

**TITLE: 'Malibongwe Igama Lama Khosikazi' ('Let the name of Woman
be praised')**

**The Negotiation of Female Subjectivity in Laretta Ngcobo's
*And They Didn't Die***

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I hereby acknowledge that this is an original piece of work, unless otherwise referenced.

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Abstract

In this thesis I attempt to examine the way that rural women in Natal, from the early 1950s to the 1980s, were relegated to the periphery of both white society and black traditional society. Lauretta Ngcobo's second novel *And They Didn't Die* is therefore a very useful resource as it takes a look at the interplay of traditional black patriarchy, white patriarchy, and the way rural women were affected by these oppressive institutions. *And They Didn't Die* examines the way that apartheid affected rural communities and the individual. It investigates the various struggles faced by rural women; how women have to negotiate their own identities within different systems. *And They Didn't Die* focuses on the political, economic, and traditional struggles of rural women in Natal at the end of the 1950s, but unlike other novels, *And They Didn't Die* also focuses on the sexual identities of rural women, and how they mobilised themselves through political activities such as the struggle against the dreaded pass laws, and the protests against the beer halls. *And They Didn't Die* is a novel which explores political, traditional, economic, sexual, and communal aspects of rural life. Ngcobo foregrounds the communal, political, economic, and traditional problems that the women in the novel have to face.

Ngcobo recreates the various political protests that were happening at this time, to demonstrate the construction of the black woman as political subject. She carefully demonstrates how agency has to be negotiated with both the white authorities and black patriarchy. Black South African women were forced to fight double political battles on the domestic and national fronts. The split structure of the political and traditional struggle is at the center of Ngcobo's work. *And They Didn't Die* shows that the struggle for female subjectivity is a dynamic process. In South Africa, rural black women had to negotiate numerous subject positions. Forging a sense of selfhood was difficult,

especially when confronted with dual patriarchies, apartheid, and the constant negotiation with tradition.

Ngcobo's novel is an interesting fictional account that draws on various historical events that offers the reader a sense of what women had to go through in order to survive the atrocities of apartheid.

Introduction

Numerous books have been written on apartheid, how it circumscribed people's lives, and its devastating effects. On the other hand, less has been written about the interplay of traditional black patriarchy, white patriarchy, and the way rural women were affected by all of these oppressive institutions. Laretta Ngcobo's fictional novel *And They Didn't Die*¹ takes into account not only the effects of apartheid on rural communities, but on the individual as well. It investigates the various struggles faced by rural women, and in particular Jezile Majola. Jezile represents one sector of such women, and Ngcobo creates her as a vehicle for exploring the experiences of young rural women during a particular stage of South African history. Laretta Ngcobo's interplay of the personal and the communal is an interesting one. *And They Didn't Die* focuses on the political, economic, and traditional struggles of rural women in Natal at the end of the 1950s, but unlike other novels, *And They Didn't Die* also focuses on the sexual identities of rural women.

And They Didn't Die is a novel which explores political, traditional, economic, sexual, and communal aspects of rural life, all of which form part of what make *And They Didn't Die* an excellent source of insight into the psyche of the rural woman in the novel. I am not, however, suggesting that Ngcobo's portrayal of this 'psyche' is necessarily wholly reliable and authoritative, one must remember that this is merely a recreation of such a psyche, and not some unmediated access to the mind and experience of a real person. What she offers then is a fictional account of rural life during apartheid, drawing on her own personal experiences of rural life. Ngcobo uses Jezile, a young woman from the rural village of Sigageni, in Natal, to emphasise how all these aspects form part of the negotiation of the individual's personal identity and simultaneously his or her political identity.

Ngcobo foregrounds the communal, political, economic, and traditional problems by making Jezile the wife of the migrant worker Siyalo. Jezile is unable to bear children, and Siyalo's mother MaBiyela considers her a useless daughter-in-law. Jezile is determined to trace her own path of destiny, and so travels to Durban to be with Siyalo and fall pregnant. Soon after this, Jezile's first daughter S'naye is born. Siyalo loses his job in the city because of his political activities, and has to return to Sigageni. The narrative, however, focuses mainly on Jezile, who forms part of the Sigageni women's political movement. During one of the women's many anti-apartheid protests, Jezile is arrested, and jailed for six months. She has to leave her husband and starving child in the arms of her mother-in-law. Troubled and guilty about his starving daughter, Siyalo starts to steal milk from a white farmer's cows, in a battle to keep his daughter alive. After Jezile returns, and their second daughter Ndondo is born, a still unemployed Siyalo is arrested and imprisoned for ten years for stealing milk. Jezile is forced to take a job as a domestic servant for a white family in the city of Bloemfontein, where her white employer rapes her.

Ngcobo recreates the various political protests that were happening at this time, to demonstrate the construction of the black woman as political subject. The two that she draws upon are the beer hall protests and the mass demonstrations against pass laws. She carefully demonstrates how agency has to be negotiated with both the white authorities and black patriarchy. Black South African women were forced to fight double political battles on the domestic and national fronts. The split structure of the political and traditional struggle is at the center of Ngcobo's work. *And They Didn't Die* shows that the struggle for female subjectivity is a dynamic process. In South Africa, rural black women had to negotiate numerous subject positions. Forging a sense of selfhood was difficult, especially when confronted with dual patriarchies, apartheid, and the constant negotiation with tradition. Dorothy Driver, in 'M'a-Ngoana oTsoare Thipa Ka Bohaleng', argues that:

[The] search for a self-constituting community is important because of the damage done to black South Africans in an apartheid culture. But it is a process of extraordinary complexity. If 'self' is constructed in the terms provided by the symbolic system into which one is born, then South Africans are called upon to define themselves in terms offered by the symbolic repertoire of apartheid, a repertoire which includes the marks of imperialism and colonialism, of class exploitation, racial oppression, and gender stereotyped expectations. The search for, or definition of, self must negotiate, then, a set of particularly laden and particularly inflexible categories, for instance, black and white, male and female, terms rigorously ordered to their own 'group areas', 'their proper place', and held there by the concept of 'own affairs'. (232)

Many would argue that Ngcobo's novel is simplistic and one-dimensional, because it does not offer a multi-dimensional plot, with complicated dialogue. Ngcobo in an interview with Itala Vivan (Nelm Interviews)², argued that it is essential for the European reader to realise how blacks are influenced by their folklores, and how these stories pivot around the story of an individual. The importance of the plot is created around one single character, as is the case in *And They Didn't Die*. It is only rarely that black stories are constructed using multiple plots; the plot is organised around different possibilities. Ngcobo claims that, because of the particular conditions of life in South Africa, many topics have been forbidden to South African black writers. She argues that: '[I]f I should tell the story of a man who struggles to possess land, houses, factories etc., what would be the purpose? There are so few blacks that find themselves in such a position.'(109) Ngcobo goes on to say that:

The themes that in European society have always found a mutual place in the structure of the novel, are in South Africa often met with many inhibitions. The black writer is forced to limit himself to a few themes which deal with a society scarred by poverty and restrictions ...

Our particular tragic situation initiates every writer to reveal the fundamental themes which are for us of common interest, and asks for an answer to the feelings of our people. (110)

Ngcobo's novel is ground-breaking in many senses, because she explores the rural woman's experience of apartheid, her role in the community, and her negotiation of her own identity. All of these themes are relatively new in current South African Literature (at least the last ten years). Her novel marks the road towards a more integrated understanding of society, where voices that were previously unheard in many instances are able to receive some kind of attention in the literary field.

In 1998 a new women's campaign was set up, called 'Women's Week'. It was set up to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the historic march on the Union Buildings, to protest against the pass laws. What struck me as interesting was the fact that rural women, although slightly more empowered, are still facing the same oppressions that they were facing during apartheid, as described in Ngcobo's novel (Refer to Appendix 2). I realise that just because apartheid has been lifted, women do not automatically have easier lives and more say in the making and implementing of traditional and constitutional laws. It seemed to me that Ngcobo's novel has a place in this new, protracted struggle. With the new constitution offering more scope for women, Ngcobo's novel seems to hold some effective lessons. Not only is her novel a powerful reminder of where women have come from, in relation to the dual patriarchies, but also of how it is possible to move, and negotiate an effective identity, within restrictive systems such as apartheid and traditional communities.

Lauretta Ngcobo was born in 1932 in South Africa to a Zulu mother and Xhosa father. Her father died young, leaving her mother with four young children to bring up. She managed with great difficulty to send them to school. Ngcobo, after doing her initial schooling in her native village, was

sent to an American missionary school. After completing her education at the Inanda Seminary girls' school, she attended the University of Fort Hare, where she obtained her BA and teaching certificate. She taught in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, and eventually Johannesburg. She married an ANC political leader who was among the accused at the Treason Trial. Ngcobo avoided being arrested by escaping to Swaziland in 1963, and later lived in Zambia. In 1969 she and her family moved to London, where she worked as a teacher, principal, and active political exile. In 1981 she published her first novel *Cross of Gold*, followed by the novel *And They Didn't Die*. She has also edited a collection of women's writings, *Let It Be Told: Black Women Writers in Britain* (1987). She has now returned to South Africa, and works as the secretary of the I. F. P. in Durban. This biographical information leads one to realise that Ngcobo herself came from a rural background, and in many ways the novel is semi-autobiographical. In my interview with her, she discussed some of the main concerns she had with regards to the community and the way that traditional roles had circumscribed her own sense of self, and the conflicts that arose out these tensions. When asked why she wrote a novel that foregrounded the rural experience of apartheid, she replied as follows:

My experiences are rural ones. You write the way you have lived, I write about life as I have known it, and how other relatives who went off into towns had related what was happening there. Town life has always been the 'other'; rural women who went into the cities would relay stories of what it was like, what people and especially the men did there. Sometimes it was quite frightening when the men got mixed up with politics, but at the same time politics stirred the women into furthering their own political resistance. (Assink, 72)

I try to draw out some of the main issues that Ngcobo had in mind, and other issues that were from my own interpretation of the novel. *And They Didn't Die* is very rich in themes. My own interpretation of the novel relies on a close textual analysis, placing the novel into historical context,

and using various theorists to construct an understanding of Ngcobo's, in many ways groundbreaking, novel. Chapter one of this thesis examines the way that rural women in the novel are constricted by the harsh policies of apartheid, and simultaneously how they are constrained by their own traditional society. Chapter two engages with a more individualistic emphasis. It takes into account the way that women, in particular Jezile, attempt to negotiate a sense of self within these two often reinforcing systems - apartheid and traditional customs. It examines how these women have to negotiate a sense of themselves as not only as political activists, but as sexual subjects as well. Chapter three opens the novel to other interpretations. It offers other criticism, drawing on my interview with her, and other theories

Chapter 1

And They Didn't Die was published in 1990. Ngcobo's second novel is particularly interesting because it explores several social and political issues from the perspective of a rural woman, Jezile Majola. The novel relies on this rural position to identify key issues in understanding the different kinds of experiences of apartheid. *And They Didn't Die* looks at both events in rural KwaZulu-Natal and urban experience, from the late 1950s to the late 1980s. The novel is narrated wholly from the perspective of a rural inhabitant, who has to exist within the apartheid system, and negotiate an identity within it. Ngcobo explores the rural woman's identity within two somewhat conflicting contexts - apartheid and tradition, and she characterises these two systems through the discussion of various issues, such as migrant labour, and traditional versus urban experiences.

