

TITLE OF MINI-DISSERTATION

**SINDIWE MAGONA : AN ANALYSIS OF MAGONA'S
WORKS**

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DECLARATION

This dissertation is a product of my own research, and to my knowledge it has not before been submitted, in part or in its entirety, to any other institution for the purposes of examination.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE NOS.</u>
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. CHAPTER ONE : THEORY	4
3. CHAPTER TWO : AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY	14
4. CHAPTER THREE : ANALYSIS OF MAGONA'S LITERARY WORKS	27
5. CONCLUSION	75
6. BIBLIOGRAPHY	78

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The study is divided into five sections: Introduction, Theory, Author's Biography, Analysis of Magona's Literary works and themes and the Conclusion.

The aim of this study is to outline Magona's trials and triumphs reflecting, in a refreshing and authentic voice, what it means to obtain womanhood in a society where patriarchy and apartheid often conspired to degrade and enslave women economically, domestically, politically, traditionally and sexually.

4. **CHAPTER THREE**

**TEXTUAL ANALYSIS (ANALYSIS OF MAGONA'S
LITERARY WORKS)**

Chapter four will closely examine how Magona uses the various narrative techniques to represent the complexity of her circumstance and emotional state; in addition portraying the predicaments of women caught between custom, white law and the scourge of apartheid.

5. **CONCLUSION**

6. **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

NOTE: The use of the term "Black" in this thesis, is used not because I endorse the mentality of apartheid and discrimination, but rather to acknowledge the divisions between people.

2. CHAPTER ONE

THEORY

It seems necessary to declare at the outset that a theoretical study of a literary genre which does not take into account some of the wider issues raised by literature as a whole, may end up glossing over problems which are virtually important in having to conscientize and awaken the reader or audience of the “African Novel” by their nature fundamental to all its important aspects.

The African women writing, is a genre of “African Literature” which describes African writing in the European language, unlike African literature which is a collective description of the various literatures written in different African languages.

This subtle distinction is a product of the factors of language and as a result, it is consequently obvious that some critics who have been very unsympathetic to African literature have been using inappropriate criteria in relegating it to inferior standard or to the periphery.

This is not to condone glaring defects but to caution that what may be unwittingly discredited as a defect may well be an essential feature in the culture which informs a particular work of art.

Women writers and women readers have always had to work ‘against the grain’. Underlying this problem of power in relations between men and women is what might be called the paradox of gender – a paradox that influences social structures, politics, economics, and issues of war and peace.

Gender struggle in First World feminism is paramount and the need for gender parity is critical as this discrimination existed solely, unlike the double jeopardy of being Black and a Third World female. However, Third World women are opposed to male domination, but on the other hand, racial oppression and discrimination has come to the fore as a common evil and therefore Black women needed to show solidarity to their male counterparts. In doing so, Carole Boyce Davis (1994 : 12) identifies a tension involved in this double allegiance, which is reflective in *African Women’s Writing*. In no uncertain terms gender issues are not the priority, but rather a struggle for racial

equity and liberation from the racist ideology in apartheid South Africa.

At this point in time there is no allegiance to First World Feminism as Third World Women were being engulfed by a multitude of struggles: struggles around social, political, economic, domestic life, housing, food and land rights. There is a perspective projected by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991:52) that in order to avoid the 'othering' of Third World Feminism, a simultaneous process of deconstructing and dismantling (First World Feminism), and building and constructing (Third World Feminism) is necessary. However noble Mohanty's position appears to be, feminist commitment entails the opposition to the exploitative, hierarchical and authoritarian structures of capitalism, and no amount of deconstructing and re-constructing will achieve global feministic ideologies.

To put the same point slightly differently, the Black women in the Third World is oppressed by numerous forces as apposed to her White, First World counterpart. Thus the attempt to achieve global feministic ideologies is a move towards a liberating dream or vision

of the future, which in reality is virtually unattainable as these two worlds have divergent origins.

It is quite evident that at any point in both feministic worlds, various cultures and sub-cultures will coexist, creating or maintaining this dichotomous relationship. Nigerian critic, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyami, (1985 : 68-69) rejects white feminism in favour of black womanism. Ogunyami notes:

The intelligent black woman writer, conscious of black importance in the context of white patriarchal culture, empowers the black man. She believes in him, hence her books end in integrative images of the male and female worlds. Given this commitment, she can hardly become a strong ally of the white feminist until (perhaps) the political and economic fortunes of the black race improve.

By definition, womenism is meant to address the liberation of black women or women of colour only. In her paper Venitha Soobrayan (1991:1) argues that she finds this potently unacceptable. She further

argues that a liberatory theory based on racial differentiation is intrinsically counter-productive and results in a fragmented approach to issues of emancipation.

Sindiwe Magona, in *To My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow*, differs from her European (First World) modernist counterpart with reference to her autobiographical works. Her testimonial does not focus on the unfolding of a singular woman's consciousness, but rather the strategy is to speak from within a collective, as participants in a revolutionary struggle, and to speak with the express purpose of bringing about social and political change. Thus, a great deal of Third World Women Writers are fundamentally seeking to construct relationships between the writer and the reader, in order to invite and precipitate change or revolutionary action. Jane Watts (1989 : 4) has dubbed it 'The Literature of Combat' and argues that the South African novel is a narrative form 'that aims not merely at historical and social documentation, but also at bringing about a movement towards commitment on the part of the reader'.

Thengani H. Ngwenya (2000 : 3) states that:

... autobiography serves the crucial function of reflecting, analysing and interpreting the racial, ethnic, class and gender differences in a South African community.

Some writers make an overt and sustained effort to analyze their own reactions, to sort out exactly what the system has done to them as human beings, exactly what areas of the humanity it has eroded. Not all autobiographical writings are necessarily deeply self-analytical. For some writers such a confrontation in depth is still too traumatic an undertaking, and they side-step the issue by humorous if not schizophrenic series of fast-moving sketches as in Magona's book, *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*. It is perhaps in this manner that Magona, comes to terms with her experience as a domestic worker.

Closely linked to analyzing and interpreting the struggle of women to construct "authentic" self-identities and to challenge the identities imposed on them by patriarchy becomes a subjective issue. The perpetuation of patriarchal traditions and the inferior social position of women is embedded in the interests of the prevailing power

structures. These power structures leads to conditions in which people are literally either exiled to other countries or forced to migrate within their own country; engenders a feeling of displacement, of being cut off from cultural traditions and roots; and a sense of inferiority.

Magona in her works, expresses a great deal of inferior emotions, the implication being one of incoherence, irrationality, and consequently her analysis does not pass the objectivity test. Thus the control of emotions is viewed in direct opposition to rationality.

The mind/body dichotomy that still holds sway in the academy is based on the binary thinking that cannot imagine a passionate or angry and still coherent argument. Many African women writers had not been sufficiently exposed to requirements of literary art. They wrote from inspiration with much heart-felt emotion and simplicity. They had to grapple with exotic genres like the novel which did not originate from their traditional orature and yet possessed the ability to convince the reader of their honesty and authenticity. Like most women writers, Magona emerges above all as a survivor, hoping to change black stereotypes and white attitudes. She intends to create a

black self-image that is strong and confident and at peace with itself, no longer merely the passive subject of white myth making.

In doing so, critics interrogate these texts and as a result, it is consequently obvious that some critics who have been very unsympathetic to African literature have been using inappropriate criteria in relegating it to an inferior standard or to the periphery.

