some level, a triumph of the subaltern imagination" (original emphasis).[128] However, Titlestad questions this possibility soon after it has materialised and argues it cannot flourish in a violent apartheid system of

[127] Ibid, p. 197.
[128] Ibid, p. 197.

oppression saying; "when Molope's jazz falls silent, we are facing the brutal facticity that is both the condition and limitation of the realist mode of the novel's second part."[129]

Loflin's outlook is somewhat more optimistic. While Baldwin's Sonny's Blues is able to use jazz to reconnect brothers and strengthen the bonds of a community, and seems to offer a sense of freedom, Loflin points out that indeed in To Every Birth Its Blood "jazz itself is no longer enough; it has no answers for the silence it acknowledges."[130] Despite this Loflin sees the reintroduction of jazz in the last chapter of To Every Birth Its Blood, when Tsi comes in to close the narrative, as Serote's recognition of the role of creativity as a mechanism of survival for the individual. He argues that "[...] although Kelwyn Sole sees the reappearance of the 'practically unaltered Tsi' as part of the "remaining contradictions of the novel", Tsi's reappearance can also be read as Serote's acknowledgment of the disjuncture between the time scale of the rapid expanding Movement and the relative slowness of individual change and reconciliation [...]. The Movement's ultimate success is assured, but the survival of any individual into the utopian future beyond revolution is very much in doubt."[131]

Creating the Space of Resistance: Music, Silence and Combative Resistance

One way of considering the limits and potential of music is by augmenting the aesthetics and significance of jazz with the deployment of funeral songs in the novel. It is through the latter that we get a clear picture of the "rapid expanding Movement" Loflin refers to. We are told that when university students start striking Tsi's mother started talking about Fix and going to his trial, singing the songs sung in the court and going to "freedom funerals," (114) but we only hear these songs much later on at the procession of Willy's funeral, a young student shot during demonstrations following the "days of Power" when many such public killings continued to define black everyday life.

[129] Ibid, p. 201.
[130] Loflin, 'Jazz, James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues", and Mongane Serote's "To Every Birth Its Blood"', p. 144.
[131] Ibid, p. 147.

Gayle Wald encourages us to "think about sound as an instrument of oppositional consciousness, particularly in relation to struggles over space."[132] He thinks of music as "vibrations" of sounds creating meaning and feeling. For Paul Gilroy, "the physical inscription of sound in matter" is carried out by bodies "binding subjects together through shared affect." That is, "bodies resonate together in space through vibrations."[133] The song sung at Willy's funeral sees the mass of Alexandra residents out in their mourning clothes, while businesses shut down for the day in respect. The great gathering moves together in song to the graveyard singing: "Go well, go well, young fighter/ we will always remember you Willy." (245) The atmosphere of this scene is very different to the one we encountered when Tsi visited his grandfather's grave discussed in chapter two. Here the symbol of death is synonymous to resistance. The life that is to be laid to rest enables the gathering of the community. The funeral procession is surrounded by police and "shut in from both sides by Hippos." (246) At this stage in apartheid South Africa, funerals were the only occasions where black people were allowed to gather, with all other public spaces of meeting banned. The funeral space is thus transformed by these restrictions and becomes multifunctional. It essentially has to hold within it two fundamental moments of human existence: life and death. While the crowd moves in song, the young members of the Movement we have been following throughout, carry out their biggest mission yet - taking down the leading police squad who drive around the township in a blue Granada targeting ringleaders in the Movement. While this first song sings Willy's memory into the narrative of liberation, the second "went, in a rumble, held and led by a young voice which seemed to be carried by the momentum of older voices." (245) The words sung are: "Vorster, Vorster is a dog/ Vorster you own guns, we own history/ Vorster, Vorster is a dog." (246) Claiming what they have been denied through the act of killing Willy, the community creates sound vibrations that move them into a space which they have had to make since it does not exist. This is the space of resistance. The last song we hear intones: "This is a heavy load/ This is a heavy load/ It needs strong men and women/ This is a heavy load." (247) The crowd at Willy's funeral is a restless one, it breaks into song holding each member together and allowing others within it to break from it to take on the task of "strong men and women." Inevitably the load is a heavy one for everyone, but one taken forward by the youth and carried by "the momentum of the older."

