

**A STUDY OF SELECTED THEMES OF PROTEST IN
ZAKES MDA'S POST-APARTHEID FICTION**

By

DINEO IDA HOVEKA

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH STUDIES

in the

SCHOOL OF LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

at the

UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO

SUPERVISOR : PROF. M.J. CLOETE

CO-SUPERVISOR : MRS D. WATT-GOWANS

FEBRUARY 2009

(i)

DECLARATION

I, DINEO IDA HOVEKA, declare that **A STUDY OF SELECTED THEMES OF PROTEST IN ZAKES MDA'S POST-APARTHEID FICTION**, hereby submitted by me, is my own original work. I have not previously, in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree, and that all the sources that I have used or quoted, have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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D I HOVEKA

23/10/2008
DATE

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my children Tshepo, Lebogang, Lerato, and Bontle.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt gratitude goes to

- The Almighty God for giving me strength and courage to complete this study.
- Professor Nettie Cloete for believing in my abilities, her constant support, kindness, understanding, and mostly for guiding me patiently throughout my studies.
- Mrs D. Watt-Gowans for her incisive and insightful suggestions.
- Dr Moloko Sepota for persuading and encouraging me to pursue this study and his unfading support during my studies.
- My beautiful children, my Mom and Dad for their love, motivation and support.
- The University of Limpopo, for granting me the opportunity and financial assistance to undertake this study.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines elements of protest in four of Zakes Mda's novels, namely, *Ways of Dying* (1995a), *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995b), *The Heart of Redness* (2000), and *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002). The elements of protest that are identified and investigated in this study are abuse, betrayal, discrimination, and violence. This study also shows that these elements of protest that are investigated are a result of a lack of integrity and social accountability on the part of government, the civil service, and individuals themselves.

In addition, this dissertation reveals the extent to which social injustices negatively influence the thinking and behaviour of the general South African society and thwart the aspirations of ordinary people. Finally, suggestions to curb abuse, betrayal, and discrimination are made.

CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUALIZATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Protest is a global historic phenomenon. It occurs in social or political contexts where individuals or groups show disgruntlement towards an ideology, policy, or system that subjugates them. In South Africa, protest has always been the preoccupation of a large number of individuals such as writers and political activists due to the country's history of racial inequalities. In order to confront inequalities that existed between European and Non-European citizens of this country, protest has always been utilised as a channel through which the subjugated show resistance to reclaim their human and cultural identity. The purpose of protest is thus an endeavour to attain emancipation.

In all previously colonized countries, various forms of protest such as public demonstrations, boycotts, civil wars and military coups were instrumental in the fight against colonial domination. Countries such as Mozambique and Zimbabwe resorted to guerrilla warfare in order to liberate themselves from Portuguese and British colonial rule respectively (Chapman, 1996:255-295). However, in South Africa, while public demonstrations such as the Sharpeville Anti-Pass Demonstration on 31 March 1960 (Eilersen, 1995:46) and the Soweto Students' Uprising on 16 June 1976 (Christie, 1986:238), were employed as tools of protest against discrimination and other apartheid atrocities, literature also played a significant role in the struggle against apartheid. After the banning of the African National Congress and its military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe and the subsequent incarceration of its leadership by the Nationalist government, literary protest in the form of poetry, drama, music, and prose became indispensable in the struggle against oppression.

A large number of South African writers such as Bessie Head, Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing, Es'kia Mphahlele, and J.M. Coetzee, have written extensively on issues of protest during the liberation struggle. While the works of these writers give insight into the machinations of apartheid before independence, Zakes Mda, generally regarded as the

most prolific dramatist and currently novelist, tackles aspects of protest from a different perspective. Mda's novels reveal the perspective of a post-apartheid writer who sets out to investigate a number of social maladies that occurred during the transitional and post-apartheid periods when the National Party and the African National Congress engaged in negotiations, by illuminating the ways in which those maladies have proliferated into the present. Mda's post-apartheid novels thus deal with the recurrence of such maladies in South Africa.

The main social maladies that are addressed in Mda's work are abuse, betrayal, corruption, discrimination, and violence. Mda's concern with the propagation of these social ills in a newly democratic society, emanates from his realisation that they dispel the dream of nirvana that was envisaged by the leaders of the struggle against apartheid. Leaders such as Oliver Tambo (as quoted in Jordan, 1988:90) cherished the following ideal when they undertook the struggle:

We conceive of our country as a single, democratic and non-racial state, belonging to all who live in it, in which all shall enjoy equal rights, and in which sovereignty will come from the people as a whole ...

This dream of a future nirvana is echoed by Mandela (in Holloway, 1999:38) when he states, "I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities". The current president, Thabo Mbeki, concurs with Tambo and Mandela when he asserts:

As Africans, our struggle is to engage in both the total emancipation of our continent from the social, political and economic legacy of colonialism and apartheid ... [to] rebuild our societies to ensure that they are developed and prosperous (Bekker, in *City Press*, 2006:23).

All these assertions reveal the quest to liberate and restore the human dignity of the previously oppressed Africans by accordin them equality with the other inhabitants of the country. However, after more than a decade of democracy, the previously marginalised still do not have the basic human rights or equality that was envisaged. Thus, Mda sets out to interrogate the conscience of those in leadership positions in order to confront

the issues that have thwarted the ideals of the liberation struggle, as the present government can no longer blame apartheid or colonialism for the evils that abound in South Africa.

Uwah (2003:136) observes that Mda's work articulates his disillusionment with independent Africa and that Mda does not see any overt independence at all. Uwah further observes that Mda does not regard the state of the ordinary man in post-apartheid South Africa as being elevated to a better position.

It is on the basis of such observations that protest has become a central theme in Mda's post apartheid novels.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

In 1948 the white-only ruling party known as the National Party (NP) came into power in South Africa. The assumption of power by this party saw the introduction of controversial laws which collectively became known as Apartheid Laws. Mandela (1995:13) states that these laws "represented the codification of all the laws and regulations that had kept Africans in an inferior position to whites for centuries".

The oppressive nature of the Apartheid Laws urged political activists such as Nelson Mandela, Oliver Thambo and Walter Sisulu to engage in a liberation struggle under the wing of the African National Congress (ANC). Many of these political activists were either exiled or incarcerated. However, in 1990 the then President of South Africa F.W. de Klerk unbanned the ANC and released political prisoners so that negotiations between the NP and ANC could ensue. The negotiations ran from 1990 to 1994.

During this transitional period, the country was plunged into a state of political, economic and racial instability. There was notable rivalry between political parties such as the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party. The struggle for political power between the two parties resulted in faction fights and senseless killings. International countries also imposed sanctions on the government as a way of advocating change. Mda's novels form part of the literature that focuses on the events that took place

during the transitional period, in other words, from 1990 to 1994, so that his post-apartheid novels have been characterised by a revelation of the effects of the radical changes in the society as well as the effects of history on the present.

1.3 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study was to examine selected themes of protest in Mda's first four post-apartheid novels, namely, *Ways of Dying* (1995), *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), *The Heart of Redness* (2000), and *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002).

In order to achieve this aim, the study explored the following aspects of protest as addressed by Mda:

- Factors that propagated violence during the transitional and post-apartheid periods.
- Forms of discrimination that South Africans had been experiencing.
- Ways in which women and children were being abused.
- The role of corruption and betrayal in the lives of those who claimed to be of one accord with those who had struggled for freedom.
- The negative impact of westernisation on traditional values.

1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Protest has always been a significant part of people's lives in South Africa. Both black and white dissentients of apartheid such as Es'kia Mphahlele and Nadine Gordimer have written extensively on issues of apartheid. The dawn of a post-apartheid South Africa has brought to the fore new writers such as the late K. Sello Duiker, Phaswane Mpe, Sindiwe Magona, and Zakes Mda. These writers have produced novels that illustrate the heritage of apartheid in the post-apartheid era. Zakes Mda is the most prolific of these new novelists as he vigorously addresses a wide variety of contemporary social and political ills upon which apartheid had a bearing. Mda's work recognizes the fact that protest literature is not merely about the past but also about the present since the ills of the past such as women and child abuse, corruption and betrayal, and violence keep re-surfacing

and are being propagated. Thus, Ndibe aptly corroborates Mda's view when he states, “[Mda] seeks to show how particular ancient traumas dog contemporary lives, how they disfigure, dismember, and embitter the present (<http://web6.inotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>).

Despite the fact that Mda is a relatively new writer in the area of prose fiction and that elements of fiction in his novels have not yet been adequately explored, it should be noted that he has previously dealt with issues of protest in poetry and drama. As a playwright he was accorded special recognition for his acclaimed play, *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (1993), for which he won the Merit Award of the Amstel Playwright of the Year Society (Yao-Kun, 2003:123). In this play, Mda protests against the exploitation of individuals who had sacrificed their lives by engaging in the struggle for liberation. Janabari and Sergeant are war veterans who had hoped for a better life after freedom. Their ideals and expectations are verbalised thus, “our wars were not merely to replace a white face with a black one, but to change a system which exploits us, to replace it with one that will give us a share in the wealth of this country” (Mda, 1996:22). Nevertheless, instead of getting a share in the wealth of the country, they are relegated to beggary and homelessness. In addition, a corrupt police officer known as *Offisiri*, extorts money from them by making them pay for inhabiting the city park. Exploitation of the poor and the corruption of those who are in power are some of the ills that Mda protests against.

Mda's shift from playwright to prose fiction writer resulted in the publication of his novels, *Ways of Dying* (1995), *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), *The Heart of Redness* (2000), *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), and *The Whale Caller* (2005). His novels have generally received positive criticism and won several literary awards. For example, *Ways of Dying* won the M-Net Book Prize while *The Heart of Redness* won the 2001 Commonwealth Writers Prize for Africa (<http://www.sundaytimes.co.za/literaryawards/authors/zakesintvu.asp>).

Moffet (1996:14) observes that Mda's work has been received with excitement and intrigue by other critics while *The Economist* (1995) quoted in Moffet (1996:14) refers to Mda as “[p]erhaps the most refreshing black novelist to emerge in South Africa”. Mda can thus be regarded as one of the leading current South African novelists.

This study will provide insight into these socio-political issues for which Mda's work has been acclaimed. The study will also reveal the extent to which the remnants of apartheid are still discernible in the democratic South Africa.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

The nature of the research topic required the use of the qualitative research method which involves a literary and critical study of primary and secondary sources. The research topic was approached from a humanist point of view.

1.5.1 Primary sources

The study was based on Mda's first four novels, namely, *Ways of Dying* (1995), *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995), *The Heart of Redness* (2000), and *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002). However, reference will also be made to Mda's other works of protest such as his drama, *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (2005).

Mda's work was examined against the context of post-apartheid independence South African writing as well. This includes references to the works of other writers such as Nadine Gordimer, Es'kia Mphahlele and Sindiwe Magona.

1.5.2 Secondary sources

Critical material on the nature and history of protest literature was investigated to provide a historical and theoretical framework against which Mda's contribution to South African post-apartheid independence fiction was studied and evaluated. The study of secondary sources first focused on critical works on protest writing as a genre. While the study of critical works on protest in Mda's own work includes articles in scholarly journals, and reviews as expounded in Chapter Two, the Internet also served as a source of information.

1.6 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

For the purpose of this study the following concepts have the meanings as given below:

- 1.6.1 **Protest:** An act of expressing objection to or disapproval of something. In this research study various forms of protest were examined, such as protest against all forms of racial oppression, the oppression of women and children, as well as corruption and betrayal.
- 1.6.2 **Apartheid:** An Afrikaans term which has been adopted into English. According to the *South African Student Dictionary* (1999), apartheid was the former official policy in South Africa of keeping people of separate races apart. This policy was designed by H.F. Verwoerd, the Prime Minister of South Africa in 1961.
- 1.6.3 **Post-apartheid independence:** This refers to the period after the end of apartheid. In this instance, after the first democratic elections in South Africa held on 24 April 1994. For the purpose of this study, no specific end to this period was cited.
- 1.6.4 **Transitional period:** The period from the mid-eighties when it became clear that apartheid was being vigorously contested and would not last until the end of the apartheid regime in 1994. “This is the period when South African societies experienced extensive ideological, political, economic and institutional changes” (Van Wyk, 1997:79).
- 1.6.5 **Violence:** The use of physical force against another person with the aim of inflicting pain, injury or death.
- 1.6.6 **Discrimination:** The act of being biased, showing prejudice, or making unjust distinctions. Although the end of apartheid officially ended discrimination, this phenomenon still informs South African life as is shown in this study.

- 1.6.7 **Abuse:** Maltreatment of another person, physically, emotionally or psychologically. In this case the focus was on the abuse of people of colour in general and children and females in particular.
- 1.6.8 **Corruption:** The lack of integrity or honesty as shown by individuals or groups of people in positions of leadership or authority. This theme was extensively explored in the works under discussion in this research study.
- 1.6.9 **Betrayal:** Being unfaithful or false to another person or to an ideal. Mda's novels teem with instances of different kinds of betrayal.

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study will make a contribution to the body of literary criticism of Mda's work, while certain aspects that the study examined are of vital importance towards nation building in contemporary South Africa. Therefore, the study will hopefully sensitise people to recognize ills in the current South African society and encourage them to endeavour to create a more unbiased country in which the *Batho Pele* and *Ubuntu* principles will be practised and not merely preached. *Batho Pele* and *Ubuntu* are government initiatives which seek to transform the culture of public service delivery by prioritising the needs of the citizens. *Batho Pele*, a Sotho translation for “people first”, aims at getting public servants to be service orientated, to strive for excellence in service delivery and to commit to the improvement of service delivery. This concept embraces, among others, the principle of consultation, ensuring courtesy and providing information to the public in an open and transparent way (<http://www.dpsa.gov.za/batho-pele/Definition-asp>). As such, *Batho Pele* is an initiative that endeavours to evoke and instill a sense of integrity and consciousness in public servants.

The concept *Ubuntu* originates from Nguni languages such as isiZulu and isiXhosa. This concept suggests that a common bond and interaction exist among human beings, and that it is through this bond and interaction that humans discover their human qualities (<http://www.buzzle.com/editorials/7-22-2006-103206.asp>). The South African Nobel laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, describes *Ubuntu* as,

The essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. It speaks about compassion. A person with *Ubuntu* is welcoming, warm and generous, willing to share. Such people are open and available to others, willing to be vulnerable, affirming of others, do not feel threatened that others are able and good, for they have a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that they belong in a greater whole. They know that they are diminished when others are humiliated, diminished when others are oppressed, diminished when others are treated as if they were less than who they are. The quality of *Ubuntu* gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them (<http://yourlifemanual.com/ubuntu.htm>).

1.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited in that it is based on only a number of aspects of protest in a single genre in the works of one author. As such, it leaves ample scope for scholars to do research on this theme in the works of other post-apartheid writers as well.

1.9 CONCLUSION

Having provided the preface to the study in this chapter, the researcher will now embark on a brief outline of the chapters that will follow.

Chapter Two contains the literature review that has illuminated the topic of the study. This includes the works of early protest writers, transitional and post-apartheid writers as well as critical material on Mda's works.

Chapter Three is an exposition on aspects of protest such as protest against child and woman abuse, violence, corruption, and betrayal of ideals in Mda's *Ways of Dying* (1995).

This will be followed by Chapter Four which will deal with protest against abuse of all genders, corruption and betrayal, and police brutality in *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995).

In Chapter Five the theme of protest will be further elucidated by illustrating the impact of colonial exploitation and dupery on Africans in *The Heart of Redness* (2000).

Chapter Six will mainly deal with the abuse of women of colour, racial discrimination and protest against corruption and betrayal of ideals in *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002).

Finally, Chapter Seven will provide a general conclusion to the discussion of Mda's works while Chapter Eight will provide a bibliography of both primary and secondary sources.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

To make a meaningful contribution to existing literature in general, and transitional and post-apartheid protest literature specifically, this study reviews literature that is relevant to the research topic. This includes a study of elements of protest in a number of well-known South African protest writers' work as well as critical studies on Mda's output, especially on his novels. While the work of the writers included in this literature review serves to elucidate the argument of the study since these writers have mainly protested against the ideologies and practical implications of apartheid, Mda's novels will illustrate that although apartheid was officially ended in 1994, the remnants of its ideologies and practical applications are still discernible in South Africa.

Much has been published about Mda as a renowned dramatist, less as a poet but little about him as a novelist since he only started publishing novels in 1995. Although the focus of this study is not on Mda's work as a dramatist, his play, *We Shall Sing for the Fatherland* (1993) which deals with the same thematic aspects of protest as those depicted in *Ways of Dying* (1995), is given recognition. In this play Mda portrays the turbulent lives of former cadres who despite their contribution towards the struggle for liberation, end up homeless and face constant police harassment in the new dispensation. The marginalisation of the ordinary South African citizens who were engaged in the struggle for liberation is one of the concerns that Mda continues to protest against in his novels.

2.2 SOUTH AFRICAN PROTEST WRITERS

In this study the literature of both early South African protest writers and post-apartheid writers will be reviewed. The work of early South African writers will make a significant contribution to this study since Ndibe observes, "Mda wishes us to see that the past is never a category for antiquity but vitally potent in the present" (<http://web 27.epnet.com/DeliveryPrint Save.asp?>). It is, however, worth mentioning that early and post-apartheid

writers are not necessarily different individuals, for example, some of the early writers such as Nadine Gordimer and J.M. Coetzee have continued to write about issues of protest in post-apartheid South Africa.

2.3 EARLY SOUTH AFRICAN PROTEST WRITERS

2.3.1 Bessie Head (1971, 1986, 1993)

Bessie Head is one of the writers who wrote extensively on aspects of protest before the end of the apartheid years. She is generally regarded as the foremost woman novelist in Africa by critics such as Maxwell-Mahon (1992:39), as she was one of the few female writers who confronted the injustices of the apartheid laws through writing. Bessie Head was born of what was termed an “illicit affair” by the racist apartheid government which “outlawed sexual union between black and white people” (Head, 1993:iv). Her identity as a coloured person in South Africa became the onset of a series of unfortunate circumstances that surrounded her. Mackenzie and Woeber (1990:1) describe Bessie Head’s life as “a tragic life-story that truly encapsulates the greater social and political evils of apartheid”. Bessie Head’s unfortunate life began when her white mother was forced by social and political pressures to give her up for adoption. As Bessie was growing up she constantly experienced injustices of apartheid which she expressed in writing. Mzamane (1997:29) describes Bessie Head’s work as “a cross between autobiography and novel”. This is an apt description as evinced by the autobiographical nature of her novels, but especially by her last, *A Question of Power* (1987). In the preface to this novel she stated: “It’s myself and myself alone that I have to present” (Daymond, 1993:ixii).

In her first novel, *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1986), Bessie Head portrays the life of Makhaya, a refugee who made a perilous escape from South Africa because he could not marry and have children in a country where black men were called “‘boy’ and ‘dog’ and ‘kaffir’” (Head, 1986:10). He also felt that it was appropriate to move out of a part of the African continent that was mentally and spiritually dead as a result of the perpetuation of false beliefs (Head, 1986:10). Bessie Head’s second novel, *Maru* (1971), also deals mainly with the ugliness of racial prejudice. Although the setting of this novel is

Botswana, she illustrates parallels between South African racial issues and those of Botswana. Thus she asserts, “With all my South African experience, I longed to write an enduring novel on the hideousness of racial prejudice” (1971:back cover page).

In *Maru* (1971) the narrative focuses on the life of a Masarwa teacher, Margaret Cadmore, who despite her good qualifications and modesty, is rejected by the Batswana people who relegate her to a bushman, belonging to “people who are contented with their low, animal lives” (Head, 1971:44). Margaret’s plight is not alien to Bessie Head’s as in South Africa “coloureds [were] trash” (Head, 1971:44).

In *The Cardinals* (1993) one of her works that was published posthumously, Bessie Head illustrates the injustices of the Immorality Act, an apartheid ideology that forms the core element of protest in Mda’s *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002). The Immorality Act, No. 23 of 1950, prohibited sexual relations between Europeans and non-Europeans. Although the most prominent element of protest in *The Cardinals* (1993) is incest, Head also relates two incidents where the police harass and arrest people for contravening the Immorality Act. PK, a white journalist is arrested and kicked around after being seen in a park with a coloured girl who was simply helping him upon realising that he was too drunk to walk by himself. A Norwegian sailor also finds himself in a predicament after being arrested for trying to have illicit sex with a non-European woman.

2.3.2 Es’kia Mphahlele (1959, 1971)

Another prominent early South African protest writer is Es’kia Mphahlele whose autographical novels, short stories and critical works have contributed to the understanding of issues related to apartheid. The autobiographical nature of his first two novels, *Down Second Avenue* (1959) and *The Wanderers* (1971), gives an authentic account of his life experiences in the then apartheid South Africa as they relate events from a personal perspective. In 1952 Mphahlele was dismissed from his teaching post for his opposition to Bantu Education. Subsequently, in 1955 he went into exile in Lesotho. On his return he joined Drum magazine as a journalist. However, his political beliefs which were reflected in his writings, caused him problems with the government. He then went into his second exile in Nigeria in 1957. He returned to South Africa in 1977 and worked as a professor of

African Literature at the University of Witwatersrand. *The Wanderers* is a portrayal of his life as a journalist in South Africa and later as a refugee in countries such as Nigeria.

During the apartheid era *Drum* journalists were perceived as enemies of the state as they produced exposés of police atrocities which included the brutal deaths of political prisoners, the death of black farm workers on white-owned farms and the disappearance of journalists who went out to investigate these matters. As a result of the peril that followed such exposés, Mphahlele fled the country to evade arrest and the concomitant police brutality. In this novel Mphahlele observes that South Africa was a turbulent country where Africans were both victims and perpetrators of the violence that engulfed them (Mphahlele, 1971: back cover notes).

The violence of the South African police is further illustrated in *Down Second Avenue* where Mphahlele recalls an incident when as a boy who was keeping watch for his mother who was selling beer illegally, he was beaten up by a white policeman. He states, "... the big white man caught me behind the neck and pressed my face against his other massive hand I began to suffocate" (1959:32). Other aspects of protest that Mphahlele points out in this novel are woman abuse and discrimination. He depicts the suffering of his mother, Eva, whose husband, Moses, abuses emotionally and physically. When she refuses to give him money he calls her "bitch" (1959:16) and empties a pot of boiling stew over her head (1959:18). Although Mphahlele's other works such as *Father Come Home* (1984) and *The Unbroken Song* (1981) abound with aspects of protest against apartheid, only the first two autobiographies have been selected as part of this literature review as they deal with salient aspects relevant to this study. For example, police brutality features prominently in Mda's *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995) and *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002), while the aspect of woman abuse resonates throughout Mda's entire literary output.

2.3.3 J.M. Coetzee (1974, 1977, 1980)

Coetzee is one of the white liberals who made a significant contribution to South African protest writing. Coetzee has written about protest in both the apartheid and post-apartheid era. During his career as a protest writer in apartheid South Africa, he produced works of fiction such as *Duskland* (1974), *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) and *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980). Coetzee, who has emigrated to Australia, still continues to

write about issues which are prevalent in post-apartheid South Africa. In his novel, *Disgrace* (2000) which he wrote prior to his departure, he illustrates the relevance of the colonial past to the present, a thematic aspect that Mda addresses in his third novel, *The Heart of Redness* (2000). This thematic aspect of protest against colonialism is more pronounced in Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) which has won several awards such as the CNA Prize, the Geoffrey Faber Memorial and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (Penguin insert in Coetzee:1980). This work of fiction pointedly illustrates the ills of western colonialism. It illustrates the perpetuation of earlier colonial structures such as the exploitation of the indigenous majority, their forced subsumption into a foreign culture through false ideologies and the subsequent rejection of their own culture (Watson, 1989:375). In *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) Coetzee depicts the ongoing war between the "barbarians" and the empire which conquers the less powerful owners of the land through subjecting them to imprisonment and torture. The magistrate who is the servant of the state fails to comprehend the injustice and indecent way the "barbarians" are treated. When he shows sympathy towards the victims, he is seen as colluding with the enemy. He is consequently imprisoned and treated indecently. Since this novel deals with the broad phenomenon of colonialism, it casts illumination on Mda's concerns in *The Heart of Redness*. Coetzee's later works, namely *Elizabeth Costello* and *Slow Man*, do not deal with South African issues.