Rural life during apartheid is documented in the autobiographical, or semi-autobiographical works of writers such as Ellen Kuzwayo, Bessie Head, Miriam Tlali, and Es'kia Mphahlele. Rural experience documentation is, however, not extensive, especially that which comments on the rural experience of apartheid. Apartheid tends to be thought of as an urban experience, whereas rural life is understood to be structured by traditional values outside of urban modernity. Portrayal of the rural tends rather to serve as a background to many writers' urban experiences of apartheid. Ngcobo does not exclude the urban experience of apartheid, and this is evident in her portrayal of the living conditions in the Durban hostels, and the urban resistance campaigns that Jezile herself becomes involved in. The juxtaposition of the rural with the small cramped spaces of the urban setting is interesting when considering the protagonist's move between these geographical settings, and her negotiation with identity within these frames of reference. These, however, are not the only set of references she is being positioned within; the role she plays as a daughter-in-law simultaneously conflicts with her

own sense of self, and her self as political activist. The desire to define oneself is not a new theme, but what is striking about Jezile is her insistence on controlling her own destiny.

She cannot fall pregnant, and is consequently considered useless by her community and especially her mother-in-law. So we are alerted to her position as a woman, where her worth is valued in terms of reproduction, especially by MaBiyela who is a spokesperson for both the absent male figures and the community's traditional ideas on women and motherhood. In one instance Jezile is the 'center of the excitement' because she is the main instigator in the emptying of the dipping tanks, in the next she is the barren daughter-in-law. There is a constant movement between what is circumscribed by her community, by the apartheid system, and her own personal desires, and this forms part of one of the main issues of the novel - the negotiation of identity within different frameworks. In the following passage we are made aware of Jezile's position. MaBiyela is constantly 'persecuting' her:

MaBiyela [fixed] her eyes below Jezile's waist and had repeated, 'Anything?' Jezile had stared back at her mother-in-law and had shook her head silently. That almost silent exchange was to mark the nature of their relationship for a long time. That day Jezile had cried and cried. The episode was the start of a relentless persecution. MaBiyela would not stop. She talked about children, she talked about childless women and she wondered aloud often, to all and sundry, what would happen if Jezile was barren, for Siyalo, an only son, simply had to have children. The year was long and anxious and as it drew to a close Jezile began to twitch with anxiety - if only she could tune and time her body this time; her heart was filled with anticipation and renewed hope. (4)

She is seen as the barren wife who cannot fulfill her traditional, preordained role as the bearer of children. She herself is caught up in negotiating her own identity, where she is constructed in one sense by the traditional value placed on the bearing of children, and in another by the real desire to have children. I do not think that Ngcobo is altogether commenting negatively on the notion of reproduction as a means for constructing an effective identity. Ngcobo does, however, comment critically about reproduction with the character Zenzile, a childhood friend of Jezile's:

Zenzile [was] married to that good-for-nothing Mthebe. For a while their friendship had cooled off, for seeing Zenzile who, in the six years of marriage, had four children was painful for Jezile. Each time Mthebe came home from leave he found a new baby, and he left another growing, ready to find on his next visit. But, Zenzile was a captive in her house, with children who whimpered and hung around her skirts. Everything around was drab and Zenzile looked haggard and despondent. (5)

Ngcobo is contrasting various subject positions, as well as the possible moves within and outside them. The above passage contrasts, then, with the passage that follows, where Jezile is not a 'captive' like Zenzile. Jezile, unlike Zenzile, is determined to change her own life, and this illustrates Ngcobo's suggestion that change is possible within a system of reference. Change can be achieved through appropriating that system and letting it work for you, the way Jezile does. Jezile uses her 'barrenness' to mobilise herself within a system that is very confining. Zenzile is unable to move outside of her situation, she has too many children and is confined because she relies totally on her husband in the city. Again there is the irony that is so prevalent in Ngcobo's novel; Jezile is able to mobilise herself because she is barren, while at the same time she is regarded as useless because of it. Her community on the other hand automatically regards Zenzile as a good wife because she is able to bear many children, and yet she is unable to mobilise herself against a lecherous husband. Her

only real means of escape is through death. Jezile is not confined by children and she uses this to her advantage to embark on a journey to Durban. Again we see that Jezile appropriates what she can in order to increase her own mobility.

[J]ezile received a short letter from Siyalo. It had a far-away feel about it. She was shocked, but she did not cry. It was her will, strong and unbending even when it hurt her, coupled with anger ... She, Jezile, would wait no longer for other people to do things to make decisions about her life; she would make them herself. Why, it did not even need thinking about. It was the most natural thing in the world; to stand up and prepare to go to her husband herself and to sort out their life - if he could not come and live with her and give her babies, it was for her to go to him. She would not wait for him to say it or do something about it. (10)

Jezile is determined to plot the trajectory of her own life: 'nobody would take that power away from her - not [Siyalo's] mother, not her own mother, not anyone.' (11) This is contrasted with Zenzile who is unable to move from her situation through obvious constraints. The phrase 'give her babies' suggests a complete reversal of the assumptions of women's roles in society. Jezile chooses to go to Durban: she wants Siyalo to fulfill her own maternal needs, so she can create her own identity. She wants to have babies out of a conscious understanding. She sees Zenzile's situation: 'Jezile wanted babies, Zenzile had more than she wanted' (16). One could argue that Ngcobo is merely falling into the stereotypical notion of womanhood: that is, the need to be defined as a woman in terms of motherhood and marriage. I think that Ngcobo negotiates with this quite subtly; she is creating a space for the individual psyche within these patriarchal or traditional constraints. Jezile is conscious of her friend's situation: 'Jezile wondered if her friend was not somehow to blame for her own decline' (5), and this indicates a realization on Jezile's part that perhaps Zenzile should have been

more assertive with her husband. But, Jezile is aware of the constricted roles that women in her own society have, especially with too many children, and no husband. Admittedly Jezile is upset at MaBiyela's comments, and scared of the 'social torment' of not being able to bear children. Undoubtedly she is subjected to traditional ideologies of motherhood and the pressures she is subjected to do play a role, but Jezile wants to take on the role of motherhood; she '[does] not see motherhood as a bind, a fulfilment of other people's expectations of her' (6), and through subtle negotiations like this, I think Ngcobo is able to side-step ideological traps. There is a constant mediation between the communal identity and a more individualistic one.

Jezile is a conflicted character in many ways, having to negotiate within different systems. When she goes to the Bantu Affairs Department (BAD)¹, which she refers to as 'the burial ground of all human dignity', to present them with the forged letters to enable her to go and see her husband, she is humiliated by the official. His language is crude and cold. He refers to her as part of a common group, 'these people'. This dehumanisation by the white government official is one that is common throughout the novel. From the onset of the novel Jezile and the other women of the novel are disregarded and described in animal imagery, by the white dipping tank official, the white BAD official, and the white guards at the jail in Pietermaritzburg. Interesting schisms are at play here, where in one instance she is able to deceive the official, in another she is totally silenced by the offensive white man's humiliation of her. Jezile is a victim of the worst kind of abuse - disgrace. The sexual vocabulary of the white man is disgusting, and she is unable to respond; firstly because she cannot counter what he says, and secondly because she knows that she has to rely on his permission to allow her access into the city. She is surprised at the 'grovelling tone' of her voice, and this scene is similar to the scene with her mother-in-law, where in both instances she is silenced. She has to succumb to accepting a pass book:

'So when you people want a fuck you pretend you're ill. Why can't these people think up something original? Why do they all say the same thing?' Turning to her at last he asked, 'Are there no men around your village; must you leave everything and lie your way to Durban? She trembled in humiliation. Her eyes dropped, she felt her anger hissing out through her ears, making them unbearably hot. Silence ... 'You want a fuck maan, you look for a man here.' After leafing through some files he took out a card. Shouting from the center of the vast room he asked why she was 'burning' that much, for her husband had just been home a month before ... 'I'm not going to my husband as such, I'm visiting the hospital,' she ventured to say. She was surprised at her voice, her grovelling tone. (13)

Ngcobo's account of Jezile's humiliating experience examines how really marginal these women were. Their resistance has to come from an already marginal position. Tradition already circumscribes these women, and apartheid laws relegate them even further. For Ngcobo there is a constant pull between resistance and being broken down. What is potentially a very negative experience, Ngcobo turns into a positive one when Jezile does eventually get to Durban. There she will meet the urban women who lead her to discover real political mobility, in the sense that they are able to protest against their own men, something that is particularly foreign to Jezile. Ngcobo relies on a historical backdrop for her novel. Her vivid accounts of the pass law struggle, and the beer hall protests, add a kind of authenticity to the novel, that allows the reader a look into both the rural and urban experience of the struggle against apartheid. Jezile arrives in Durban just as the 1959 beer hall protests are reaching their climax. I rely here on Tom Lodge's historical accounts of prior events and these particular events, as a background to Ngcobo's portrayals. Up until the 1950s black women were not entirely bound by the policies controlling influx control. Resistance against influx control laws in 1913 was effective in delaying what would culminate in the pass laws forty-odd years later. Protest by black women was on the whole not far-reaching. Organised activity was through

various church associations, or organisations working towards the upliftment of women. These included the National Council of African Women and the ANC Women's League. In 1948, with the emergence of the new Nationalist government, there was a new need for control of the black woman. Pass laws would regulate labour procedures, thereby controlling the move from the rural to the urban proletariat. By doing so the government could control influx into the cities, and secure jobs for the white working class. As it has been noted, women were relatively quiet on the resistance front. But with the now impending pass laws that would marginalise the women even more, there was a surge in defiance throughout the country. (Lodge, 1983)²

Rural women were part of this defiance campaign, and Ngcobo uses this point of entry to discuss the protagonist's identity in relation to the national identity of women resisters, as well as the role of resistance in the construction of traditional or communal identity, and the individual's sense of self within and outside these parameters. The government official has the power to control Jezile, even though she forms part of a larger power base - mass participation in the struggle against the pass, and other stringent laws:

'Your pass,' he barked without raising his eyes. At first she did not think she had heard him properly. 'My pass?' she repeated, trying to grasp the meaning of the question. 'Yes, your pass. Haven't you got a pass yet? How can you travel to Durban without a pass? Every woman in this district should have a pass by now or are you one of those who won't have one ...' How could she, when one of the most burning issues at Sigageni was the fight against the passes. She was sworn not to take the pass, like all the women. (13-14)

Jezile is at a cross-roads; like the other women in her community (and thousands of women throughout the country) she has resisted the passes. Her inner monologue indicates a new struggle

she must embark upon. This is the first of Jezile's individual decisions. From this point on Jezile has to consciously make decisions that will alter the course of her life:

'God, I'm weak. This is an impossible choice. Only last Thursday I talked heatedly against the passes - how can I face the other women this Thursday, tomorrow. While my friends are talking and swearing against the pass at the weekly meeting, I will be queuing for the same pass - God, why are women so trapped? - are there ever any choices?' (14)

The question at the end of this passage is indicative of the contradictory position these women are in. If she refuses to take the pass she will be unable to see Siyalo and fall pregnant; if she does take the pass she is going against everything she has fought for. Both options are limiting, but it is the latter that she chooses as a means towards an end. For Jezile there are no real choices, and she has to appropriate what she can in order to survive. Jezile is impatient and unable to wait for anything to be given to her; she has to be assertive and quick in any decision she makes. Ngcobo uses Jezile to foreground the hybrid nature of the rural woman³. Rural women, like all other individuals, had to negotiate within a plethora of subject positions. Grant Farred in his essay "Not Like Women at All" argues that:

[The rural black women] must forge subjectivity in relation to historically changing black and white patriarchies; they must respond to and engage patriarchally defined sexual codes and their own (female) experience of sexuality. Likewise, they have to confront racial codes and their own encounters with the black and white communities. In both instances, of race and sex, they must question how their experiences are governed by such codes. (2)

Although I find Farred's ideas particularly useful, that the women should 'confront racial' (as they do) and sexual codes, I would argue these ideas are potentially problematic, in the sense that they are somewhat idealistic, and not altogether possible in a society that is embedded in centuries of tradition. I would offer a counter argument to Farred's, drawing particularly from my interview with Ngcobo, and the novel itself. In the interview she argues that it is not possible to merely confront the black patriarchy outright, but that subtle negotiations are more effective. While Ngcobo realises that there is indeed a need for change, she also believes that it has to be done in a way that does not jeopardise the woman in any way. Ngcobo draws attention to the fact that men often get violent when women appear to be trying to contradict them. Ngcobo argues that women in her society (black rural women in particular) do have a great deal of mobility (especially within the private spheres of the home), but that this mobility when regarded in western terms is considered worthless and the women considered weak. What Ngcobo calls for therefore is a new kind of analysis that takes into account the African experience (Assink, 75). One could argue that Ngcobo is not confronting black patriarchy effectively enough, but I think one has to take into account that Ngcobo like the women in the novel, is embedded within the system. Even Jezile who is a very strong character is unable to change the fundamental traditional constraints. She is unable to alter her mother-in-law's stereotypical view that she is a useless wife because she cannot bear children. Only at the end of the novel do we see a real change in who she is. Although the women are confident in their struggle against apartheid, they are not as confident in their struggle against black patriarchy. Ngcobo confirms that the women of Sigageni are oppressed through their own communities and at the same time through the apartheid system, but while they are politically active they do not confront tradition outright. But throughout the novel Ngcobo shows subtle movements that the women employ in order to alter their own communal situations. Although their energies are more focused on political aspects, women like Jezile attempt to resist the traditional system as well. One need only look at the way she forges a Doctor's letter to enable her to go to Durban to see

Siyalo. Where apartheid represses them through restrictive policies, the community itself restricts them through the customary bases of patriarchy. The Bantu Affairs Department forms part of the whole coercive apartheid system. Black women and men are only allowed mobility through complying with the devices that govern them. People have no freedom to move, and they are trapped by pass laws and other stringent laws. People are enmeshed in the system: 'it was as if they did not know why they were there, as though they had always stood there, half their lives in that queue' (12). Jezile is confined in many ways: on the one hand she is constrained by the obvious restrictive policies of apartheid, while on the other hand she is restricted within her own community, and especially by her mother-in-law. MaBiyela is at once upset with Jezile for being independent enough to go off and see her husband, but ironically, because she is not politically mobile herself, MaBiyela is not upset that Jezile has accepted a pass book. Jezile goes to see MaBiyela for comfort, or out of some 'sense of guilt', after she has agreed to accept the conditions which will enable her to see her husband in Durban. MaBiyela is not happy to see her: 'As she entered MaBiyela looked at her feet rather than at her face - a cutting look that slid and went past her, and, then silence.' (16) Ngcobo uses the word 'silence' time and again when describing Jezile. But her silences are only momentary, and by the end of the novel she is empowered and her actions speak the words she has for years been unable to say. MaBiyela, in the same conversation, accuses her of having an affair, when Jezile tells her that she has been in Ixopo. Jezile is furious at her accusations, and tells MaBiyela that in actual fact she is preparing to go and see Siyalo in Durban.

That was like a bomb - it blew up and engulfed the two women. Such an explosion could never be countenanced, never between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Custom had prescribed that, no matter how bitter the scorn, each had to go along in churlish compliance.

(16)

Custom dictates the ways in which these women can position themselves in their communities. Jezile cannot understand her disrespect towards her husband's mother, but at the same time she is unable to curb her outbursts. This draws attention to the fact that there are conflicting ideals within the traditional/communal system as well, and that rural experience, like any experience, is not based on a shared set of homogeneous principles. Again we find that pull between her inner reasoning and her community reasoning. Jezile is in a sense compromising her political self in order to fulfill the needs of her private self; she is breaking her community's political as well as traditional rules:

She had said everything, but she did not feel purged, she did not feel sorry either. The little kitchen hut was suffocatingly hot and she had the strongest desire to get out of there ... She had the urge to go and see Zenzile. She wondered what they would make of it if she walked out into the night. They already thought the worst; if she got up and left they would assume she had a tryst to keep - perhaps with the same young man she was supposed to have spent the day with. But she was in no mood to conform - let them think the worst. She did not care. She was changing so fast she couldn't even understand herself, but she had no time to speculate about it. So she walked into the night she would go anywhere to cool her inner furnace. (16)

There is a remarkable sense of individual strength in Jezile, as she seeks agency within the dominant ideological network of custom and tradition. The people of the village are so tied to a set of ideologies that they automatically assume that she is having an affair, because a young woman has no 'business in town' without her husband. Jezile is merely getting some things in order before she embarks on her journey. Chela Sandoval, in her essay entitled "U.S. Third World Feminists", argues that it is not that 'women of colour somehow exist in the interstices between the legitimated categories of the social order' (11), but rather that they manage to grapple with these categories in

an effective and reaffirming way. Jezile has to be flexible in the way she uses both the apartheid system and her own communal ideologies. The heterogeneity of the community should not be ignored. Where Jezile and the younger women of the village are much more aware of political happenings, the older generations, like MaBiyela, are not. That is not to say that they do not form part of the defiance campaigns, their political mobility comes from the younger women, who in a sense led the way. They are generational victims of black patriarchy, white patriarchy, and of migrancy. MaBiyela is described in the following passage. What is interesting is *her* hybrid position:

MaBiyela had so much power. She was permanently vigilant, armed with authority and custom. Her vigilance was born of her own embittered life, soured by her own outgrown relationship with her own mother-in-law in her own past. It was the way she perceived her role, the guardian of morality in the absence of the men. Embittered by her own lonely life when she was younger she had to cope with the long absences of her husband. So she often exercised her new-found power with an element of retaliation against some malignant social order. (16)

MaBiyela is a product of her society. She appropriates the authoritarian role of the male, but it does not alter her situation in the slightest. She has had to battle against the harsh aspects of rural life - poverty, fathering and mothering growing children, because of migrant labour, just to mention a few. Ngcobo draws attention to the fact that although these women can appropriate a seemingly strong sense of authority, it is only achieved through using the available traditional/patriarchal discourses, which ultimately disempower them. MaBiyela wields her power in a way that excludes Jezile's identity as anything other than a barren wife to her son. The women of the village, like MaBiyela,

are 'strong' and 'capable', but at the same time are often isolated within the very community that in so many ways sustains them:

They projected their own secret needs, fears and desires on their neighbours and friends. They, who could be so supportive in other ways, were malicious and even inventive when it came to these matters. They were all essentially afraid - afraid of failing in the burdensome task of harnessing their human needs. (18)

What Ngcobo, I think, is arguing is the fact that although these women are able to come together to resist apartheid, there is always that element of isolation within the communal setting. Jezile is completely alienated from her community when she returns from Bloemfontein with her illegitimate white child, after being raped by her white employer. She is rejected by her mother-in-law, and sent back to her own family. Jezile has, in the community's eyes, disgraced them, 'It was no longer Jezile's misfortune that lay in front of them, it was a communal catastrophe' (214).

Jezile moves out of her communal setting when she goes to see Siyalo in Durban. Jezile is aware that she is leaving the 'securities and certainties of country life' (21), when she embarks on her journey. The journey itself is 'spectacular': 'Now and again her mind would be diverted from her thoughts - taken breathless by the beautiful scenery ...' (21). Ngcobo describes the change in vegetation from the 'treeless savannah of Ixopo' to 'the greenness, the lushness' of the south coast of Natal. Ngcobo's description is almost out of place at this point, but I think that it tries to emphasise Jezile's naiveté. What begins as a pleasant discovery of the unknown, ends in the harsh realities of migrant labour, hostel living conditions, and generally urban experience. One must remember that Jezile has never left the confines of her village before. When Jezile arrives in Durban, Siyalo is initially very happy to see her, but as they move further into the city towards the hostel, his mood

changes and 'a worried look, perhaps angry even' (23) takes over his face. He explains to her about his hostel, that he shares with several men in the same room, but that she will have to stay there for only one night: 'She looked him straight in the eye, listening intently, trying to make sense of *his world*. After a long pause, she repeated slowly, "His bed ... in a shared room ... with men." (25)

From this moment Jezile's bewilderment gives way to an understanding of the harsh reality of what city life is really like. Ngcobo uses Jezile to show how migrant men had to live in hostels. Jezile feels something 'drop deep inside of her' (24), when she sees where Siyalo lives: 'There was hardly any standing room. Pots and dishes lay under the bed, and a whole wardrobe hung on a string stretching across two nails on the wall above the bed ... 'This is Durban, he commented uselessly ...' (25). Jezile's first experience of urban life in Durban is not a positive one. She spends the night with Siyalo, and listens all night to the sounds of the other men coming in. What she gets exposed to in this tiny room will stay with her for a long time. She hears the loud moans of a woman and man having sex in the bed next to her. For Jezile this is something totally new: 'Then the woman screamed, oblivious to where she was, a scream that suddenly tore the silence, 'Take me, take me, Dlamini' ... Jezile was chilled to the depths of her soul and her body ... Then that final cry again from the throes of delight, 'Fuck me, fuck me. Dlamini!' (28)

For Jezile, it is not only embarrassing for her, but also raises her curiosity, because she did not realise that people were able to be 'transported that far - far beyond self-control or awareness' (28). In one sense this experience was liberating for Jezile because she was not aware of her own sexuality, because of restrictive traditional roles. Black rural women from an early age are trained to be good mothers and wives, and so sexuality and self-awareness are not advocated. Jezile's own sexuality and desires are discussed in the following chapter, and this marks a ground-breaking move on the part of Ngcobo.

Chapter 2

Ngcobo addresses the construction of female subjectivity, and shows that the negotiation with it is one that is dynamic; that is created through transferred mediations with various systems. One of the issues that Ngcobo addresses in her novel is the idea that these women are also constructed as beings that have their own needs and desires, in other words their own sexual identities. As Farred notes, Jezile's sexuality becomes an important question for Ngcobo (96). It reduces her [Jezile's] ability to achieve the 'independence' her male counterparts have, but at the same time this does not reduce her own sense of sexuality. Her own sexual desires, and the need to have a child add conflict to Jezile's own negotiation with her self and her surroundings. The role of sexuality in the novel is an interesting one. Ngcobo subtly explores the various roles that women in this society employ. There is a schism between Jezile's own sense of self and her sexuality, and the prescribed roles of women in her society. At the same time Ngcobo shows that her sexuality makes her a victim of white male violence as well. The most obvious violence is the rape of Jezile by her white employer.