Cynthia Ward (1990:83) contends that:

the practitioners of such criticism, much like their colonial predecessors, demand an unproblematic self-representation of the authentic African women that will erase deviations and contradiction... Failure to delineate the essential features of what such critics feel an African woman is or should be – leads to an accusation that she is unable to represent herself adequately.

Although differences and ambivalences exist, it should therefore be considered as a strengthening modality rather than a weakening one.

It should be the pathway to understanding these ambivalences rather than the end product of issues that cannot be resolved.

Autobiographies of Black South African women writers such as Sindiwe Magona provide important testimonies of black women's empowerment, of the frequency and normalcy of their involvement in the masculine public domains of the economy and politics. This clearly illuminates the reversal of gender roles in African societies, thus questioning the male-female gender ideologies which are so prevalent in Western cultures. It consequently becomes virtually impossible to demarcate a clear and distinct universal model of male and female behavioural patterns. This transgression of roles is perhaps what kept the cohesion of the African family unit.

In being resilient Magona as a Third World Woman reflects a realistic, honest and meaningful symbol of Africa's struggle, an ambivalent continent searching for equilibrium. Thus attempts at constructing universality merely involves the privileging of one model and the marginalizing of others as aberrant or contradictory.

3. CHAPTER TWO

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Sindiwe Magona is a woman who knew only urban poverty and who, single-handedly had to fight for self-preservation and combat the fears of feeling herself alone in her resistance to oppression.

Born in the Transkei (a former South African homeland) in 1943, she grew up in Cape Town's black townships. Growing up in the 1940's in a dispossessed peasant culture, traumatized by the destructive effects of a migratory labour system, Magona rescued herself from destitution to become a courageous woman and a terrific writer. Magona's education in English, which began informally with mimicry, continued more formally at primary school under Bantu Education and at Lourdes Secondary School in Guguletu, Eastern Cape. As she grew older, she became more aware of her situation and subjugation. However by age 23, Magona had three children, without a husband and an incomplete secondary education. Through sheer determination and perseverance, Magona completed her last two years of high school and a B.A. degree from the University of South

Africa through correspondence. All that studying had to be by candlelight in electricity-less Guguletu. The good example of effective parents had motivated and spawned a fear of failing her own children.

Pat Schwartz (1993:8) writes:

Magona started doing private studies by correspondence. She did not complete the last two years of high school and so did that and after that she did A-levels, through the University of London, by correspondence. She then did her BA degree, through the University of South Africa.

Magona moved from post to post in checker-board fashion as her private studies qualified her for better positions. Her experience took her from teaching to social welfare and back to teaching.

Experiencing the 1976 student revolt when 'education came to a bloody stop for Africans' (1992:166) and being involved in women's organizations, Magona's sense of what education has meant in her life was too strong for her to accept the realities of a sustained boycott.

She was not prepared to make her children sub-servient to a brutal apartheid system.

She failed to find a job in South Africa that is commensurate with her training and abilities and so, when offered a contract with the United Nations, she took up an option usually open only to white people: a job abroad. She and her children moved to New York.

Magona holds a Master of Science in Organizational Social Work from Columbia University. In 1993, Hartwick College awarded her a honorary doctorate in Humane Letters.

Sindiwe calls herself a migrant worker, a South African woman away from home living in the Bronx and working for the United Nations. It is however so ironic that Magona should call South Africa home. Home is often associated with pleasant memories, intimate situations, a place of warmth and protective security amongst parents, brothers and sisters, loved people. The irony is that South Africa does not have many pleasant memories for Magona. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that the concept of home seems to be tied in some way with the notion of identity. But identities are not free-floating, they are

limited by border and boundaries which I will further discuss in the ensuing chapters.

Magona is the author of the books of autobiography: *To My Children's Children and Forced to Grow*; two books of short stories: *Push-Push and Other Stories* and *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night*. *Imida* is a published book of Xhosa essays. Her first published novel, *Mother to Mother* (1998), was prompted by the 1993 mob killing of American Fulbright scholar Amy Biehl in Guguletu.

In the 1990 Weekly Mail Book Week Leg in Cape Town, Magona was asked why it was that she had felt it necessary to leave South Africa in order to write. She responded that Black women in South Africa were not encouraged to believe in themselves.

In America I can do anything; in South Africa I am helpless. The environment has bonsaied us she said, 'we are all less than we should have been' (1991:19)

In the situation above, leaving the country appears to be the only way to avoid the social and political repression and also intellectual stagnation. Could this departure be interpreted as “defeat”?

Magona relinquishes her efforts to continue with the struggle on behalf of others. She contends in *Forced to Grow* (1992:182):

Tired of talking to the converted. Tired of talking to
stones, no amount of talking would ever change.

This departure of Magona is similar to a decolonization process awaited by her with deep anticipation as a time of a virtual rebirth. The issue of rebirth will also be discussed in the following chapter. On the other hand, Eskia Mphahlele argues that as blacks lost their land as well as tribal structures, the right to live in the city became all the more precious.

When apartheid policies enshrined influx control, pass laws, and the official designation of all urban Africans as merely “temporary sojourners” challenged their existence, a fierce affirmative dialect of township solidarity, humanity and organicism developed. It possibly

explains why the poverty and misery have become subsumed in a celebration of community and these negative qualities at times seem to be idealized and pardoned in an ethic of endurance.

Writers and commentators with influential theories, who helped to shape the thinking of the masses, were deemed offensive and thus many went into exile. Even if they left South Africa, as many did, perforce and by choice, they carried with them all the preconceptions, all of that world view impressed on them from birth. South Africa, because of its peculiar legal and moral structure, had become Satan's "hell within" from which there is no escape, no matter where the exile may end up.

Black aesthetics and Black consciousness against a background of racial injustice and discrimination was influenced by "Negritude".

According to Isaac Elimimian (1994:9):

Negritude freed African authors from European patterns of writing. It became a confession; the confession of Africa, of African thinking, African way of life, African writing.

This Black intellectual ideology, helped many authors including Magona, to accept their colour and transgress beyond the boundaries of “white” South Africa.

Attempts are made to conscientize white women of the “horrors” of domestic workers in, *Living, Loving, and Lying Awake at Night* (1991:59) :

We are slaves in the white women’s kitchens.

Atini, the naïve narrator in “Atini’s Reflections”, calls her life as a servant a ‘hell’, a ‘nightmare’, a sentiment that all of the maids share. In an interview conducted by Siphokazi Koyana at Magona’s apartment in Riverside, Bronx, New York, he questions the plight of domestic workers in relation to their ‘white medems’, offering a perspective from Magona:

In South Africa the problem is that, somehow, every white women still thinks she is entitled to a domestic worker even when she has no money to pay her! The madam treats the domestic worker

like a fool, yet she leaves her house and everything in it, she leaves her children - her most prized possession – in her care! She also eats the food cooked by this fool.

Magona introduces the issue of the attitudes of whites towards their employees: their labour, even their names, are at the whim of the employers. Mrs. Reed admits: (1991:14) that she ‘cant say your names, they’re so difficult’, indicating the willful ignorance of whites about African lives, culture and language. The name ‘Tiny’ is particularly humiliating, as Atini is a large women, a fat, person who cannot even pretend she isn’t fat. Atini is aware of the humiliation and degradation of her situation and tries to preserve herself from them as best she can.

The image created by Magona, leaves the reader with an indelible impression of a justified anger, calling for a decent wage, decent hours and respect. Magona’s voice is a powerful call for change in the spectrum of universal humiliation, oppression and over work that domestic workers experience.