[132] G. Wald, "Soul Vibrations: Black Music and Black Freedom in Sound and Space", in American Quarterly, 63, (2011), p. 674.
[133] Ibid, p. 675.

The mission undertaken requires the full participation of each member in fulfilling their role. The operation is strategically planned and it unfolds on the morning of Willy's funeral. The operation is successfully accomplished but a life is lost in the process, that of Oupa whose capture, torture and death are detailed for us. Having established a close relationship with this bright young character, the amount of time and narrative space Serote affords his death places this very personal story within the larger struggle. Oupa's interrogation touches on a central pillar that held the Movement together but that was equally its most vulnerable point, keeping secrets. Throughout his interrogation Oupa is required to expose numerous members of the Movement while being lied to that his mother has been detained because of his actions. The spirit of the Movement is revealed to reside within those who are prepared to fight and risk their lives by giving themselves over to it as its secret keepers. Those who hold its secrets risk their lives in silence as well as in speaking. This stems from the same awareness Nolizwe shares with John when he has come back from eleven months in detention:

> When he had told her about how, when he was inside, the police took him to a window and told him to jump or tell them the names and addresses of the people he was working with, she had said that he must know that a time was coming when we would rather die than give the names; when we would rather fall from the top floors of buildings to save the lives that must take these mad men. (137)

While inevitably individual lives will be lost in the journey to liberation, it is towards the furtherance of the collective vision.

We are already familiar at this stage with two other operations that required a disciplined silence, one undertaken by Dikeledi and Onalenna who blow up a parking lot, damaging twenty cars in central Johannesburg. Oni shows great discipline, even withholding "such important information" from Dikeledi on the bomb they set off in central Johannesburg. (219) The second being the extermination of Captain Mpondo, known for opening fire on demonstrating students in the "days of Power." (214) The discipline of silence is one that has always been required of those involved in work within the Movement. Being in the Movement requires that Michael not reveal the work he does to his children or wife, who are only aware of the consequences that come with this, once he is in the public eye. (198) When Oupa tells Dikeledi and John he is fighting for the destruction of oppression and exploitation

in the Movement, Dikeledi asks ‘what does one say?’ Oupa’s response is ‘Nothing, be quiet, wait. You know a lot now, protect it, that is all.’ (206)

Whereas keeping secrets comes with real risks to individual lives, the Movement is depicted as omnipotent. It embodies the elements of life, water and wind; assumes the nature of a snake that defies touch; is rooted as a tree is to the earth in its vision and branches out ever growing but also sheltering those beneath it. Serote uses numerous images of nature most effectively through short poems as in the following extract:

> The sunshine was laughing and laughing
>
> it held its silence
>
> it danced, in the street
>
> dust, smell
>
> the deserted streets (46)

The language used after this poem is grammatically punctuated with frequent pauses. Through poetic language Serote shows how harmonious light and sound are. Silence as a phenomenon encountered through human experiences has revealed itself as oppressive, restrictive, ambiguous, intangible and unreachable. Here light captures and holds this phenomenon which defines it in a manner that still leaves room for expressiveness. Nature is the most effective metaphor for silence that reaches into the subliminal subconscious, where it communicates messages from ancestor to grandchild. Its presence is at times depicted as “the vastness, the emptiness, the horizon, the blue, blue sky” (74-75) sometimes only witness to the events that play out (70), and at other times requiring that the lessons of the past, moments of defeat, be recognised by asking; “What have you learnt, children?” (75) Mastering silence, the Movement persists:

> The silence here is stubborn. The mountains and hills and the trees, even the sky, persist and persist and are stubborn. The sizes and heights are sizes and heights of silence. The way cattle stare at you. The way sheep keep eating, in the silence of the grass and the trees, in the silence