2.3.4 Nadine Gordimer (1953, 1974, 1979, 1981, 2001)

Gordimer is one of the white South African protest writers who has made a significant contribution towards confronting the injustices of apartheid. Gordimer can be regarded as both an early and post-apartheid protest writer as her career as a novelist began in the twentieth century and continued into the twenty-first century. Throughout her early writing career, apartheid, a policy which she describes as "[an] all consuming single internal issue at the core of [South Africa's] psychic and intellectual life" (1995:32), has been the focal point of her protest.

Thomas (2002:ii) thus asserts that Gordimer may be regarded as a writer from Africa whose being and writing have been directly involved with issues pertaining to the historical phenomena of colonialism and the race struggle over an extended period. Moreover, Thomas (2002:22) observes that Gordimer has been deeply bound up with the

multiple phases and consequences of the South African apartheid situation and has therefore been “the conscience against apartheid”. These observations and the fact that Gordimer has been acknowledged as a very worthy recipient of the Booker Prize in 1974 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991, afford her work authenticity and recognition in this study.

Having grown up in post-colonial South Africa and lived through the various stages of apartheid, Gordimer was able to immortalise her observations and experiences in writing. She has thirteen novels to her credit. Her earlier works such as *The Lying Days* (1953), *The Conservationist* (1974), *Burger's Daughter* (1979), and *July's People* (1981) are representative of South Africa’s painful history of racial intolerance, injustice and the cruelty of the apartheid system (Dimitriu, 2000:12). Of these earlier works, *The Conservationist* forms part of this literature review as it addresses aspects of apartheid that are pertinent to Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* such as colonialism and capitalism. *The Pickup* (2001), one of Gordimer’s post-apartheid novels, is also included in this literature review as it focuses on the question of culture and identity, which is one of Mda’s concerns in *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002).

In *The Conservationist* (1974) dispossession of black land, relegating blacks to the status of labourers on their own land and containing them in violence-infested townships while generating wealth for the usurper of their land, are some of the concerns of the novel. The novel is a depiction of the luxurious life of a white farmer, Meiring, who discovers a corpse of a black man on his farm. The man is a victim of the ownership violence that was fostered by conditions resulting from racial segregation in South Africa where blacks were confined to ghetto settlements. Township violence, an occurrence upon which apartheid has a bearing, features prominently in Mda’s *Ways of Dying* (1995).

Issues of culture and identity have become some of the salient concerns in post-apartheid South Africa. In *The Pickup* (2001) Gordimer addresses these issues through the characters of the young lovers, Judy Summers and Ibrahim Musa. Judy is a white South African from an affluent, prestigious white family and Ibrahim (alias Abdu) is an illegal Arabian immigrant who works as a motor mechanic. The search for identity and the reconciling of their different cultures has social and political implications for the lovers.

Judy breaks the racial and cultural barriers between herself and Ibrahim. She readily accepts Ibrahim and immigrates to his Arabian country with him. The theme of the search for identity and culture in South Africa, a country where people of other races are regarded as inferior and are barred from having relations with whites, is one of the central concerns in *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002). In this novel, Popi, a product of miscegenation, struggles to accept her coloured identity and rejects her half-brother Tjaart Cronjé who grew up enjoying all the privileges of being a white South African while she battled with the every day injustices of apartheid. She, however, finally finds peace when she learns to accept herself and to a certain extent reconciles with her half-brother.

2.4 TRANSITIONAL AND POST-APARTHEID WRITERS

The transitional period in South Africa began in the mid eighties and lasted into the nineties when negotiations for democracy were taking place and well after the 1994 elections. During this period it became apparent that apartheid was going to end. However, the death of apartheid gave birth to other evils that were either a proliferation of apartheid ideologies or newly created ones. The transitional and the post-apartheid periods saw the emergence of prose writers who wrote on different aspects of the social and political situation of the country. Common concerns that are discernible in the works of these writers include, among others, the nature of the evils of the apartheid regime, contemporary social and political ills, as well as fears and uncertainties about the future.

2.4.1 Steve Biko (1996)

In the sixties, Steve Biko was one of the most radical opponents of apartheid. Although Biko started writing about protest during the apartheid era, his work, *I Write What I Like* (1996) which has contributed immensely to the study, will be reviewed under post-apartheid work as it was published posthumously and for the first time in South Africa in 1996. *I Write What I Like* is a memoir and a collection of papers that Biko presented at seminars and meetings. During the apartheid era Biko's ideas were suppressed, he was banned in 1973 and subsequently prohibited from speaking in public or writing for publication. Biko became immersed in politics when he was a medical student at the University of Natal. He became president of the South African Students' Organisation in

1969 whereupon he founded a movement that became known as Black Consciousness (Biko, 1996:1-2). Biko's political activities ended in 1977 when he was arrested, tortured and murdered by the police while in detention. The brutality that the police exhibited in the killing of Biko reinforces the fact that violence has always been a characteristic of the South African police. Police brutality is one aspect of protest that is poignant in Mda's works, especially in *Ways of Dying* (1995) and *She Plays with the Darkness* (1995).

Another important aspect in Biko's work that illuminates the topic of this study is his idea of Black Consciousness, a phenomenon that embraces his total perspective on the roots of the struggle of a black person. According to Biko (1996:52), the Black Consciousness philosophy seeks to guide Africans towards aspiring towards self-assertion and emancipation by committing themselves to fight against all forces that mark them as inferior and subservient. Black Consciousness also seeks to attack the exploitative nature of colonialism and the contempt that the "superior culture" shows towards the indigenous cultures. Thus, this movement expressed its aim as "[exorcising] the horrible demons of self-hatred and self-contempt that made blacks suck up to whites whilst treating fellow blacks as the scum they thought themselves to be" (Biko, 1996:ix).

The ideas that Biko propounds in Black Consciousness form the core of Mda's protest in *The Heart of Redness* (2000) where the modern day protagonist, Qukezwa Ximiya, is depicted as representative of Africans who are so subsumed by western culture that they scorn and deplore African cultural and religious practices. Therefore, Mda and Biko express the same view when it comes to issues of identity and culture. They observe that the most important weapon against the oppressor is the oppressed's positive attitude towards his or her cultural identity.

2.4.2 Sindiwe Magona (1990, 1992, 1998)

Sindiwe Magona is one of the few black South African female writers whose works vehemently condemn the ideologies of apartheid and patriarchy. She writes from a female perspective as she addresses the problems faced by black women in South Africa. Her first two novels, *To My Children's Children* (1990) and *Forced to Grow* (1992), are autobiographical while her third novel, *Mother to Mother* (1998) is based on a real-life

occurrence in that it depicts the circumstances that surround the death of Amy Biehl, an exchange student who became a victim of violence in the black township of Gugulethu. The violence that erupted in the township was the result of political upheavals that were prevalent in the black townships during the transitional period. Ironically, Amy Biehl was caught in the wave of violence while she was working as one of the organisers of the first democratic elections, an event that was to change the country for the better. Such acts of violence and senseless killing are some of the issues that Mda protests against especially in *Ways of Dying*. In both *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*, Magona argues against the injustices of patriarchy and the apartheid system. She protests against issues such as racial discrimination and gender inequalities. While *Forced to Grow* generally outlines the problems that Magona encountered as she was growing up, *To My Children's Children* is a novel in which she gives her grandchildren an account of her life to encourage them not to allow themselves to be victims of the injustices that she had suffered. The most salient aspect of protest that features in this autobiography is the abandonment of women. As a young girl, Sindiwe learnt from her grandmother, Maxolo, that she had been abandoned by her husband who had gone to the city to work there and only came back home when their child was ten years old. Sindiwe Magona herself became a victim of abandonment that resulted from apartheid laws when her husband went to the city as a migrant labourer. Laws such as the Group Areas Act, No. 41 of 1950, forced black people to live in demarcated areas in the cities to which they were prohibited to bring their families. Mda's protagonists, Noria and Niki in *Ways of Dying* and *The Madonna of Excelsior* respectively, are abandoned by their husbands and face the struggle of bringing up their children on their own. Thus, Magona's work is significant to the topic of the study as it illuminates issues of woman abuse and the general plight of women during the apartheid years.

2.4.3 Nelson Mandela (1995)

Nelson Mandela was the first democratically elected African head of state in South Africa. During his office as president, Mandela was acclaimed both locally and internationally as the most outstanding moral political leader of his time for his unwavering commitment and selfless devotion to the struggle for liberation. Mandela sacrificed his personal and family life as well as his career as an attorney when he became engaged in the struggle for

liberation under the African National Congress between 1944 and 1962 when he was arrested.

His autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* (1995), which he began writing in 1974 while imprisoned on Robben Island, is an account of his life as a young man in his home village of Xunu in the Transkei, a law student at Wits University, an attorney in Johannesburg, a political activist, and political prisoner on Robben Island, and finally, his release and inauguration as President of the Republic of South Africa on 10 May 1994. *Long Walk to Freedom* is an exposition of the trials and tribulations that Mandela and his compatriots such as Govan Mbeki, Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu, and Ahmed Kathrada, went through during the apartheid years. This work provides insight into the operations of the apartheid policies. In this work, Mandela (1995:182) points out that he condemned the apartheid government for its ruthlessness and lawlessness. By lawlessness, Mandela refers to the injustices of the laws that discriminated against other races. He illustrates the injustices of the law by referring to numerous personal and social mishaps that he experienced. To illustrate the extent of racial discrimination by the law, Mandela (1995:190) recalls an incident where the Law Society of the then Transvaal applied to the Supreme Court to have him struck off the roll because the system deemed him unprofessional and dishonourable. At the time of his hearing Mandela pointed out that a certain advocate Strydom was admitted to the Law Society despite facing prosecution for stealing a car. The response he got was “There are of course differences between Strydom and Mandela. Mandela is not a Nationalist and Mandela is not a white” (1995:190). Mandela (1995:386) further points out that on 15 October 1962 when he stood trial for treason, all court officials were whites. He thus presents the following argument to the magistrate:

[T]he real purpose of this rigid colour bar is to ensure that the justice dispensed by the courts should conform to the policy of the country, however, much that policy might be in conflict with the norms of justice accepted in the judiciaries throughout the civilized world ... (1995:386).

The injustice of the courts where white magistrates dispensed justice is one of the concerns that Mda addresses in his works. For example, in *She Plays with the Darkness*, a magistrate humiliates an elderly woman, who has been raped by her son-in-law by stating

that her beauty and state of inebriety at the time of the crime were extenuating circumstances. Protest against issues of colour and race are some of the central aspects in Mda's works especially in *The Madonna of Excelsior*. Mda shares Mandela's observations about a "rigid colour bar" (1995:386) when he states that Africans were not allowed to sit on the seats in a courtroom, they could only stand against the wall at the back (2002:77). They were also not allowed to enter an hotel except as cleaners (2002:141). Mandela's work deserves attention in this study as it not only encompasses aspects of protest that feature in Mda's works but also provides valuable insight into the operations of apartheid laws.

2.5 CRITICISM ON MDA'S NOVELS

Since Mda is relatively new to the world of prose writing, not many full length studies on him have been published, but his work, especially *Ways of Dying*, has evoked quite a number of critical works in the form of reviews and articles. While it is common for writers who embark on a new genre to receive both positive and negative criticism, Mda's novels have generally evoked affirmative responses as evidenced by the following works.

2.5.1 Johan Van Wyk (1997)

In his article, *Catastrophe and Beauty: Ways of Dying, Zakes Mda's Novel of Transition* (1997), Van Wyk (1997:79) contends that Mda's *Ways of Dying* portrays many recognisable aspects of life in the transitional period but also observes that the focus of this work in particular is mainly on the multiple occurrences of violent deaths in a society where the state has lost control and legitimacy. Van Wyk's observations are apt as aspects such as discrimination as well as child and woman abuse also feature in this work while violence is admittedly the most prominent feature in *Ways of Dying*. Van Wyk's article will, therefore, play a significant role in expounding the issue of violence during the transitional period.

2.5.2 Margaret Mervis (1998)

In *Fiction for Development: Zakes Mda's Ways of Dying* (1998) Margaret Mervis observes that Mda as a theorist is concerned about the insensitivity, insincerity and delusion inculcated in the various population groups in South Africa by decades of social and political oppression, resulting in the stunting of hopes and compassion coupled with deep-rooted communal and individual fears. A lack of compassion for others and fear within different groups of people and individuals are observations Mda corroborates and ascribes to apartheid laws which discriminated against blacks. Apartheid laws portrayed blacks as uncouth and uncivilized. This depiction of black people created tension and unfounded fear between the black and the white races and consequently bred oppression and hatred. Mervis (1998:40) further observes that Mda's work provides "an occasion within which vistas of inner capacity are opened up and offers ways in which individuals and society at large can redeem and transform themselves". Social and political transformation are issues that Mda's works aim to achieve. The relevance of Mervis's observations about Mda are proved by the examination of these concerns as discussed in this study.

2.5.3 Tony Eprile (2004)

Eprile in *The New York Times Book Review* (2004) states that Mda's purpose in *Ways of Dying* (1995) is to show various ways of dying in the transition to a new South Africa, whether through the brutality of white overseers and policemen or that of black gangsters. He points out that there is a startling contrast between the vibrant lives that existed and the violent deaths that occurred (http://www.ahO.org/books/0312420919_Ways_of_Dying_Review.shtml).

Violence is undoubtedly one of the central concerns in *Ways of Dying*. For example, Mda (1995:65) observes that on Boxing Day people were vibrant and merry yet they went on raping, drinking and stabbing sprees. He further illustrates the contrast between vibrant life and violent death when he relates the incident where children of a school choir from a rural village become victims of a senseless shooting in the township. Cases of white-on-black and black-on-black violence are prominent features in *Ways of Dying*, thus Eprile's article successfully points out one of the salient aspects of protest in this work.

2.5.4 Straus and Giroux (2004)

Straus and Giroux in *Beyond the Pale* (2004) illustrate that Mda's work addresses issues that are based on the historical events that still resonate through South Africa. Although these two critics cite Mda's novel, *The Madonna of Excelsior*, as a novel that shows that past historical events still encroach on the present, this observation actually applies to all of Mda's works. In *Ways of Dying*, for example, the principle of "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others" (Orwell, 1983:83) that is practised by the elite, emanates from the segregation policies that were instituted by whites during the apartheid era. In *The Heart of Redness*, the relegation of African culture to barbarism and superstition is a direct result of the influence of colonialism while *The Madonna of Excelsior* is illustrative of the predicament of a coloured person in the apartheid era, a poignant issue which has provoked political discussions in the post-apartheid era (www.sundaytimes.co.za). Straus and Giroux's observations about Mda's works are, therefore, germane to this study.

2.5.5 Benjamin Austen (2005)

Austen in *The Pen or The Gun* (2005) argues that although apartheid ended a decade ago, black South African novelists are forced to confront the burdens of expectation since pure fiction which is uninflected by political commentary or the promotion of the country's interests is apparently insufficient. Mda serves as an example of a novelist who has set out to confront issues of the past in the present. His works inarguably address a wide variety of issues such as betrayal, corruption, discrimination, and violence which, although presented in fictionalised narratives, are factual accounts of factors that diminish the expectations of many South Africans.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This literature review has provided some of the existing literary material relevant to the theme of this study. The relevance of the pre-apartheid and post-apartheid sources as well as critical works discussed in this study will be substantiated by the expositions that the researcher embarks upon in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER THREE

PROTEST IN WAYS OF DYING

3.1 INTRODUCTION AND PLOT SUMMARY

Although Mda is widely regarded as a post-apartheid novelist, it should be noted that the novel, *Ways of Dying* (1995), belongs to the transitional period, that is, the period from 1980s to the end of the twentieth century when negotiations for peace were taking place between the National Party and the African National Congress. It culminated in the 1994 democratic elections but a fair amount of uncertainty still reigned in the years following the elections. The purpose of the negotiations was to initiate the eradication of apartheid policies, their concomitant atrocities as well as the general political upheavals that were ripping the country apart. While these negotiations were in progress, social maladies which had propagated the evils that existed during the apartheid era were still prevalent. These social ills included abuse, betrayal, corruption, discrimination, and violence. The painful reality of the situation that prevailed at this time was that it was mainly those people who were previously marginalised by the apartheid government who became either victims or perpetrators of the social ills prevalent in the transitional period.

Mda's aim in writing *Ways of Dying* was to highlight and expose those social ills and show how they affected people's lives. Moreover, he endeavoured to demonstrate that even those who were engaged in the struggle for liberation were responsible for those social ills and that their irresponsible conduct not only defeated the ideals of democracy but also thwarted the hopes of a better future for many, especially the poor. In this novel, the suffering of those who are marginalised by the new government is portrayed through the characters of Toloki and Noria, Mda's male and female protagonists, who grew up together in a rural village. Both Noria and Toloki experience abuse in different ways in the village, and later in their adult lives, they are dogged by misfortunes and maltreatment. Toloki, who was physically abused by his father, Jwara, runs away from home and ends up in the city where he tries to make a living. His dreams of a better life are, nevertheless, shattered by the evils he encounters in the city. Firstly, his shack is demolished when he refuses to pay protection fees to corrupt state-paid vigilantes. Then his meat-and-

boerewors grill business is destroyed when city council officials confiscate his trolley and take it to the rubbish dump. Finally, he is unable to make ends meet; being without money and a home, he is reduced to vagrancy.

Noria, who becomes promiscuous while still at school, also runs away from home with a man called Napu, who later abuses and abandons her. Like Toloki, she moves to the city in the quest for a better life. But, unlike Toloki, she uses indecent means of making a living, by becoming a prostitute. After men had “chewed and then spewed her” (Mda, 1995a:144), she goes to live in an informal settlement with her son, Vutha the second. Vutha is called the second because Noria’s first son who had died was also called Vutha. Vutha, an activist at five, betrays his comrades when he divulges information to the rival hostel dwellers. He is consequently necklaced. Noria, who hopes to receive sympathy from those who were responsible for Vutha’s death, is betrayed by the comrades who, instead of taking responsibility, tell her that it was actually her son’s betrayal that led to his death. They further maltreat her by burning her shack to silence her. So, when she and Toloki meet after twenty years at Vutha’s funeral, they are drawn together by their tribulations. They finally find meaning in sharing their misery and in helping others overcome theirs. Toloki assumes the role of professional mourner while Noria becomes involved in social projects such as helping to care for abandoned children in the settlement.

There are multifarious forms of abuse that are discernible in current society. Women and children are abused either sexually, physically, psychologically or emotionally. The maltreatment of children in particular is an old practice that was of little concern to the authorities. “In fact, abuse and violence [were] generally integral to child-rearing and socialization” (<http://web25.epnet.com/citation.asp>). This view is shared by both African tradition and western religion which propound that beating is a necessary measure towards making children obedient, disciplined and responsible. For example, in African tradition the idiom “*Mohlare o kobja o sa le meetse*”, which may mean, children should receive corporal punishment right from infancy, encourages physical abuse as a corrective or disciplinary measure. In the Bible there are various references to the rod, especially in the book of Proverbs where it is stated, “He who spares the rod hates his son ...” (Proverbs 23:14). Therefore, it is not surprising that physical abuse in particular was not treated

seriously in the past. It should be noted, however, that sexual abuse which will also be discussed in this chapter, was never in any way encouraged by either African tradition or western religion.

Today there are laws such as Act No. 38 of 2005 (Government Gazette No. 28944, 19 June 2006) as well as Section 28 of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa which protect children from all forms of abuse. To give effect to the rights of children, welfare organisations, in conjunction with the South African Police Service, have declared the week 26-31 May 2008, Child Protection week (www.childwelfaresa.org.za). In addition to this, the South African Police Service has distributed pamphlets in schools. These pamphlets explain to children what child abuse entails and what they should do in case they have been or are being abused. Children are also provided with a toll-free Childline number, 0800 05 55 55, which they can call when they need to report incidents of child abuse (<http://www.is.org.za/pamphlet/childrens-rights-pamphlet.jpg>).

Women, like children, have been abused in various ways in the past and are still experiencing abuse on a very large scale, even in the twenty first century, an era where democratic rights of women are generally endorsed. On 25 November 2005, the day South Africans marked as the beginning of 16 Days of Activism Against Women and Child Abuse, Sandile Memela, spokesperson for the Ministry of Arts and Culture, interviewed several men to get their views on the issue of women rights. One of the respondents asserted, "...[I] would ask the new-age woman who desires freedom to completely stay out of my life" (*City Press*, 2005). This response clearly shows that there are men who still uphold outdated patriarchal beliefs that oppress women. In African and western traditions the patriarchal system relegated women to inferior positions and roles, hence idiomatic expressions such as "The place of a woman is in the kitchen" and the Sotho idiom, "*Tša etwa pele ke ye tshadi di wela ka leopeng*" which means, if women are allowed to assume leadership roles, nothing will go right. While these notions belong to the primitive world, Memela (*City Press*, 2005) argues, "In fact, to this day many ... men take mischievous delight in using the name of ... culture to justify and defend their oppressive, violent and abusive attitude and behaviour towards their women."

Nevertheless, the society and the law are working together to eradicate these age-old beliefs. Today structures such as the People's Organisation against Women Abuse (POWA) and the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996), which stipulates that the rights of all people in the country, their human dignity, equality and freedom shall be protected, have helped to create awareness of woman abuse and are fighting towards the eradication thereof. The media is also opposed to the abuse of women and children, for example, Van Schalkwyk (*Capricorn Voice*, 2005:n.p.) quotes Sello Moloto, Premier of Limpopo Province who stated at the launch of the 16 Days of Activism campaign against the abuse of women and children, "Abuse of women and children should be confronted and effectively dealt with as it destroys the moral and social fibre of society." In spite of the existence of organisational structures, awareness campaigns and massive media exposure of cases of woman and child abuse, this crime still continues to be part of society and receives abundant attention in the news media, the radio and on TV.

3.2 FORMS OF ABUSE IN *WAYS OF DYING*

3.2.1 Abuse and exploitation of children

In *Ways of Dying*, abuse, especially physical abuse, psychological and emotional abuse are portrayed. With regard to these forms of abuse, the cases of Noria, Toloki and Vutha will be expounded. It should be noted that while Mda presents the case of Toloki and Vutha in a straightforward manner, he does not do so in Noria's case but leaves it to the reader to infer that she has been abused in all three ways.

At the age of ten Noria is in the habit of spending most of her time with Jwara, who is a close friend of her father Xesibe. Jwara is a blacksmith and it is claimed that he is unable to create his figurines if Noria does not come to sing for him. At one stage Jwara keeps Noria in his workshop for a week. When Xesibe goes to the workshop to plead with Jwara to let Noria go, neither Jwara nor Noria responds to his plea. Instead Xesibe's wife, who is only known as "That Mountain Woman" and is said to have a promiscuous past, berates him; "How dare you, father of Noria, interfere with the process of creation. Who are you,

Father of Noria, to think that a piece of rag like you can have the right to stop my child from doing what she was born to do?" (Mda, 1995a:30).

While Mda does not explain what it is that "[Noria] was born to do" (1995a:30) illumination can be derived from the following statement: "in the village, we all know that by the time she reached her mid-teens, she had already acquired a reputation for making men happy. We were not sure whether it was Jwara who started her on this road." Another hint which indicates that Jwara and Noria's relationship is questionable can be surmised from the fact that Jwara's wife gives Noria the title "stuck up bitch" (Mda, 1995a:30), a title that does not befit a ten-year-old child if what she is doing in Jwara workshop is indeed singing for him. The final hint that Mda provides is, "That Mountain Woman, on the other hand, did not seem to notice what was happening ..." (1995a:74).

It is, therefore, not surprising when Noria, after leaving Jwara's workshop, engages in sexual rampages, first with a young man in the veld, then with bus conductors and finally, elopes with a man called Napu. Bagley and King (1990:130) point out that children who have been sexually abused display tendencies such as a preoccupation with sexual matters, promiscuity and running away from home. This observation is corroborated by a report in *Daily Sun*, (2006:n.p.) where a fifteen year-old girl claims that since she had been raped by four boys when she was ten, she had not been able to abstain from sex. She states that she sleeps with about fifteen men a day and still cannot get enough of it ([dailysun.co.za](http://www.dailysun.co.za)). Hence it can be concluded that what Noria turns into as a young girl is the result of what transpired in Jwara's workshop.