Magona's very literary form offers a dialectic of Western and African modes of representation : she uses written representation to articulate "oral" forms of expression, participating in what some have termed "orature". Similarly, the woman's experiences represented in "Auto-Ethnography" (Lionnet, 1995 : 39) terms, demonstrates a dialectic of autonomy and community that synthesizes Western and African individual and cultural identities.

Magona (1990:71), in *To My Children's Children* repeatedly presents herself as straddling two cultural systems:

I had come to accept the existence of two far from compatible worlds, the one my world of traditions, sites, and ancestor worship and the other, the world of civilization that included school.

The culture binarism suggested here, is not however absolute. This binarism also takes the form of contradiction. Magona's reflecting sentiments, similar to those found in the Xhosa book, *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* (The Wrath of the Ancestors) (1945:66), writes:

Our lives are filled with such contradictions. We go to church. We go to the witchdoctor. We go to the doctor... .

The self she sees reflected in her text is a divided self. Here she discusses splits in her African identity. For Magona, a text which apparently exposed her own self-division is spoken of as bringing pleasure, notwithstanding the fact that Magona attributes this pleasure to a more straight forward recognition of her early rural background, geographically and culturally.

In South African terms this may be seen as a black person who, through her marginalisation and cultural heritage, has come to integrate a better understanding of her society in all its multiple contradictions and hence is able to knit its culture together.

Magona shares Fanon's view that racism functions by the destruction of the culture of the colonized, by the devaluation of their language, art, dress, and cuisine, by trampling upon their values and by alienating them from their original way of life. The migrant-worker system led to the breakdown of the family unit and as a result, the

culture was beginning to disintegrate. Therefore, Magona saw this very break-down in her oral-tradition, Xhosa culture. One means of recovery lay in a continuing affirmation of the worth of this literature and also the culture from which they emanate.

This affirmation takes place by Magona using Xhosa words and expressions in her works. As a form of cross-cultural interrelationship (Iser 1996 : 246) the various translations take place across the dividing line between cultures into the narrative. Magona in *Forced to Grow* (1992:1), rejects the harsh Xhosa term for a husbandless woman, 'indikazi' in favour of the cold comfort of what she perceives as the kinder English epithet, a 'has-been'. The "unbridgeable differences" surely here been testimony to cross-cultural assimilation. In her book, *Mother to Mother* (1998), Xhosa words and expressions constantly remind the reader that Mandisa's linguistic world is not an English one. This sense of wholeness, of the interconnections between the natural world, animals, and humans, between the present and the ancestral part, between the individual and the clan, is expressed through the profound social nature of oral literature. It is quite clear that Magona is making an effort to collect proverbs, idiomatic expressions, folk tales in order to preserve their

oral tradition in her latest works *imida*. This approach is sustained throughout Magona's literary works, making it known that European literature has its roots in an orator going back both to home and to the cultures from which we derive most of the books of the Bible.

Mazisi Kunene (1976:31) comments:

Indeed, I am convinced that the choice of language in literature is often preceded by a full integration of the writer's psyche.... They cannot be said to be African cultural representatives who write in another language because, in spirit, at least, they speak from the perspective provided for them by the effective apparatus of mental control exercised by the former colonial power.

What is evident in Kunene's statement is that he uses traditional stylistic techniques, rather than embracing European literary strategies, so as to revolutionize African literature. However he does not consider the broader readers inability to read African languages and as a result, translations become necessary thus losing the essence

of the original. Although Magona wants to preserve the Xhosa oral-tradition, she wants to share and project a vision of the wealth of human diversity that is South Africa (1992 : 102). Black women are writing in English, but they are writing in and about an Africa that is home to them no matter what laws or powers have robbed them of their freehold.

Craig Mackenzie (1991:19) concludes:

Sindiwe Magona's suffering has honed an intelligence remarkable for its ability to transcend its stultifying origins. Those who were present... would have been struck by her irrepressible personality and sharp wit.

4. CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF MAGONA'S LITERARY WORKS

Magona is caught in the gap, in the chasm, between past and present, between tradition and modernity, between two opposing systems of knowledge. Race was defined and enforced by law. It imposes a hierarchy of importance, of humanness. Apartheid defines race and creates classes. Black women were triply oppressed by virtue of belonging to a devalued race, class and gender.

Barbara Fields (1990:181) conceptualizes race ideologically:

If race lives on today, it does not live on because we have inhabited it from our forebears of the seventeenth century or the eighteenth or nineteenth, but because we continue to create it today.

However this is only one of a multitude of factors oppressing women. Therefore women writers need to relate their experiences and emotions from a women's perspective.

Magona wrote straight from harrowing daily personal experiences. The everyday experiences of humiliation, harassment, displacement and sheer violence that every black person can bare witness to.

Moyana, TT (1976: 95 96) must have had this situation in mind when he pointed to the problematic relationship between art and objective reality in South Africa :

An additional difficulty for the creative artist in South Africa, especially the black writer, is that life itself is too fantastic to be outstripped by the creative imagination. Nkosi calls the theme of the absurd the theme of daily living in South Africa.

Nadine Gordimer (1989:23) strongly contends that the whole creative energy of black writers in South Africa:

... is stifled by the atmosphere in which they live to such an extent that the free development of their artistry is a ludicrous and impossible ideal.

Magona recognizes this pain and downtrodden atmosphere as an integral part of who she is and is convinced that it is only by proving both the joys and wounding of time that she might be blessed and empowered to affect the future.

In *To My Children's Children* (1990), Magona under the pretext of making her unborn grandchildren aware of their history, recounts the first twenty three years of her life. Her writing addresses the need to convey to future generations the African women's identities which they will inherit. Magona (1990 : 8) asks :

How will you know who you are if I do not or
cannot tell you the story of your past ?

She records her remembrance of the stories, songs and riddles, the myths and legends that excited her imagination and helped to form her values as a child in the Umtata district of the Transkei.

Magona writes of her memories playing in the river as a child, when she remembers it's yellowish – green frogs, it's tadpoles and it's tender sweet-tasting reeds. She is reclaiming for all the children of

Africa the pleasure of their childhood: the feel, the scent, the sight of Africa.

The children were at home in the veld, as Magona (1990:11) writes:

... To run and run and run ... To run and feel the
grass massage your feet.

This is the Transkei before the introduction of barbed wire fencing, cattle culling and other features of the “Betterment Schemes”; it is a time before the rolling grasslands were eroded.

At age five, she moved to Cape Town, with a sense of anticipation. “The Promise of Cape Town!” Although they moved to “better and better” places, her family and her continued to live in the township in poverty and in wretched circumstances. The promise is ironical, as it is the “promise” of even worse conditions; disintegration of culture, values and family units.

The way apartheid displaced and destroyed African family life, Magona (1990:30) writes:

A policy aimed at keeping Africans away from the urban areas of South Africa. A policy that succeeded in wrecking African families.

The experience of crises splits a culture apart, and a rift develops, which divides the culture into an inaccessible past and a helplessly stricken presence. Thus the voices of resistance being echoed by woman, such as Magona, is vitally imperative. And so the demand that the woman's voice be heard and attended to has been made for a variety of reasons: not just so as to greatly increase the chances that true accounts of women's lives will be given, but also because the articulation of experience (in myriad ways) is among the hallmarks of a self-determining individual or community.