> of the sunlight and the sky, in the silence of the wind. The silence is stubborn here. It does not matter whether the birds sing or horses neigh. The silence; it seems to cover everything. It seems to cloak, it wants to protect, like a womb, like a mother. It spreads itself, it covers, it spreads and spreads. In a way that it alone knows, it is there. (254)

In a space that surfaces a lot of the pain, oppression, resistance, absence, unspoken, inexpressive and fractured experiences within a community of black South African's under apartheid, the Movement as nature usurps the phenomenon of silence. It holds the meaning of the words Tsi's grandmother spoke to him in chapter one, the memory that Tsi is one with and comes from the elements that birthed creation. That he is in essence one with the Movement that embodies a fundamental paradigm based on a concept of humanity as old as time itself.

The magnanimous force and power silence exudes and its effects on characters, as well as its threatening consequences of effacing and deeming one inarticulate, is pitted against artistic expressiveness and here it fights a losing battle. The arts give Serote an avenue that he pursues to its limits. By turning to the creative medium of music his characters grapple with life as it plays out before them. Music is used as the bridge between the process of conscientising and the act of resistance and this bridge is crossed over in song. People are able in this way to communicate through song, to reveal their deepest despair, and greatest desire- emancipation from apartheid. As a mass they move into revolution. Although the individual may not have caught up with the speed at which the movement proceeds, they are invariably moved by it. The message to move into the next phase of the war is communicated into the vacuum that silence once was.

Conclusion

Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

In her work tracing the landscape of literature and politics in South Africa, Nadine Gordimer introduces her first chapter with the following quote by Salman Rushdie: "One of the things a writer is for is to say the unsayable and speak the unspeakable, to ask difficult questions."[134] The violence of the apartheid regime in the late 70's and 80's provoked creative works that sought to document these horrors in ways the government had silenced. In To Every Birth Its Blood Serote presents the reader with a story that speaks to the ordinary experiences that black people negotiated in their everyday lives. These experiences were largely informed by a violent state of oppression. Although Serote makes certain that the Movement is the organ identified to inevitably deliver the nations freedom, the individuals that make up this complex organ necessitate that we understand them in order to gain a holistic grasp of apartheid as experienced by black oppressed people. To Every Birth Its Blood deals intricately with silence and the traumas of silence. Serote's writing utters the unspeakable, making it accessible, although not easy to deal with since, "In time, all these silences created more complex silences." (176) It is these "complex silences" that see Serote creating a multi-layered story that simultaneously speaks to the larger apartheid ideology and counter ideologies, and the hidden spaces of personal hurt, resistance, vulnerability, hopes, imaginative creations and loneliness.

I found it of interest that what is "unsayable" in To Every Birth Its Blood, namely the bloodshed of the 16 June 1976 student uprisings, should be what the narrative rests on. By not overtly saying what happened, Serote focuses on detailing the kind of state that turned such spectacular attacks on black people into a common experience in their lives. Shifting attention away from documenting this historically grand act of resistance Serote's focus on how the everyday makes this moment one amongst many resilient stands against apartheid. In this research report the first chapter traced the web of mechanisms that the state used to silence people and discussed how these penetrated through to the quotidian. It looked at how

[134] N. Gordimer, Living in Hope and History, David Philip, Cape Town, 1999, Contents page.

the creation of determined spaces in the form of townships or locations for black people in and on the outskirts of the city of Johannesburg lead to the inhabitants developing anxieties informed by a sense of placelessness. What this chapter also elucidated was that such spatial planning determined who was crammed into these makeshift spaces using a racial rubric designed to justify such dehumanisation. What developed from this was the argument that in such conditions of restriction and restraint, violence had a fertile breeding ground. Looking at the township space as a marked out boundary that the black body is confined to I considered how in this space violence is both a result of and defined by physical restrictions. To illustrate the effect of such encampment I focused on the kind of individual that emerges from the township space. I discussed the protagonist Tsi as symbolic of the many that come from the underbelly of the architecture of apartheid and its daily institutionalisation. The various illustrations in To Every Birth Its Blood of ways the black body was governed initiated discussion on the traumas experienced by families, especially after a loved one was captured by the police. This opened up an "unhealing wound" (112) that was never given time to heal. What emerged from this discussion was that families were forced into fear and that uncertainty was compounded by the state's withholding of information.