Another victim of abuse is Toloki, Jwara's son. Toloki is an artistically talented child but his father refuses to acknowledge his creativeness and discourages him when he deserves praise. Jwara stifles his son's creativity by openly rejecting and ridiculing him, for example, he labels him, "ugly boy" (Mda, 1995a:33). One day when Toloki runs home excitedly to show his father a prize he won at school after one of his drawings has been selected as the best, Jwara's response is "Get out of here, you stupid ugly boy! Can't you see I am busy?" (Mda, 1995a:33). On another occasion when Toloki tells his father that he wants to be like him in creating beautiful things, his father responds by shouting at him "Don't you see poor boy, you are too ugly for that? How can beautiful things come from

you?" (Mda, 1995a:68). These harsh words discourage Toloki, consequently he stops drawing altogether. Jwara's rejection of and hostility towards Toloki escalate to physical abuse. One day Toloki joins his friends at an all night service at a Methodist Church where testimonies are given. Toloki takes the cue from others and tries to preach but makes an utter fool of himself. When Jwara hears of it he assaults his son, even though Jwara does not care about the church. Mda (1995a:103) points out, "Jwara kicked [Toloki] in the stomach. He fell down vomiting blood. Jwara kicked him again and again." This brutal act finally makes Toloki decide to run away from home.

While any form of child abuse is inarguably horrendous and abhorrent, Vutha's case is so poignant that it transcends any comprehension. Vutha, Noria's first son, becomes a victim of abuse when his father, Napu abuses him for commercial gain. He uses his son as bait when Napu goes to beg in the city. Mda (1995a:137-8) explains Napu's operation as follows:

Napu knew that if he went on a begging spree with Vutha, he would get a lot of money. However, he did not spend any of the money on Vutha. When he got home he chained Vutha to a pole, and went off drinking ... until the money was finished ... Vutha would cry for Noria and for food. But Napu would only go back to unchain him and take him to the city for more begging ... One day Napu had scored a lot of money from begging. As usual, he chained Vutha to the pole under the bridge and went drinking. He was gone for many days and forgot all about the boy.

Napu's cruel and irresponsible behaviour finally has unpalatable repercussions, "when he returned to the bridge, it was to a horrific sight. Vutha was dead, and scavenging dogs were fighting over his corpse. They had eaten more than half of it" (Mda, 1995a:138). The malice of this form of abuse reveals the extent to which abusers have lost all sense of conscience and compassion.

3.2.2 Political exploitation of children

Another form of child abuse that Mda protests against is leveled against political organisations. Prior to independence some political organisations used children to

promote the ideals of their organisations. Children were brainwashed and exposed to perilous escapades. Those who failed to uphold the ideals of the organisation were labeled sell-outs and severely punished or even killed. Noria's second son, Vutha whom she named after her first son, becomes an activist at the age of five. At this age he is already proficient in the ways of the struggle for liberation. Mda (1995a:179) describes Vhutha's adeptness as follows: "He was an expert at dancing the freedom dance, and at chanting the names of the leaders who must be revered ... he could recite the Liberation Code and the Declaration of the People's Rights."

The satire in Vutha's expertise in reciting the code of the liberation struggle is that he does not understand the meaning or the implication of the words, a fact that is not important to the comrades. What is important is that the children are well-versed in slogan-chanting and "dancing the freedom dance" (Mda, 1995a:179). Besides these activities, young children are allowed to attend meetings where the leadership of the struggle, the Young Tigers, discuss strategies on how to protect their community against hostel inmates and the Battalion 77 soldiers who rape, maim and kill their people. In one of the meetings the Young Tigers plan to attack the hostel inmates and divulge the attack strategies to all comrades, including the little ones. Discussing war strategies in the presence of children is a folly that the Young Tigers are ignorant of because children are vulnerable to allurement. Thus, when Vutha and another boy are one day accosted by men from the hostel and are dragged into the hostel dormitories where they are enticed with all sorts of delicacies which they do not get in the settlement they inadvertently put their lives in jeopardy. When the two are invited to come back for more, they do so. Finally, the hostel inmates implore them to give them information in exchange for more meat and sweets, they also promise that no one will ever know about their visits. The older boy gives them information about the impending ambush. When it becomes known that Vutha and the boy have betrayed the comrades they are sentenced to a gruesome form of punishment, necklacing, which is carried out as follows:

They called the children to come and see what happens to sell-outs. They put a tyre around Vutha's neck, and his friend's. They filled both tyres with petrol. Then they gave boxes of matches to Danisa and to a boy of roughly the same age as Danisa and the child who had been given the honour of carrying out the executions struck their matches, and threw them at the tyres (Mda, 1995a:189).

The irony of giving the children “the honour of carrying out the execution” (*ibid.*) is that these children who are still too young to understand the implications and consequences of their actions, are actually being abused. The extract reveals that the leadership of the Young Tigers abuses young children by forcing them to do their dirty work when they order them to commit the vicious act of necklacing their peers. It is, therefore, not only Vutha and his friend who become victims of abuse but also their executioners.

3.2.3 Spousal abuse

Spousal abuse occurs when one partner maltreats the other either physically, emotionally or psychologically. In this chapter the emotional or psychological abuse of the female partner will be discussed. Emotional and psychological abuse will be treated inseparably as, “... emotional abuse impacts on mental health” (Makofane, 1999:50).

According to Makofane (1999:50), “emotional abuse entails demeaning words, disregard for the other partner’s feelings ...” Noria becomes a victim of such abuse when she is treated disparagingly by her husband, Napu, who also infringes on her right to make decisions. When Noria goes out to seek employment, Napu denies her the opportunity to become independent, “My wife will not work, especially in those offices. That is where women meet men” (Mda, 1995a:85). By so saying Napu insinuates that Noria is not faithful, she will end up getting involved with the men at her work place. He further humiliates Noria when, “One night, almost at midnight, [he] came home with another woman. He ordered Noria to pack her belongings and vacate the shack” (Mda, 1995a:85).

Napu’s actions indicate that he is abusive towards Noria. First, he verbally attacks her which shows excessive possessiveness and then he deprives her of an income when he prevents her from seeking employment. Moreover, he degrades her by bringing a mistress home. This, according to Makofane (1999:47), constitutes emotional and psychological abuse.

An examination of literature on the issue of female abuse, however, shows that not all men treat their wives in this way. For instance, in *We Shall Not Weep* (2002:11), Masilela relates an incident where his protagonist, Mabena who is a polygamist overhears one of his wives stating that women are equal to men. Mabena becomes so incensed that he takes a cowhide whip and tries to strangle the offending wife. However, Mabena is restrained by one of the village elders who rebukes him, “You, who cried so much for your mother’s breast, must today turn around and say a woman is nothing … you should be ashamed of yourself!” (Masilela, 2002:11). This incident shows that Mabena was prepared to kill his wife for merely mentioning the fact that women and men are equal, a matter which is endorsed in the Bill of Rights (*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996:9). The elder’s reproach to Mabena demonstrates that it is not all males who abuse their spouses by denying them freedom of expression and other rights. The elder acknowledges that women play a significant role in the society, especially in the nurturing of children as indicated by Masilela’s reference to “mother’s breast” (2002:11). The elder’s message is that women should be accorded the right to speak their mind and be treated as equals.

Ilbury (*Sunday Times*, 2007:n.p.) states that according to a survey conducted by the Centre for International and Comparative Politics at the University of Stellenbosch it was found that 10% of South African men thought it quite normal to abuse their spouses. Ilbury argues,

There is absolutely no logical reason why women should be subjugated. The repression of women and their relegation to subservient status in any society are purely outdated manifestations of male-dominated and constructed belief systems and cultures … Furthermore, in South Africa, where for many years far too many people were denied their rights, … to advocate the maltreatment of women is to spit in the face of all those who gallantly fought for freedom from oppression.

Another incident of spousal abuse is illustrated in *The Heart of Redness* (2000). A mine worker who is on holiday is outraged when his wife, NoGiant, denies him his conjugal rights. The woman insists that she is prepared to let her husband enjoy his conjugal rights provided he takes a bath first. The man becomes furious and throws insults at his wife:

You think that just because you now make all this money running around with educated people I am no longer good enough for you? ... What gives you, a mere woman, the right to pass judgement on the state of [my] cleanliness or lack thereof? (Mda, 2000:253).

As the man raves, he pours paraffin all over their rondavel and sets it alight. This leaves NoGiant petrified and emotionally traumatised.

The actions of both Napu and NoGiant's husband constitute emotional and psychological abuse. Mda reveals that men frequently regard women as mere possessions, sometimes by denying them the freedom to choose whether they want to work or not. The men's quest is to confine their women to the domestic environment. Napu degrades Noria when he insults her and brings his mistress to their home. These acts show contempt and disregard. NoGiant is degraded by her husband when he refuses to bathe because he wants to be in control and use her as he wishes. Moreover, he refers to her as "a mere woman" (*ibid.*), an indication that he simply regards her as a commodity.

3.3 AN ERA OF VIOLENCE

The transitional period was marked by high levels of violence which occurred mainly in the townships. The violent situation was amongst other things, fuelled by the tension between the supporters of the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party who were township residents and hostel inmates respectively. Mda (1995a:23) explains the reason for the tension as follows:

[T]he vicious migrants [hostel inmates] owed their allegiance to a tribal chief who ruled a distant village with an iron fist. They came to the city to work for their children, but the tribal chief armed them, and sent them out to harass the local residents. Sometimes they were even helped by the police, because it helped to suppress those who were fighting for freedom.

The violence that occurred took on different forms. There was black-on-black violence, white-on-black violence, gang related violence, and police brutality. However, in *Ways of Dying*, black-on-black violence and police brutality receive the most prominent attention.

Mda articulates his protest against black-on-black violence as a folly which defeated the objective of unity among blacks who were supposed to focus on fighting the common enemy – the apartheid government.

3.3.1 **Black-on-black violence**

This type of violence affects children, women and men alike. Besides the hostel inmates who terrorise the township residents, people generally act irresponsibly by going on drinking sprees and ending up committing acts of violence. Mda points out that the violence that reigns is due to the irresponsible behaviour of the people. For instance, he depicts that on Christmas day, “they engage in an orgy of drinking, raping and stabbing one another with knives and shooting one another with guns … [They] walk[ed] in the streets pissing in [their] pants …” (1995a:25).

Noria becomes a victim of violence in the township after the necklacing of her son, Vutha. As a way of silencing her, comrades petrol-bomb her home. “She fled with only the clothes on her back” (Mda, 1995a:51). This occurs despite the fact that she herself is a member of the settlement community that is involved in the struggle against apartheid. Mda (1995a:168) furthermore illustrates the magnitude of the violence that is rampant in the township by stating:

In a recent massacre in the settlement, which was carried out by some of the tribal chief’s followers from the hostels, assisted by Battalion 77 of the armed forces of the government, as many as fifty-two people died, including children. Some children were orphaned overnight.

In another instance the community takes the law into their own hands in order to avenge and protect community members who are victims of gang violence. In this case Mda shows that people are applying the “eye for an eye” principle, a principle that divided the people and drove them to more violent and irresponsible behaviour as the following extract evinces:

[I]n a moment of mass rage the villagers had set upon a group of ten men, beat them up, stabbed them with knives, hurled them in a shack, and set it alight. Then they had danced around the burning shack, singing and chanting about their victory over [the] thugs, who had been terrorizing the community for a long time. It seemed [the thugs] ... had thrived on raping maidens, and robbing, murdering defenseless community members (Mda, 1995a:66).

These incidents clearly reveal that people have lost direction in that they are no longer fighting for freedom, but their fight has culminated in self-destruction.

3.3.2 Police brutality

Police brutality in South Africa is not a practice that was pertinent only to the transitional period, since the South African police have always been regarded as brutal. For instance, on 26 March 1960 they opened fire on unarmed demonstrators at Sharpeville, wounding four-hundred people, including women and children. Sixty-nine blacks were killed (Mandela, 1995:281). Many other incidents of police brutality such as the shooting and killing of 152 revolutionary mine workers in the Rand in 1974, and the 1976 massacre of Soweto students who were protesting against Bantu Education (Christie, 1986:238), are evidence of South African police brutality. Paris (2002:246) ascribes police brutality to the fact that during the apartheid era, the police defended only twenty percent of the population against the rest, and “they are still untrained in the ways of impartiality [in the new dispensation]”. Paris (2002:263) further asserts that “what motivated the apartheid police was the conviction that blacks were satanic and godless, uncivilized and uncontrolled in their impulses. And they were going to swamp [them].” Another observation that Paris makes about the apartheid police is that,

[T]hey were conditioned to see the other as inherently evil and less than human ... when they received orders to carry out grisly government-sanctioned tasks, they did not struggle with their consciences ... they could kill without passion, because they were part of an important, approved enterprise – and because their victims were undeserving (2002:266).

Paris provides evidence for his arguments by referring to Eugene de Kock's brutal actions. De Kock was one of the special branch policemen who appeared before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the brutal killings of political activists on Vlakplaas. Paris (2002:263) remarks:

The brutalization of Eugene de Kock seems to have taken place over a twenty year period, starting in the former Rhodesia where he learned to hang "terrorists" upside down from trees and pushed burning sticks in their anuses; then in Namibia where he enjoyed cutting off ears as souvenirs and tying those who were about to die to the wheels of Jeeps.

Paris' observations reveal that the police "learned" and were "conditioned" to see blacks as "less than human". This information serves to explain why the apartheid police acted and behaved brutally; and why South African protest literature is inundated with incidents of police brutality.

Even today, in the democratic South Africa, incidents of police savagery are reported as evidenced in the following: "... police fired two stun grenades into the [club's] dance floor, intimidated clubbers with loaded rifles, and beat, kicked and verbally abused men and women" (*Sunday Times*, 2005:n.p.).

During the transitional period the police, who like ordinary citizens had lost control, went out of their way to torture black people. Even law-abiding citizens did not escape the senseless tortures. One night, Noria's neighbour, Shadrack becomes a victim of police brutality. While he is waiting in his taxi for passengers, a police van pulls up. Without any provocation he is assaulted and thrown into the van. Mda (1995a:141-2) reveals the savage manner in which he is treated:

His kidnappers dragged him out of the van, and he was ordered to enter a dilapidated room whose door was opened just in front of him. It was freezing in the room. The men told him that they were going to kill him, and started assaulting him again ... One of the men grabbed him by the shoulders and ordered him to make love to a corpse of a young woman.

Shadrack is not only physically tortured but also psychologically tortured when he is ordered to perform the inhuman and sacrilegious act of making love to a corpse in front of jeering policemen.

Mda continues to reveal police brutality in an incident where they torture a young man who is accused of stealing bags of maize from a milling company. When the man denies any knowledge of the theft, his “interrogators got angry and punched his testicles. They then tied him to a chair and attached wires to his fingers and neck. They connected this to the electric outlet on the wall, and the man screamed in agony and lost control of his bowels” (Mda, 1995a:62).

Torturing a man until he loses control of his bowels is not only an agonising experience but also extremely humiliating. Even worse than this, tampering with a man’s genitals through exerting any form of pressure on the testicles may result in the loss of his virility since these glands are a site for sperm production (Austoker and Eloff, 1987:259). Consequently, this might have long-lasting emotional and psychological implications.

Coetzee (2002:37) states that, “[i]n the Transvaal the police [would] fire shots into a crowd, then in their mad way, go on firing into the backs of fleeing men, women and children.”

The madness of the police is evident in Dirk Coetzee’s words (Dirk Coetzee, Eugene de Kock, Mamasela and others were the notorious apartheid Special Branch police who committed the most gruesome murders on Vlakplaas):

“We abducted them and interrogated them in different ways. We gave them electric shocks or smothered them or hammered them on the head. We shot them, then we put them on fire or tyres and wood and burned them to ashes” (Paris, 2002:263).

Bizo (1998:39) explains that at the inquest of Steve Biko, the leader of Black Consciousness who was brutally murdered while in police custody, he discovered that,

“racism had distorted ordinary people, ... it has destroyed all morality and decency in a rich and beautiful country”.

Sadly this legacy of police brutality continues to destroy lives in the new dispensation. Examples that validate this observation will be expounded in the next chapter.

3.4 CORRUPTION AND BETRAYAL OF IDEALS

The ideals of those who were engaged in the struggle for liberation encompassed values such as “Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms” (*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996:3). The liberators somehow, had lost legitimacy like the government they were opposing. They became the Squealers and Napoleons of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* as they practised the slogan, “All animals are equal but some are more equal than others” (1983:83).

3.4.1 The emergence of the elite

The leaders of the struggle for liberation emerge as the elite when they start putting their needs before those of the people at grassroots level. This occurs when they use large amounts of money to buy mansions in suburbs and drive around in luxurious cars when the poor remain living in cardboard and tin shacks where there is no proper sanitation and electricity. Gumede (2005:x) quotes Chris Hani who remarked on this behaviour of the leaders by stating, “What I fear is that the liberators emerge as elitists who drive around in Mercedes Benzes and use the resources of this country ... to live in [affluent] places and gather riches.”

In concurrence with the above observation, Malala (*Sowetan*, 2005:n.p.) argues:

The leaders of Africa who benefited from independence ... [have] no concept of the ideals of rulership ... other than their desire to displace the Europeans in their oppression ... and their opulent lifestyle with the resources of the people. These leaders’ vision [is] in stark contrast to that of Nelson Mandela.

This observation shows that the leaders of the struggle are more concerned about their own comforts, and disregard the poor, by failing to attend to their needs. For example, when Noria needs the empathy of the leadership after her son's death, she is dismissed in a heartless manner. At first she is made to believe that when the leaders come to the settlement for a meeting, one of the issues that would be addressed is her son's necklacing and that the leadership would apologise to her publicly. However, this does not happen, "Instead, they called her privately, and added insult to injury by saying that her child, who was only five years old, was not completely blameless" (Mda, 1995a:178). Had Vutha perhaps been the son of one of the prominent figures in the struggle, the case might have been treated differently. The following case illustrates the tendency towards preferential treatment which is afforded to those who are regarded as more equal than others:

Following the media frenzy around Jacob Zuma's rape charge, the media and the public were barred from attending his first hearing ... This added to the on-going favouritism claims caused by the fact that the rape complaint was laid against Zuma on November 4, and he was not arrested as is procedural with rape cases (Msomi, *City Press*, 2005:n.p.).

The theme of the preferential treatment of the "Aristocrats of the Revolution" (Mda, 2002) is treated in detail in Mda's *The Heart of Redness* as will be shown in Chapter Four of this study.

3.4.2 Unscrupulous civil servants

Besides the leaders of the struggle, even the civil servants and government officials are corrupt. They fail to provide services in an honest, friendly, respectful, and effective way. Their failure to perform their duties in line with the latter has merely served to undermine the principles of *Ubuntu* and *Batho Pele* which propound that people should be served with respect and impartiality.

Mda protests against such unscrupulous individuals by referring to an incident where a mortuary clerk treats bereaved people and those who are looking for their missing relatives with rudeness, instead of being compassionate. He depicts their uncouthness as follows:

The woman at the counter looked at the [woman in the queue] briefly and then doodled on a piece of paper. Then she shouted to a girl at the other end of the office, and boasted to her about the Christmas picnic she and her friends were going to hold. They discussed dresses, and the new patterns that were in vogue ... The girl said she was going out to the corner café to buy fat cakes.

Rudeness and disregard for the plight of ordinary people are not the only thing that civil servants are guilty of as Mda (1995a:38) further points out that civil servants also misuse public resources or facilities for private matters by presenting the case of a health assistant who has an affair with a married woman. To access the woman's home in the village, the health assistant dons a white coat and steals a stethoscope, thus disguising himself as a doctor. In addition to this, the health assistant, goes to the police station and asks the officers for their Land Rover. He tells them that there is an emergency in the village over the hills ... and conscientious policemen drive him to the village (Mda, 1995a:38).

By behaving in such an irresponsible way the health assistant is doing the community a disservice. Firstly, his absence from the clinic means that those who require his assistance will not be helped. Secondly, he is removing the police from their post, where their services may be required. Christie (1986:199) observes, “[Civil servants] are showing that instead of liberating their humanity by giving it a chance to express itself, the education they have received has degraded their humanity”. Christie (1986:199) further observes “With such an attitude a person will inevitably spend his life sucking from the community to the maximum ... and contribute the minimum”.

Mda's observation about the misuse of government vehicles is affirmed by an exposé that was presented by a team of reporters from NMG (Northern Media Group). This team reveals that government vehicles are still used for personal gain. The team asserts,

Most of the employees tend to use these cars when buying groceries, for family responsibilities and sometimes they are also seen at parties during the night, which make it seem like the law of not drinking and driving doesn't apply to them (*Polokwane Express*, 2007:2).

This exposé is accompanied by photographs of state vehicles which were spotted at various spots in Polokwane, among those vehicles which were photographed were two police cars, an ambulance and a van that belonged to the Department of Education.

3.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter Mda has drawn our attention to the fact that the society is drifting away from the objective of the struggle for liberation, which fundamentally implies that all people shall have equal rights (Mda, 1995a:204). Men such as Napu still oppress their wives by denying them the right to employment. Toloki's right to express his artistic talent is taken away when his father scorns and beats him. In the society there are still those who are subjugated and marginalised such as the informal settlement residents who live in shacks while those who are in leadership positions live in affluent suburbs and drive luxurious cars. Ordinary citizens are disregarded and deprived of the fruits of liberation despite the fact that they are the ones who put the leaders into the positions they occupy by voting for them. Mda has also shown that there is a tendency towards self-serving among civil servants. This self-serving attitude is still rampant in post-apartheid South Africa. The prevalence of this attitude is one of the aspects of protest that will be discussed in the next chapter. Other aspects of protest such as the abuse of and discrimination against all genders and police brutality will also be further investigated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROTEST IN *SHE PLAYS WITH THE DARKNESS*

4.1 INTRODUCTION AND PLOT SUMMARY

Mda (1995) asserts that when he writes, he becomes politically committed because the stories he writes come from an environment that is highly politically charged (<http://web19.epnet.com/DeliveryPrintSave.asp>). Even though this perspective is credible, it should be noted that Mda's concern is not politics per se but how people behave in any politically charged situation and how their lives are affected by the situation. While in his first novel, *Ways of Dying*, he portrays the lives of the people of South Africa during the political strife that marked the upheavals of the transitional period, in his second novel, *She Plays with the Darkness*, he shifts his attention to the people of Lesotho in order to show parallels between what happened in South Africa and Lesotho during those political upheavals. Mda is using these parallels to illustrate that political instability in any country brings about various social problems. Lesotho, unlike South Africa where the political strife was a result of apartheid, was plunged into political instability by several coups. First, there was the 1970 coup where the National Party government led by Leabua usurped power after the Congress Party had won the elections. Then there was the 1986 coup where Leabua's government was overthrown by his own soldiers. Finally, there was the 1994 coup which brought to an end the Lesotho monarchical rule in favour of a republic.

In *She Plays with the Darkness*, Mda relates the story of the “twins” of Ha-Samane, Dikosha and Radisene. Dikosha and Radisene are not real twins, but the villagers call them twins as they were born eleven months apart, because Dikosha was conceived accidentally at a night dance when Radisene was only four weeks old. Mda portrays the siblings as diverse individuals who grow up together in the village but later separate and become alienated when Radisene goes to stay in the city and Dikosha remains in the village. Dikosha is portrayed as a carefree child who spends all her time participating in singing and dancing with the village girls, hence she is given the name Dikosha, which means songs. As she grows up Dikosha displays superior intellectual abilities to her

brother, Radisene. Despite this fact, she is denied the opportunity to progress to high school on the basis that she is a girl. As a result Dikosha stays in the village as Radisene goes to high school sponsored by the Catholic Church. In the village Dikosha grows into a recluse, becomes absorbed into the mysterious world of the spirits, and eschews men forever. Consequently, her maidenhood and childlike appearance are preserved.

On the other hand, Radisene who has received a high school education becomes a high school teacher in the city of Maseru. Later on, when the night school is disrupted by curfews he works his way up, first by working for a lawyer as a clerk and then by opening an illegal law practice. His practice prospers by his defrauding of the Road Accident Fund and robbing ignorant claimants. Nevertheless, he loses his amassed wealth when Nigerian crooks fraudulently access his bank account and leave him bankrupt. At the same time his business rival, his former employer who taught him the tricks of the trade, informs the authorities of his illegal operations. Consequently, Radisene is instructed by the authorities to close down his practice. This finally renders him insolvent.