The present becomes alienated from the past and to compensate for the loss, a discourse has to be constructed to allow for mutual interpretation between present and past. Magona's medium takes the form in written representation, to articulate "oral" forms of expression of the past serving as a mirror to refract the present. Magona was expecting her third child at age 23, when she was abandoned and became "indikazi", a husbandless women with children. She bought

sheep heads from the butcher on credit and collected firewood from the nearby bush. She washed, dried and cleaned the heads over the wood fire to provide for her children. The milkman and even her neighbour offered assistance and understanding ... 'when I couldn't pay the milk bill' (1990 : 181). This solidarity is truly the hallmark of the cultural structures and practices in African society.

In an interview with Rolf Solberg, 23 September 1996, Magona makes mention that in retrospect her husband's leaving became actually a blessing in disguise. Had he not left, she feels that she would either have been dead by now or an old, old woman. She goes on to say :

I would have had god knows how many more children. I would have ended up in the village, while he was a migrant worker. When I think about it I am grateful that he left, you have no idea!

Is this not a feministic stance, in validating female identity and that advances Magona to an assertive, dominant and dual-role emancipated woman? This situation with all its hardships helped to

empower Magona to make life-altering decisions. She was no longer “the result of a series of losses lacks, and lapses” but rather paved the runway for self-awakening and self-discovery, propelling herself to achieve greatness.

The self that has been revised and repossessed at the end of *Forced to Grow* (1992), is one that is able to accommodate overlapping identities and to reconcile different epistemologies.

Magona is being forced not into growth, but into what she herself calls a (1992:186): ‘schizophrenic split’. However one can argue that one’s whole-being or wholeness depends, paradoxically on knowing the ‘split’ in yourself. Thus, Magona through her experiences is able to create a new identity that gradually allows the ‘split’ or two-halves/selves to integrate into one cohesive and coherent whole.

Magona describes her desperation and initial attempts to make ends meet, selling ginger-ale, failing to sell dagga and her determination to overcome her difficulties. She managed to return to teaching, experiencing the 1976 student revolt and became involved in women’s organisations. She records the fear and bewilderment she experienced in the aftermath of the 1976 uprising (1992 : 163):

Scarred, scared and scantily clad with wisdom, I
reluctantly looked... in the mirror... Where was I?
Who was I?

This theme of identity is sustained throughout the two volumes of her autobiography, seeking self-worth, creativity and revolutionary change. Audre Lorde (1984 : 64) suggests that:

the true focus of revolutionary change is never
merely the oppressive situation which we seek to
escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is
planted deep within each of us.

For writers, like Magona, the autobiography is the tool of their search for their “inward moral being”, a means by which they can find the balance between themselves and the outside world. Writing also brings healing from deep within and is therapeutic, hoping to harvest the pain and suffering that is in the unconscious.

Discussing economic sanctions with “friends”, Magona is accused by a white woman of elitism (1992:169):

How do you know what black people, the ordinary
black person in the street, want?

This is the hardest blow against her self-identity which she had to endure and although her

mouth flew open-but not a sound, came out. An
inflated frog blocked my throat.

It is here that Magona realized that the white women did not see her as ‘not black’ but yet with the same breath could ask her: ‘what do you people want?’ (1992:130). This double-standard is representative of the white oppressive ideology of acceptance and rejection, depicting their ambivalent nature. Surely they knew the evilness of apartheid, yet they whole heartedly cultivated it and allowed it to flourish with rejection, yet accepted it by making it a religious and moral issue.

Forced to Grow ends with Magona's departure to the United States, when offered a contract with the United Nations. This is done through the metaphor of birth (1992 : 230):

the severance of the umbilical cord announces the first breath drawn and the scene is repeated, many a time in the human drama we call life.

It becomes quite evident that Magona is seeking to triumph over that 'inflated frog' which once rendered her silent.

In having to cut herself from South Africa and embark on this journey, she is "forced to grow" and in so doing, allows herself to develop and transcend the boundaries of white oppression. The range of human behaviour is so wide, that groups maintain boundaries to limit the type of behaviour within a defined cultural territory. Boundaries are an important point of reference for the participation in any system. Boundaries may refer to, or consist of, geographical areas, political or religious viewpoints, occupational categories, linguistic and cultural traditions.

In an interview with Stephan Meyer (1999:90), Magona speaks about the symbolic boundary. Firstly, geographically crossing the Atlantic, which has the association of escape from South Africa, of “stepping into something excitingly new and liberating”. In *To My Children's Children*, Magona writes about the symbolic river and crossing the river. The big kids who could cross over and go to school and the little ones who couldn't... Meyer goes on to question this geographic crossing of the Atlantic as a type of separation from Magona's own past. The fact that she could draw some kind of a line, that there was a gap, maybe an absence between how you were earlier and how you are now. Magona goes on to state in the interview : ‘Gains come with something. You gain something, you lose something’.

Generally, when migrants cross a boundary there is hostility and at times a welcome. Migrants are included and excluded in different ways leading to assimilation and accommodation. Whilst some boundary walls are breaking down, others are being made even stronger. Boundaries are constitutively demarcated by a borderline. The borderline is always ambivalent (once again reflective of Magona's self-identity), sometimes it is seen as an inherent part of the inside, at other times it is seen as part of the chaotic wilderness

outside. Perhaps Magona is a fine example of a “borderline case”, who does not want to give up her own culture or assimilate with the new.

The image of transgression of boundaries is aptly conveyed in Magona’s short story collection, *Living, Loving, and Lying Awake at Night* (1991). The nine stories in “Women at Work” are narrated by Black domestic workers. The identities of Magona’s narrators are the site of a struggle between the narrators and their employers for the right to define the terms and parameters of their identities.

In the first story of “Women at Work”, called “Leaving”, Atini a rural woman leaves her children in order to provide for them. She continues her journey and ‘hunger drove her through night, river, field, forest, and mountain’ (1992 : 9). “How she loved them.” This image of overcoming boundaries and self-sacrifice for the well being of their children is paradoxical. Jacklyn Cook (1984:54) speaks of:

The cruel paradox of a situation that drives a black mother to seek employment to support her family, and then neglects her family in the process.

Atini, Stella, Shiela, Sophie, Virginia, Joyce and Lillian describe their lives, work and experiences which are bitter. They all look after white children while their own are far away from them, in their native village. It is the least prestigious of all occupations, and domestic workers were not legally protected from oppressive working conditions, unreasonable hours and low wages. Through her personal experiences and this crushing oppression, Magona comes to respect the women who were forced to choose this kind of work, and she commended the way that these women formed a community for each other. However this solidarity is challenged by the mother's need to fulfil her family's need, when Atini continues her service with Mrs Reed instead of Imelda. Atini's commitment and loyalty to her children, takes preference over her co-worker Imelda.

Sophie, while acknowledging the generosity of her employer's act says:

I feel the house is cement; because of it I can never leave this woman... My cement has dried and both my feet are in this woman's house. I am stuck-for the rest of my life. (1999:34)

Although Sophie acknowledges the kindness and generosity of her employer she does not attain any contentment. Her human spirit is cemented in the house and as a result, she feels that her human rights, civil liberties and freedom are curtailed, and there is an eternal obligation to her employer. This feeling of obligation is most certainly not the catalyst for protesting and rebelling against the “medems”. Stella’s mistress, finding that Stella has ignored the “panties” she had left in the bathroom, leaves her a note, explaining that Stella is supposed to wash them. Stella, in response, writes her own note (1991:19):

Medem, please excuse me but I did not think
anyone can ask another person to wash their panty.