I moved on to develop thoughts on how much of the violence of apartheid was saturated in language. Yes, official law and speeches by infamous apartheid leaders and officials had direct implications for black people but apartheid thought permeated into everyday language. I argued that because this authoritarian use of language was most accessible to white citizens, it governed relations between both white and black often to the exclusion of the black voice. I have considered how Black Consciousness thought worked to radically dismantle the language of oppression and humanise the image of blackness. I looked at principles of Black Consciousness adopted by the youth Serote depicts, and the subsequent difficulties they faced when their actions brought them within a frightful proximity to the "display of power" (72) by state police, which often culminated in brutal attacks on these youth. I argue the greatest counter force against the physical threat by the state at this stage is the imagination. I discussed how Tsi and John's imaginative re-creations of the past are indicative of their ammunition against oppression and more specifically periods of torture and trauma. The effectiveness of this is brilliantly captured in Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko's famous quote: "The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed."[135] The mind is reclaimed through an awareness of one's position in relation to

[135] S.B. Biko, I Write What I Like. Oxford: Heinemann, 1979, p. 68. This was said at a speech Biko gave in Cape Town in 1971 titled "White Racism and Black Consciousness."

the oppressor and the use of the power of the imagination as instrumental to unlearning falsities.

In Chapter Two the primary focus was on physical and institutional state violence and its impact on the unseen pains of individuals, family members and the community at large within the novel. Considered here is how Tsi's unstable nature is largely due to his vulnerability towards the common impossibility that all black people face - the uncertainty of what the next moment might present for them and their loved ones. This vulnerable position that the marginalised in South Africa faced was further explored through the disappearance of Tsi's brother, Fix, whose detention exposed the levels at which loss affected the very basic interactions amongst family members.

This chapter also paid attention to relationships. I noted that between generations, the concern was the protection of what was cherished most- one another and the hope for a future free of apartheid. I explored this relationship as paradoxical and investigated the relationship younger generations have with elderly men and women. I argued that men are predominantly rendered absent within the family and community while women remain and bestow upon the young the knowledge of wisdom and also are left forever waiting for the return of absent sons and husbands. The trope of the crisis of intimacy and interiority informed the discussion of relationships. I also looked at the ways people invariably resist oppression and even re-appropriate instruments of oppression such as silence. The ways in which silence is adopted by the state as a tool of oppression was re-interrogated and from it methods of turning silence into a shield were developed and examined.

The final chapter explored the role of music in To Every Birth Its Blood. I attempted to understand the hidden nature of silence that had thus far made it difficult to trace and follow the life of especially, Tsi, through discussing numerous moments of listening to music, the way its poetic expressions are used to narrate and the sensory and thematic significance that the act of listening to jazz enables. Through engagement with the lyrics of songs I found music was a significant mode through which characters and a community communicate to one another their most hidden anguish, hopes and desires. What surfaced through lyrics and Tsi's listening of jazz pieces was the tension between seeking the knowledge of one's past to make sense of the present suffering and choosing to act upon the findings, or in Tsi's case

avoiding engagement. I further read music as shaped by and able to fill the spaces of silence, affording people agency to the extent that the community of Alexandra is ushered into a phase of mobilized combative resistance. In his "Lecture on Nothing," John Cage tells us that "there are silences and words make help make the silences."[136] These silences, he says, should not be feared as the space of time is organised by these silences. In my conclusion to this chapter, I argue the Movement appropriates silence as a mode of discipline meant to organise the ensuing war- the revolution South Africa desperately needs.

Attempting to engage with the trope of silence in all its complexities requires an acknowledgment that philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein presents in the Tractatus Logico Philosophicus that, "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence"[137], translated differently "we must say nothing about that which cannot be said."

[136] J. Cage, "Lecture on Nothing", printed in Incontri Musicali, 1959, p. 109.
[137] L. Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico- Philosophicus, Kegan Paul, London, 1922, p. 111.

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