In many cases women are dominated by a preconceived notion of what it is to be a woman, but as I have argued earlier, Ngcobo is critical of motherhood. There are a variety of contradictory positions in the production of subjectivity. Jezile has to subscribe both to what is expected of her, and to her own sense of self. Jezile wants to have children out of a conscious desire, not merely through prescribed conventions. Ngcobo is not suggesting, though, that this is the reason all women want to have children. Children were seen as the binding factor for many marriages, especially with the husband away. Childbearing and the restrictions placed on a woman's body are addressed in the novel. But it is the complex negotiation of Jezile's own sexuality that is important at this point. Jezile moves between her desire to have children and her own awareness of motherhood. She

appropriates her hybridity to achieve the optimum amount of movement within the restrictive systems. Jezile uses her 'barrenness' as a means to mobilise herself. She goes to Durban out of a desire to be impregnated by her husband, but ironically it is her 'barrenness' that allows her this scope to do so. Going to Durban has to be mediated within the resistance of the black women's movement, while simultaneously adhering to apartheid's ideologies to curb rural women's access into 'cities [which] are for white people' (13). Jezile has to take a pass book in order to achieve mobility. Ironically Jezile's intention is to leave Durban impregnated, but she leaves the city impregnated with new political ideas, and the feeling of political solidarity between herself and the other black women protestors. The urban women have given her insight into effective political agency, that she can take back to her own community. Outside the confines of her village she observes the urban women and their protests, while at the same time her own sexual identity starts forming. As I mentioned in the preceding chapter, the woman in the bed next to her awakens in her something that she was not aware of. So Jezile's urban experience, although difficult, enables her to experience, in some ways, affirming practices.

Another very important part of this construction of subjectivity is the role that the rural women play in the political and national struggles. The hybrid identity of the black women is made even more difficult because their subjectivity is located somewhere between white apartheid structures and the traditional black patriarchy. Jezile and the other women of Sigageni have to move between the restrictive systems of racism and patriarchy, and the customary practices of their community. The following passage identifies the attitude of both the black and the white men to the women's resistance:

"These women, this strange breed of womanhood, thin and ragged and not like women at all - they think they rule the world, they spill men's beers, they herd cattle, they plough the

fields, they run this community. That's what it is; that's why this defiance - they've lost respect for manhood, for all authority ... if nobody stops them they're going to ruin this country. In spite of what others think, it is these women we've got to deal with, not those far away men in the cities." (2)

Mr Pienaar, the white dipping tank official who is speaking here, is suggesting that these women are challenging not only apartheid, but their own black men as well. What Mr Pienaar indicates, as Farred notes, is 'how much female activism issues a radical challenge to both black and white men ... because their actions render existing gender relations inadequate' (95). These "unwomanly" women disrupt both the authoritarian power of the black men and the apartheid system. What is interesting here is the fact that the white official temporarily aligns himself with the black men, whose beers the women spill. This indicates that black women are the lowest rung on the hierarchical ladder of apartheid. These black women do not respect the "authority" of manhood, and the roles they are expected to play. Through her presentation of the hybrid subjectivity of women like Jezile, Ngcobo examines how women are able, though often to a limited extent, to appropriate, subvert, and occasionally challenge the dominant system/s.

Jezile has to accept the pass law she resisted, in order to be with her husband. And it is this constant pull between different subject positions which is highlighted in the novel. Jezile's acceptance does not last long, and she is soon mobilised in the beer hall protests, when she is visiting Siyalo in Durban. Jezile and her urban friend Fakazile are at first reluctant to join in the Cato Manor beer hall protests, but they decide that in fact even their own husbands are unable to stop them:

For the next few weeks, the women in Durban were on the rampage, fighting, marching and making representations. After a couple of days of this Jezile and Fakazile decided to go and

join the marches. Reluctant at first, their husbands could do nothing to stop them. Their [Jezile and Fakazile] nightly discussions had gone too far to stop them seeing for themselves what women could do to influence the thinking of white authority. Authority itself seemed nervous and uncertain in the face of this challenge. (33)

They are set up here in opposition to their own husbands and white authority. At first they are worried about what their husbands will think, but they realise that it is their duty to try and stop the crippling effects of apartheid, and the pass laws, on their lives. Even Siyalo comes to realise that these women protestors are valuable. He says: 'these women are right; and our women in the country are right to fight back' (35). Jezile joins the urban proletarian women in the marches against the pass laws, and in the demonstrations against the beer halls in Durban. Ngcobo's authorial comment sums up how black women like Jezile felt about the beer halls: 'Making people drink; paying people little money for food was an act of aggression against the community of black people; women and children were the community, and they had the right to defend themselves aggressively' (33). Ngcobo bases the beer hall events on actual demonstrations at this time. The brewing of traditional beer, or *utshwala*, had been a long-standing tradition, and the government implemented laws that undermined this. People were allowed to brew a small amount of beer for domestic purposes, provided they obtained a permit from the municipality. The restriction on home brewing enabled the government to draw revenue from the beer halls it established. Social drinking in these places was a very real problem for the women. Not only did the beer halls usurp a traditional domestic function of the women, but it caused men to spend a large portion of their salaries on beer, while their families back home were battling to make ends meet. The first beer hall demonstration at this time took place in June of 1959, when furious women invaded a beer hall in Cato Manor, driving out the male customers, and destroying several beer vats and machinery. For two weeks these women expressed their outrage in demonstrations, invasions of beer halls, and clashes with the

police. In many instances anger was effectively mixed with ribaldry and sexual assertion invasions in the following terms: One source describes the invasion in the following terms:

These women were very powerful. Some came half-dressed with their breasts exposed, and when they got near the place [municipal buildings] the Blackjacks [municipal police] tried to block the women. But when they saw this, the women turned and pulled up their skirts. The police closed their eyes and the women passed by and went in ... the women took off their panties, filled them with beer and said, 'Look, this is what happens', as they squeezed them out. (Lodge, 304)¹

Ngcobo's portrayal is subtler than this graphic scene. In my interview with her she says that she draws on actual events at that time. She says: 'In the novel I refer to actual events in Ixopo, where many women were arrested and imprisoned for resisting pass laws. My own relatives were involved in the struggle, and at the same time other counterparts were involved in Durban' (Assink, 72). But the above scene is indicative of what the women in the urban areas were doing to demonstrate their grievances. Jezile is amazed at the assertiveness of the urban women, and she realises that it is the first time in her life that her grievances are 'so well articulated' (33). She is initially very reluctant to join, but it is her participation in the resistance which allows her to realise that the women of Sigageni, like the urban women, are part of the same struggles. Jezile's realisation is compounded when she goes to jail and joins other urban women who are part of the same struggle. Ngcobo deals with a complex issue here: because the rural women see the urban women as threats to their marriages and family settings they are initially unable to unite in the prison setting:

The city women were their traditional rivals. They were the women who took their men when they went to work in the cities, or so they thought. Jezile, who had spent time with the

city women in Durban, no matter how brief, saw them differently. She knew that they were really no different ... (102)

There is a stalemate between the rural and urban women. Ngcobo is drawing attention to the fact that black women are not a homogeneous group necessarily, but that women can come together on the basis of suffering. However, it is only Dr Nosizwe (she is the village doctor), who realises that 'the fundamental lesson' is that all suffering people must unite against oppression. By the end of Jezile's prison experience, all the women, both rural and urban, come together on the basis of their shared experiences. They sing the political anthems in one united voice, they are all victims of the rapes and violence of the prison system:

[S]oon the old divisions collapsed and the women of Sabelweni accepted that they were among friends. And without a single word from Jezile, but simply by example and the help of the other women, the 'them-and-us' attitude died a natural death. Rather, the politicised city women shared their ideas... they believed that they were all reacting to the same problem but in different ways, and tried to show that it was better to fight politically than to engage in self-defeating crimes. (104)

Through apartheid's migrant labour system the family structure is broken down; the women and children are left relying on the father or husband to send money, and the wife feels threatened by the 'lascivious' urban women. Ngcobo, as Farred argues, although she 'astutely attributes the fundamental causes of black rural poverty and social disintegration to apartheid capitalism' (100), falls short of examining the role of the black migrant worker here. Black migrant men had more economic benefits than rural women, unlike the women at home with the children who relied solely

on the money the men would send. Again there is a potential for connivance between the black and white patriarchies against the rural women:

Disenfranchised by apartheid, their capacity for militant opposition circumscribed by an absent black patriarchy, rural women constantly have to conduct dual struggles against these two groups of men in order to secure their existence in the "dumping grounds" of South Africa. (Farred, 97)²

These black women have to assert themselves within the dominant discourses of both patriarchies. They have to empower themselves and let the men know that the men themselves are being exploited by the apartheid system. The beer hall protests are indicative of this need for mobilisation against the black men themselves, who fall prey to the snares of apartheid. The women can no longer wait for the men to help make a change. It is up to them to confront the "white intruders", and assert their own political destiny. Ngcobo is suggesting that change takes place slowly, and that mobilisation is a complex process:

Something had changed - they could not say when it had changed. These women, who had not, up until now, made decisions but had waited for their husbands to give them the final go ahead, were not talking any more about writing letters or the return of those far away men. They were making decisions and they were going to implement them. They were facing white intruders and screaming hell into their faces. The change had come over them slowly, not harshly in one exploding episode, but slowly like the weathering of rocks. (81)

Due to apartheid's coercive laws, women had to bear the brunt of social, economic and personal laws. Women are politically mobilised in this novel, but there is also the negotiation with their own

sexuality that needs to be foregrounded. I have discussed the notion of reproduction as a possible site of contention, but there are other instances in the novel where the questions of a woman's own sexual self needs to be discussed. *And They Didn't Die* challenges the notion that a woman's body necessarily has to fall prey to male domination and control. Jezile has to acknowledge her own sense of sexual self. Jezile is aware of the fears the other women in the village have: '[The women in the village] were capable, they were strong. They had to be. They were lonely and afraid ... Fears about their sexual needs - the dangers that lay under the surface - the daily longings and the ever-present temptations and attendant disgrace' (17). Nomawa, Jezile's friend whose husband has deserted her for a woman in the city, makes the following statement: 'There's so much fear and trouble, people can't think of women and sex; neither can we really' (183). It is the final part of her sentence that is so striking. The women themselves are so scared to confront the stereotypical notions of womanhood that they themselves are unable to realise their own sexual desires without feeling guilty. Jezile is unable to curb her inner desires when she is on her way to Bloemfontein on a train:

Then a feeling that she had managed to banish deftly for months took hold of her. Her body throbbed and ached inwardly, awash with longing, while she sat there oblivious of the hustling scene on the railway platform. She turned her thoughts voraciously on her self, squeezing her bodily greedily as she wondered why she had not allowed herself the privilege of those deliciously painful and unfaithful thoughts. There was no guilt in her mind as she speculated on what might happen - if it should happen, just by chance - that someone should arouse such wild uncontrollable feelings in her. It could happen right here in Bloemfontein. (192)

Jezile's thoughts are outside of the shackles of traditional modes of thinking. She is for once allowed to feel freedom from her rural surroundings. This scene is one of the most interesting scenes in the novel, and its sexual tones are very provocative. Not only is Jezile indulging her own desires and longings, but her fantasy is one in which she will enter into an illicit affair, as a married woman. Jezile is thinking totally independently. A woman committing adultery poses a threat to the social order. As a rule, the woman cannot decide her marital fate, whereas an adulteress would be taking her fate into her own hands. Jezile is only fantasising, she does not really intend having an affair. It is the very freedom of thought that is important here, and the fact that Jezile has the capacity to expand her mind. What, however, comes from this intensely liberating experience, is the realisation that she is all alone and 'released from communal supervision'. (206)