In having done this, Stella has raised her dissenting and protesting voice against this unlady-like act and cries out for reform. Joyce, a former student who has started to work as a domestic servant, sees that the growth of feminism is inhibited because of white racism:

Feminism in this country has been retarded, in part, by this paternalistic attitude of white women towards black women. How can I be a sister to my father, the white woman? (1991:42)

Thus, the Third World women, finds feminism less significant than labour and political movements that might change their circumstances. Dissatisfied with her awful plight and miserable social conditions, Stella assumed the position of a “protest writer”, exposing the hypocrisies of the white “medems”. A reversal of position, having to “write back”, reaffirms her sense of equality, dignity and self-integrity. Once again the issue of transgression comes to the fore, as Stella has not only written a letter of an insubordinate nature to her “medem”, but also silenced her white employer without using any form of brutality and force. Magona’s subtleness and quiet defiance is closely observed without losing the basic conviction of obliterating white supremacy.

A critical question, coming to mind, concerns the tone Magona is expected to adopt, particularly when the writer is constantly forced to defend her people’s right to exist, to articulate repeatedly what has

been denied, to explain repeatedly the basic principle - the refusal of a people to cease to exist. What is most striking in this aesthetic critique of Magona's tone is the refusal to see that a "civilised" tone and manner might itself be seen as offensive, aggressive and even violent, when it serves to mask the thousands of brutalities performed against dominated people.

Magona truly deconstructs the myth of the "criticized" First World against the "savagery" of the Third World in her literary texts. She is appealing to white readers to read her works against the backdrop of black socio-economic conditions, hoping to evoke a heightened sense of guilt, unconsciously or subconsciously. These responses are so ironically inappropriate that it makes one pause to consider what would be a desirable reaction. One would be for white women to engage themselves in the issues Magona raises, the principle one being money. The issue of money, economic empowerment, is an image sustained from her first written line, *To My Children's Children* (1990:1):

I was born in the Union of South Africa rands
and cents,

and continues throughout her literary works. The domestic worker wants to earn enough money to pay for her own children's education, to pay for her own home, but is unable to do so, thus providing the white women with :

...freedom to become whatever she would become.

And she fails to see her indebtedness to the black maid who asks for so little in return: freedom from want, fair wage for sweat. (1991:45)

Any reasonable white can understand and respect the implications of this thinking on the part of the maid.

Despite the common circumstance in which they find themselves, the women in these stories find it difficult to act collectively. The women, consigned, as Magona's (1991:27) one character eloquently puts it

to be slaves in the white women's kitchen,

are given no opportunities to persevere in their circumscribed, drain-dried lives. Sophie holds a meeting at her employer's house, but few people attend. Silenced, like the slave women, by blows to their psyches, these women are forced to submit to the necessity of conforming to the externally imposed requirements of their society. Living in bondage to the "medems", but desiring to live freely and fully, they are bewildered and seethed with inner rage at their servitude to a structure of values matched to the needs of others. They are also reminiscent of Magona's self-identity crisis of being schizophrenic, their personalities fragmented by their desire, both to accept and to reject their conditions. Denied both personal identity and self-determination, they are metaphorically buried alive.

Is it perhaps a feeling of sheer fear or fear of victimization, or a combination of both? What characterises the nature of this type of situation, is that those who opened the prison doors for their "slaves" were not comrades, but they were opened by an enemy who had declared (some whites) that he was now a friend. To date he still holds the keys and exploitation of the Black domestic women is rife. According to Ndebele, N.S. (1994:28).

Their human anonymity becomes the dialectical equivalent of the anonymity to which the oppressive system consigns millions of oppressed Africans.

Fortunately Magona raises this issue and explores the facts and destinies of her characters. However the stories do not exude pessimism, on the contrary, they stimulate persistence and the will to go on, to survive.

Christine Obbo reveals in her study, *African Women – Their Struggle for Economic Independence* (1980:143):

Woman must act as mediators between the past and the present, while men see themselves as mediators between the present and the future.

However, this belief or cultural dogma, has led to impoverishment and ultimately the urban migration of women to empower themselves by providing for the children. For many of the women, their hopes and aspirations for the future, not even the present, is focused not on improvements in their own lives, but in the lives of their children.

They sacrifice basic needs that they presently need, for achieving future success and ultimately economic advancement.

The “Women at Work” are unable to act collectively but are able to speak in a collective vibrant voice, echoing black women’s resistance. Apartheid is not dealt with directly, but it is omnipresent, serving as a backdrop for all the tales of the collection. It permeates such stories as “Nosisa”, “Now That the Pass has Gone” and “Two Little Girls and a City” and stamps all the characters in the collection.

“The Two Little Girls and a City” is a narrative that reflects South African horrors, telling the tale of a white girl, Nina, and a black girl, Phumla, who are abducted and killed. It also relates Hilda’s “taken for granted” role as a domestic worker in the white household thus sustaining the image of Black women becoming the invisible, recyclable hands that made things work, getting little for their pains. Magona is able to contrast the two girls’ lifestyles, dictated by financial constraints. She also lashes out at the migrant-worker system which harbors the deprivation and disintegration of African family lives:

Nolungile felt sad for her husband who would never see his children grow. She was sad, too, for the children, her children, for they would never really have a father. It had become clear to her that this was the meaning of the 'join' (as the migrant labour system is called by a Xhosa), instead of joining families it split them into bits and pieces like the grains of the sand (1991:137),

and ultimately the manifestation of a degenerative community with the absence of father figures as role-models, and the love and companionship a woman needed. Magona writes:

It was time. So she had come to fetch a child from her husband (1991:128).

The images of the brutality of the migratory system haunts Magona and even in an interview with the International Women's Writing Guild (IWWG), "In Your Own Words" Profile, she speaks with an intense sorrow:

...grown men naked as unpodded beans... dusted with spraying of “DDT” and forced to show their anuses, regular inspection against theft of precious stone.”

and wept for her father when the realization hit her, of the unimaginable and unspeakable violation and humiliation he endured.

Although Phumi’s death goes unnoticed as opposed to Nina’s (newspaper, radio and television coverage), Magona is once again weeping for the redemption of the human spirit in every being. It may appear that she is bringing into prominence the Black-White issue (which she is), but most certainly she has a profound conviction to resolve this racial issue, seeking rational and peaceful ways. At no point in the narrative does Magona classify the perpetrators to provoke any form of rage but indeed shows the erosion of better judgement and the stress on physical “groaning and grunting” gratification. In times of distress, African “brotherhood’ and solidarity is shown by the:

other woman from the same zone who took care of Nodoli and kept the search party on it's feet.

This communal way of living clearly reflects the compassion and united concern offered by neighbours and friends. Magona intends to unveil the decay of society, created and propagated by white strategists, who are indirectly and directly responsible for the atrocities against humanity. Similarly, Magona in *Mother to Mother* (1998) engages directly in an attempt to understand an affected black South African culture in relation to their "killer instinct". She travels the boundary between responsibility and judgement, finding accountability in the killer, and finally his country.

Magona's other short story, "Nosisa" relates the anguish and self hatred within Nosisa, when compared to Karen and therefore suffers:

The pain of knowing that she was not quite as good, not quite as clever, not quite as gracious...as that other child, (1991:86)

Nosisa grew despondent and disgruntled until she, in the words of Deirdre Byrne, in “Versions of Transgression” (1992:146):

commits the ultimate transgression-suicide...