4.2 PROTEST AGAINST ABUSE OF ALL GENDERS

In the past whenever there was mention of abuse, society tended to think that only females were vulnerable to abuse by their male counterparts. However, this perspective has changed since more males are coming to the fore and increasingly speak out against male abuse as evidenced in the headline, “Abused men get their way” (*Capricorn Voice*, 2005:n.p.). The Department of Justice and Constitutional Development Directorate has also released a brochure that states, “Both men and women can be guilty of, and be victims of [abuse]” (2005:3) in order to create awareness that both genders can either be victims or perpetrators of abuse. This view is substantiated by several reports that inundate newspapers. For example, it was reported in *Beeld*, 2005, “Mans is ook slagoffers van mishandeling” (Men are also victims of abuse” - own translation). Another newspaper reported that a man sought police protection after his wife had tried to kill him. He even showed the police the scars on his body which were a result of beatings by his wife (*Daily Sun*, 2005:n.p.).

This report clearly shows that men who were previously afraid to speak out because of the patriarchial belief that men were the stronger sex, are now aware that they can seek help and police protection against abuse.

4.2.1 Abuse of and discrimination against the girl child

Mothers are supposed to be custodians of moral values as they are responsible for transferring these values to their offspring. However, women such as Dikosha's mother fail in this regard when they behave immorally. Dikosha's mother becomes known as the Mother-of-Twins after giving birth to Dikosha when her first child, Radisene, is still an infant; she thus becomes the laughing stock of her village. When Radisene is only four weeks old, his mother goes to a night dance where she conceives Dikosha (Mda, 1995b:3). When Dikosha is born, she becomes a shameful and constant reminder of her mother's irresponsible and immoral behaviour. Consequently, Mother-of-Twins projects her guilt and frustration by abusing Dikosha physically and emotionally as the following discussion will illustrate.

One day, after seeing beautiful paintings in the Caves of Barwa, Dikosha goes home inspired by the paintings; she excitedly makes similar paintings on her mother's rondavels. She then waits, anticipating praise from her mother. Unfortunately, this is not what she gets. Instead of praise she is physically and emotionally abused as Mda (1995b:38) states:

Mother-of-Twins pounced on her, grabbed her ear and twisted it. "What is this you have done to my house?" She demanded. Dikosha moaned softly in pain. "You want to make me a laughing stock of the village!" Mother of the twins shrieked. "You are not satisfied with making a fool of me by getting yourself conceived at a night dance." She pulled Dikosha by the ear, and ordered her to get water from the well at once, and clean the frames she messed up with heathen patterns.

Mda thus stresses that Mother-of-Twins does not take responsibility for Dikosha's conception, but blames it on the innocent child. In this regard, Fako (<http://web25.epnet.com/citation.asp>) remarks, "Physical and emotional [abuse] of children is more prevalent

among ... mothers who become pregnant out of ignorance or by accident, and are not mature enough to accept the maternal responsibilities.”

Dikosha’s maternal grandmother, Nkgono, displays an abusive attitude towards Dikosha as well. After the misunderstanding that occurred between Dikosha and her mother, Dikosha runs off to her grandmother’s in the hope of getting sympathy and solace. However, she is merely further abused when her grandmother shouts, “Get out of my compound, you little witch!” (Mda, 1995b:39). Mda refers to another incident of abuse towards Dikosha by Nkgono, “Once when Dikosha was six or seven, Nkgono became so angry with her that she grabbed a piglet that was grunting and sniffling around ... and hit Dikosha with it” (Mda, 1995b:40).

Dikosha’s abuse does not end in the home but members of the community echo her mother’s words by remarking, “It is because she was conceived at a night dance” (Mda, 1995b:38) whenever Dikosha behaves strangely. Later, when Dikosha becomes of marriageable age, and still shows no interest in men her mother continues to abuse her by calling her a *lefetwa* (Mda, 1995b:5). This is a Sotho word that means a spinster and is regarded as derogatory as Mda (1995b:5) asserts, “It is supposed to be the worst insult that can be hurled in the direction of any woman.” The term *lefetwa* is formed from the verb *feta* (present tense) or *fetile* (past tense) which means past and passed respectively. The term, therefore, essentially implies that the woman has been passed by eligible men because she is not worthwhile; and would never be married as society demands of every woman.

Dikosha is not only a victim of abuse but also of discrimination. When she passes standard seven with a first-class pass, she is unable to continue with her education because her mother does not have the money to pay for her school fees. However, the Catholic Church decides to pay for Radisene’s education in spite of the fact that he received a third-class pass. The church argues, “After all Dikosha [is] a woman ... bound to find a good man of the church and settle down in blissful matrimony” (Mda, 1995b:5). This view of the church is not strange in the lives of Africans since it is enforced by the patriarchal system that believed that girl children should be groomed for marriage, child-bearing and domestic work. Education systems of the past also endorsed this form of discrimination

by designing syllabi that compelled girls to do subjects such as needlework and housecraft which would later in life make them efficient domestic workers (Magona, 1990:25). When Dikosha becomes aware that she has been discriminated against she becomes angry at everybody and herself in particular for being a girl. The anger takes over her life and leads her to self-imposed loneliness and the unusual preoccupation of catching and roasting snakes. Later on she confines herself to the Caves of Barwa where she learns to communicate with the spirits.

4.2.2 **The plight of the abused woman**

The fundamental duty of the law in any country is to protect all citizens regardless of race, gender, religion, age or any other distinguishing factor. It is, therefore, the prerogative of every citizen to be afforded unbiased judgement in a court of law. However, the law, as Mda shows in the following case, sometimes disregards this prerogative. Mda illustrates this negative side of the law by presenting the story of an elderly woman called Mother-of-Daughters who is named so because she had many daughters and no sons. This elderly woman is raped by her cuckolded former son-in-law, Motsohi, a military police officer, who was married to one of her daughters, Tampololo. After raping the elderly woman, Motsohi goes on a drinking spree and subsequently boasts about the rape to a migrant worker who reports the case. In court Motsohi confesses to the crime but the magistrate further abuses the victim when he gives the following verdict:

“The accused has committed a rape, which is a hideous crime”, he said. Then he looked benevolently at the gallery where Mother-of-the-Daughters was sitting. “But the victim must be flattered that at her advanced age she should be the subject of desire of a handsome young man” (Mda, 1995b:187).

This verdict leaves the community of Ha-Samane outraged: “The general feeling was that Motsohi deserved the death sentence, especially because he had raped his mother-in-law. According to custom it was taboo to touch your mother-in-law. You were not even supposed to shake hands with her” (*ibid.*).

Mda (1995b:187) furthermore points out that even when the woman shows her outrage at the magistrate's attitude by crying out, "I have been violated and the court is making light of the matter!" the magistrate is not deterred, but continues to abuse the victim:

"But there are mitigating factors that have to be taken into consideration in this case. The victim is an experienced woman who was not a virgin at the time of the crime, and therefore suffered no serious injury. She was also drunk when the crime was committed. It is well known that drunken women sometimes invite such actions" (Mda, 1995b:187-8).

This incident clearly evinces that, according to the magistrate, being a non-virgin who also happens to be drunk at the time of the crime is regarded as a mitigating factor. Moreover, the magistrate fails to take into cognizance the fact that even if the woman has sustained no physical injuries, the emotional and psychological injuries that she has suffered may be more serious than physical injuries. The magistrate does not only maltreat the violated woman but also fails to protect her and other women in general when he sentences Motsohi to three months imprisonment suspended for two years. This sentence does not befit the crime or serve as a deterrent to others. The judicial system is not the only institution that sometimes fails to empathise with and support victims of abuse. When the villagers hear of the rape of Mother-of-the-Daughters, they go to her home to console Father-of-the-Daughters. Mda (1995b:184) observes, "They passed Mother-of-the-Daughters, who was sitting on the stoep with her head bent down in sadness. They greeted her casually and walked into the house." Mda then continues to observe that as the villagers were leaving they remarked "Who could do this to Father-of-the-Daughters ... such an important personality in these parts? A man known far and wide for his generosity and his modesty, even though he's the wealthiest man in the village?" (*ibid.*).

It is ironic that the villagers of Ha-Samane who were outraged by Motsohi's crime and the magistrate's verdict fail to give Mother-of-the-Daughters the support that she needed. It is, however, understandable that the attitude of the villagers is simply guided by the patriarchial value systems that operated in their times. A married woman was regarded as her husband's property. Therefore, the husband as the "owner" was the one who had suffered abuse. What Mda hopes to achieve through this case is to create awareness that a married woman is an individual who deserves recognition as a human being and who has

to be accorded all the respect due to her. Mda wants people to realise that what has happened to Mother-of-the-Daughters has got nothing to do with Father-of-the-Daughter's "generosity and his modesty" (*ibid.*) but his wife's pain and humiliation, therefore, all the support should be directed to her as the victim.

Mda's observations are a clear indication that Mother-of-the-Daughters is treated like an object. She is regarded as Father-of-the-Daughters' property and not as an individual who is going through the traumatic experience of having been violated. All the sympathies and support go to her husband, not her. Nevertheless, Radisene who had grown up without patriarchal influences in his home and has adopted the lifestyle of the city, reacts differently from the villagers of Ha-Samane. Mda (1995b:185) illustrates this reaction as follows: "Radisene's blood began to boil with anger. Who would do such a dastardly thing to such a kindly old lady? He remembered her sitting on the stoep outside, shoulder stooped in shame, and both men and women passing her as if she did not exist, on their way to sympathise with her husband."

Mother-of-the Daughters is abused on three levels; firstly by the rapist, then by the magistrate who states, "[s]he was also drunk when the crime was committed. It is well known that drunken women sometimes invite such actions," (Mda, 1995b:187-8) and finally, by the villagers who treat her husband instead of her, as the victim.

Mda's observation about the disregard and the indignity that is suffered by victims of rape is not something that belongs to the past since cases where rape victims are treated unjustly are still prevalent in the new dispensation. For example, when the then Deputy President of the country, Jacob Zuma, was accused of rape, the victim suffered indignity when the court took into account the fact that when the alleged rape occurred, she was wearing a *kanga* (a traditional cloth that is wrapped loosely around the body) only. She was humiliated further when the court interrogated her about her sexual history. Furthermore, those who called themselves Zuma's supporters did not spare her because whenever she appeared outside the court insults and threats were hurled at her (SABC 3 News, 6-8 March 2006). All this was done to discredit her and make her feel as though she was the guilty party.

Buhlungu, Daniel, Southall and Lutchman (2007:441) assert, “[t]his trial [was] more about sexual politics … than it [was] about rape.” According to Buhlungu *et al.*, what gave this rape trial a political dimension was the fact that the alleged culprit had power. Through this power he could impose his will upon the victim either by coercion or manipulation (*ibid.*) Buhlungu *et al.* furthermore argue,

Law is implicated in this politics for how it excuses or justifies such impositions, invalidates or diminishes the harm that subsequently arises … As such, it is also an illustration of the double-edged nature of the law. On the one hand, women and their advocates have successfully used the law to claim their constitutional rights, but at the same time, the law has also been used to deny women rights to dignity, privacy and a fair trial in relation to rape (*ibid.*).

While many critics and members of the public may perceive trials such as these as a miscarriage of justice, it should be noted, however, that the fact that a senior member of the African National Congress was charged and prosecuted for rape, gives hope and courage to potential victims of rape.

Rape, assaults and court injustices are not the only forms of abuse that women are vulnerable to. Women are also abused when they are frequently falsely accused of evil acts such as murdering their spouses and practising witchcraft or black magic. Such accusations often lead to the alleged victim being assaulted, repelled, cast out or even worse, burnt.

Mda (1995b:40) relates the story of Nkgono who was the maternal grandmother to Dikosha and Radisene. Nkgono becomes a recluse after it was rumoured that she had killed her husband. Nkgono is rejected by her daughter, Mother-of-Twins, her grandchildren, Dikosha and Radisene, and the villagers.

In her early days Nkgono was emotionally abused by her husband who cheated on her while he was working in the mines. However, when Nkgono’s husband finally returns home, he is bound to a wheelchair. He was paralysed after he was involved in a mine accident that killed several miners. Once his compensation money is expended Nkgono’s husband starts to feel insecure as he has to depend on Nkgono. He then,

[T]thought he could assert his manhood by boasting to all who came to see him about his exploits as a lover who had a string of women ... in his youthful days. He said all these things in the presence of Nkgono. When they were alone in their sleeping-room, he constantly taunted her with the affairs he had had ... he relished hurting her with them (Mda, 1995b:40).

After enduring emotional abuse from her husband, Nkgono suffers further abuse from the villagers when her husband dies. The villagers allege that she had smashed her husband's head with a bedpan as she could not take the taunting anymore. However, there was no evidence of physical assault on the corpse. It was this rumour that made Radisene slight Nkgono when he came to visit the village. Thus Mda (1995b:39) observes, "[Radisene] gives money to people who are not his relatives, yet he does not [go] to see his own grandmother."

Another form of abuse that women are vulnerable to is witchcraft. Women, especially in black rural communities, are abused when they are accused of practising witchcraft or black magic. Kgatla (2003:31) asserts, "[I]t appear[s] from research that there is a clear gender bias in witchcraft accusation, with women falling victim to these more than men."

In *The Heart of Redness* a nineteen-year old girl, Qukezwa, faces constant taunts and disdain from a group of girls in the village. The girls abuse Qukezwa because they allege that Qukezwa's late mother, NoEngland, had bewitched their friend, NomaRussia, long before she died. NomaRussia has since then been bleeding profusely. The source of the fracas between NoEngland and NomaRussia was the love affair between Zim, NoEngland's husband, and NomaRussia. Then, the younger woman, NomaRussia "became too greedy and selfish ... she went to a famous *igqirha* – diviner who would give her medicine that would make Zim leave NoEngland and love her only" (Mda, 2000:44). To accomplish the latter, NomaRussia had to steal her rival's petticoat and bring it to the diviner. However, when she brings the petticoat to the diviner, the plan changes as the diviner recognises the petticoat as belonging to NoEngland. The diviner then betrays NomaRussia to NoEngland who is instructed to bring NomaRussia's undergarment. Subsequently, it is NomaRussia who is bewitched. When NoEngland later dies and NomaRussia finds no cure for her affliction it is Qukeza who bears the brunt of the anger

of NomaRussia's friends. Mda (2000:43) observes, "When they saw [Qukezwa] they giggled and pointed fingers at her ... One girl stepped forward and shouted, 'Your mother was a filthy woman! She must be rotting in hell for what she did to that poor girl!'" Qukezwa defends her mother by saying, "Your friend got what she deserved ... Next time she will leave other people's husbands alone!" (Mda, 2000:43).

NomaRussia is abused by Qukezwa when she is brought to her home on a sleigh to plead with Zim who was dying, to appeal to NoEngland when he meets her on the other side, to remove the curse that caused her affliction. However, when Qukezwa sees her,

She takes one look at her and screams. 'What do you want here? Are you not satisfied with what you did to my mother? Have you come to put the final nail in my father's coffin? ... You set your friends on me ... to harass me wherever I went!' (Mda, 2000:290).

After Qukezwa had suffered the accusation of her mother's alleged witchcraft and NomaRussia had suffered physical pain and psychological abuse, it is revealed that doctors have told her that she was suffering from cervical cancer. In view of the doctors' diagnosis, the question that arises is, what evidence can the accusers put forth as an argument against the witchcraft accusation? As in Nkgono's case, although she is accused of bashing her husband's head with a bedpan, there is no evidence to substantiate this accusation. Through these narratives Mda shows that it is a general trend for people to blame witchcraft for occurrences that they find inexplicable. Sadly, "it appear[s] that women are often not only the victims of witchcraft but also the perpetrators of witchcraft accusations" (Kgatla, 2003:31).

The extent to which women, especially the elderly, are abused unnecessarily as a result of rumours of practising witchcraft is also illustrated in Mpe's short story, *Brooding Clouds* (in Gray, 2002:158). The victim of a witchcraft accusation is Makgolo (a Sepedi version of Nkgono, which is a Sotho word for grandmother). Makgolo is accused of having killed her husband, then her lover, Kereng, and finally a young boy known as Tshepo. Before these accusations Makgolo was loved and respected by the villagers whose children used to visit Makgolo's hut, listen to her stories and enjoy the products from her field.

Nevertheless, this changed after the two men's deaths. Makgolo's husband died two weeks after returning home from the mines. He had stayed away for many years without returning home or providing for Makgolo. During his absence Makgolo had secured a relationship with Kereng who is hard-working and caring. It is then rumoured that Makgolo killed her husband in order to secure her relationship with Kereng. Ironically when Kereng dies shortly after Makgolo's husband, Makgolo is once more the suspect. Finally, when Tshepo is struck by lightning on the day he receives his outstanding university results, Makgolo is accused of his death as well. The accusers claim that Makgolo is jealous because Tshepo's education is going to give him a teaching job in the village and thus alleviate his mother's poverty. After Tshepo's death, the village youth decide to consult a bone thrower. The verdict of the bones is, "Tshepo was bewitched by an old woman, to the east of his homestead" (Mpe, in Gray, 2002:162). The youth, including those who had spent their leisure time at Makgolo's then decide that it is time to "cleanse their village" (Mpe, in Gray, 2002:163). By this they meant that they had to get rid of the culprit, who they had decided was Makgolo. Makgolo meets her fate when her hut is set alight. Makgolo's case, like Nkgono's, was based on mere speculation, suspicion and the insubstantial evidence of a bone thrower (in the case of the latter victim).

Mda illustrates another case of witchcraft victimisation in *The Heart of Redness* where alleged witches are identified by poles. In the village of Qolorha-by-Sea, a prophet, Mlanjeni sets out to eradicate "ubuthi" (witchcraft) amongst the amaXhosa nation. The villagers who came to his homestead to be cleansed of evil charms and those who wanted to be exonerated from suspicions of witchcraft are required to walk between two anti-witchcraft poles. Mda (2000:17) observes,

One by one they began to walk between the poles. The clean were unscathed. The unclean were struck by weakness and fear as they approached the poles. Then they writhed on the spot, unable to move. The people shouted, 'Out! Get out witchcraft!' until the victim staggered to Mlanjeni, who gave them some twigs that would protect them from further evil and keep them pure.

One of the people who had come to Mlanjeni's homestead is Xikixa, one of the revered elders in the village. Xikixa is described as, "the ancestor, a patriarch and a patrician of the Great Place of King Sarhili" (Mda, 2000:13). The ancestor came with his wives, his sons Twin, Twin-Twin and their wives. It is Twin-Twin's wife who becomes the victim of witchcraft suspicion. Mda (2000:17) expounds,

Twin-Twin's wife from the senior house stood up and slowly walked towards the poles. It was as though she was in a trance. As she moved between the poles she froze. She was paralysed. Mlanjeni began to dance a frenzied dance around the poles, and the crowd chanted, 'She is fixed! She is fixed! She is a witch!'

When Twin-Twin protests on his wife's behalf, he is dragged to a donga and beaten until he almost loses consciousness. Xikixa and his other son, Twin blame Twin-Twin for "stupidly defending the honour of a woman who had been declared a witch by none other than the great prophet himself" (Mda, 2000:18). As a result of being identified as a witch by the great prophet, Twin-Twin's wife is ostracised.

Mda and Mpe's narratives show the insensibility of determining whether a person is a witch or not by using dead bones and poles. Mbiti (1987:11) argues that people believe that sorcery, witchcraft and magic cause death or illness, however, these acts cannot be scientifically proven. If this be the case, then it appears that there is no basis for witchcraft accusation.

4.2.3 The plight of the abused man

Patriarchy, together with Christian teachings such as, "Wives submit to your husbands ... For the husband is the head of the wife ..." (Ephesians 6:23) have contributed to the dominating role of men in households. However, it should be noted that even when men have been endowed with the responsibility of heading families, not all men have the assertiveness and determination required for executing this role. Mda (1995b) observes that some men such as Motsohi are dominated and subsequently abused by their wives. Motsohi is handsome to a point of effeminacy and unable to assert himself to the role of the head of the family because his wife, Tampololo, who is big and tall, has not only

usurped his role as the family head but also abused him. Mda (1995b:27) remarks, “Tampololo was known to beat up her husband everyday for the flimsiest of reasons.” Mda (1995b:26) further illustrates the extent of Motsohi’s abuse by stating, “Tampololo leaped at Motsohi and throttled him with both hands. She threw him on the floor, sat on him and rained fists on his face.”

On another occasion when Motsohi is eating, his chewing starts irritating Tampololo who angrily tells him that from then onwards he must eat in another room. When Motsohi tries to reason with her, “... she grabbed his maleness and twisted it” (Mda, 1995b:90).

Tampololo’s maltreatment of her husband extends to emotional abuse which, according to Makofane (1994:47), entails demeaning words, disregard for the other partner’s feelings, name-calling, insults, and swearing. Motsohi thus suffers emotional abuse when Tampololo calls him a “bastard” and “fool” (Mda, 1995b:26). Motsohi’s final humiliation occurs when Tampololo leaves him for Radisene, who at that time was his master. Motsohi was on Radisene’s pay-roll for providing him with information about road accidents so that Radisene could approach the victims or their families before other lawyers could. When Motsohi goes to the hotel where Tampololo cohabits with Radisene to plead with her to come back home, Tampololo dismisses him by telling him to stop hammering at the door if he knows what is good for him (Mda, 1995b:124). Because Motsohi knows that Tampololo implies that she will beat him up, he stops the hammering and leaves the hotel.

Mda’s shift from woman abuse which he elaborates on in *Ways of Dying* and *The Madonna of Excelsior*, to male abuse which he refers to in *She Plays with the Darkness* shows that he is unbiased when it comes to gender issues. Through Motsohi’s story Mda shows that men in modern societies are abused by females, a phenomenon that was too shameful to reveal in the past when patriarchal ideas about men as being strong and powerful were rigorously upheld.

4.3 A PERIOD OF COUPS

Usually during a *coup d'e tat*, a curfew is set in order to protect civilians from the violence that accompanies coups and also prevents them from getting out of control. As the movement of the civilians is curtailed by curfews, the only people who are allowed to roam or patrol the streets are the military or police officers whose duty is to see to it that curfew regulations are observed. Ironically, these law enforcement agents are often the ones who frequently become lawless by engaging in rape, physical assault and corruption. This lawlessness among police officials is still rife today as reports of crime committed by police abound in newspapers and other sources. For example, on 10 April 2000, members of the South African Police Service in Barkly East, Eastern Cape, arrested six youths who had allegedly committed a burglary. They took the youths to a dam where they pointed a gun at them and then held their heads under the water. They further assaulted them by throwing stones at them. Later on, they tied one of the boys to their van and drove away with him running alongside the vehicle. Eventually, the boy got exhausted and fell, the van ran over his head (Mwanajiti, Mahlangu, Sifuniso, Nachali-Kambikambi, Muuba and Mwananyanda, 2002:15).

In another newspaper it was reported, “A police officer has been charged with killing a 17-year old boy who was arguing with his 15-year old daughter” (*City Press*, 2005:n.p.). Hosken (*The Star*, 2007:n.p.) reported that a woman was fighting for her life after being viciously assaulted by police officers. An eyewitness, who is a photo-journalist at *The Star*, gives the following version of the assault:

[O]ne of the policemen grabbed her by the head and began smashing her into the back door. The woman began to scream before she fell to the ground, where she was kicked in the head and stomach (*ibid.*).

According to Venter (*Northern Review*, 2005:n.p.), the police tend to behave irresponsibly towards ordinary citizens because they seem to forget the policy “In the eyes of the law everyone is equal.” He furthermore observes “police think that being a police officer means being above the law”. It is clear from this exposition that police officers can be as

dangerous as the criminal elements that they are supposed to protect law-abiding citizens against.

4.3.1 Police brutality

In *Ways of Dying*, physical torture or assault are prominent features. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, Mda also shows that police brutality is not confined to beatings but also includes sexual assault and purposeful shooting of unarmed persons. Mda illustrates the extent of police brutality by relating the story of three night school teachers, Radisene, Makhele and Cynthia who are accosted in the street as they are returning from a night school. This incident occurs during the coup of 1970 in Maseru. A curfew is in place and the three night school teachers have been waiting for their students to turn up. When they finally realise that no one is coming, they decide to leave. Unfortunately it is already late and they are caught in the curfew without permits. Makhele is shot dead as he tries to run away, Radisene is brutally assaulted and Cynthia raped and then beaten up. Radisene is seriously injured, “He had weals all over his body. His shirt was stuck to his back, and when he pulled it off the weals opened up and began to bleed” (Mda, 1995b:31). Mda (1995b:32) then describes Cynthia’s ordeal:

As for Cynthia she had been terribly assaulted and repeatedly raped by the policemen, and then left her for dead. As she was stumbling towards her home, she had come across another group of policemen from the Mobile Unit and they beat her again for breaking the curfew regulations.