Jezile is in this moment the freest she will ever be. What is highly ironic is the fact that Jezile's sexual-fantasy ends with her rape by her white employer. From this moment onwards she is the victim of white patriarchy, communal rejection, and the isolation that comes with these things. She arrives in the city where no one speaks Zulu, where her employer Mrs Potgieter is cold and selfish, where her room is 'sparsely furnished', and she has to look after white children, while her own are away from her. Her job is tiring and she earns hardly anything. What comes as a complete shock to Jezile is when Mrs Potgieter asks her for her pass. For Jezile this is devastating:

She had forgotten about her pass altogether. Conflicting memories of the pass flashed through her mind - the day she burnt her pass book so long ago at the dipping tank; the memory of that defiance before the police, the morale-boosting company of the women of Sigageni. She stood there and thought, 'But we have fought the pass, we have served our term of imprisonment for fighting it.' (196)

Jezile is made aware of the fact that she is still bound by the laws that she has rebelled against. She is no longer free: she does not have the solidarity of the women in her community, she is away from her children and her husband. Jezile's rape is indicative of her situation. Farred argues that since no space the black woman occupies is 'inviolable', her body is a sexual terrain exposed to male domination and violence (106). Where Jezile is the bearer of her own sexuality when she decides to have children out of a real need, here she is not only the victim of sexual and racial injustice, but she is the voiceless victim of apartheid. She has nowhere to turn, and South African law did not favour the black woman. As a domestic worker, Jezile is put into a disempowered position. Politically disenfranchised, these women have no real platform for real resistance, unless they are on their own home territory; as the popular saying goes: 'Safety in numbers'. Even MaBiyela realises that Jezile's move to the city is one that is motivated by a desperate need for survival:

'You [Jezile] recall once I told you that you had a responsibility to raise these children. Well responsibility takes you through many unforeseen byways. There is no virtue in staying with us here to preserve our way of life and reputation and lose these children through starvation. That makes no sense to me. Many decent women nowadays are forced to do just this: leave their children to work in the cities ... Go to the city and we shall all survive.' (188)

It is at this point that MaBiyela seems to accept Jezile as she has never done before. But the irony is the fact that in going to the city to help the family, Jezile is in turn raped, has an illegitimate child, and on her return is rejected by the very family she tries to help sustain. *And They Didn't Die* reveals the vulnerability of the black woman's sexuality. In Sigageni Jezile's sexuality is ignored, but outside she is rendered vulnerable by the very fact that she is from a rural village with no experience and no one to turn to. Many would argue that the ultimate sexual domination is rape:

'Now quiet. I'm not going to hurt you. I love you. I've loved you a long time and you know it. If you sit quietly down here we can have a lot of fun. I need you and I'm sure you need me.' Jezile wriggled in her attempt to get free. But his grip tightened. Panic and horror seized her. He had her arm twisted and he rolled her onto the bed and pinned her down. In the ensuing struggle she managed to loosen his grip on her mouth and she screamed ... he had his way with her. Afterwards she curled up like a ball at the opposite end of the bed and winced and whimpered like a wounded animal. (204-5)

He has the audacity to say that he loves her, and Jezile cannot understand how he can say the word 'love.' Again she is silenced in a way that is worse than any other. She manages to scream, but it is still pointless. Jezile is at her most vulnerable here. It is from this brutal rape that Jezile conceives her son. She loses her job, and has to return to her community. She is 'excommunicated' from the church, because they regard her as having broken a 'moral code'. In her community Jezile is not understood as the victim of sexual violence, rather it is seen as a sin that defiles the community. In implementing 'God's Law' the black patriarchy fails to make the connections between the rape of black women and the economic devastation of the rural areas that causes women like Jezile to be exposed to such acts of violence by white men. In order to sustain the rural communities, black women have to run the risk of arrest, long working hours, and rape. Black women can be so severely censured by the black patriarchy because within the community there is no acceptable sexual framework other than monogamous marriage for black women. Black rural men like Nomawa's husband, who abandons her to start an urban family, have free rein sexually when they are in the cities; rural women have no such sexual latitude (unless in their fantasies). *And They Didn't Die* reveals how, because of patriarchal hegemony, black women's gender construction has come to include the repression of their sexuality while tacitly condoning the existence of sexual double standards for men. Jezile's daughters are taken away from her, because they are considered the

property of the in-laws - the Majolas: 'the Majolas are here. They've come for their children' (226). The law of the black men ensures that women who 'transgress' are punished. Again the ironic fact is, that Jezile was raped and did not have an affair. Sandra Harding, in *Feminism/Postmodernism* argues that: 'Feminist epistemologies are embattled. They struggle to create space for feminist voices within worlds - academic, intellectual, social, economic, state policy, judicial practice, health care - that continually try to squeeze them out, isolate them, and co-opt them' (90). *And They Didn't Die* disrupts those silences within a historical period. Political agency is only possible within the community setting. No place is ever wholly undivided, devoid of any ideological constraints, and Jezile's community is like that too. But it is a place where black women can meet, discuss topics of interest, and gain a sense of solidarity and camaraderie from one another. Another strong woman character in the novel is Doctor Nosizwe Morena. It is through her that the prayer meetings form part of the political agenda of the community. It is here that she links the women with other women throughout the country. Jezile is in a sense taken under her wing. The Thursday afternoon meetings provide a forum for political matters, rather than religious ones. Ngcobo argues that when the women meet on Thursdays to discuss issues, 'one must remember that they were slightly removed from tradition It was in the church sphere, and it was strongly affected by the absence of men.' (Assink, 66). She goes on to say that without these constraints the women were not necessarily free to say and do what they wanted. As I have mentioned before, the women often had views that conflicted with traditional views. Women like MaBiyela restricted these women, because they were in a sense standing in on behalf of the absent men. The meetings are also important in the bridging of the generation gap between the women. The meetings held the view that the 'young daughter-in-laws had as much right as mother-in-laws' (167). Within the village the women's meetings constitute an important communal site for resistance, and political groupings that are able to achieve a sense of solidarity and the consensus of agreement. Donna Harraway, who has been involved in the debate about how women can achieve 'unity' for many years, provides a way at looking at the women of

Sigageni and the way in which they produce their community. Although she is sceptical of the notion of 'essential unity', because 'there is nothing that is female that naturally binds women' (196), she is useful in theorising the Sigageni women's experiences. She has developed a useful concept which she calls "affinity" (196).

Harraway argues that political communities based on "affinity" are founded upon the condition that subjects are "related by choice" so that women of Sigageni for instance would be able to form coalitions through a 'process of crafting' communities that are politically and strategically necessary (196-198). She emphasises that for women a political community is achieved in the face of antagonistic historical forces: 'Gender, race, or class consciousness is an achievement forced upon us by the historical experience of the contradictory social realities of patriarchy, colonialism, racism and capitalism' (197). These disruptive effects render stable political entities unachievable so that the women instead have to "build effective affinities". Because of racial and patriarchal oppression, the women have to negotiate with a number of subject positions, and so Hartaway's theory of affinity is useful in understanding their strategies. The women are often struggling against dual oppression simultaneously, and so the women have to employ "political kinship" in order to support one another. The women are thus capable of wielding their social organisation as an offensive weapon to achieve specific gains - the abolition of passes for black women, the right to a secure a stable family life, the right to unrestricted access to urban areas, and so on. Because as a group they are so insecure, black women have to depend on other black women:

[W]ithout any formal structure, they [black women] had such vast inner resources with which to support each other. From that day she knew she could depend on these women. Whenever they ran short of supplies, they appealed to each other for help; when one was in difficulty, they rallied in her support. They made friends and tended to go out together (148)

Even though they are on the periphery, the women have to maintain the support of their fellow women to ensure the survival of the community. In instances such as Jezile describes, where individual needs become an issue of communal importance, conscious collaboration becomes vital. The social interconnectedness of these women is vital to their own sense of security and the validation of their identity. Ngcobo realises that the women differ in many respects, and affirms the fact that no group is homogeneous. The women of Sigageni are not a coherent group, they are divided by the ideological constraints and the generational lines. By joining together they are able to stand against the white authorities. Ngcobo does not suggest that the communal values held by these women are wholly affirming, as is the case when the women of the village accuse Jezile of having an affair when she goes to Ixopo on her own. What she suggests rather is that there are certain traditional ideologies that these women are bound up in.

Chabani Manganyi, in *Being-Black-in-the-World*, argues that in Africa there has been insufficient documentation of the characteristic primary group structures such as the extended family and kinship systems as well as the secondary group processes involved in communication. At the level of the relationship between the individual and his fellowmen, we recognise a polarity of approaches. The white approach is characterised by the primacy of the individual and individualism, while the black approach is characterised by the primacy of the community. (30) What his analysis draws attention to is the fact that black people are very located within their communities, and that a large part of their identity is a communal identity. The women of Sigageni locate themselves within this kind of communal understanding. They strive to do the best for the community, while often suppressing their own personal desires and needs. While the community enables the women to achieve the sort of political solidarity that enables other gains, such as a feeling of solidarity and political mobility, the community is also destructive and detrimental to the individual, demanding the repression of her personal needs. Jezile is considered worthless because she cannot bear children, she is sent back to

her family when she returns with an illegitimate son, yet her fellow women regard her as a hero in the dipping tank episode. So there is an obvious dichotomy at play in the novel, which merely emphasises the heterogeneity of communities. This is a real dilemma that these women have to deal with.

Chapter 3

In this chapter I take a look at other issues that affect the rural women, and Jezile in particular. And how the women face multiple forms of oppression.

The position of women in Africa, and in particular black women, has for many years been subject to male domination through coercive systems such as traditional patriarchy and the white system of apartheid in South Africa. I use the concept of patriarchy as a general term for the oppression of women. Cindy Courville in her essay entitled 'Re-examining Patriarchy' stresses the "transhistorical" nature of patriarchy as an ideology shaping the construction and reproduction of women's oppression:

The sex-gender roles and sexual division of labour identified in the family structure reflect the patriarchal ideological determinants of the social formation of the family and the state. Women's productive and reproductive capacity made them a social and economic resource which provided men with political leverage. African women were primarily responsible for the economic, social and political reproduction of the household; the bearing of and caring for children; the production, storage and preparation of the food. As well, women had exchange value within the context of marriage, forming alliances between households, clans and nations. (33)

Ngcobo, in her novel, is very aware of the issues that Courville is examining. Although her focus is not entirely identical to the issues that Courville raises, there are a number of similarities. Ngcobo's analysis of gender relations in the novel is an interesting, one. She is quite critical of patriarchal

constraints and yet she tends to underemphasise the roles that the black men themselves play in the demands that are placed on the women. Ngcobo argues that African culture is very different to western culture. She calls for investigation into the way that black women are able to mobilise themselves within their own settings. What she is suggesting is what she calls a 'protracted struggle', that changing the dominant ways of black patriarchy has to come through subtle negotiations. She says: 'Change is a difficult thing, especially when one is bound up in age-old customs. And even on an individual level it is a long process' (Assink, 68).

Ideas of reproduction and motherhood are foregrounded throughout *And They Didn't Die*. Zenzile, for instance, is described in all her frailty as standing 'above her children like a tower of strength; the one who shielded them from great suffering'. (35). Even though the frail Zenzile is incapable of curbing her lecherous husband, unable to provide food for her starving children, she is still a good mother who tries her best to support them. Ngcobo's analysis of reproduction and motherhood as I mentioned earlier is quite subtle. Motherhood is regarded as very important in black culture, and is often one of the main themes in African literature. The suffering of women is often transformed into a story of successful motherhood. There is both a positive evaluation of mothers, as well as a negative stereotyping. Ngcobo addresses issues that are embedded in years of tradition and customs. In my interview with her I asked her how she felt about these traditionally prescribed roles. She replied as follows:

Children were often used to perpetuate society. At the same time I am fully aware of the fact that coping with children, with no support was very difficult, as is the case with Zenzile. Perhaps this was one of the most realistic observations I have made. I had an aunt who did not have children, and she saw her self as worthless. And yet when I looked on the other side and saw mothers with a lot of children, with no means of supporting them, and all the

suffering that went with it, I started querying what real choices these women actually had.