Is this truly the ultimate transgression? Perhaps a self-transgression, but certainly not the “ultimate transgression”. One may argue that self-destruction is the ultimate transgression, but if the destruction has no consequences for humanity, then certainly it is a futile sacrifice. (If Jesus Christ did not die on the cross for all the ills of humanity, then certainly he would not be worthy of anything). To dissolve the limits of repressive identity, the traumatised and oppressed Nosisa is driven to interrupt the closed equilibrium of her life. In this instance, Nosisa’s death is a wasted one, bringing only heartache and despair to her mother:

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‘Why, Nosisa, why did you do this? Why? Why, Nosisa?’ (1991:92)



Once again a mother, a woman, has to bear witness to these sufferings, not as individuals, but as embodiments of an entire nation's struggle for freedom.

Push-Push and Other Stories (1996), is a collection of short stories spanning rural Transkei, the township life and "New York". Themes are sustained in her literary works, depicting her concern for the value of human life and the continuation of customs and traditions. Magona feels so passionately about culture and customs that in her life story she describes how she had to hurry to South Africa from her graduation at Columbia University, because her youngest brother was coming out of the Xhosa traditional circumcision school and she had to be there for the coming out ceremony.

One of Magona's cultural stories, 'A Drowning in Cala', brings about the emergence of religious differences based on Christianity and the power of the ancestors. Being a culturally orientated writer, Magona makes mention in the *Iwung Member Profile*":

And for that, I shall always be tremendously grateful to my Creator, my Ancestors, and all the

mothers and fathers who have, throughout my life,
fed and clothed me both physically and spiritually

It becomes evidently clear that ancestral religion is not relegated to the past but infuses the present. In keeping with the theme of culture, a flashing question concerning the 'lobola' system is discussed in *To My Children's Children* (1990). Ali Mazrui, in "The Black Women and the Problem of Gender: An African Perspective", offers a serious indictment:

Is bridewealth a form of benevolent sexism or is it disguised bride price?... More often than not, bridewealth gives the husband more power after the payment has been made. This practice strips bride wealth of all pretense of benevolence (1992:88)

Magona does not fully develop this custom and other traditional practices in her works, thus providing an incomplete understanding of her cultural matrix to the unknowing reader.

In “The Hand That Kills”, another short story from *Push-Push*, Magona gives an account of Mr. Walker’s death at the hands of Lunga ‘... *the son I never had*’ (1996:129). Lunga matures into a young man, fully aware of his fate as a pass carrier and experiences the wrath – “tenderised steak out of his face” (1986:134) - first hand of the police. Here again Magona denies the narrative directly a colour-orientated character, in order to prevent any form of racial uprising and disharmony, thus committing herself to peaceful resolutions. Her resolute implications and protesting voice is powerful and loud to all human-beings, against transgression of the colour-barrier. Nevertheless, Lunga murders his mother’s employer to gain recognition and respect of the ‘Lagunya Panthers’ (1996:133), only to send his whole world into disarray.

In the narrative, Magona provides valuable insight into Lunga’s makeup, reflecting embarrassment, disobedience to his mother and his inability to reconcile the two worlds he inhabits, one in Guguletu and the other in Newlands. Once again there is a self-identity crisis of belonging and obligation which is so inherent throughout Magona’s literary-work. Spurred by the Soweto Riots, school boycotts and his own comrade: “ ‘Let him prove it!’” (1996:137) Lunga plunges head

on into this heinous crime, transgressing the barriers of love, trust and loyalty. Magona, here again, strikes a blow for the African women, Lunga's mother Sally (the Walker's convenient name for their depersonalised servant) who brings up her child. In her book *To My Children's Children* (1990), Magona speaks about an:

invisible league of women, world-wide-the bearers
and nurturers of the human race whom no
government or institution recognizes or rewards,
and no statistician captures and classifies.
(1990:161)

The ability to cope against all odds, is most certainly the hallmark of African women. *Push-Push and Other Stories* (1996), also reflects themes of house-hunting by a naïve, penniless black South African woman. The title story concerns reactions of family members to a local Stokvel and the short story, "I'm not talking about that, Now," highlights the effects of a consumer boycott, in the lives of a family. The narrative recounts the ordeal Mamvulane undergoes to evade the boycott and provide nourishment for her family:

girdled the sausage around her waist,...they formed
a pipe (1996:79),

and in the process, "...she was disciplined..." (1996:82) by the youth, one of them being her own son, Mteteli. This incident caused Mamvulane grief, and her husband, Mdlangathi, anger and rage towards his son:

Since when is this women lying next to me the
government? (1996:82)

This strained encounter between father and son, culminates with the death of Mteteli by his father, who is imprisoned ultimately leading to the disintegration of the family unit. There appears to be a turning around of relationships, were the child is able to influence the parent. Mteteli is affected by the present situation and is protesting in the way he knows best. However the parent is getting older and his ways and attitudes have become fossilised. His world view is fixed and he is therefore unable to adjust and interact. Therefore Mdlangathi resorts to physical violence, as this is the only avenue of dominance that he knows.

It seems as if there is no way the black person can escape the harsh-reality of the status-quo and lead a normal life. It seems as if being black is an “abnormality’ on its own.

The promotion of her first published novel, *Mother to Mother* (1999), was a huge success, which was prompted by the 1993 mob-killing of American Fulbright scholar, Amy Biehl in Guguletu, a black township of South Africa. Magona reconstructs the events leading to a young man’s involvement in Amy Biehl’s death, from the perspective of his mother, Mandisa.

The killing was made all the more senseless and ironic by the American student’s sympathetic involvement in African social customs and problems. The novel’s narrator, Mandisa, tells the story of two victims: one, her son, denied an education and opportunity by the government, and the other an idealistic young American, visiting South Africa to help the nation work toward all-race elections. Mandisa alternates between recounting the events on the day of the crime and remembering the part in a series of extended flashbacks.

Interlaced with the sadness, Magona hopes to imbibe spiritual healing and inner peace. Her exploration of violence exposes the complicity of all South Africa, Black and White, in this murder, as the novel becomes a searing criticism of race hatred in South Africa. This period of South African history is perhaps a moment of truth which Magona hopes to evoke, when the African feels desolate and abandoned, and his bitterness and hatred comes to the fore.

The change from a fairly static society to open competition was marked even in Medieval Europe by such apparently irrational explosions of violence. There is a school of thought that propounds that violence springs from guilt, and guilt from a feeling of abandonment.

The Black world has been invaded once and it is continually being bombarded with missiles from all directions in whatever form. This feeling of invasion and violation seems as if it is genetically transmitted from mother to child and generation to generation. Blacks are continuously seeking to gain approval and recognition and in order to achieve this, they are constantly giving birth to new complexes and negative-feelings, thus hindering their development

and having an adverse effect on their dynamic lives. Is it in order for the blacks to invent missiles, anti-missiles, as a measure of self-defence? What is required, is a “commitment” by the people to unite creating strong communities and a powerful nation. This is essentially the central essence of Magona’s writing in having to unite people of diverse origins.

African mythology prior to the arrival of the European, knew where it was, and that was half way between the ancestors who mediated between them and the supernatural powers and the children who had yet to produce. The African society had security and he was part of a system. Then came the Europeans with neuroses and anxieties about his relations with other peoples. The Whites were able to alienate the “native” Black and all of a sudden the Black finds he is expected to act as a responsible member of society. The abandonment discussed, in no way is intended to convey the impression of Blacks being let-down by the Whites.