Mda (1995b:36) further illustrates the extent to which the police violate the rights of civilians by referring to the case of Molahlehi who suffers both physical and psychological abuse at the hands of the police: “... they doused the beard of business man Molahlehi with petrol and set it alight. They then forced him to make love to his daughter ...[he] later died of shame”. As a result of the shame and hopelessness caused by this incest, Molahlehi’s daughter gives herself to the world of prostitution.

Sexual assaults by members of the police force have become a common occurrence in South Africa. For example, in a report by Mwanajiti, *et al.* (2002:18-21), a senior police officer was arrested in Limpopo for allegedly raping a female prisoner awaiting trial at Phalaborwa Police Station on December 1999. In another incident a police commander in Jerico, North West was arrested for allegedly raping a female awaiting-trial prisoner (*ibid.*). More cases of various incidents of rape by policemen abound in the media.

On 7 November 2006 the South African Broadcasting Corporation programme *Special Assignment* showed a video that depicted a horrendous scene where police brutally assaulted illegal immigrants by setting dogs on them. The video showed the police punching, kicking and stamping on the faces of the hapless victims while the dogs mauled them. As the injured men were shoved into the police van one of the policemen was videotaped throwing stones at them (www.specialassignment/sabc.co.za).

According to Special Assignment (7 November 2007), in statistics released by the Independent Complaints Directorate in 2007, indicate that there was an overall 20% increase in cases of police brutality in 2007. From the 1 005 cases that were reported, cases of death in custody and injuries incurred prior to arrest were included while 56% of the cases that were reported involved domestic violence (www.specialassignment/sabc.co.za). These statistics further give evidence that police brutality is an ongoing practice.

Mwanajiti *et al.*, (2002:3), assert that there are diverse factors which motivate police brutality such, “a desire to assert authority, sadism, [and] a type of overzealousness in pursuing the ‘crime-fighting’ goals of the police organizations”.

4.3.2 Defrauding the Road Accident Fund

During the coups in Lesotho, people frequently died either as a result of police brutality or in road accidents that were on the increase as a result of the turbulent situation which prevailed. Unscrupulous lawyers saw the opportunity of making money out of the situation; they became wealthy through defrauding the Road Accident Fund (RAF) which is commonly known as the Automobile Third Party Insurance. The inclination of lawyers towards this crime is still prevalent among lawyers a decade after Mda wrote *She Plays*

with the Darkness. The wealth that these greedy and unscrupulous lawyers amass is evident from the following newspaper report: “A former North West attorney who successfully claimed more than R700 000 from the Road Accident Fund (RAF) failed to pay them a cent” (*City Press*, 2005:n.p.).

The successful operation of this crime depends on the co-operation of the police, traffic officers and medical doctors who provide the lawyers with counterfeit documents that will enable them to access the insurance money. In return the police, traffic officers and doctors receive bribes.

Radisene, who acquired the knowledge of defrauding the RAF and cheating claimants from his employer, later sets up a practice which he names Radison Insurance Claim Consultant. He then puts corrupt police officers such as Trooper Motsohi and a physician, Dr Bale, on his pay-roll. The irony of the relationship between Radisene and Motsohi is that Motsohi’s wife, Tampololo, is cohabitating with Radisene, yet Motsohi allows himself to enable the man who stole his wife to become wealthy. For Motsohi to stoop so low and for individuals such as Dr Bale to put their profession at risk, can only mean that the money they are getting is worth taking the risk.

Mda (1995b:91) explains Motsohi’s role in the scam as follows: “... when the ambulance came [Motsohi] stopped them from taking the victim away, pretended that [he] still had to do measurements of the road ... In the meantime, the bastards were dying.”

The word “bastards” (Mda, 1995b:91) is an indication of Motsohi’s lack of respect for his fellow human beings. The word bastard is usually used in derogatory terms to refer to an illegitimate child. Motsohi’s attitude towards the plight of the injured persons demonstrates his lack of humanity and compassion, which can be attributed to his greed. In addition to the delay tactics that Motsohi employs at the scene of the accident he also withholds any vital information that he has picked up until Radisene arrives. Only then does he release it to the authorities.

Mda (1995b:94) reveals the complicity of Dr Bale by citing the following incident:

[Radisene] was reading a report on a woman who had been in an accident a week ago. Although the car was badly damaged, both the driver and the woman passenger had received no injuries at all ... There really would have been nothing to claim from the insurance company ... So he's referred her to the reputable Dr Bale who on closer examination, found that in fact the poor woman had been paralysed for life.

Radisene and his counterparts do not only cheat the insurance companies, but also betray the destitute claimants. In addition to fees that they force their clients to pay, they take half of the compensation money despite the fact that the insurance company would already have paid them their share. Mda (1995b:67) illustrates the betrayal in the following extract:

But as usual, A.C. took half of that amount as well, in addition to his fee. He made out a cheque of three thousand rands and Radisene took it to the widow who was waiting in his office. She was breathless with joy when she saw the large amount she was getting. She would never know that it was in fact only half of what was due to her and that [the lawyer] had stolen the other half. She thanked Radisene over and over again.

It is clear that the claimants are not aware that they are being cheated. In their ignorance they think that what they are getting is what is due to them. Mda's fitting use of irony is apparent when he states, "She thanked Radisene over and over again" (1995b:67). The woman thinks that the lawyer has done her a great service when he has actually robbed her.

The corrupt nature of individuals who are supposed to be exemplary when it comes to upholding the law is illustrated in the case of a Johannesburg judge, Nkola Motata, who was arrested after his car crashed into the wall of someone's home. Subsequently, the judge was charged with, "driving under the influence of alcohol [and] drugs or alternatively reckless and negligent driving ... defeating the ends of justice, with an alternative charge of resisting arrest" (Rademeyer, *Sunday Times*, 2007:n.p.). When Motata appeared in court he further broke the law when he violated the "strictly no smoking" sign in the court corridor (*ibid.*).

Mda's observations of the involvement of members of the justice system in criminal activities is corroborated by media reports of South African Police Services members who are implicated as accessories to crime. For example, a police sergeant in Beit Bridge was caught smuggling cigarettes from Zimbabwe using a state vehicle while a superintendent in the same station was charged with smuggling illegal Zimbabweans into the country (Yende, *City Press*, 4 November 2007:n.p.). Ironically, no disciplinary action was taken against the culprits. This indicates that the management who were supposed to convene a hearing are either negligent or corrupt themselves.

Mda concludes the novel, *She Plays with the Darkness*, on an ironic note. Radisene who has spent his life cheating others finally gets what he deserves – desolation and destitution. His life starts falling apart when his wife, Tompololo, who he had stolen from Motsohi, leaves him, then Nigerian crooks steal all his money, finally his former employer, and lately business rival, M.C. Malibu, betrays Radisene when he exposes the former to the authorities. When Radisene realises that he is without any income, he goes to Ha-Samane, seizes his sibling Dikosha and sets off to a remote village in the lowlands where a night vigil for a man who had died in a taxi accident is being held. On their arrival, Radisene joins the preaching, singing, and shouting of the Hallelujah and Amen praises. Once Radisene has made sure that his praises to the Lord have been eloquent enough, he assumes the role of “The Nurse”, who according to Mda (1995a:20), is a person who gives an account of how the deceased met his end. Radisene’s account is, however, a fabrication, and those who know the facts are incredulous. Later, he brandishes the third-party insurance forms and addresses the mourners once more:

“[T]he Lord, my brothers and sisters, is both merciful and beautiful. He has not forgotten those who remain on earth – the children and the widow of our dead brother here. He has catered for them through what is known as third-party insurance. Amen! That is why I am here, my brothers and sisters – to see to it that this family is taken care of in its hour of need. I am the hand that the good Lord uses to alleviate your pain and suffering. Amen! Hallelujah!”

Unfortunately, Radisene’s speech does not evoke the reaction he has anticipated. When he approaches the widow in mourning and asks her to sign the third-party forms, she declines. Subsequently, Radisene becomes hysterical and gives vent to his frustration by

insisting that the widow sign the forms. However, an irascible man rescues the widow by threatening to smash Radisene with a knobkerrie and drags him out of the house. The helpless Radisene joins Dikosha who is sitting on the hill where they end up being eaten by *marwana* ants.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, Mda has endeavoured to address numerous factors that contribute to the abuse, betrayal, discrimination, and corruption of individuals. Firstly, he has shown that careless mothers are inclined to blame their unplanned offspring for their accidental conception and consequently abuse such children. He continues to show that girl children are often discriminated against when it comes to matters of education. Dikosha's aesthetic talent is stifled by her mother while her sibling, Radisene, is free to explore his interests. Furthermore, Mda has illustrated that abuse does not only happen to children and women but that men can also be victims of abuse. Finally, Mda asserts that professional people such as magistrates, police officers and doctors are not beyond reproach. They cannot always be held in high esteem as the novel has revealed that there are magistrates who are biased as well as police officers and doctors who are corrupt.

The following chapter will expound on the effects of colonialism and its concomitant Biblical teachings on the lives of the African people in the Cape Colony.

CHAPTER FIVE

PROTEST IN *THE HEART OF REDNESS*

5.1 INTRODUCTION AND PLOT SUMMARY

This chapter illustrates how Mda uses *The Heart of Redness* to protest against the abandonment of the African tradition by the post-apartheid generation which perceives its tradition as backward and barbaric. This novel reveals that the negative attitude of the post-apartheid generation towards the African tradition emanates in part, from the teaching of the British who impressed on them that African traditions were crude, sinister and savage. Therefore, colonialism will be investigated, although briefly, for the sake of elucidation “as [the] past cannot be consigned to oblivion – or locked in the closet where it must not disturb the present” (<http://web6.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/informark>). This chapter shows that colonialism, just like apartheid, advocated factors such as inequality, subjugation and exploitation. Though colonialism was not as severe as apartheid as it did not endorse segregation laws, it nevertheless contributed significantly to social maladies still discernible in the modern generation.

In the 1850s the British infiltrated the Cape Colony where they came upon the Xhosa nation. The British, with the aid of their missionaries, intruded upon the traditions of the amaXhosa by introducing the teachings of the Bible and their western ways of life. This resulted in the splitting of the amaXhosa into two rival groups. On the one hand, there were those who welcomed and embraced the teachings of the missionaries. This group became known as the “civilized” or “enlightened” ones; that was according to the British notion of Africans who had abandoned their culture in favour of European culture. On the other hand, those who tenaciously sustained African culture were referred to as coarse, primitive or uncivilized. Hence, the “enlightened” ones were encouraged to sever all ties with the latter for fear of being contaminated by their “sinful” ways. The British view of what civilization entailed was basically that Africans should abandon their African tradition and follow Christianity, thus their followers assumed a “holier than thou attitude” towards those who continued to observe African tradition. It is against this background

that colonialism receives attention in this chapter to demonstrate Mda's protest against the folly of rejecting one's tradition and fellow human beings in favour of a foreign culture.

In *The Heart of Redness*, Mda narrates the history of the Xhosa nation in three time periods, firstly, the pre-colonial era, then the colonial era and finally, the post-apartheid era in which he depicts the lives of the first generation, the middle generation and the modern generation of the amaXhosa respectively. The purpose of treating the three time periods simultaneously in one narrative is to illustrate the link between the past and the present so as to provide evidence that the events of the present are a result of the past. Strauss and Giroux state that "Mda seeks to show how particular ancient traumas dog contemporary lives, how they disfigure, dismember and embitter the present" (<http://web6.infotrac.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>).

The title of the novel, *The Heart of Redness*, is essential to the understanding of the argument outlined in its plot. Redness has both a literal and a figurative meaning. Literally the word refers to the ochre or clay that Xhosa women use as make-up and also to dye their traditional garments. Figuratively, it refers to the essence of being a Xhosa as it is a mark or a symbol of being a Xhosa traditionalist.

The narrative in *The Heart of Redness* unfolds in the rural village of Qolorha in the Eastern Cape in the 1850s, where a girl prophet known as Nongqawuse, claimed that she had been instructed by the ancestors to tell her people to destroy their cattle and crops in order to cleanse and prepare the land for better breeds that the ancestors would provide. According to Davenport and Saunders (2000:142), "the Xhosa people slaughtered their stock and destroyed their crops in the expectation of the resurrection of ancestral spirits, accompanied by the provision of food from heaven ... the process became known as the Great Cattle Killing of 1857".

This event resulted in the splitting of the Xhosa people into two rival groups. Those who heeded Nongqawuse's call became known as the Believers, under the leadership of Twin; while those who rejected the call were called Unbelievers and were led by Twin-Twin. The two leaders were twin brothers who were succeeded by their modern day followers,

Zim and Bhonco respectively. Besides heeding Nongqawuse's prophecy, the Believers held tenaciously to their culture while the Unbelievers adopted western culture.

As the strife between the Believers and Unbelievers continued, Camagu, an exile returnee, arrives in Qolorha in pursuit of a woman, NomaRussia, whom he claims has "inadvertently left with his passport" (Mda, 2000:63) while she was working for him in Johannesburg. The truth is, when he met her in Johannesburg, he had fallen in love with her but NomaRussia had disappeared before he could get her details.

When Camagu's search for NomaRussia becomes fruitless he decides to stay in Qolorha where he befriends the village school's principal, Xoliswa Ximiya, who is Bhonco's daughter. Xoliswa is "beautiful, fiercely proud, but dour and emotionally arid" (<http://web6.infotrack.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>). At the same time, Camagu also becomes acquainted with Qukeswa, who is neither educated nor as beautiful as Xoliswa. Qukeswa openly propositions Camagu, but Camagu tries to avoid her as he becomes aware of his vulnerability. Mda (2000:172) portrays Camagu's predicament as follows: "He must get away from [the] surroundings that are haunted by Qukeswa's aura. He must fight the demons that take hold of him at the mere thought of her smile. He must be in control. This wild woman cannot possibly be of any good to him."

When Camagu finally decides to settle in Qolorha he sets out on a mission "to help the community heal the wounds of the past and to bridge the schism between believers and unbelievers" (<http://web6.infotrack.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>). Camagu's intention is to introduce self-help projects in the community of Qolorha, since he believes these projects would help people generate money for themselves and enrich their community. One such project that Camagu initiates is a cooperative where the village women become engaged in making Xhosa costumes and accessories such as beads. Camagu's good intentions are met with fierce opposition from Xoliswa who sees the production of Xhosa garments as reversion to "redness" which, according to her, is tantamount to turning away from civilization. Mda (2000:172) articulates Xoliswa's objection as follows: "You are an educated man, Camagu, all the way from America. How do you expect simple peasants to give up their superstitions and join the modern world when they see educated people like you clinging to them"?

What Xoliswa fails to realise when she confronts Camagu about his “deviant” behaviour is that although they are both educated, education has impacted differently on them. Xoliswa has erroneously concluded that their tertiary education will automatically elevate them to the same level of thinking. However, unlike Xoliswa, Camagu proves to be different, he is not haughty and pretentious. He mixes with everybody in the village, despite the fact that he holds a doctoral degree in Economics. Moreover, he respects his culture and upholds his traditional beliefs. When Camagu shows Xoliswa that he neither abandons his self-help initiative nor compromises his beliefs, Xoliswa is disappointed. The two become alienated when Camagu courts and finally marries Qukezwa, a girl who only has a standard eight and is despised by Xoliswa for being frivolous and for belonging to the rival group, the Believers.

5.2 PROTEST AGAINST COLONIAL EXPLOITATION AND DUPERY

Colonial infiltration into the interior of South Africa began in 1830 and was continued in 1855 when the Cape Colony became a British possession with Sir George Grey as its governor (Head, 1989:117-8). According to Davenport and Saunders (2000:142), the split between the Xhosas was seized by Grey as an opportunity to take advantage of the cattle killing tragedy to destroy the Xhosa power and open Xhosaland to white settlement. Strauss and Giroux, in response to this assertion, point out that the internecine feud weakened the internal cohesion the amaXhosa needed if they were to stand a chance of warding off their white nemesis (<http://web6.infotrack.galegroup.com/itw/infomark>).

Strauss and Giroux’s response illustrates that lack of unity among the amaXhosa made them vulnerable to the abuse that Grey was planning against them. Both the Unbelievers and Believers took a stance concerning Grey’s position in their land. The Unbelievers regarded the governor as a thief who had stolen their land while the Believers regarded him as a friend who was interested in the welfare of the Xhosa nation. However, this was not so as Mda (2000:96) points out,

Grey was a wonderful man whose only motive for coming to and ruling the land of the amaXhosa was to change the customs of the barbarous natives and introduce them to British civilization. The land that he had grabbed in the process was really a small price to pay for the wonderful gift of civilization.

Mda uses the word “wonderful” ironically to show that there is nothing wonderful about a man who sets out to turn others against their culture by making them believe that their culture is barbaric. No one has the right to relegate another’s culture to barbarism or an inferior position. According to Assmann (1995:130), “the concept of [culture] comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose cultivation serves to convey and stabilize that society’s self-image.” In addition, the action of duping them into giving up their land was not wonderful but malicious as he knew that without land the amaXhosa would lose their independence and succumb to white domination and exploitation.

Furthermore, it is ironic that the British should regard African culture as being barbaric when they themselves had shown savagery and crudeness when they decapitated the ancestors of the Xhosas and kept their heads in boxes in the British National History Museum (Mda, 2000:193). Moreover, the so-called “civilized” nation has kept the private parts of a Khoi-Khoi woman called Saartjie Baartman in a bottle for display purposes (Mda, 2000:194). According to *Webster’s Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, “to civilize” means to bring out of a primitive or savage state; or to bring to a socially accepted level. Therefore, the act of beheading the conquered amaXhosa and the dismemberment of Saartjie Baartman’s body reveal the brutal nature of the British who claim to be of a refined culture. Mda (2000:193) thus remarks: “[Camagu] never understood this barbaric habit of the British of shrinking heads of the vanquished people and displaying them in impressive buildings where ladies and gentlemen go to gloat and celebrate their superior civilization”.

The action of beheading people is not only brutal but also sacrilegious, especially when the beheaded individual is an ancestor. An ancestor, according to Mda (2000:13-22), is a patriarch and a patrician, who after death is able to mediate between his family and Qamata (God). Mbiti (1987:176) asserts, “[I]n all African families there is a hierarchy

based on age and degree of kinship. The oldest members have a higher status than the youngest.” So, when Xikixa, a descendant of King Sarhili and an ancestor, was beheaded by the British, his sons, Twin and Twin-Twin become despondent. Mda (2000:22) states that,

It gnawed the soul of the twins that their father met his death in the boiling cauldrons of the British and they were never able to give him a decent burial in accordance with the rites and rituals of his people. How would he commune with his fellow ancestors without a head? How would a headless ancestor be able to act as an effective emissary of their pleas to Qamata?

Therefore, the decapitation of the amaXhosa by the British had far reaching consequences. Besides the fact that families would not have peace of mind if they buried headless corpses, in the case where they were to lose an ancestor, they would not have someone to plead on their behalf before God.

Grey’s intention in conquering the amaXhosa is revealed in the following words by Rose and Tunmer, “We should try to make them a part of ourselves, with a common faith and common interest, useful servants, consumers of our goods, contributors to our revenue” (1975:266). This extract shows that the British wanted the Xhosas to lose their autonomy, become subservient and generate capital for them. Another critic, Thomas, outlines the intentions of the colonialists as follows: ‘‘Forcible domination [by] an alien minority, asserting racial and cultural superiority, and notably, enforced dislocation of people by capitalistic and exploitative colonial forces” (2002:2).

While Grey’s success in “civilizing” the amaXhosa can be attributed to the splitting of the Xhosa nation into two rival groups, it can also largely be ascribed to the teachings of the missionaries. Christie (1986:62) observes that the missionaries worked hand in hand with the colonial government which was not necessarily for the good of the Xhosas; and that these missionaries often thought in racial terms and practised exploitation. Christie furthermore asserts,

[T]he missionaries actually helped in the conquest of the African chiefdom. They helped to break down African culture, and they imposed Western culture and work patterns. They undermined the way of life of the African people ... [their] education actually divided the people (*ibid.*).

The assertion that the missionaries were in collusion with the British government is further observed by Omer-Cooper (1994:39). “Missionary aims ... involved converting indigenous people into a subordinate working class within the white controlled economic system”.

These examples amply prove that the combined intentions of the British government and the missionaries were evil because their objective was not to elevate the position of the blacks but to divide, subjugate and exploit them. The evilness of their intentions is elucidated by Biko (1996:56) who makes the following observation:

[T]he people were divided into two camps – the converted (*amagqobhoka*) and the pagans (*amaqaba*). The difference in clothing between the two groups made what otherwise could have been merely a religious difference actually become internecine warfare. Stripped of the core of their being and estranged from each other because of their differences, the African people became a playground for the colonialists.

5.2.1 **Usurping power and exploitation**

Once the British had succeeded in splitting up the amaXhosa into two feuding groups, they embarked on the mission of winning the chief’s confidence. For example, they bribed Chief Ximiya with a bottle of brandy and he gave them land. This was sheer dupery. The brandy, which was part of “the gift of British civilization” (Mda, 2000:141) would inebriate and incapacitate the chief with the result that he could not take wise decisions. He would then be vulnerable to exploitation. By duping the chiefs into giving up their land in exchange for a worthless thing such as brandy, Sir George Grey was actually taking away the powers of the chiefs because traditionally ownership of large herds of cattle and vast lands were and are still a symbol of power in chieftaincy.

The chiefs were further deceived when they and their councilors were offered monthly salaries. Superficially, regular monthly salaries seemed more attractive than the meagre payments that they got from the fines which they imposed on transgressors. However, the chiefs were oblivious to Grey's ploy which Mda (2000:154) reveals as follows: "When they are paid by him, they will owe their loyalty to him, and not the amaXhosa people, and not to [their] laws and customs and traditions!" The implication of this was that once the British had won the loyalty of the chiefs, the tribal resistance of the Xhosa people would be irreparably shattered (Cronin, 1997:37).

Mda (2000:154) protests against the deception of the chiefs by making the following caustic remarks:

The work of the chiefs was now made lighter because they would no longer be allowed to judge legal cases on their own. At every case there would be a magistrate, who would do most of the work. This was because the governor valued the chiefs so much that he did not want them to be burdened with such mundane matters as presiding over cases.

To the unsuspecting chiefs these words sounded like the words of someone who was caring and concerned about their work load. The chiefs were made to believe that the governor held them in such high esteem that he would let white magistrates do most of their work so that they could be relieved. However, that was not the case. The aim of the governor was to render them powerless. The chiefs were being exploited because their traditional way of doing things was tampered with. Moreover, their status as chiefs was relegated to an inferior level, thus Biko observes that a colonial culture had all the trappings of sophistication and was heavily equipped for conquest (2004:45). By this Biko indicates that the governor's offer to alleviate the chiefs' burden looked attractive while his real objective was to demote them and take over their supremacy. Grey's intentions were clearly malicious as evinced in the following: "He was happy that all his plans were coming together so nicely. It has always been his intention to break the independence of the amaXhosa by destroying the power of the chiefs" (Mda, 2000:296). Once the chiefs had lost the power to rule and administer justice in their traditional way, western laws which ran concomitantly with the teachings of the missionaries became operational.

5.2.2 Scorning and abandoning the African culture and customs

The demise of the traditional powers of the chiefs ran concurrently with the coercion of the amaXhosa into submitting to the foreign western culture. The amaXhosa were made to believe that if they failed to heed the call to repel their culture, they would be eternally damned. Converts such as Mhlazana, who had adopted the Christian name, William Goliath, took up the task of spreading the message of salvation with enthusiasm. He went around telling people to do away with their cultural practices and customs which he referred to as “heathen [and] superstitious” (Mda, 2000:53). Mda uses Mhlazana in this novel to illustrate his protest against the brainwashing of the African people into believing that changing their names and abandoning their culture was part of the “civilization” that the British had sold to the chiefs. The Xhosas who heeded Goliath’s call believed that it was for their own good that they should discard their own customs and follow the ways of the English. “There was no saving grace in the culture and religion of the natives” (Mda, 2000:141). Through spreading this message, Goliath was able to win the hearts of those who became afraid of eternal damnation. Hence Biko (2004:49) asserts that,

[missionaries] went on to preach a theology of the existence of hell, scaring our fathers and mothers with stories about burning in eternal flames and gnashing of teeth and grinding of bones. This cold cruel religion was strange ... but our forefathers were sufficiently scared of the unknown impending [hell] to believe that it was worth a try. Down went our cultural values!