(Assink. 71)

Courville goes on to argue that women, in pre-colonial, and in many instances post-colonial, times were not entitled to land, for instance, due to patriarchal hierarchies, but that they were not helpless victims either (36). Ngcobo suggests through her novel that black women were often politically active, and a vital part of the struggle against apartheid. One need only look at Jezile, who throughout the novel is not only motivated politically, but in her own personal sphere as well. She exerts her own agency throughout the novel, as when she forges a doctor's letter to allow her to travel to Durban. This is merely one of the various ways she embarks upon life outside her rural setting. Because capitalism formed part of apartheid and intervened in the prescribed economic order of rural life, there was a new move from the rural to the urban, and women's traditional work was altered. Urban labour divided the traditional family system, and women in rural areas were now oppressed in other ways. Traditional laws bound women, but from the onset of colonial laws and then apartheid, they had no right to the ownership of land or any real control over what they produced. Again a historical understanding of the land problems needs to be addressed here in order to understand what the struggle was about. Ngcobo discusses the way her own family was bound by traditional ideas:

I found the role of women in society very problematic. Here were great giants that I knew, my grandmother for instance was a very powerful woman, and my mother who overcame so much, and yet I couldn't come to terms with the way they were constrained, the way they were unable to do certain things, their inability to do things because of the way that society prescribes things. I couldn't accept that my grandmother was left out of important decision making. And my mother who did everything while we were growing up, had to look for a

guardian, to represent her, because it was not customary for a woman to stand alone. It was those conflicts in my mind which kept coming up. (Assink, 65)

The Land Act of 1913 ensured that land was set aside for black peasant farmers, so that the government could control where the blacks lived and control influx into the city. The rural people were forced to live in reserves or driven to the city to find new jobs - as farm workers, as mine labourers, and later in badly paid positions in urban industrial, municipal and domestic employment. Rural Africans responded in a number of ways, in a wave of unrest. They refused to work on farmer's lands, and, as was the case with the rural women they emptied the dipping tanks. After widespread resistance to government attempts to assess and then limit the number of reserve cattle, women resisted against the dipping of their cattle. Dipping was particularly unpopular because it was believed to make cattle more susceptible to illness, as a number of stock deaths had occurred. What added insult to injury was the fact that local women had to fill and maintain the dipping tanks: a tiring and for them irrational duty (Lodge, 149)¹. Ngcobo discusses the problem women themselves face:

[T]he South African judicial system exercises laws which are very different for black women, who are not allowed to own any land; thus we see that law is curiously interwoven with tradition. In the traditional system, however, there were some loop-holes, some compensation that would somehow adjust the balance. But since the iron hand of the law has put its rigid control on tradition, the whole situation has become utterly intolerable for the black woman. (Vivan, 103)

At the beginning of *And They Didn't Die*, the reader is made aware of the village women's rebellion, in the emptying of the dipping tanks. The white dipping tank official is livid, and cannot understand

why these women are acting so ungratefully. His outrage is the first of the outrages the women will hear in response to other acts of resistance:

'How could they? How could they?' He heard himself growl ... For the fourth successive week the women of Sigageni had emptied the tank in spite of the threats. 'Senseless. unthinking creatures?' he hissed looking at his feet. 'The government is doing everything for them, and they deliberately wreck it - they accept nothing that is done for their own good, no appreciation, no understanding at all - how can anyone teach them to think!' (1)

The dipping tank official refers to the women as 'unthinking creatures', and this de-humanisation indicates how they were thought of as sub-human, as something totally 'other'. The emptying of the dipping tanks is the first act of rebellion that the rural women of Sigageni embark upon. It is indicative of the fact that they are able to resist apartheid from their own rural setting, and in a sense form part of the larger power struggle. From this point Jezile, and other rural women, form part of the struggle against the dreaded pass books, which will put them in jail for six months.

During this period the State and the Church were used as a means of controlling the black people. Ngcobo questions the church in her novel. Jezile realises that the church itself is responsible for alienating the young women who formed part of the resistance campaigns in the village. She wonders why 'the church judged these young women of the community so harshly' (166), when they tried to find a sense of comfort there. But Ngcobo is not denying the fact that the church also serves as an effective outlet for the women, especially when they meet on Thursdays. Jezile, outside of her community, finds a wonderful sense of comfort through the Zionist movement when she is working in Bloemfontein:

She found a group of Zionist worshippers and joined in their hymns and sang and danced devoutly like the Zionists she had seen in Sabelweni and Durban. She herself was a Methodist. The Zionists sang and prayed loudly and literally commanded God to come down and save them. That was just what she needed - a God who was at her command. (207).

Jezile needs a God whom she can engage with. This is particularly interesting because it emphasises the fact that Jezile is unhappy with the God who is passive; she needs a God who is active, that she herself can control, and who does not reject her because her ideas differ from the traditionally religious and communal norm. She is challenging her own beliefs as a Methodist as well. The Zionist movement offers Jezile an alternative, and this is what Jezile strives for in all aspects of her life. The women of Sigageni themselves find a wonderful sense of solidarity within the confines of the church, but also the church serves as a platform for political agendas. A political discussion that takes place in the church is quickly transformed into a religious ritual when the women hold their meetings in the church: 'One or two were in police uniform, but the rest were in ordinary clothes ... No one knew who they were. Somehow, their purpose seemed foiled, as they stood there, watching people pray to their god ' (49). The women manage to foil the police who are trying to catch them in political discussion. Traditional black society and the apartheid government considered education for women unnecessary, and very few black women had the opportunity to be educated. So the church provided a kind of education where the women of the village could come together and learn from one another slightly removed from their traditional roles. In her novel *Cross of Gold*, Ngcobo is interested in the debate about the Christian God, about the relationship between God and the characters, especially Mandla. Ngcobo discusses the role of God in her first novel:

God is the initial point of reference, but he disappears towards the middle of the book ... My whole education was permeated with the idea of the Christian God, even though I don't believe that my mother was a particularly religious woman. Naturally when we were children, she used to pray to God a great deal, because she had no one else to turn to. This figure of God, so prevalent in the life of the oppressed, is a presence that I find in the literature of all peoples ... When one is utterly helpless, then one inevitably turns to God for help ... The church was a meeting place, a place of social gathering. The Sunday sermon always touched on the social problems of the community. (Vivan, 104)

Ngcobo is critical about the church and God in her second novel as well. But there is the understanding that the church plays a large part in the development of the communal identity, and also plays a major role in politics. She goes on to say that: 'God has to abdicate in favour of politics. Because when we get involved in politics, usually the first victim is God because one thinks: if God has permitted all this, it means that it is their God, not ours (Vivan, 105). The church played a large role in the implementation of apartheid laws as well. Writers such as Ngcobo were at this point trying to break the bonds that had kept them in subordinate positions, and what better way than by using literature as a medium. This struggle was not a new one, but its ideological implications were now becoming clearer; those who had been bent to the misgivings and contradictory position of the church, were now beginning to see the church's true worth. Ngcobo, although she responds positively to the church in many ways, also realises that the church often had an unseen agenda, especially with regard to apartheid. The church was not simply a sacred institution immune to pressures to conform to the status quo. Lack of political options placed black people in an ideological vacuum and was pernicious to the revolutionary process.' Daryl Balia in his book *Christian Resistance to Apartheid* argues that:

It is the events of suffering, persecution and oppression affecting Blacks in the country which determines the change in political climate and the subsequent necessity for theological reflection. The government almost always uses ecclesial discourses on political issues ... Hence the acceptance or rejection, selective interpretation or propagation, and its expressions, will differ significantly from one social class to another. The discourse will be undertaken in the belief that the Christian gospel provides one with absolute certainties about the scope and limits of Christian involvement in a political struggle. The Church has been the pivotal institution in forming political perceptions. (Balia, 3-5)

Certain churches were involved in implementing apartheid laws. The apartheid regime used the church as a forum for justifying its laws. Balia in his book does draw attention to the positive effects of the church. But he argues: 'If the apartheid system was ever questioned, it did not mean that the churches became overnight champions for black aspirations ...' (Balia, 26). When Jezile is raped she is not understood as a victim of sexual violence by her community, but rather as a woman who has committed adultery. What is also interesting is the fact that the church often reinforced black patriarchal control. When Jezile returns from the city, and goes back to her own family, her children are taken away from her: 'Her uncle spoke through the din, "The Majolas are here. They've come for their children." It was as if God had spoken.' (226) Ngcobo emphasises that Jezile's situation [her excommunication from the church and the community] is due to the fact that she is seen as an adulteress in the eyes of the Lord. And that this is disgraceful to her community. While the church allows the polygamy of men, women are restricted to a monogamous marriage. One could delve deeply into the church and its role in oppression. But what this brief synopsis tries to suggest, is the fact that writers such as Ngcobo were aware of the implications of institutions and their seemingly neutral stand during apartheid.

Courville provides a useful summary of the situation of African women. (I use the term 'African Women' here in a way that is seemingly homogenising, it is not to be taken as such):

[M]any African women were raped into submission, were exploited as labourers, and endured subhuman status as a result of colonial European and African patriarchal oppression and capitalist exploitation ... The exploitation and oppression experienced by African women was shaped by the coexistence of dual political systems, dual patriarchal systems and dual modes of production. (39-40)

Courville's analysis suggests that black women were not only exploited by the white patriarchy, but by the black patriarchy as well, therefore by 'dual patriarchies'. Sexual hierarchies have not only been maintained in colonial situations, and that is obvious in all cultures. But one has to regard the fact that black women in South Africa suffered first and foremost under the two patriarchies of apartheid and traditional black patriarchy. (I refer to apartheid as a patriarchy, merely to reinforce the notion that apartheid served to devalue black women, which is similar to the coercive ways that traditional black patriarchy devalued women). One can not assume that before colonialism men and women were equal. That would be an idealistic position, and would jeopardise a full understanding of how the black women suffered under both white apartheid and black tradition. Ngcobo stated that black women not only had to endure 'oppression by the whites', but also had to endure the oppression at the hands of their oppressed men. Ngcobo goes on to say that:

We find ourselves on an even lower level than our husbands. A woman is not only black, but at the same time must also submit to her husband, who, being oppressed, will find it necessary to oppress his woman. Tradition reinforces this, and elevates man above woman.