Magona’s excellent point of departure in *Mother to Mother* (1998), is based on self-knowledge and not self-deception. She discards the literary stereotypes and cliches by admitting that the African is a

normal human being who is capable, like all other human beings, of exhibiting a whole galaxy of human virtues such as love, devotion, loyalty, justice, etc. In the same way, we have to accept that he is very capable of committing all kinds of crimes and sins, and that when this happens, we should not try to find scapegoats as we have tended to do. In the words of a famous prayer:

if we say we have no sins, we deceive ourselves,
and the truth is not in us.

Magona goes on to propound that, self-knowledge is the cornerstone in having to deal with sociological inquiry. It is directed at discovering the ways in which beliefs and values define the situation of action. Social perceptions become crystallized and disseminated as ideologies, varying with conditions and cultures in the workings of personality and social structure.

Mandisa's son, Mxolisi at a tender age of four years, witnesses the vicious rage of the shooting of two young student activists. This incident had a profound effect on him :

struck mute by what he saw the police do to the two boys (1998:148).

The young boy withdrew into total silence for a period. Mxolisi's actions cannot be condoned but Magona suggests that perhaps this childhood, life-altering incident manifested itself, resulting in the brutal murder of Amy. The sentiment expressed by Magona evokes a certain degree of compassion and understanding. Facts and values are distinct but interdependent. The possibility of different ways of understanding truth is based on the different criteria for evaluating this truth. Conversely-judgements of value are in various ways dependent upon factual information. Thus a judge in his courtroom must know not only what the law says is right or wrong but also what in fact a man has done, before a decision can be made as to guilt or innocence. This is exactly Magona's mission in having to write the novel and the narrator states:

My son was only an agent, executing the long-simmering dark desires of his race. Burning hatred for the oppressor possessed his being (1998:210)

Perhaps if Magona was White, or a White offered this perspective, then possibly the given situation, would assume a different reaction. The anomaly of the South African situation: that if somebody is going to be critical of racism among blacks, it will have to be a black which in a way is a contradiction. The bottomline is you must take a racial stand, in order to fight racism: Mandisa is angry. She knows exactly against whom she is bitter – against the government, it's corruption, it's policy of separate development and its lack of concern for the black youth. The student uprising in 1976 brought African education to a virtual halt resulting, in Mxolisi:

gallivanting up and down the township (1998:71).

Children had become polarised from educational institutions and little could the parents do to rectify the situation. Mandisa comments:

But then he never did have any sense. No sense at all in that big head... at all (1998:3).

In addition to this problem, Mandisa works as a domestic servant to a “mlungu” employer, Mrs. Nelson. Katie Cannons in *Black Womanist*

Ethics (1988:26) brilliantly discusses the “contradiction in being a valued person in a devalued occupation”.

Mandisa is unable to care and nurture her children, as she leaves before they go to school and returns in the evening. With a heavy heart she states:

we work, to stay alive. As my people say, *ukulunga kwenya, kukonakala kwenye*, the righting of one, is the undoing of another (problem). Life is never problem free. (1998:9)

This is a remarkable quality of Mandisa as she accepts her lot and predicament and seeks to transcend “normally” beyond the “abnormalities” of life.

Having achieved this equilibrium in her life, the murder of Amy Biehl, is of no surprise. I have known for a long time now that he might kill someone some day (1998:2).

A truly horrendous thought for a mother to have perceived without knowing what to do. Magona, through Mandisa, echoes the cries of help for all mothers, however not for themselves but for the redemption of their own children.

Magona's style in this novel is reminiscent of her short story "Two Little Girl's and a City", constantly shifting and contrasting in detail, the mundane day-to-day affairs of simple living. It is in this taken for granted lifestyle that Magona shows the struggle endured by others. A poignant example is the cleansing process, in the second chapter, "Mowbray-Wednesday 25 August 1993", depicting Amy taking a shower and Mandisa frantically calling:

'Lunga! Lunga, get up... Hurry, before the water
I've heated for you gets cold.'(1998:7)

This attention to detail forms an integral part of Magona's personality make-up, which emanates from her commitment to preserve her culture. In an interview with Stephen Meyer (1999:87) she states:

Even really unimportant things like the games I played as a child... for me, those things are important...

This form of style is fashioned throughout the novel, creating life-like, eidetic images. In conjunction with the images, Magona creates a form of cross-cultural interrelationship.

The use of Xhosa words and expressions, such as ‘umngqusho’, or ‘broken-corn-with bean meal’ (1998:21), ‘mlungu’, or ‘white’ (1998:20) and ‘Yekelela! Yekelela, Mjita! Ease off, brother, ease of’, clearly juxtaposes the cultural worlds, yet at the same time not marginalizing or “othering” in the interrelationship.

According to Schipper M, (1989 : 6):

Between authors and readers from different cultural contexts, frequently no overlap is achieved. Simply on the basis of their own conventions, critics often decide whether or not a text from outside culture belongs to the body of “real” literature. On the

other hand, authors may partially sacrifice their originality to the preaching norm in the field of literature in order to guarantee success.

This is the case with Magona who creates an authentic African feel with its mysticism and uniqueness.

However according to Jacobs, J.U. (2000:57).

culturally idiosyncratic expressions also signify unbridgeable differences (2000:57),

which I do think is true in some contexts, but I do not think this was Magona's intention. She goes on further to echo Iser's point that different cultures interact with each other hoping to achieve a clearing station in which cultural differences are juxtaposed and sorted out.

Magona is constantly seeking a "unity in diversity" dispensation, hoping to transgress into other cultures, while maintaining her dignity and self-identity. Although the lives, fates, and destinies of Magona's

characters are sad, the stories do not exclude pessimism: on the contrary, they stimulate persistence and the will to go on, to survive.

However this is not the case with Mandisa. Once again Magona is not crying, but shouting at the humiliation of being depersonalized, and verbally abused. Mandisa's employer:

‘Mandy!’ Mrs. Nelson screams. That is what the white woman I work for calls me: Mandy. She says she can't say my name. (1998:9)

I find this quite ironic that Magona kept the employer's name, Mrs Nelson, (or perhaps it was intentional), as it represents the first name of the then oppressed ANC leader. If the employer cannot say “MANDISA”, then surely it will be a cup, ‘too bitter to swallow’ (1998:4), when she has to say the name NELSON MANDELA. This is truly “sweet” victory to the oppressed Mandisa and domestic-workers emerging everyday from the ‘Ugly, Impersonal, Cold to the eye’ (1998:27) township.

The very environment that they inhabit bears testimony to their lives:

The streets are narrow, debris-filled, full of gullies,
alive with flies, mosquitoes, and sundry vermin...

Guguletu (1998:27)

and in addition there is the element of violence and gangsterism. The irony is that they assault, destroy and obliterate the lives of their very own people:

Every day one hears of someone who was killed ...

... Guns are as common as marbles were when we
were growing up. (1998:44)

In the fragile African existence, the perpetuation of certain cultural practices remain firm and steadfast. It is customary to address children, friends, elders and parents in a particular respectful manner. This is most apparent in the way Mandisa's neighbour addresses her: 'Mama ka Siziwe' and 'my sister,' (1998:43).

In the novel, the mother of the murdered Amy Biehl is referred to as "your daughter".