Besides instilling the fear of “eternal flames” (*ibid.*) into the hearts of the people, Goliath went on to condemn traditional attire. He promoted the white man’s idea of regarding the wearing of traditional clothes as a symbol of barbarism. He thus instructed the people, “Throw away your red ochre blankets! Wear trousers! Throw away your red *isikhakha* skirts! Wear dresses!” (Mda, 2000:53). The irony of this was that the Bible, the book on which the teachings of the missionaries were based, does not state that the African way of dressing was sinful or savage. It is, therefore, apparent that the missionaries abused the Bible in order to promote their mission of subjugating the Africans.

It is against the background of such false and devious teachings that Mda's modern generation female protagonist, Xoliswa Xumiya, is introduced in the novel to portray the role of a character who, after receiving western education, loses touch with her culture and customs because of western ideologies. Mda includes Xolisa in this novel to show that even individuals who are learned fall victim to the charade of the western mentality, the mentality that separates people into rival groups and makes them scorn their tradition. Xoliswa is a thirty-year old spinster. She is highly learned, holds a BA degree and a certificate in second language teaching, which she got in the United States of America. She is also very beautiful and is the first female principal of the village school, Qolorha-by-Sea. All these attributes make her stand out in the community of Qolorha. Xoliswa is the daughter of Bhonco, a staunch member of the Unbelievers who, according to Mda (2000:105), maintains that the Unbelievers are for progress and modernity, the modernity that will remove their uncivilized state and their redness. To Bhonco "redness" is simply adherence to uncouthness.

When Camagu arrives in Qolorha, Xoliswa assumes that Camagu's friendship with her will automatically lead to a courtship. Xoliswa's assumption is based on the fact that she is beautiful and has academic status. Moreover, Camagu and she are on the same academic level as they both received a modern education, the type of education that Tollefson (2000:275) describes as,

[An] education so uncompromisingly foreign in the African context and ... transplanted with a few concessions to African cultures, its impact was more culturally alienating ... A whole generation of African graduates grew up despising their own ancestry and scrambling to imitate others, [they] remained intellectual imitators and disciples of the west.

This description aptly conveys Mda's perception of the attitude of the so-called "educated" people towards their culture. Mda thus shows through Xoliswa's character that western education alienates Africans from their culture. Individuals such as Xoliswa think that by adopting and imitating white lifestyles they become better than those who practise their own African culture. However, Camagu's life in America and his education "[have] not made him an espouser of infantile ideas of civilization" (<http://web6.infotrackgalegroup>.

com/itw/infomark). Despite his western education Camagu continues to embrace his African culture while Xoliswa becomes contemptuous of hers. The conflict between Xoliswa and Camagu is included in the novel to demonstrate Mda's protest against the abandonment of culture and customs, a practice which emanates from the teaching of the colonial missionaries.

The first disagreement between Camagu and Xoliswa occurs when they are enjoying a leisurely walk around the village. They come upon semi-naked girls who are singing and dancing. The sight of the girls repulses Xoliswa who comments, "it is shameful that the girls are frolicking topless ..." (Mda, 2000:172). Camagu responds by telling Xoliswa that he does not see anything to be ashamed of. He shows appreciation of what he sees by pointing out, "The girls are from a culture that is not ashamed of breasts" (2000:172). Xoliswa's outburst clearly reveals that her judgement is clouded by western notions, because in African culture exposing one's breast is not taboo. Xoliswa's reaction furthermore reveals that she has aspired to model herself according to the British way of life (Head, 1986:118). Mda is, therefore, protesting against Xoliswa's attitude because she looks down upon something that is culturally beautiful - she scorns the girls' expression of their culture as the white man's education has taught her that exposing one's breasts is immodest.

When Xoliswa realises that Camagu disagrees with her on the issue of traditional dressing she voices her objection to the matter of observing totems. Xoliswa has learnt from hotel workers that a snake known as Majola was seen in Camagu's hotel room. When the hotel staff try to kill it, Camagu remonstrates. He tells them that the snake is sacred and is a totem of his tribe, the amaMpondomise clan (Mda, 2000:173). When Camagu admits to what Xoliswa has heard, her fury is demonstrated in the following confrontation:

"Don't you think you are reinforcing barbarism in this village ... You are an educated man, Camagu, all the way from America. How do you expect simple peasants to give up their superstitions and join the modern world when they see educated people like you clinging to them?" (Mda, 2000:172).

What emerges from this confrontation is that Xoliswa's attitude towards her fellow Xhosas who have not attained western education is that they are "simple peasants" (Mda, 2000:172). She also accuses Camagu of propagating barbarism in the village. The use of such derogatory terms shows that Xoliswa is echoing the views of the colonialists. The irony of Xoliswa's accusations is that she is the one who is insensitive towards cultural differences as she disrespects Camagu's culture.

Nevertheless, the confrontation does not shake Camagu's belief in his own views. His unshaken stance in favour of tradition is pointed out as follows:

"I am an African from the amaMpondomise clan. My totem is the brown mole snake, Majola. I believe in him, not for you, not for your fellow villagers, but for myself. And by the way, I have noticed that I have gained more respect from those people you call peasants since they saw that I respect my custom" (Mda, 2000:173).

This ingenious retort shows that Camagu's acquisition of western education has not influenced him against his culture. He would, therefore, not compromise his culture even for the affection of a woman who obviously does not realise that "African humanism ... is rooted in traditional values ..." (Bell, 2002:40). Bell's observation reinforces the argument that Xoliswa, who sees those who believe in tradition as barbaric, fails to realise that by shunning her tradition in favour of the white man's tradition, she is missing the essence of being African. Unlike Camagu, Xolisa also fails to realise that people, especially those who are not "educated", will respect you more if they realise that in spite of your education, you respect your African culture.

The next conflict between Xoliswa and Camagu erupts when Camagu establishes a co-operative which is a self-empowerment project for the village women. In the co-operative, the women engage in the production of traditional costumes and accessories, such as beads and tobacco pipes. Xoliswa's mother, NoPetticoat, is one of the women who enthusiastically engage in the activities of the co-operation. NoPetticoat's engagement in the co-operative, the fact that she discards the western dresses that Xoliswa bought her and goes back to smoking a tobacco pipe, infuriates Xoliswa, who sees her mother's actions as a betrayal of herself and the rest of the Unbelievers. However, Mda

(2000:300) points out that “[NoPetticoat] was adamant that she was no longer going to stifle herself with soulless European clothes”. Therefore, Mda illustrates through NoPetticoat’s stance that Africans, despite their lack of “education”, are becoming aware that their culture is their soul, while those who are said to be educated lag behind in realising this important aspect of being African. Xoliswa’s clouded perception of Africanism is further demonstrated by her anger and frustration when she reapproaches Camagu, “I say it is an insult to the people of Qolorha-by-Sea … My people are trying to move away from redness, but you are doing you damnest to drag them back” (Mda, 2000:184).

Once more, Camagu responds to Xoliswa’s provocative statement without submitting to her fury by remarking, “To you, Xoliswa, the isikhakha skirt represents backwardness … but to other people it represents a beautiful artistic cultural heritage” (Mda, 2000:184). Xoliswa maintains that she stands for civilization and accuses Camagu of reinforcing shameful practices and an uncultured mode of dress. The irony of Xoliswa’s words is that her idea of civilization is actually what is dragging her people backwards. She is reinforcing Sir George Grey’s intentions when he maintained, “the British should make the Xhosas useful servants, consumers of [their] goods, contributors to [their] revenue” (Christie, 1986:37).

In contrast to Xoliswa, Qukezwa, who is not educated and “is not burdened by beauty and is therefore able to be free-spirited,” (Mda, 2002:175) adheres to tradition although she abandons the restriction with regard to propositioning a man when she tells Camagu, “I am not married … I am available if you like me. You can lobola me if you like” (Mda, 2000:62). Nevertheless, Qukezwa reveals her zeal to preserve her culture when she takes Camagu to Nongqawuse’s Pool and lets him throw a silver coin into the pool. This was a continuation of a belief that the throwing of the coin into the pool would bring one good fortune. She also takes him to the crossroad where a cairn of the Khoikhoi prophet, Heitsi Eibib, was situated. Qukezwa makes Camagu perform the ritual of placing a stone on the cairn and tells him that it will ensure that he has a safe journey back to America. Qukezwa’s determination to preserve her culture is further illustrated when she violates the law by cutting down trees in Nongqaquse’s Valley without the chief’s permission.

Qukezwa, who appears before the chief's council with a shaven head and wearing a red blanket, defends her action as follows:

"The trees that I destroyed are as harmful as the inkberry. They are the lantana and wattle trees. They come from other countries ... [they] suffocate our trees. They are dangerous trees that need to be destroyed ... Just like the *umga*, the seed of the wattle tree is helped by fire. The seed can lie there for ten years, but when fire comes it grows. And it uses all the water. Nothing can grow under the wattle tree" (Mda, 2000:248-9).

Qukezwa's defence reveals her commitment to preserve her culture through protecting the indigenous trees which were threatened by foreign trees which are consuming much more water than the indigenous ones. She was protecting the Nongqawuse Valley, a heritage site. In support of the quest to preserve heritage sites, Pretes in Buhlungu *et al.* (2000:268) argues,

Heritage sites can be a particular important element in the construction of national identity, in that a legitimizing ideology can be presented through selected sites for both domestic and foreign visitors, who are thereby exhorted to extol and embrace national aspirations.

Pretes also argues, "heritage helps to define the meaning of culture ..." (*ibid.*).

In view of these arguments, Qukezwa is simply ensuring that indigenous plants are not endangered by the growth of foreign ones as they are an embodiment of her culture.

Thus, Loyd (2001:34-39) commends Qukezwa as a better woman than Xoliswa when he asserts,

Although she is a reservoir of the past in her relationship with Camagu and with traditional authority, she is strongly centred in a contestatory womanist consciousness of the present. If Camagu is the male protagonist who forces us to engage with issues of sustainable development that face everyone at the turn of the twentieth century, Qukezwa is his equally strong female counterpart. While Camagu helps us to see possibilities for the new African man, Qukezwa defines the potential of the new, dynamic African woman.

Qukezwa's quest to protect the heritage site, will ensure capital growth in the tourism sector whose beneficiaries will be the villagers themselves and their offspring while Camagu's initiative will uplift the status of women. Camagu's project will not only liberate the women from subservience and dependency but also generate capital that will bring prosperity to the villagers. Therefore, Xoliswa's opposition to Camagu's initiative shows that her notion of civilization is myopic as it is limited to what the white man's idea of civilization is. It may be argued that Xoliswa, as a learned woman and leader in her capacity as school principal, should be taking the lead in encouraging the village women to strive towards self-empowerment. However, she shows limitations by becoming anti-Camagu, a move that proves her allegiance to the ideals of the British.

5.3 PROTEST AGAINST NEPOTISM AND CORRUPTION

Nepotism and corruption in both the public and private sectors are some of the eminent evils that have thwarted the hopes of many unemployed South Africans. One form of nepotism occurs when employers or those who are in leadership positions show preferential treatment towards employment seekers. This is practised when family members, relatives or friends who do not have the required credentials or qualifications are appointed or when employees do not follow the procedures as stipulated in the Public Service Amendment Act, No. 5 of 1999, when they shortlist candidates or conduct interviews.

Although President Mbeki (2005:18) has expressed the government's zeal to eradicate unemployment, many ordinary South Africans are still battling to secure jobs while those who have connections with the "Aristocrats of the Revolution" (Mda, 2000:36) are comfortably employed as a result of nepotism and its concomitant corruption. Michaels (2005:5) points out that there is a tendency in the civil service to appoint only people with ANC membership cards, who are often unqualified or incompetent. It is against this background that Mda relates the unfortunate situation in which his male protagonist, Camagu, finds himself when he fails to acquire a job, despite his knowledge and doctoral degree.

5.3.1 The flaws of nepotism

According to the Bill of Rights (*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, Act No. 108 of 1996, Section 9), it is stipulated that no one may be unfairly discriminated against on the grounds of race, gender or sex. This stipulation is endorsed by the Public Service Amendment Act, No. 5 of 1999, which states:

The evaluation of persons shall be based on training, skills, competence, knowledge and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve a public service broadly representative of the South African people, including representation according to race, gender and disability.

However, Camagu who is a South African and has the necessary qualifications discovers that,

The corporate world did not want qualified blacks. They preferred the inexperienced ones who were only too happy to be placed in some glass affirmative action office where they were displayed as paragons of the government (Mda, 2000:33).

Mda (2000:32) observes that when Camagu goes for an interview for the position of Director of Communications in a government department, “They listened patiently and heard about his vast learning and experience. Then they sang the lamentations, What a pity ... Unfortunately he is overqualified.”

Mda further observes,

Jobs were advertised only as a formality, to meet the requirements of the law. When a job was advertised there was someone already earmarked for it. Not necessarily the best candidate, but someone who had lobbied or had powerful people lobbying on his or her behalf. It helped if the candidate lived vividly in the memory of the decision-makers as the best dancer of the freedom dance (Mda, 2000:35).

While qualified individuals such as Camagu fail to get jobs in government departments, public funds are used to train inexperienced and unqualified persons to do the same job. For example, Yende (*City Press*, 2007:5) reveals,

Public Protector, Lawrence Mushwana has stirred controversy after recommending that a Limpopo MEC's son be trained to perform well in a job that he got irregularly. Provincial sport, arts and culture MEC Joyce Mashamba's son, Wisani (30), was employed in her department in January as deputy manager for human resource development although he did not meet the requirements of the job.

It is clear from these observations that people are not employed by virtue of their knowledge, skills and qualifications but rather on worthless factors such as being “the best dancer of the freedom dance” (*ibid.*). This state of affairs compromises service delivery and tax-payers’ money as companies and departments end up paying individuals who are incompetent as in the following case:

In *The Madonna of Excelsior* (2002:249), Sekatle, who is a mayor, employs his sister, Maria as a registry clerk. Mda asserts,

It did not really matter that she was barely literate and that the Afrikaner lady who had been working at the registry for decades, and was now just waiting for retirement, did all the work for her. As soon as Maria had become a clerk, she had “organised” a job for [her friend], Mmampe as a tea-lady.

This instance of nepotism illustrates the lack of accountability and disregard for the law by those in leadership positions.

For instance, when the Public Protector condones nepotism by over-looking the irregular appointment of MEC Mashaba's son, it confirms that, “[O]ur laws [are] broken and ignored by those charged with the task of enforcing them” (Harper, *Sunday Times*, 2007:1).

5.3.2 Multifarious nature of corruption

Various acts of corruption in the civil service or in the higher echelons of government are frequently disclosed in the media. According to Heath (Heath Forensic Investigators and Consultants),

[I]n the past corruption practices were never made public or disclosed. With the advent of democracy following the 1994 elections and the freedom of the press entrenched in our constitution, all the skeletons are starting to fall out of the closets (Heath, 2001:2).

The public service often comes under the spotlight of the media when cases of fraud are disclosed. For example, Buhlungu *et al.* (2007:12) reveal that in 2006 only, more than 12 000 public servants were found to be receiving social grants fraudulently.

According to the Special Investigating Unit, it is estimated that R57 million in pension monies has been stolen in the township of Mdantsane, in the Eastern Cape only through corrupt and fraudulent practices (Heath, 2001:3).

Heath states that,

Corruption occurs where the ultimate gain outweighs the consequences of the act of corruption. In addition to this, it has been proven that corruption and moral degeneration go hand-in-hand. Poverty, unemployment, greed, opportunity ... lead to moral degeneration ... moral degeneration leads to lack of integrity and dishonesty (*ibid.*).

While Heath's observations are valid, it should however, be noted that in the case of civil servants poverty and unemployment cannot be regarded as causes for corrupt practices as civil servants are salary earners. The corrupt nature of civil servants can indeed be ascribed to greed, opportunity, lack of integrity, and dishonesty. Corruption in the civil service can also be attributed to a lack of accountability, mismanagement and maladministration in institutions of the government (*ibid.*).

Buhlungu *et al.* (2007:8-9) asserts that there are disturbing indications that corruption in government is becoming systemic and pervasive and that corruption has gained ground because of mixed messages which are conveyed by those who hold high offices in government. This occurs when those in the highest level of government are implicated in cases of corruption.

Buhlungu *et al.* substantiate their assertion by referring to the “Oilgate Scandal” which was publicized in the media. Buhlungu states that, according to *Mail & Guardian*, 20-26 May 2005,

The state oil company, Petro SA, irregularly made an advance payment of R15 million to Imvume Management for the supply of oil condensate, sourced from a Swiss company, Glencore. However, when Imvume – which had close connections to the [ANC] – chose to divert R11 million of this sum to a cash-strapped ANC ahead of the 2004 general elections, Glencore turned for direct payment of the R15 million, and another R3 million owing to it from Imvume to PetroSA. The latter thereupon paid Glencore the R18 million for fear that its Mossel Bay gas-to-liquid fuel point would run out of feedstock ... (2007:10).

This is not the only case of corruption in which high level government officials have been implicated. There are other cases such as the “Travelgate Scandal” where members of Parliament were exposed for using airtickets fraudulently and the “Arms-Deal Scandal” where the deputy president of the ANC, Jacob Zuma, was implicated in the allegation that he received a bribe from convicted businessman, Shabir Shaik, who solicited the deal on his behalf.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has illustrated that the infiltration of western culture and ideologies into Africa has resulted in the disruption of the amaXhosa way of life. The white man’s culture has upset the harmony that existed among the African brethren as illustrated in the following: “Unbelieving sons plotted the demise of believing fathers. Unbelieving fathers attempted to kill their believing sons. Siblings stared at each other with eyes full of blood”

(Mda, 2000:98). This illustration indicates that the rivalry that operated among Africans was so intense that it destroyed the camaraderie that existed between and among brethren before the arrival of the missionaries. This division resulted in the white man having absolute power and control over African people.

Moreover, Mda has used the antagonism between Xoliswa and Qamagu, the representatives of the modern generation, to illustrate that western culture should not override African culture but rather complement it. By creating situations of conflict between Xoliswa and Qamagu, Mda has shown that the Western and the African cultures should find a common ground rather than repel each other. Xoliswa, who has imbibed western ideologies in totality, becomes haughty, pretentious and contemptible of her culture. However, Qamagu, who is equally highly educated, does not compromise his culture even though by so doing, he risks losing Xoliswa's affection and respect. Thus, he resolves to relinquish his relationship with Xoliswa and marries her rival, Qukeswa, who is not educated but respects her culture.

This chapter has furthermore expounded the harsh reality of the hypocrisy of the colonialists who coerced Africans into discarding their archaic ways in favour of civilization by turning them against one another in order to render them powerless. Head (1986:117-8) points out that once white people usurped land from Africans, they reduced them to tenants and servants while the white man assumed the position of landowner and master. This meant that the capital generated from the land went to the white master. As a result of brainwashing and duping, Africans found themselves immersed in a foreign culture that made them lose their autonomy, unity and respect for their own culture.

Other important aspects revealed in this chapter are nepotism and corruption in the employment situation. Those in leadership positions do not necessarily appoint job-seekers on merit or stipulations of the law but rather on political or blood connections. Mda observes that as long as those who seek jobs took part in the struggle for liberation, or are "the best dancer[s] of the freedom dance" (Mda, 2000:35), they easily get employed. Such individuals end up earning substantial salaries despite not having skills or qualifications while those who are skilled and qualified and could put their experience to good use, are marginalised. This situation retards progress in the work place and impacts

negatively on the growth of the country's economy. What Mda hopes to achieve is that individuals such as Qamagu who have qualifications and experience should be given due recognition for the advancement of the country as a whole.

The next chapter will focus on the sexual abuse of women of colour, the plight of their offspring and the general discrimination against blacks.

CHAPTER SIX

PROTEST IN *THE MADONNA OF EXCELSIOR*

6.1 INTRODUCTION AND PLOT SUMMARY

The main focus of this chapter is the issue of the contravention of the Immorality Act, No. 23 of 1950, which ran concomitantly with the Mixed Marriages Act, No. 55 of 1949 (<http://africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/blsalws.htm>). This is followed by an examination of social ills that emanated from apartheid laws and those that emerged within the political situation that prevailed at the dawn of democracy. The Immorality Act was introduced by the National Party in 1950 to prohibit sexual relations between Europeans and Non-Europeans. Head (1993:ix) recounts the history of this law as follows:

This legislation, which progressively outlawed sexual union between black and white people, has a long history. In 1927, the first country-wide prohibition of sexual union between the White and African people outside of marriage was passed, in 1950 this prohibition was extended to include Indian and Coloured people ... behaviour of a sexual nature involving white and black people was criminalized – imprisonment of up to seven years could follow from just inviting a person of another race to perform [an] illicit sexual act.

Although Head points out that the prohibition was against Blacks, Indians and Coloureds, Mda (2002:76) asserts that it extended to other races as he states, “Greeks were not white enough. They were no different from the Portuguese. Greeks were kaffirs.” According to the Nationalist government, the term whites referred only to races such as the Dutch and the British.

Sex across the colour line has frequently been portrayed and criticised in protest literature. For instance, in *The Cardinals* (1993:125) Head shows the ridiculousness of the arrest of the journalist, P.K. Head explains the circumstances that led to P.K.’s arrest as follows:

[P.K.] was pissed drunk ... Apparently, what really happened was that a sixteen-year old Coloured kid passed by and saw [him] clinging to a lamp post and on impulse decided to give [him] a hand to a bench nearby. Unfortunately, for her kindness, a cop van happened to patrol by just then and it was enough to see her brown arm around a ... white man (Head, 1993:125).

In the *Madonna of Excelsior*, Mda relates the scandal of the sexual liaisons between leading Afrikaner farmers, and influential business men of the town of Excelsior in the Free State, and African women of the neighbouring Mahlatswetsa township and farms in the 1970s. The narrative also covers their subsequent arrests and the eventual trial. The crime that the accused had committed was having illicit sex and producing offspring of mixed breed. Omer-Cooper (1994:190) observes that according to the apartheid government, “Racial interbreeding would corrupt and destroy the inner potential of both races involved. Free of racial mixture and white determination to preserve racial purity were of key psychological importance to the appeal of apartheid.”

Omer-Cooper (1994:190) further observes that in 1944 at a *Volkskongres* held by the *FAK* (*Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuur Verenigings*), a certain Professor Cronjé claimed to have scientific proof that racial mixture led to racial degeneration, while from the Afrikaner’s religious point of view, the separation of races was part of God’s plan and racial mixture was contrary to God’s will.

Another critic, Duncan (2002:135), explains the criminalization of sex between black and white persons by the apartheid government as follows: “To sleep with a black is like sleeping with an animal; and ... it is against God’s law. It is God’s will that the superior race should never mix with the mud race.” Duncan’s explanation clearly shows that whites regarded themselves as superior to and cleaner than blacks. They thus feared that by sleeping with blacks who are muddy or dirty they would become contaminated by the filth and become one with the inferior race. The irony of this is that it was not the black women who sought the white men, it was the very men who were the proponents of the apartheid laws who solicited the women as will be demonstrated in the case of Johannes Smit and the other white men who perpetuated this crime.

One of the accused, Niki, who is Mda's protagonist, is referred to as the Madonna. Mda accords her the name that is usually used for the Virgin Mary because Niki got involved in the illicit sexual deeds when she was still a virgin. Niki, as a young maiden, is raped by the white farmer, Johannes Smit, who is called Hairy Buttocks by the black girls who had seen his hairy nakedness when he defiled them. Later on, as a married woman, Niki gets involved with Stephanus Cronjé, a butchery owner. Niki and Cronjé's relationship emanates from two factors, firstly, Niki wants to spite Madame Cornelia, Cronjé's wife, for humiliating her. Secondly, Niki's husband, Pule, had decided to stay away after abusing and accusing her of infidelity when she was actually still faithful to him. When Cronjé's relationship with Niki produces a daughter, Popi, and the widely-publicised scandal of the illicit affairs and arrests appears in the newspapers, Cronjé commits suicide, thereby leaving Niki to face the trial alone. This is not the only challenge that Niki faces; she also loses her husband who decides to abandon her. Only when he is diagnosed with a terminal lung disease does he return home to die. Niki is also alienated from her friends, Mmampe and Maria, who, through Sekatle, the corrupt mayor, and Maria's brother, live in better houses and are employees of the town council. Niki constantly worries about her children, Popi and Viliki, who have to deal with the situation in their own ways. Popi's main problem is establishing her own identity since she cannot come to terms with her long straight hair and her light skin colour. Viliki's problem is the betrayal of his political ideals by his friend, Sekatle, whom he formerly trusted. However, Niki's life takes a new turn when she finds peace in her preoccupation with bees with which she farms to produce honey.