In our tradition we find customs against which resistance is vain, especially if one is an isolated individual or part of a restricted group. (Vivan, 102)

Ngcobo is well aware of the women's position within the black patriarchal setting. On the one hand the women are politically active, on the other they run the household, care for the elderly and the children, and generally ensure that the village runs smoothly when the men are away in the cities. But what Ngcobo draws attention to is the fact that when the men return, the women have to take a back-seat, because according to traditional customs women are not allowed to form part of the decision-making panel in the village:

Being Christmas time, there were a lot more men of Sigageni back home for their annual leave too. She [Jezile] knew vaguely that a meeting was called one Sunday afternoon to discuss the points that had been raised at the dipping tank a few months earlier. It was a men's meeting that no women attended. It was like that at Sigageni. When the men were there, they attended their own meetings to which they did not invite the women. They did not have to say it; it was simply understood that a men's meeting was a men's meeting. In the course of time, women would come to make their own decisions. But for the moment it was the men who decided. (76)

What is extremely interesting is the second last sentence. In my interview with her, Ngcobo argues that change can only take place slowly, and that for black women to achieve any real position in society they have to do this from within the existing system. Ngcobo emphasises the fact that it is very difficult to change age-old customs, especially when one is bound up within them, with no real way of coming up against it. Just as Zenzile is unable to leave Mthebe, because she relies on the

pittance he sends her from the city, so Jezile in her own way is unable to break away from her authoritarian mother-in-law, and her poverty-stricken village. Ngcobo argues that:

There is room for change. It is the kind of change that is going to come from acceptance. If men recognise that women are just as bright as they are, then change will eventually come ... I think things will change slowly. Change is a difficult thing, especially when one is bound up in age-old customs. And even on an individual level it is a long process. One has to look at an African model of identity, because we are so bound by western ideas. Identifying the problems and possible solutions facing black women will come by using patterns of behaviour, which are typically African. (Assink, 68)

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, in *African Women*, argues that African women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of the interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Her (the African woman's) own reactions to objective problems are therefore often self-defeating and self-crippling (124). From an early age communal value systems differ for girls and boys. Girls learn during initiation rites that their futures are determined by, as Schipper calls it in *Unheard Words*, 'exogamy and exchange arrangements' (56). Men remain in their familiar environment, surrounded by their families. Girls, on the other hand, are married off, ending up in another village with their in-laws. Ngcobo, in an essay entitled 'African Motherhood', describes the situation as follows: 'From an early age girls realise that they are in transit, and they also are aware that they are being prepared for the central role that she will play at her in-laws [where] disillusionment awaits her' (143). The girl has to leave her own family and bear children, who in many cases belong to her husband's family. Her identity is uncertain and she is vulnerable. Girls become tokens of exchange between two villages, as is the case with Jezile:

Throughout her childhood she had been made aware that although she was well loved by her family, her place was with another family - unknown yet, but that she was where she belonged, at her in-laws. She trained hard for the role, learning to do all the chores and to take responsibility for a lot of things. Marriage, complex as it was, was meant to make this possible. The fulfilment of her life depended on a successful marriage and the success of that marriage depended on hard work ... Marriage was not just a relationship between two people, but a relationship between two families. (55)

In this kind of setting, collective communal interests supersede personal interests. Respect is given to anyone entitled to it, on the basis of age, status or gender. Girls are taught to be loyal to the village, to be hard working, good wives and mothers, and, most important, not to question male authority. When Jezile returns with her illegitimate white son, she is seen as having disgraced the community. What happens here is that she is returned to her own family, because she has disgraced her in-laws and their community.

Often respect for tradition has kept black women in subordinate positions, because they are unable to voice their own opinions. South African black culture can draw on a number of other African peoples, such as the Wolof in Senegal, or the Kikuyu in Kenya. In a Kikuyuean story the woman is named 'Mutamia', and this loosely translated means: 'she who keeps everything to herself: she who has no opinion and never answers back, who is seen and never heard' (Schipper, 49)². Jezile, as I discussed earlier, is constantly silenced. But it is in her affirmative negotiations with her surroundings that she fights against her situation, and she unlike the Kikuyuean woman is heard and not just seen. Because some narratives often depict women negatively, the narratives themselves contribute to the social gender construction that explains the control of women in society, and control of women's productive activities and their contributions to the community. The construction

of gender differences hides an ideological power struggle, in which one party benefits from the preservation of existing differences. Ngcobo herself argues that 'the basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman's fertility to the husband's family group' ('African Motherhood', 141). In a number of cultures, a woman is only known as some man's daughter or mother. Her identity is dependent on her father, husband, or son.

Ngcobo argues that 'the basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman's fertility to the husband's family group' ('African Motherhood', 141). In a number of cultures, a woman is only known as some man's daughter or mother. Her identity is dependent on her father, husband, or son. Christine Obbo, in *African Women*, argues that in Uganda, the roles of women have changed and this is more often than not regarded as a threat to tradition. Women are expected to be bearers of tradition, as 'links between past and present' (143). Carol Boyce-Davies in *Ngambika*, discusses gender issues:

... the sex role distinctions common to many African societies supported the notion that western education was a barrier to a woman's role as wife and mother and an impediment to her success in these traditional modes of acquiring status. With few exceptions, girls were kept away from formal and especially higher education. The colonial administrations were therefore willing accomplices because they imported a view of the world in which women were of secondary importance. Clearly, then, European colonialism, as well as traditional attitudes of and to women, combined to exclude African women from the educational processes which prepare one for the craft of writing. (Boyce-Davies, 2)

Right up until recently, African literature and literary criticism has mainly been the province of male authors. What has arisen out of this is the question of whether the construction of the image of

women has not been debilitating. Many stories have shown that women who act independently eventually are reprimanded. Women who behave in an emancipatory way are reproached for losing their femininity, and their African identity. Obbo argues that '[A] frequent criticism is that women who seek more freedom are contaminated with Western feminist ideas' (3). Often the term feminism is avoided by African women because of its negative connotations and effects. There are women who genuinely associate the term only with Western feminism; others avoid using it for strategic reasons, while in practice engaging in feminist strategies. As Boyce-Davies points out:

... although the concept may not enter the daily existence of the average woman, and although much of what she understands as feminism is filtered through a media that is male-dominated and male-oriented, African women recognise the inequities and, especially within the context of struggles for national liberation, are challenging entrenched male dominance.

(10)

Ngcobo is very wary of the Western models. Ngcobo argues that: '[W]e are tempted to interpret the African experience from a western perspective, because of all the literature, and the vocal views from the western mind' (Assink, 68) and that one needs to look at an 'African model of identity, because we are so bound by western ideas' (68). What Ngcobo calls for is a new analysis of the African woman's position. Her emphasis on the authority of experience could do with analysis itself. Here her emphasis on the authority of experience seems to posit a self-knowing subject, while the idea that a culture can only be understood from within, and that western ideas corrupt that understanding is highly problematic. What Ngcobo seems to forget to realise is that she herself had critical distance when she was in exile in England, that allows her to look at her own culture with an analytic eye.

With the power of the western word, and ways of thinking, we have had the problem with people who have been exposed to too many western ideas ... Often [they] do not identify with the Africanness of being African. They will choose certain beads here and there for convenience, but they do not have the genuine need for analysis. The reason people do not know the intricacies of African customs, is because the people who write about them are western-minded themselves. The need for new analysis is being delayed, and the longer it is delayed the more chance there is of African culture being lost. We don't have enough women analysts, who are rooted in the genuine African experience. (Assink, 76)

Stratton in her book *Contemporary African Literature* offers a study of the interracial bond between male authors. Stratton describes this as an 'interracially binding connection of inter-continental male solidarity in a shared ideal of superior active masculinity and female subservience' (39). As I mentioned in the second chapter, there seems to be some kind of understanding between the white and black men. The white dipping tank official aligns himself with black men: he sees the women as not only a threat to white political rules, but sees them as a menace to their own men, to whom they show disrespect by spilling their beers. But that is not the only alignment between the two races. What becomes significant in the novel is the fact that black men often support the white apartheid system, by reinforcing its regulations. Two striking examples of this come from the rural village itself. When Siyalo steals milk for his starving child, he is turned in to the white farmer by a black worker:

'Ufunani lapha? (What do you want here?) he asked him in awkward Zulu. 'Tzinkomo zakho yini kanti lezi? (Are these your own cattle?) Siyalo turned slowly, 'No master. These are your cattle. But you don't need this can of milk as much as I do. My child is dying. She's starving. I came to you for your skimmed milk a while ago; the kind you give to your pigs.

I wanted to buy it from you but your servants said you would not let me.' He would have gone on babbling anything, if only to stop the white man asking any more questions. But Masadubana interrupted. 'So you felt you would take it anyhow, regardless of my wishes? You know that I don't want to sell the milk, but you're stealing it from me.' Siyalo looked past him and he saw a black man standing a distance away. 'Awu, Mfowethu (Oh brother)', Siyalo heard himself shout to the man, who had obviously betrayed him. (143)

Siyalo's words are striking: he cannot believe that a man of his own colour could betray him. Siyalo is imprisoned for ten years because he attempted to steal a tin of milk. Ngcobo draws attention to the trivial nature of apartheid laws, and how a man (or woman) can be imprisoned for something that is not essentially hurting anyone. Another example of white and black collaboration is Chief Siyapi and Counsellor Duma's 'double-dealing' with the government. Siyapi is used by the government to try and implement laws that prescribe how they [the rural farmers] were to sow and plough their land. The government uses Chief Siyapi and Counsellor Duma to reinforce the coercive laws of the apartheid regime. Siyapi is described as anxiously trying to demonstrate 'his authority to both his masters and his subjects' and this is regarded as a 'frontal attack on the community's rights' (170). The rural people of Sigageni not only have to rebel against the white government but against their own Chief:

The people gathered at the meeting place to negotiate with Siyapi. They came from far and wide, men and women and children of all ages, many with young children on their backs. This was to be like no other meeting in the recent past. It had been agreed that everything would be calm and reasoned, reminiscent of the orderly traditional meetings which were always marked by consensus. (172)

The people of the rural district resort back to a traditional way of meeting; they call for a peaceful meeting, where everyone is calm and collected, so they can discuss the issues at hand. The Chief acts against his own people in the name of apartheid, and he is described as the 'white man's stooge'. He aligns himself with the white ideals, and he himself believes (like the white dipping tank official) that these laws are for the good of his people and the community. The community eventually turns from their calm attitude to one of violence and destruction by setting fire to the houses of Siyapi and Duma, which results in their burning to death. From this moment Sabelweni is a war zone. The rural people cannot contend with their own people being traitors, and so the burnings are in a sense, almost a cleansing process for the community. The crowd psyche is an interesting example of the way people identify themselves as a group. For the community, coming together is one of the only ways that they are able to mobilise themselves in an effective, and in this case devastating manner.

Although Laurretta Ngcobo's novel does not explicitly examine the Black Consciousness movement, emerging out of the seventies, Jezile's children do form part of the seventies resistance period. Jezile's second daughter, Ndondo, is a resistance fighter, who is wanted by the government, while S'naye and Lungu are involved in the educational campaigns of the seventies which resulted in the 1976 Sharpeville uprising. The reason why I bring up Black Consciousness, is to demonstrate the way that black men still undermined black women, even though they both fought on the same side against apartheid. Ngcobo's novel emphasises the way that women had a valuable role in the fight against apartheid. Just like the men they fought back in any way they could. And yet women were still disregarded. After the Soweto uprising of 1976, the major emphasis was still on women fighting side by side with their men in the liberation struggle. Yet as Mamphela Ramphele points out in *The Dynamics of Gender*, women suffered from race, class, gender, and national oppression. The Black Consciousness movement had treated women as capable and effective, yet there was still the deep-rooted desire to preserve traditional gender roles (224). Referring to the conflict between race

and gender, Ramphela advocates an integrated approach to racism and sexism in South Africa. What she points out is the fact that people who are themselves oppressed within a racial relationship often take out their frustrations on 'weaker' members of their groups: men oppressing women. Understanding Black Consciousness offers an understanding of where women writers like Lauretta Ngcobo have come from and where they are going. Black Consciousness has been criticised as being exclusively male dominated. In the following definition of Black Consciousness, it is evident that this is an exclusively male-dominated discourse:

- (i) Black Consciousness is an attitude of mind, a way of life.
- (ii) The basic tenet of Black Consciousness is that the *Black man* must reject all value systems that seek to make him a foreigner in the country of his birth and reduce his basic human dignity.
- (iii) The black *man* must build up *his* own value system, see *himself* as self-defined and not defined by others.