Magona in no uncertain terms, is forcefully propelling and protecting the dignity of the denigrated African. Her approach follows from this simple premise, “respect beget respect”. However on the other hand, Magona extends a degree of contradiction when Dwadwa refers to Mandisa as ‘mother-of-Lunga,’ (1998:69). This apparent contradiction stems from a depersonalization of Mandisa from a patriarchal perspective or perhaps is also an indication of the respect he accords his wife within the boundaries of patriarchy: ‘its going to be alright .. you wait and see’ (1998:171). Although Mxolisi, an African, committed the crime, she does not condone it, but yet at the same time leaves no stone unturned, preventing the opportunity for generalization and stereotyping of the African nation, as she conspires to elevate their dignity and status. Mandisa offers the example of Mxolisi, who risks “his own life saving a girl from a group of men who wanted to rape her”. She also gains self-esteem in having to ask the other mother some questions of her own:

‘But, let me ask you something...white people in this place?’ (1998:2)

In order to achieve this, Magona's skill of entwining the African culture with her discourse, takes the form of Mandisa's experiences and her family's life history. Although her family mirrors the reflection of fear, it is fear borne out of pride and self-integrity. This is clearly demonstrated when Mandisa quotes her mother as not wanting: 'anyone to say she had raised a rotten potato' (1998:94) and therefore does her ritualistic virginity test to ensure her potato remained 'whole' or 'unspoilt' (1998:95). However on hearing about Mandisa's pregnancy, her mother becomes very emotional although the midwife confirmed that she was a virgin. This occurrence in Mandisa's life, is sure to change the course of her life and bring "Bitter tears to a mother's proud heart." (1998:115)

In the opening of chapter 8, Mandisa assumes various motherly positions.

Mother of the beast. Mother of the serpent. The puffadder's mother. There are those who even go as far as calling me Satan's mother. (1998:115)

thus redefining her feminine role. Why does Magona alienate Mandisa when she is already traumatised and suffers a “pierced heart” (1998:115)? She does this with the expressed hope that perhaps the white society will feel a sense of retribution. According to D Tannen (1999:224):

Society is seen as the individual’s enemy, imposing demands that conflict with actualizing your own self ... such as Africans, for whom the self exists only in relation to others-family members, clan members, co-villagers, and so on. In this view you are who you are because of your place in a social network (1999:224)

Mandisa, through her suffering and grief having to contend with spiteful in-laws, a spineless husband and being a domestic worker is able to transform her relationship with the “other mother.” She comes from a strong family history, ‘Dejected and dispirited, but determined to build ...’ (1998:66)

Mandisa no longer considers herself a sister in sorrow, 'my heart bleeds, it sorrows for you,... no rest' (1998:199) but rather a sister in comfort. Once again Magona transcends the boundaries of cross-cultural differences by sustaining the African way of life and spirit of solidarity. As her neighbours:

...have come to cry with you... as is our custom, to grieve with those who grieve. (1998:200),

so does Mandisa with "Mother of your Daughter". She is able to move forward and forge new relations inspite of all the adversities experienced, and welds a "Sister-Mother" womanhood. Her sublime words of comfort to her sister in comfort are:

'No deep sense... your source of strength, your fountain of hope, the light that illumines the depth of your despair.' (1998:202).

Magona via Mandisa tries to understand how one mother's child can kill another mother's child. Mandisa recalls her grandfather, Tatomkhula and the story of Nongqmwuse's dream and its

catastrophic effects of bringing about starvation and ultimately the call:

To the mines, to the mines, hasten! hasten and be saved.. Never will you hunger again. Never (1998:182).

This master-plan for exploitation and oppression has the side-effects in the form of Mxolisi. Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, a former Army Ranger and paratrooper who is now a professor of military science at Arkansas State University, explains:

there is a natural human resistance to killing other human beings (1999:254).

However in Guguletu and other parts of South Africa, the community was systematically being desensitized and as a result being taught to regard the enemy (white) as ‘nonhuman and to suppress their natural impulse to feel sympathy when seeing another person suffer’. (1999:254). This is exactly what happens to Mxolisi, who is consumed with a ‘Burning hatred for the oppressor’ (1999:210) (Amy

Biehl represented the white) and performs a 're-enactment of the deep, dark, private yearnings of a subjugated race' (1998:210).

The conclusion to Mandisa's narrative, considers Amy Biehl being the 'perfect atonement of her race' for the human atrocities endured by the brutalized blacks. On the hand Mxolisi the 'perfect host of the demons' (1998:201) in effect finding his community and his country accountable. Iser (1996:213) maintains that:

Fiction will always be a mode of exercising an impact, and what is affected will vary according to requirements necessitated by the context in question.

Confidently it can be said, that *Mother to Mother* at large developed an image of sociopolitical relevance, which again in essence is a trait of Magona's total disgust at the political scenario. *Mother to Mother* traces the translucent lives of the impoverished and humiliated black community providing a compelling counterpart to the actual Amy Biehl murder case.

In 1998, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission granted amnesty to the four men responsible for the murder of Amy Biehl: Mongezi Manqina, Ntobeko Peni, Easy Nofemela and Vusumzi Ntamo. Wittenberg argues regarding Amy Biehl's parents:

Their magnanimity towards the people of Guguletu, and their willingness to forgive and even shake hands with their daughter's killers, has been one of the success stories in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's process (1998:318).

5. CONCLUSION:

This study has drawn attention to a theme of remarkable durability presenting itself through a multiplicity of comparable images and symbols throughout the writer's career.

Sindiwe Magona has truly made giant strides in having to conquer her own "demons" and overcome and reflect the betrayals, economic disenfranchisement and deep-rooted racial hatred amongst the people. She writes about certain very ordinary human situations, however not avoiding reality or suppressing burning issues against apartheid.

There are some remarkable themes and images in her two volume "auto-ethnography", her short stories and novel. These themes are the biographical and historical events finely interweaved which Magona deems necessary to express and record for future generations. She fears the younger generation appears to have gone astray, for a multitude of reasons (I have mentioned), and therefore writes from a point of empowerment, hoping to create a gradual transition from servitude to personal prosperity. The themes therefore embodies the

traditional life as in *My Children's Children* and *Forced to Grow* clearly depicting customs and rituals. *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* is a move towards transgression and levels of redemption from sexism for the Black woman. In the words of Ali Mazrui (1992:87): '*liberating* the Black woman, *centering* the Black woman, and *empowering* the Black woman' (1992:87).

The short stories are rich in symbolism and can be read with psychoanalytic theories in mind. The experiences of the women are attempts by Magona to make sense of the world around her, a world that poses itself as irrational, evil and cruel. Her other book of short-stories, *Push-Push*, also examines the racial conflict and the struggle for liberation against the confining political and social system.

Magona gains the respect of her reader, through her subtleness, at times assuming a feministic standpoint with an African perspective, trying to change the marginalization of women in Black societies and the country as a whole. Her writing is used to give a voice to the Black South Africans oppressed under apartheid, the official policy of racial segregation. In her novel, the brutality serves as a metaphor for

the experience of Blacks and at the same time serves as an artistic vision for change.

Wole Soyinka, Nobel Laureate, Stockholm in 1986 affirmed that:

the writer is the visionary of his people: he recognizes past and present not for the purposes of enshrinement but for the logical creative glimpse and statement of the ideal future. He anticipates, he warns. (107).

Magona deviates from the African woman being defined as “other”, or as peripheral and thinks it is time to move beyond, and transcend all negative “mind-sets”. She finds it of paramount importance for Blacks to represent themselves and not be represented. Magona therefore embarks to unchain the Black women and allow them to be, while recognizing that what they are is just as meaningful, valid and comprehensible as the white “medem”. She essentially transcends the self-conscious cross-cultural analyses, calling for a “humanism” that is fundamentally constructive and productive.

Sindiwe Magona: truly a woman for all times!

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**ELECTRONIC SOURCES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE
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3. <http://worldwriters.English.sbc.edu/wws.comlete.html>.