6.2 PROTEST AGAINST EXPLOITATION AND ABUSE OF WOMEN OF COLOUR

While in Mda's earlier novels women of colour are abused by their male counterparts, in this discourse Mda explores the exploitation and abuse of women of colour by white men. Women of colour are exploited and abused in this text when the so-called superior race use their whiteness and masculinity to take advantage of them. The fact that these men use the women for their sexual gratification and then leave them in the lurch when problems arise, proves that they are exploitative and abusive. The exploitation of the women of Mahlatswetsa township is evidenced in the conduct of their "partners in crime" (Mda,

2002:73). Firstly, the white men implicated in the sex scandal treat the women as mere sex gadgets when they exchange them. Then, when they are arrested the men pay their own bail “while their partners in crime remained incarcerated in the fester [of] prison cells” (Mda, 2002:73). Finally, Niki is manipulated when she is asked not to give evidence against the men; she is promised, “They will look after you and your child. They will pay for the support of your child” (Mda, 2002:106). The promise is never fulfilled, instead, Niki and the other women continue to fend for their children single-handedly. Furthermore, at the end of the trial the men state that they have maintained right from the onset that they were wrongfully implicated. The implication of their declaration is that the men are not only denouncing the women as liars but also degrading them further. The irony of the denouncement is the fact that the products of the illicit sex serve as proof that these men had sex with the women. The conduct of the white men inarguably affirms Duncan’s observation that according to the apartheid government, “To sleep with a black is like sleeping with an animal” (2002:135). It is this relegating of another human being to the position of an animal that makes the white men apathetic and callous as will be illustrated in the following exposition.

6.2.1 Sex across the colour bar

Sexual relations between whites and other races have existed since the arrival of the colonists in the Cape Colony, hence the widespread presence of the coloured race. This assertion is validated by Van der Ross (1986:2) who states:

There were marriages between white men and slave women ... at the Cape, and between white men and free women of mixed descent while extra-marital relations between white men and all categories of women took place.

What emerges from Van der Ross’s observation is that before the Immorality Act was passed, sexual restrictions between Europeans and non-Europeans were not official but were based on the disapproval of the society. Europeans and non-Europeans liaised sexually within and outside of marriage. Therefore, when legislation against interracial relations was introduced, it became difficult even for those who supported the apartheid policy of conserving the Afrikaner homogeneity and immutability to abide by this

legislation. Even those who believed that God was against interracial sexual relations were defeated by the reality that sex between two human beings is not a criminal act. For example, Waldner (*City Press*, 30 September 2007:n.p.) states, “one of the first accused convicted under the Immorality Act was a Dutch Reformed minister who was caught having sex with a domestic worker in his garage”. Mda (2002:42) points out that coupling across the colour bar had actually become a tradition to some whites when he remarks: “It was the tradition of the Afrikaner boys of the Free State platteland to go through devirgination rites by capturing and consuming the forbidden quarry that lurked beneath their nannies’ pink overalls.”

Mda’s use of the word “capturing” appropriately indicates that the Afrikaners took their victims by force while the word “quarry” reinforces their contorted idea of relegating black women to the level of animals.

In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Mda illustrates how Afrikaner men fail in their quest to conserve their “racial purity and superiority” by coupling with African women. Mda presents his exposition of sexual relations between blacks and whites through the characters of Johannes Smit, Stephanus Cronjé, Referend Francois Bornman, and others. All these men “[are] pillars, reputable men in their community” (<http://web27.epnet.com/DeliveryPrint Save.asp>). Despite their whiteness and reputation, these men are unable to restrain themselves from seducing or manipulating black women such as Niki, Mmampe and Maria to have sex with them. Mda also reveals that if the women tried to resist the men’s sexual advances they would be violated. Johannes Smit, a fat and hairy farmer who becomes known as Hairy Buttocks amongst the girls that he defiled, was known for waylaying young girls in the sunflower fields where he would give them money in exchange for sex. But, if he did not get what he wanted, he would use violence.

Mda’s protagonist, Niki, becomes a victim of interracial rape when she encounters Johannes Smith in the sunflower fields. Unlike the other girls who have been defiled by Smit, she is still a virgin and thus refrains from accepting money in exchange for sex. Smit who is used to getting his own way with the African girls decides to use his masculinity to get what he wants, as Mda (2002:16) recounts: “[He] pulled off Niki’s terylene skirt. [Niki] tried to hold on to it, but he had the strength of ten demons. He

threw her on the damp ground. Then he pulled down her panties and took them off ... He slapped her and ordered her to shut up."

The incident that is recounted in this extract clearly relegates the Afrikaner man to the level of a brute. It, therefore, illustrates one of the many ironies of apartheid laws such as the Immorality Act which, according to Duncan (2002:135), propound that sleeping with an African is tantamount to sleeping with an animal. Although Mda (2002:16) points out that on this occasion there is no penetration, the man has nevertheless acted immorally and brutally. Niki is physically abused and defiled as the man has used her as a masturbation gadget. Smit's indecent behaviour towards the girls can be ascribed to his political and financial position. Politically, as a white person he is of the superior race. He also has the financial means with which he can entice the girls who come from an impoverished background. For example, Smit gives Niki money before he abuses her. Mda (2002:13-14) indicates Niki's poverty by stating that her terylene skirt and white blouse are the only outfit she owned both for happy and sad occasions.

After being defiled by Johannes Smit, Niki "grabbed her skirt and ran like a tornado" (Mda, 2002:16). When she gets home she cries until she falls asleep. However, this is not the end of her problems since she also has a drunken father to deal with. When her father arrives home he is very drunk and demands food from her but Niki had not been able to prepare food after the ordeal that she has gone through during the day. Mda (2002:16-17) presents Niki's predicament as follows:

She tried to explain that she was not feeling well. And in any case, there was no food to cook because [her father] had not left her any money. But he was not prepared to listen to any lame excuses. He was going to beat the laziness out of her. He was going to lash her buttocks with a belt until they were sour.

To avoid punishment from her irate father Niki rushes to the shop to buy food, using the money that Johannes Smit had given her. Mda observes, "there was a lot of change left over" (2002:17) after Niki had bought bread and a tin of pilchards.

The background information on the behaviour of Niki's father brings to the fore factors that would understandably make Niki vulnerable to the likes of Johannes Smit. Firstly, her father expects her to be a provider as he does not buy food but expects to get food when he comes home. Secondly, Smit's money has been a lifesaver for Niki, had she not been able to improvise by buying bread and a tin of fish she would have been severely beaten. Therefore, in consideration of these factors it can be argued that her father's behaviour encourages Niki to join Mmampe and Maria in their sexual escapades with white men.

Another act of violence against African women is that which is perpetrated by a traffic officer, Barend Jacobus Nolan, who drives out at night and tricks a teacher into getting into his car. He drives her to an isolated place where he offers her R5 in exchange for sex. When the teacher refuses, "He grabbed her arm and twisted it. She started crying and he hit her. Nolan undid the shorts he was wearing and made an indecent suggestion to her. He also put his hand up her dress" (Mda, 2002:92).

The final scenario of sexual exploitation of African women which Mda depicts is that of sexual romps between them and some Afrikaner men who swap them among themselves in a barn. Wenzel (2003:136) observes that place, as a space within which events take place, is significant in Mda's novels. She states,

The appropriation of space and construction of shelter is part of the human endeavour to conceptualise being in and of the world. Places are defined spaces that serve as points of orientation, with the implication that space exists where humans are and vice versa. Houses in particular, feature as places or sites that occupy and define personal space; they are not only adapted to a person's lifestyle and indicative of his/her identity but also serve as metaphors of certain periods and value systems.

Traditionally, in both western and African cultures, a barn is a storage place for food, farm implements or houses farm animals. A barn protects food from external environmental forces and preserves the food's good qualities. However, in *The Madonna of Excelsior*, a barn is used as a brothel – a place where immoral and vile acts are taking place. These acts are in direct opposition to the life sustaining qualities the barn is associated with.

Mda's choice of barn for the perpetration of these repugnant and outrageous acts such as sexual orgies and swapping escapades is appropriate as it deliberately and ironically shows that the behaviour of the men resembles that of animals. Another factor that reinforces the animal-like behaviour of these Afrikaner men is the fact that even though some of them are married and are of reputable standing in their community, they unashamedly engage in sex in the presence of one another and the women that they were exploiting.

The irony of what transpires in the barn is that among the men there is Reverend Francois Bornman, "... a man of God who preached obedience to his laws. Laws against adultery and miscegenation" (Mda, 2002:75). Thus, when Bornman appears in court as one of the accused who are charged with contravening the Immorality Act, a repelled Afrikaner female spectator who is clothed in Voortrekker attire remonstrates, "Sies! ... This man was revered by all of us because he took part in the commemoration of 1938. His name is there for all to see on the plaque at the church. But here he is involved in this evil! The world is coming to an end!" (Mda, 2002:75).

This emotional outburst is indicative of the extent to which the Afrikaners have been indoctrinated to believe that interracial sex was evil and should be treated as a crime. Moreover, those Afrikaners who were found to be engaging in sexual relationships with non-Europeans were treated with contempt because their betrayal was some sort of betrayal of a sacred course.

Paris (2002:246) explains the efforts the police would make to arrest those who were either suspected of or were having interracial relationships when he states, "Police brandishing tape recorders and binoculars investigated the crime of interracial sexual intercourse, examining bedsheets and hiding police officers under suspect's beds."

Waldner observes that in an attempt to criminalise sexual liaisons between blacks and whites the apartheid police, "tracked down racially mixed couples, homes were invaded and doors were smashed down in the process" (*City Press*, 2007:n.p.). Waldner further explains, "Mixed couples caught in bed were arrested and underwear was used as forensic evidence in court" (*ibid.*). Consequently, those who were arrested would not only suffer the inconvenience and the embarrassment of having their privacy invaded and their homes

raided but most importantly they suffered the humiliation of having their underwear exhibited in court.

The exploitation of the African women becomes salient when the sexual escapades produce children of mixed breed, the so-called coloureds. The white men and the black women are subsequently arrested and charged for contravening the Immorality Act. All the Afrikaner men, except Cronjé who “opted out” through committing suicide and Bosman who lay in hospital after a botched attempt at killing himself, together with the African women face a trial that receives worldwide publicity. By committing or attempting to commit suicide the Afrikaner men are clearly indicating that they would rather lose their lives than face the shame and the consequences of their surreptitious actions. For them the shame of “sleeping with animals” was just too much to bear. The conduct of the remaining Afrikaner men also shows that they regard the women they have slept with as nothing more than animals. The men pay their own bail while their partners in crime are left to rot in the debilitating conditions of the Winburg police cells. The word “fester” (Mda, 2002:73) indicates their resentment of and repugnance for the women as the word suggests a state of rotting. The lack of empathy for the women and their offspring ironically puts the men on the same level as animals such as dogs. After they had mated with the women, they went separate ways, thus no sentiment or compassion is attached to such a deed.

In spite of the scandal of the arrests and trial, the suicides and the disgust that is expressed in the word, “Sies!” (Mda, 2002:75) by one of the Afrikaner women, the Afrikaner men are not deterred, but merely continue to practise their sexual exploitation. As a result, “[t]he Coloured population of the Free State village of Excelsior has more than doubled over the past ten years” (Mda, 2002:101). According to Mda (2002:94), the increase in the number of coloured persons in the Free State can be ascribed to the following: “Young Afrikaner boys were eager to taste what their fathers were eating on the sly. They went out on hunting expeditions for what they called swart poes ...”

This shows that the Afrikaner boys grew up aware of the fact that their fathers were secretly having illicit sex with African women. They, therefore, resolve to embark on a “hunting expedition” (Mda, 2002:94) to discover for themselves what it is that their fathers

could not resist. Mda's use of the expression "hunting expedition" reinforces Duncan's view when he asserts that Afrikaners deemed sleeping with a black person as sleeping with an animal (2002:135) because it is only animals that are hunted. When a man wants a woman he would approach her, not hunt her. Furthermore, Mda uses the word "poes", a very coarse and indecent word for a female's private parts. The use of this word further illustrates the disrespect of and contempt for African women. Just like their fathers, the Afrikaner boys are out to exploit the body of African women, to experiment with it and later denounce it. It is clear from this exposition that what the apartheid laws set out to prevent, namely, miscegenation, was becoming unpreventable and turned into the worse evil of sexual exploitation when people could have coupled without shame or fear of being arrested.

6.2.2 The product of miscegenation

Mbembe (2006:23) in *City Press* observes that under apartheid, but even more so after apartheid, South Africans are haunted by questions of identity and belonging. Although Mbembe embraces all South Africans when it comes to the issue of identity, the one race that is mostly affected is the coloured race. Martin (2005:25) in *City Press* maintains that the coloureds are "disconnected from African history, have no recognizable culture and, therefore, possess no identity in a meaningful sense". Thus not only the identity but also the question of culture has become a debatable issue. While in other races culture is passed from one generation to the next, with the coloureds: "[Y]ou are formed into a group, you create a culture ... but it really doesn't have roots" (Mkefa, *Sunday Times*, 2005:n.p.). The lack of identity, roots or culture of the coloured people can be ascribed to the following factor: "European, Indian, Negro, Bantu, Khoikhoi, San, Chinese and East Indian, have all contributed to the formation of [the] coloured people" (Van der Ross, 1986:3).

Given this background, the question arises: If an Afrikaner man and an African woman conceive a child, what should the child be called? As South Africa is patriarchal, the offspring should by right be Afrikaner. However, this is not the case, since offspring resulting from a black and white relation are always referred to as coloured or even black, never white. This shows that apartheid laws not only segregated people but also denied

children their paternity rights. As a result of this, children of mixed races grew up to face the humiliation of being called names such as “bastard,” “Boesman” and many other derogatory terms. Popi, the daughter that Niki conceived with Stephanus Cronjé, becomes a victim of abusive terms when children in her community call her a “boesman” and a “hotnot”, derogatory terms which refer to the San and Khoi people respectively.

The name Popi is coined from the Afrikaans word, “poppie” which means small doll because she is as beautiful as a doll. Unfortunately, her beauty and the fact that she had the same features as Stephanus’s son, Tjaart Cronjé, do not evoke a sense of accountability from her biological father. Like other children in a similar situation, she is classified as black or bantu and uses her stepfather’s name, Pule. Although her father is white, lives in a proper house and owns a butchery, Popi lives in a shack with her family. Like the rest of the community of Mahlatswetsa Township, she is barred from the *Net Blankees* (Whites Only) public facilities. This together with the abusive terms that are hurled at her makes Popi realise the precariousness of her identity. Consequently, she becomes full of resentment and self-loathing which is evinced in the following passage:

[S]he hated the mirror. It exposed her to what she really was. A Boesman girl. A Hotnot girl ... A mirror was an intrusive invention ... that pried into the pain of her face ... She prayed that her freckles would join up, so that she could look like other black children of Mahlatswetsa Location (Mda, 2002:14).

Popi’s self-hatred emanates from the predicament she is facing; on the one hand she is mocked by blacks, on the other she is rejected by whites. “[I]n the old apartheid days [she] was not white enough, and now in the new dispensation [she is] not black enough” (Mda, 2002:259). Popi’s unfortunate circumstances make her withdraw into herself and behave differently from other teenagers. Unlike other girls of her age who straighten their black hair and are proud to expose their beautiful, smooth and slender legs, Popi hides hers because:

She had learnt ways of not calling attention to her colouredness ... She wore coloured doeks that hid her straight almost blonde hair ... Doeks that diverted the eyes of the curious from the blue eyes ... Another weapon were her slacks. Slacks that hid her hairy legs (Mda, 2002:152).

Popi's life as a teenager is not easy since she is not free to flaunt her beauty like other young girls because she thinks that everything about her is wrong. What Popi fails to realise is that there is nothing wrong wth her person but that the problem can be ascribed to the apartheid laws that dehumanised the African race. The injustice of racial oppression is illustrated in the circumstances that led to Popi's conception.

Mda (2002:42) reveals that Popi's mother, Niki, suffers utter humiliation when her employer, Madame Cornelia, who is Stephanus Cronjé's wife, accuses her of stealing meat from her butchery. Madame Cornelia had a system of weighing her workers in the morning and afternoon to ensure that there were no discrepancies between the morning and the afternoon weight. Any discrepancy would indicate to her that the worker had some meat hidden on his or her person. Human beings are weighed just like the carcasses that they cut up and sell! The butchery aptly serves as a place where cruelty takes place.

When Niki denies having stolen any meat, Madam Cornelia orders her to strip naked in front of everyone, including Stephanus and his son, Tjaart, who already knows that what he is seeing would hold for him and the other Afrikaner boys "pleasures of the future." After Niki's nakedness and even worse, her monthly flow have been exposed and nothing is found on her, Madame Cornelia laughs the whole thing off as a joke! This despicable treatment consequently urges Niki to plot vengeance against Madame Cornelia. She uses the very nakedness that Madame Cornelia abused, to captivate Stephanus. From that time, she gives herself completely to him and makes sure that they have sex in Madame Cornelia's house, in the main bedroom where Niki is conceived. Houses, as Wenzel (2003:316) observes, "define space" and indicate one's lifestyle and value systems. As in the case of the barn, Madame Cornelia's house is defiled when Niki decides to have sex with Stephanus Cronjé in his own bedroom. Traditionally, the main bedroom was regarded as a sanctified area where life was created and often a place where midwives helped to deliver babies. Niki thus succeeds in penetrating the most sanctified space of

Madame Cornelia's personal area, thwarting her "superior race" image and the value systems that she upholds. When the sex scandal breaks and Madame Cornelia discovers that her husband is one of the Afrikaner men who have slept with "animals", she is so debased that she deserts her home for the entire duration of the trial.

Mda further illustrates the injustice of the apartheid laws in Popi's attempts to hide her colouredness and her inability to reconcile with her coloured identity. If Niki had the powers to alter Popi's appearance she would have done so to alleviate her ordeal, as evinced by her earlier futile endeavours to do so. Mda points out that when Niki is informed that her friends, Mmampe and Maria, have been arrested for contravening the Immorality Act, she hastily goes home and sets upon Popi's head, shaving it clean with a razor. When Niki realises that she has to obliterate Popi's colour as well,

[She] took [a] smoking brazer into the shack and placed it on the floor. She held a naked Popi above the fire, Smoking the pinkness out of her ... The baby whooped, then yelled, as the heat of the brazier roasted her little body and the smoke stung her eyes and nostrils ... [Niki] assured the baby that it was for her own good ... She sang a lullaby as she swung her over the fire ... Turning her round and round so that she would be browned on all sides. Evenly (2002:66).

Niki's actions may be perceived as horrific and outrageous. However, she is convinced that she is simply trying to protect her child from the imminent arrest that would affect them both. Apparently, Niki does not realise that there is no escape. What Mmampe had told her some years ago when they were still young is going to happen. When Niki had her first encounter with Smit and was defiled by him, she had said, "I am going to tell the police about what he has done to me" (Mda, 2002:17) and Mmampe had admonished her,

"Don't be foolish, Niki, ... Do you think the police will believe you had nothing to do with it? ... They will arrest you and charge you with the Immorality Act. Haven't you heard of black women who are in jail for sleeping with white men?" (*ibid.*).

What Mda reveals by Popi’s “shaving and roasting ceremony” is the manifestation of Niki’s desperation and fear. Mda shows that Niki has submitted to the apprehension of the threat the pending arrest and consequences such as being “incarcerated in the fester that was Winburg police cells” (Mda, 2002:73), posed. Niki’s mind is so completely consumed by fear and the zeal to protect Popi that she fails to perceive reason.

There are parallels between Mda’s and Head’s novels that illustrate both the senselessness and the ironies of racial prejudice. In *Maru*, Head (1971:11) observes that if you are an oppressed people, “your outer appearance reduces you to the status of a non-human being” (ibid.). In this novel, Head relates the ugliness of racial prejudice against a San woman, Margaret Cadmore. Margaret was adopted and raised by an English woman, after whom she was named. Despite her good breeding, decorum and education, she is met with hostility and malice when she arrives at the Batswana village of Dilepe to assume a teaching position. The Batswana offered her the job because of her commendable qualifications. However, when they realise that she is a *Masarwa*, a derogatory term that means “a low, filthy nation”, they are outraged. Consequently, she is not accommodated in the teachers’ quarters but in a filthy old library infested with crawling creatures. A bed that was lent to her by Moleka, the tribal administration officer, is unceremoniously retrieved when it is discovered that she is a *Masarwa*. Then the school principal, Pete, who is wary of the wrath of the totems, the village royalty, instigates the children to abuse Margaret by calling her a Bushman. Ironically, the chief’s son, Maru, who like the Afrikaner men in *The Madonna Excelsior*, regarded himself as the superior race, crosses the racial boundaries when he marries the *Masarwa* woman.

6.3 PROTEST AGAINST RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Racial discrimination is one of the many phenomena that marked the apartheid era. In 1955, H.F. Verwoerd, Prime Minister of the National Party, decreed: “There is no place for the Bantu in the European community above the level of certain forms of labour” (Christie, 1985:12). By this decree Verwoerd ensured that the Bantu would not share the same public facilities and residential areas with whites. The only time non-Europeans would be allowed in the white community would be when they had to perform duties such as domestic help and gardening. Laws such as the Group Areas Act, No. 41 of 1950 and

the Population Registration Act, No. 30 of 1950, were introduced to ensure that non-Europeans were kept away from the Europeans. Any transgression of these laws constituted a criminal offence. For example, “[I]t was a crime to walk through a White Only door, a crime to ride a White Only bus, a crime to use a White Only fountain” (Mandela, 1995:172). Mandela continues to illustrate the application of the apartheid laws when he states, “[U]nder the Urban Areas Act we were not permitted to occupy business premises in the city without ministerial consent” (*ibid.*). Paris (2002:253) argues,

Segregationist laws were long part of the political landscape as early as 1931. [T]he Native Land Act attempted to push black Africans into reserves (largely to eliminate sharecropping, which undermined the master-servant relationship, and to provide a pool of contract labour for the gold mines). Attitudes were already entrenched: whites were horrified by the idea of interracial sex, [they] wanted to see the races separated and were possessive about the vote ...

What emerges from Paris’ argument is the fact that whites wanted to abuse and dominate. Their objective was to confine blacks to positions of subservience, blacks were not to become master or owners of land. Moreover, the whites were driven by the quest to possess everything that was good, which is why they allocated rural Bantustan areas to blacks while they resided in the cities where they had access to the necessary amenities of life.

In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Mda thus sets out to highlight the following incidents of racial discrimination in the conservative Free State town of Excelsior.

6.3.1 Discrimination in public facilities

This type of discrimination occurred when Africans were denied access to community halls, libraries, restaurants, toilets, and many other facilities that were demarcated for whites. Africans were also expected to queue separately or use separate entrances or exists.

Mda (2002:141) asserts that before 1994 there were always two queues at the post-office in Excelsior, one for whites and one for blacks. The one for whites was quick and the one for blacks was slow. This situation did not immediately change after liberation since the conservative Excelsior whites continued to practise discrimination, though in a different way,

One queue, now, for all the colours of the rainbow ... the white customers did not join the one queue. They walked straight to the teller, who would immediately stop serving the black customer to attend to the white one (Mda, 2002:153).

The black community of Excelsior is further discriminated against when they are denied access to the City Hall and not allowed to attend the Cherry Festival celebration, a celebration where the products of their own labour were displayed and sold. On this occasion, a Cherry Queen who was crowned the previous night in the Andrew Marquard Hall happens to pass where Niki is tending Cronjé's biltong stall. Niki manages to get a glimpse of the Cherry Queen,

Of course, [she] was seeing the Cherry Queen for the first time. She would not have been allowed into the Andrew Marquard Hall even if she wanted to attend the pageant .. the hall belonged only to the volk. And to those visitors whose bodies were blessed enough to have melanin levels that were as low as that of the volk (Mda, 2002:46).

The word *volk* refers to the Afrikaner nation, while those who "have melanin levels" as low as the *volk* refers to other whites such as the English. If the Afrikaners regard low levels of melanin, a pigment of colour, as a blessing it implies that blacks who are dark because of high levels of melanin, are cursed. This is an illustration of the contemptible sense of superiority that the Afrikaner had as they believed that they were God's chosen nation. It is ironic that the Afrikaner nation should regard blacks as a cursed nation and maintain the "holier than thou" attitude when Niki is one of the women who reduces one of them, Cronjé, to a "whimpering fool on top of her" and making him squeal "like a pig that is being slaughtered" (Mda, 2002:50). This is an empowering moment for Niki as she

proves the mastery of a black woman over the Afrikaner man showing that his blessedness and superiority are mere hypocrisy.

Another form of discrimination described in the novel is that of keeping blacks from worshipping with whites under the same roof. Niki and her son Viliki are victims of this practice. On Sundays Niki and her son would attend the service standing outside the church of Reverend Francois Bornman, one of the Afrikaner men involved in the sex scandal. On one Sunday when Niki was standing outside the gate as usual, the Reverend Bornman concluded his sermon as follows:

“As a Calvinist people we Afrikaners have, in accordance with our faith in the Word of God, developed a policy condemning all equality and mongrelisation between White and Black. God’s word teaches us after all, that He willed us into being separate nations, colours and languages” (Mda, 2002:30).

It is ironic that a man who engages in a “carnivalesque communal copulation session” (Mda and Collen, 2004:253) with black women should preach against cross-breeding and claim that it is something that God condemns, when he and his fellow Afrikaners are practising it and end up amongst the Excelsior 19 who face the notorious Immorality Act trial. This is not the only irony that emerges. In addition, Bornman is revered by his community when he is actually not worthy of reverence. The title Reverend, should only be afforded to someone who by virtue of his calling as a priest or minister is virtuous and worthy of the utmost respect. Bornman is, therefore, not worthy of respect because he does not practise what he preaches. His conduct is thus not only repulsive but also hypocritical. The disgust that his misconduct evokes from some of the Afrikaners is illustrated in the following outburst:

“Sies … This man was revered by all of us because he took part in the Great Trek commemoration in 1938. His name is there for all to see on the plaque at the church. But here he is, involved in this evil! … We knew of him as a man of God who preached obedience to His laws. Laws against adultery and miscegenation” (Mda, 2002:75).

“Sies” is an expression of disgust, thus the woman’s words are an illustration of the wrath and humiliation that Bornman’s conduct has evoked from the Afrikaners. Bornman has not only betrayed the church but the Afrikaners’ quest to conserve their Afrikaner immutability and superiority. It is, therefore, not surprising that Bornman decides to commit suicide when what he was “eating on the sly” (Mda, 2002:94) becomes public knowledge.

6.3.2 Racism and racial discrimination in the work place

In the previous dispensation blacks were not only discriminated against when they were barred from public facilities and institutions but also when they suffered prejudice and unjust treatment in the work place. This occurred when for example, derogatory terms such as *kaffir* or *baboon* were used against them, when they earned meagre wages and were allocated inferior positions. Organizations such as COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Union) and NUM (National Union of Mineworkers) have made efforts to eradicate the legacy of racial discrimination in the work place. Hence Buhlungu *et al.* assert:

Since its formation in 1982, the NUM has been a leading force in the struggle against racism and racial discrimination in the mining industry, particularly in wages, occupations, and the general treatment of black workers (2007:252).

Despite the existence of organisations such as NUM and COSATU; and the stipulations of Section 9 in the Bill of Rights which states, “No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3)” which includes among others, race; the evils of racial discrimination and racism are still prevalent in the work place as the following exposition will illustrate.

In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Mda shows how stubborn the legacy of racism and racial discrimination is the character of Tjaart Cronjé who is a member of Mahlatswetsa Council and is annoyed by the fact that a black person is elected major. When it is suggested that a feast be held for the swearing-in-ceremony, Tjaart fails to contain his frustration and

he opposes the idea of a feast on two bases, firstly that the feast was not budgeted for and secondly, the money that was going to be spent on the feast was earmarked for providing services to the people. Looking at the bases of this argument, Tjaart's opposition is laudable, the feast should not override the needs of the people. However, Tjaart's argument is marred by the fact that he refers to the black council members as "these affirmative action people" (Mda, 2002:172). Moreover, when he is asked to withdraw the remark, he refuses and continues to berate the council members,

"Aren't you people everywhere because of affirmative action? Didn't I leave the army because it was absorbing terrorists into its ranks? The very people I had been taught were the enemy of the Afrikaner race? ... I worked hard in that army. I deserved a promotion, but did I get it? No! Instead a black terrorist was promoted. I couldn't stay in an affirmative action army and salute an affirmative action general. I resigned ..." (*ibid.*).

While affirmative action has its flaws, as illustrated in Chapter Five of this work, Tjaart's words reveal a racist attitude. His stance against affirmative action does not challenge the incompetence of those who hold senior positions, but is based on the fact that they are "black terrorists" (Mda, 2002:172). Moreover, his refusal to salute a black general, is indicative of his unwillingness to accept change, especially the fact that blacks are now able to occupy positions that were previously reserved for whites. Therefore, his outburst is racially motivated. Thus writers such as Gilroy "advocate that racism and race-thinking be sacrificed in the name of 'planetary humanism' in the twenty-first century" (2000:2).

Racism can have devastating consequences or a far-reaching impact on both the victim and the perpetrator. While the victim may experience either psychological or physical trauma, the perpetrator will at the same time undergo a process of dehumanization.

In *Ways of Dying*, Mda illustrates this point when a white man sets a black man on fire and starts laughing as he watches him screaming. Mda explains,

[T]he white man hated [the black man] because he was doing so well in his job. He had been a labourer for many years, serving the company with honesty and dedication, and had recently been tipped for a senior position (1995a:65).

Mda (1995a:65) further expounds that when a witness, a black man who insists that he is a friend of the white man is called to give an account of what happened he states,

“The fire was so big that I was frightened. I went about screaming for help but by the time they put out the flames and took him to hospital, it was too late. He was badly burnt ... The same white man doused me with petrol and set me alight last month. I sustained burns but I healed after a while. Although he is a big white baas, he is very friendly and likes to play with black labourers”.

From the account of the witness it emerges that the same white man had burned other workers before, however, the man who is ironically described as being friendly to blacks is not arrested or dismissed from work after all these cases of assault. The extent to which racism has reduced this man to the level of a brute is evident in the words, “the white (man) was merely laughing because it was a game. To him, the flames were a joke. When the man screamed and ran around in pain, he thought he was dancing” (*ibid.*). For the witness to state that the white man perceived this gruesome action as a game, can only mean that he is scared to speak out against the white man. Thus Mda uses sarcasm when he states that the man was simply playing with the black men that he had set alight.

Ware and Back (2002:27) propound,

If the twenty-first century is to transcend the colour line inherited from earlier social, economic, political, and cultural formations, a progressive, forward-looking politics of social justice should embrace the will to abandon “race” as any kind of useful category, alternative or otherwise.

The reality of Ware and Back’s proposal is echoed by Gilroy who maintains, “mechanisms of [racism] estrange black and white from each other and amputate their common

humanity” (2000:15). This proposal corroborates Mda’s stance against violence that is motivated by racism.

6.4 PROTEST AGAINST CORRUPTION AND THE BETRAYAL OF IDEALS

Corruption and the betrayal of ideals are other themes that are revealed in *The Madonna of Excelsior*. In the novel the most prominent and poignant forms of corruption and betrayal are those that occur within the municipal government. Municipal governments are instituted with a view to assisting the national government to provide basic services such as water sanitation, electricity, and low-income housing. To execute these duties huge budgets are allocated to municipalities. However, municipal officials have frequently shown a severe lack of integrity in managing such monies. For example, in October 2005, the newspapers, TV and radio were inundated with the news of corruption that involved municipal managers or councillors. For instance, Papi Mokoena, the major of Mangaung Municipality, was charged with corruption which included theft and nepotism (SABC 2, 11 October 2005). The appearance of Papi Mokoena, his wife and other co-accused did not serve as a deterrent since there are still widespread practices of corruption in municipalities. It has become a rarity to find a newspaper that does not carry reports of corrupt officials as evinced in the following headlines: “Limpopo suspends municipal directors” (*Sowetan*, 16 May 2006:7), “Mpumalanga councillors face corruption charges” (*City Press*, 2005:9) and “[Municipal] Directors suspended for corruption” (*City Press*, 2006:8). The corrupt behaviour of municipal officials continues unabated despite President Mbeki’s warning, “The law will deal appropriately with them so that the resources intended for our communities are correctly utilised” (*Sowetan*, 2006:n.p.).

In *The Madonna of Excelsior*, Mda reveals the theme of corruption and betrayal through portraying the lives of Viliki and Sekatle. Viliki is a former African National Congress activist who has been arrested and tortured by the police during the struggle for liberation. Sekatle is Viliki’s friend and comrade, who later betrays Viliki and the liberation movement when he becomes a police informant.

After the struggle Viliki becomes the first black Mayor of Excelsior. Once he is adorned with the mayoral robe of honour, he begins to display dishonourable tendencies which result in his alienation from his sibling, Popi, who vehemently opposes his actions. One of the things that Popi remonstrates against is illustrated in the following extract:

Viliki had allocated himself a second house, which he was renting out to some family ... Popi felt that it was immoral for Viliki to give himself a second house when there were still so many people on the list, desperately waiting for government-subsidised houses (Mda, 2002:177).

Mda (*ibid.*) furthermore observes, "... some of [the councilors] had even allocated houses to girlfriends who did not qualify for government subsidies. And to their mothers and grandmothers". When Popi objects to such unethical practices, some of the members of the council point out that they had made enough sacrifices when they fought for liberation and they, therefore, deserved to enjoy the fruits of their labour (Mda, 2002:177-178). By this the councillors imply that since they suffered during the struggle they have the right to misappropriate public funds as compensation for their suffering. This form of corruption continues unabated despite the fact that some municipal officials earn exorbitant salaries in addition to performance bonuses. These salaries illustrate that the councilors are driven by greed and self-service as President Mbeki has aptly observed that these councilors are councilors who are greedy and hungry for power and that they use public money to get rich quickly".

While Viliki and his fellow councillors are enjoying the "fruits of liberation," the homeless start erecting shacks on the land that the town council has earmarked for RDP houses. Council, however, is determined to oppose and eliminate this practice. This move makes Sekatle see an opportunity to sabotage Viliki and to make money for himself. He thus joins the council and then hires people to go around telling the squatters that if they paid money to him, he would protect them from the town council and that once they had paid they will be able to claim ownership of the land they are occupying. Consequently, when the council goes out to bulldoze the shacks, the squatters, led by Sekatle, demonstrate outside the municipal offices. Later, people whom Viliki alleges are

Sekatle's people, petrol-bomb his house twice. He thereupon resigns as mayor and remains on the council as an ordinary member.

Viliki is succeeded by Lizette de Vries, who at the end of her term of office is succeeded by Sekatle. When Sekatle becomes mayor, another form of corruption emerges, namely, nepotism. Sekatle employs his sister, Maria, as a clerk despite the fact that Maria is "barely literate and that the old Afrikaner lady who had been working at the registry for decades, did the work for her. As soon as Maria had become a clerk, she had organised a job for [her friend], Mmampe, as a tea lady" (Mda, 2002:249).

Lack of commitment in prioritising the basic needs of the poor and upholding the ideals of the African National Congress is demonstrated when some members of the council decide to throw a big feast for Viliki when he is sworn in as major. This decision is implemented despite the fact that a feast is not budgeted for. Thus, one of the council members, Tjaart Cronjé, remonstrates,

"[t]he first thing they think about is a feast ... Not the roads, not water, not sewerage and rubbish removal. But a feast! That is the problem with these affirmative action people" (Mda, 2002:172).

Mda (2002:177) observes that once Viliki becomes mayor, his council embarks on building RDP houses in the township of Mahlatswetsa. However, some of the poor and low-income earners are deprived of their right to access these houses when Viliki and four councilors allocate some of these houses to themselves. Mda further observes, "Viliki had allocated himself a second house, which he was renting out to some homeless family. He felt that as the mayor, he deserved a second house in order to supplement his meagre income from the council" (*ibid.*).

This extract as well as the preceding one are illustrative of the lack of empathy for the poor, the greed and the self-serving attitude of those who are "mandated to promote local economic development and to ensure that services are delivered efficiently and effectively at local level" (Khoza, 2000:40).

According to the internal procedures of Local Government, Clause 160, “A municipal council may employ personnel that are necessary for the effective performance of its functions” (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996). Sekatle’s conduct clearly illustrates that he is contravening the law when he employs Maria who is not only incompetent but also redundant as there is already someone who is doing the job for which Maria is appointed. What Sekatle’s action further illustrates is that the lives of councilors are often marked by “decadence and the abandonment of revolutionary principles ...” (<http://web27.epnet.com/DeliverySave.asp>), a feature prevalent in post-apartheid South Africa that has cost the country dearly in that it has lost the respect of the world that has consequently withdrawn investment from the country.

Mathekga observes that there is a general discontent with local government in South Africa [<http://www.idasa.org.za/gbOutputFiles.asp?>]. This arises as a result of managers and councilors who have “acquired reputations for corruption and using their position for self-enrichment” (Grest, Frankel, Pines, and Swilling, 1988:20). This attitude of managers and councilors sabotage the ideals and objectives of the African National Congress. According to Khosa (2000:40),

The democratic government led by the ANC committed itself to confronting inequalities, through amongst others, providing basic infrastructure and social services to those who needed them the most. One of the goals of welfare and infrastructure delivery is to ensure access to basic services. In terms of the South African Constitution, local government is clearly mandated to promote local economic development and to ensure that services are delivered efficiently and effectively at a local level.

Khosa further observes, “resources allocated for service and infrastructure [are] sufficient, [however], implementation is ... flawed, because of inefficiencies in municipal deliveries” (2000:40). Khosa’s observation is affirmed by Malala (*Sunday Times*, 2000:n.p.) who illustrates the inefficiencies of the local government as follows:

When the ANC was elected to power in 1994, New Eersterus was one of the first villages to get access to electricity. Over the past five years, roads were improved

and water taps installed at the corners of most streets ... However, improvements to the main roads in the village were ... so superficial and shoddy that large parts of Eersterus are now inaccessible by car because recent floods have washed away the roads. Ugly, mostly useless electricity pylons stand over the houses, giving them the air of a besieged place. Dangerously low-hanging cables crisscross the sky ... The government installed pit latrines [which] stink to high heaven (*Sunday Times*, 17 December 2000:n.p.).

The situation at Eersterus is not an isolated case since similar cases abound in the media. For example, places such as Khutsong and Heuningsvlei in North West have experienced incidents of violent protests from residents who were dissatisfied about the lack of service delivery. According to the Human Science Research Council survey of September 2000, “poor and low-income households in South Africa generally received services of poor quality, whereas the better off in society received services of better quality” (Khosa, 2000a:46). Khosa (2000a:49-51) further argues that protest against service delivery in South Africa emanates from poor communities, not from middle and high income groups. This argument shows that,

Glossy annual reports of several government departments presented an impressive array of information about government successes in infrastructure and service delivery ... official facts and official statistics about service delivery were often mere fabrication, as they had little resemblance to reality (Bond, Dor and Ruiters in Khosa, 2000a:61).

6.5 CONCLUSION

Various issues have been raised in this chapter. Firstly, the introduction of the Immorality Act and its results and secondly, the corruption and the betrayal of ideals by municipal executives. The irony of the institution of the Immorality Act is that the Afrikaners whose genetic make-up was supposed to be protected from contamination are the ones who sought the African women with whom they had sexual relations. The Afrikaner men have failed to uphold the ideals of the National Party which were to preserve the superiority and purity of the “volk”. In this regard, Mda has successfully shown that people are people despite their race or skin colour. There is no superior or inferior race. Mda has also

shown that racial attacks are motivated by the fact that whites relegated blacks to the position of animals.

Africans, although in a different way, are also failing to uphold the ideals of the struggle for liberation. The ideals of the struggle are encompassed in the stipulations of the Freedom Charter, a document which forms the basis of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Among others, the Constitution stipulates, “All national groups shall have equal rights” and “No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone ...” (1996:7). Sekatle fails to adhere to these stipulations when he appoints his barely illiterate and incompetent sister in a prestigious position when there is a white lady who has been and is still doing the job competently. Moreover, councillors such as Viliki who allocate houses to friends and family members while destitute persons who had been first on the list remain homeless, show that they were not acting in line with the objectives of democracy. This state of affairs is indicative of the similarities between leaders in the new dispensation and those of the previous government. The situation in the post-apartheid era is not different from that of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* where animals overthrow the totalitarian government of man, but later the pigs practise the slogan, “All animals are equal but some are more equal than others” (1983:88). When one compares the former Nationalist leaders with the present African National Congress leaders it becomes evident that the current government in many ways, is merely repeating the injustices of the past, especially as far as the delivery of promised basic services such as housing, water and electricity are concerned. All these forms of malpractice are characteristic of the post-apartheid era and Mda should be lauded for revealing them. The president of the country, Thabo Mbeki too is not satisfied with the way in which his government fails to uphold the ideals of the ANC. He articulates his sentiment as follows:

“[A]s government, we do not want to see the legacy of apartheid becoming a permanent feature of our lives that we will continue to strengthen the democratic state so as to make it a powerful tool that will forever help the poor, to realize the dream of a life free of poverty, free of hunger, free of unemployment” (Mbeki, 2005:18).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUDING REMARKS

7.1 CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that the current democratic South Africa is still blemished by the ills of the past. When the African National Congress (ANC) government ascended to power in 1994, many South Africans who were marginalised during the apartheid era were optimistic and envisaged the coming of a utopia. However, their dream of a utopia was thwarted by the resurfacing of the evils of the past as well as the emergence of a new evils which have betrayed their ideals.

Mda's works have successfully revealed parallels between the past and the present. He has thus shown many recognizable aspects of social and political ills of the past in the present. Mda's ingenious quest in reverting to the past in order to depict the present, is upheld by Scheub (1996:xv) who maintains that the past influences and shapes the present. Another critic, Courau (2004:64) asserts, "the past is often contrasted with the events of the present to establish a sense of historical parallelism". Mda's objective in reverting to the past is further accentuated by the following remark:

It is important that we look the beast in the eye in all its awfulness, so that we can deal with it realistically and effectively. Otherwise, we will fall very badly short of the goal of healing a traumatised and deeply wounded people. If we are to experience genuine reconciliation, then it will have to be on the basis of the truth, however, shattering (Davenport and Saunders, 2000:ix).

The examination of four of Mda's works which constitutes this dissertation has dealt with the "beast" that Davenport and Saunders refer to in the extract. The "beast" refers to the evils that are addressed in Mda's works which are abuse, betrayal, corruption, discrimination, and violence.

When the current government replaced the racist National Party in 1994, its leadership stated its main objective as follows:

The defining parameter in our continuing struggle for national unity and reconciliation is the question of race ... for many years to come we will be able to measure the distance we have traveled towards the accomplishment of these objectives by the degree to which we have succeeded to close the racial divide which continues to separate communities [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/Africa/903379.stm].

In view of this, the government should be applauded for putting in place laws that have dealt significantly with racial discrimination. Msomi (*City Press*, 2007:n.p.) asserts, "Racism has gone underground, becoming more subtle and insidious". Nevertheless, another evil which operates on the same principle as racism has come to the fore. People of the same race, in this case, Africans, are practising abuse, betrayal, corruption, discrimination, and violence among themselves. For instance, those whom Mda refers to as the "Aristocrats of the Revolution" (2002:198), display discriminatory tendencies towards those who are not in the upper echelons of the ruling party.

Chapter Three of this dissertation has revealed that ordinary South Africans who have been instrumental in voting the ANC government into power are still homeless or confined to cardboard shacks, unemployed and live in dire poverty while the elite own luxurious cars, live in exclusive suburbs and enjoy round-the-clock security in their environment. As a result of elitism, the needs of the destitute are either minimally addressed or completely disregarded.

Another disturbing practice that is highlighted in this chapter is the lack of empathy that is exhibited by government employees who treat people of their own race with the utmost contempt. Mda (1995:18) describes these individuals as bureaucrats who are rude and not keen to be of assistance to ordinary people, especially those who look poor. Mda substantiates this observation by referring to a case where a mortuary assistant boasts to her colleague about expensive boutiques and Italian fashion; and goes out to buy fat cakes while bereaved families are waiting for her assistance (1995:19). This is just one of the

many cases that illustrate the attitude of undermining those who find themselves in unfortunate circumstances.

The abuse of women and children is another aspect that is addressed in Chapter Three. This malady has become so widespread that not a single day passes without reading about it in newspapers or hearing about it on the radio and TV. The question is: Who is abusing African women and children in the democratic South Africa? Sadly, the answer is that this phenomenon is no longer a racial issue. African women are mostly abused by their spouses while children are abused either by their parents or relatives. According to *Interface* (SABC 3, 7 April 2007), in 2006 alone, two-hundred thousand South African children were violated and murdered by someone they knew. In another report by *Special Assignment* (SABC 3, 5 April 2007), thousands of African children are trafficked either for sexual abuse or cheap labour by syndicates that are run by African men. These incidents illustrate that after the demise of apartheid women and children continue to be abused by men of their own race. South African children become victims of abuse despite all forms of legislation that are in place such as Article Eight of *The Children's Charter of South Africa* (1995) which stipulates, "All the children have the right to be protected from child labour and any other economic exploitation which endangers a child's mental, physical or psychological health". It is in view of these cases of abuse that Mda condemns the South African society. In the past, African women and children suffered abuse due to apartheid laws that discriminated against them. Mda has shown that African women were sexually abused by Afrikaner men while their offspring were abused by the system when they were made to be seen as "boesmans." They could not claim their rightful identity as they were fathered by Afrikaners who were taught from their sapling years that sleeping with a black person was tantamount to bestiality.

Instances of corruption and nepotism have received attention in this study as well. These instances are a further indication that South Africa has not yet realised its dream of a utopia as corruption and nepotism disadvantage those who were previously marginalised. In both the public and private sector, corruption and nepotism deny ordinary citizens the right to employment, promotion and personal development. As Mda points out in *The Heart of Redness*, inexperienced and unqualified individuals are placed in managerial positions while those who have the necessary skills and positions but are not in the echelons of the ruling party, are disregarded.

Mda has also addressed the adverse impact of colonialism and western culture on the lives of Africans. In Chapter Five of this dissertation it is revealed that colonialism deprived Africans of land ownership while western culture suppressed and denigrated African culture. The colonists imposed their western ideologies on Africans through brainwashing, consequently the spirit of brotherhood among Africans was broken. Those who imbibed western culture castigated those who did not. Mda, like his fellow African writers such as Ngugi in *The River Between* (1987) and Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* (1958), argue that the introduction of a foreign culture to Africa has upset the harmony and the unity that existed among African people.

In view of arguments presented by Mda, for South Africa to attain the utopia that it looked forward to on 27 April, 2007, the ideals of the Freedom Charter must be uplifted and upheld. For this to materialise, the following are recommended:

- *Ubuntu* must be embraced as it epitomizes the essence of being African.
- The *Batho Pele* principle must be upheld at all levels of governance.
- Inequalities at all levels of society must be addressed.
- Corruption and nepotism should be eradicated in order to ensure effective and auspicious service delivery.
- Capitalistic tendencies should be discouraged.
- Leaders, government officials and members of Parliament should be exemplary to those that they serve.
- Government should impose tougher laws to curb acts of violence against citizens, especially women and children; and mete out strict punitive measures against government officials who are implicated in unlawful acts.

To recapitulate, “There are many backlogs that need to be addressed to translate the Constitution from a document of lofty ideals into a living testament that the yoke of oppression has been removed” (Mamaila, *City Press*, 2006:n.p.).

In conclusion, Mda should be applauded for his unbiased writing. While his works condemn the wrongs of the government of the past, he also points out the prevalence of similar wrongs in the present government. For instance, in *Ways of Dying*, Mda shows

that not only female children are vulnerable to abuse but male children as well. In *She Plays with the Darkness*, he reveals that men too suffer abuse at the hands of their spouses. While he protests against racial discrimination that prevailed in the town of Excelsior in *The Madonna of Excelsior*, he also reveals that currently racial discrimination is replaced by a social-class discrimination which accords the elite certain privileges. Finally, in *The Heart of Redness*, Mda criticizes educated individuals who are ashamed and contemptuous of their culture, but at the same time he also condemns certain traditional views such as the disparagement of men who are not circumcised. Therefore, Mda's work should be seen as a contribution towards creating a better South Africa for all who inhabit this beautiful country.

It must be mentioned that this dissertation has covered only certain aspects of the topic. It is thus hoped that it will encourage other researchers to examine some aspects not fully expanded on, in future studies to help create a corpus of knowledge on a talented and prolific South African novelist of whom much is expected in the future.

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