(1971 Manifesto; my italics)

From this it is evident that the black female is excluded from the agenda. The role of women was honorary, and limited by the caring, domestic sphere of motherhood. Black Consciousness' basic premise was the understanding of the black man's suffering, while excluding roles of women, other than those of wife and mother. Again this is a very brief synopsis of Black Consciousness, but what it serves to do is identify the way that black patriarchy excludes black women through institutions that are designed to benefit all black people.

Numerous contemporary female authors in South Africa have pointed out the exclusion of women in many spheres of society, from the literary field to the decision-making roles in societies. Cecily

Lockett in *Feminism(s) and South African Writing*, argues that sexism and racism tend to make certain groups transparent. Lockett also draws attention to the problem of white women and their part in gender and racial oppression. She draws attention to the fact that although white women are often oppressed by their own men, and in the 'same' gender-oppressive position as black women, they are still viewed as agents of oppression (Lockett, 1-21). One need look at the role of Mrs Potgieter in *And They Didn't Die*, and her relationship with Jezile, to identify the problems between black and white women. From the time that Jezile enters the white household in Bloemfontein she is treated very badly. Mrs Potgieter refers to her as Annie, because she cannot, or does not want to, pronounce 'Jezile'. What we have here is a typical example of epistemic violence. By not using her real name Mrs Potgieter is relegating Jezile to something totally other:

'Annie Me?' Jezile felt emptied of herself. 'What's wrong with Jezile, I wonder?' she thought to herself. Later that afternoon, Mrs Potgieter told Jezile to call her 'Nonna'. 'Nonna' was the generic name for most Afrikaner women employers; just like 'Annie' was one of several names for female black servants. They were fast erecting barriers to map their relationship. (200)

Mrs Potgieter treats Jezile like an animal. At first Jezile thinks she is so generous to give her meat four times a week, until she finds out that they are the same bones that 'Mrs Potgieter put down on the order as dogs' meat' (200). Jezile is like a prisoner in the house; she is unable to go to certain areas in the house and Mrs Potgieter goes around the house with a bunch of jingling keys. One is reminded here of a bunch of jailer's keys. Her time as a domestic worker in Bloemfontein seems in certain ways harder than her time in jail. At least in jail, she is there because of something she herself feels strongly about: the burning of passes in front of the white authorities. In this setting she has not only 'lost her name, her past, her friends and relatives, her language, her initiative' but most

importantly 'her real self ' (201). Ngcobo sets up an interesting investigation with the portrayal of Mrs Potgieter. She, like Zenzile, is in a sense is bound by six children. But it is the relationship with her husband that is of particular interest at this point:

In the third month she saw a great deal more evidence of the unhappy relationship between the husband and wife. There were frequent rows and once or twice Mrs Potgieter woke up with a black eye. Occasionally Mr Potgieter came in very drunk and created unpleasant scenes. On such occasions Jezile did not know how to react; a night of steaming angry scenes would be followed by frigid mornings. It was a strange relationship she had with the family, marked by intimate knowledge of their quarrels, drunken scenes of humiliation observed across the gulf of formality and rigidity. (202)

Ngcobo suggests that rape and abuse in domestic situations like this was very frequent. The domestic worker was often caught up in the family set-up. If the family had problems she would be a silent victim. Ngcobo identifies the problems that a woman like Jezile has to encounter. Mrs Potgieter and Jezile are both victims of Mr Potgieter's abuse. Mrs Potgieter is abused by her husband, and Jezile is raped by him. In my interview with her I asked Ngcobo to discuss the rape. She responded as follows:

Rape was so frequent in those situations. Many of the women who lived in white homes were very often the victims of the family set-up. If the family was not happy, she was often caught up in it. When rape occurred where was she to go, what was she to do, and how was she to avoid it? These were all questions I battled with, and how in that situation, trapped women like Jezile were. The whole experience was a keyhole into the world of women crossing the barriers into urban society. Women, like their husbands, had to venture, so-to-

Speak, into the white world. Their encounter with that world remains a very complicated one. It was often a very painful experience when they [the rural black women] crossed over into the cities. White cities were never meant for rural black women. (Assink, 71)

Zoë Wicomb, in *To Hear The Variety of Discourses*, argues that more attention needs to be paid to what unites black and white women in their hierarchical relationships with men. She goes on to analyse the patriarchal view of black gender relationships: for the sake of convenience, she argues that these have been established purely on the basis of racial solidarity, and she wonders why this patriarchal mentality cannot be combated (35-56). Ngcobo realised when she arrived in England, that the western woman was often severely oppressed by her husband. Ngcobo offers an interesting analysis of the relationship of white women and black women: 'Her [the white woman's] oppression is different from mine. The most logical thing would be that my oppression would unite with hers, but this is impossible, because I am oppressed by the same white woman, who is lamenting her own oppression' (Vivan, 111). It is difficult for many people in subordinate positions to accept the person who has often helped create their unhappiness. In my interview I asked her whether or not she thought that women like Mrs Potgieter and Jezile could come together on the premise of being women, if women could transcend race, class, sexual preference etc. Her reply was as follows:

Barring conditioning, I don't see the reason that would stop this happening. Essentially women recognise in one another the problems and weaknesses that they are facing in their own situations ... Black women in South Africa have lived with white women for a very long time, and they have seen each other's nakedness ... and weaknesses, because they have lived in such close proximity. They have seen them being told off, ignored, beaten, they have seen this all in the very personal sphere of the home. But often they have failed to see the commonality ... I think there is no longer a reason to pretend that we have such varied

subject positions. Technically our circumstances may differ, but the situations are nonetheless oppressive. (Assink, 69)

Ngcobo is not suggesting that women as a category are homogenous. One need only look at her portrayal of the urban and rural women, and their antagonistic relationship to see that this is so. One of the problems with apartheid is that it homogenised black people. The rural women and the urban women come from very different positions. But once they are arrested they are considered one group: 'The new clothes were baggy and accommodating and had the instant effect of reducing them all to shocking sameness. They wobbled in their shapeless drab mid-calf dresses feeling, not just stripped of their individuality, but debased' (96). Apartheid reduced individuality, and here in jail the women are all dressed the same, and 'shared the same sense of shame' (96). In prison the women are victims of naming, just like Jezile who becomes the victim of Mrs Potgieter's naming. Nosizwe confronts the prison guards when they address the women by other names:

She told the authorities that the women had not recognised any of the names that had been called and therefore had not answered to them ... She insisted that there were no Sarahs or Brendas among them. There was Mapungula Zibandlela and Masiqgobhela Qondeni, and other such names ... it didn't matter if the names were right or wrong, one kaffir maid was no different from another - that was always the attitude - any tag would do for any of them. (97)

Ngcobo's description here is particularly touching. The women can not even retain their names, and when Nosizwe uses their real names, she is standing up with pride against the white authorities. Ngcobo draws attention to the fact that the white authorities have no regard for the women in the prison. They are treated worse than animals, and the prison system 'was a reversal of the flow of life'

(98). Even Nosizwe, who is the pillar of strength in her community, is broken by the manual labour, the constant abuse by the guards, and the rapes: 'the stress and responsibility she had felt in the last few weeks of mobilising the women, and dragging them away from their families; the admission to herself that they had reached the ultimate in abuse, all culminated at this moment' (99). As I have mentioned before, both the rural and urban women come together, and are united in song and in their mutual suffering. That does not change the fact that they different.

Ngcobo realises that there are a number of different levels of oppression, which go from the most 'general and institutionalised to the most personal and direct, in which women intervene almost with brutal, emotional force and openly express their contempt and their intolerance of the other side' (111). She is referring here to the way that some white women were often pitiless in the way that they showed that black women were not like them. Black women suffered oppression from their own colour, their own gender, on top of the other injustices made against them by apartheid. Through their men they felt the weight of the system of law and tradition. Through the white women they felt the humiliation of domestic work (same gender oppression) in many cases. Ngcobo argues that white women often shouted the loudest against apartheid, because they had the least to lose. But as is evident in earlier comments, Ngcobo is aware of the fact that women can stand together, without having to reduce themselves into a homogenous group. She says: 'I think that we black women, when we will have finally won our fight against our black men, we will find that the white woman will have already earned rights for us as well' (Vivan, 112).

Conclusion

Lauretta Ngcobo has come a long way from her first novel, *Cross of Gold*. In relation to the novel, she says that she was unable to write about Sindiswe, without the latter dying on her. In *And They Didn't Die*, Ngcobo is successful in giving Jezile a voice right up until the end of the novel. Jezile does not die on Ngcobo. I have not up until this point discussed the ending of the novel, which is perhaps one the most striking endings to come out of the writing of the experience of a rural woman. Not only is the ending extremely effective in finally letting Jezile 'get even', but it also indicates that people, especially women, can often be pushed just too far. Jezile's daughter, as I have mentioned, is a resistance fighter, and has been in exile for a number of years, because she is wanted in connection with several 'terrorist' bombings. S'naye tells her mother that she has got word that Ndondo is in the vicinity, and wants desperately to see her mother. Ndondo is described as a 'woman of unfathomable experience' (240), and we see that she is merely an extended version of Jezile, who herself in her own day was the equivalent of a 'freedom fighter'. After a stressful waking period, she arrives. Her visit is very brief but extremely intense. Both mother and daughter are overwhelmed to see one another, but Ndondo has to cut her visit short because she realises that she is in danger of being caught by the white soldiers. Jezile leaves with Ndondo, to show her a quick escape route through the mountains. S'naye is left behind. In the few minutes that Jezile is away, a white soldier barges into the hut armed. He demands to know where Ndondo is. S'naye cannot make any noise because if she does she realises that this could endanger her mother and outlawed sister. What happens next is reminiscent of Jezile's rape: 'Jezile walked into the house and there before her eyes was a young man, pale as white paper, locked in a struggle with S'naye. They did not see her. His trousers were down, and in his struggle to subdue S'naye, he shifted his position to one side, revealing a fully tumescent penis' (242). All Jezile can think of is her own struggle with Mr

Potgieter, and 'the memory strung her into action'. What follows is her own victory against her own injustices:

Her eyes landed on the knives on the table that had not been used for the meal that night and in an instant she plunged the sharpest one into the left side of the depraved soldier. He staggered forward and gave one yell as he fell on S'naye, relaxing his grip as he twitched in his final moments. That towering symbol of power lay sprawled and dying on Jezile's floor. S'naye scrambled up not realising fully what had happened. Then she saw the knife in her mother's hand. 'Oh God, I've killed him, I've killed him my child.' ... Look, he's dead. It was bound to happen some time or other; we have to fight back. I couldn't let him do it to you ...' (242).

Jezile sets off across the mountains, and walks all day and night to see Siyalo, whom she hasn't seen for over twenty years. She returns to her old village of Sigageni. When Siyalo sees Jezile he is 'stock-still', and then he smiles: 'Jezile, it's you, isn't it?' What brought you here after all these years?' (243). Jezile feels close to him even after all those years. Jezile does not answer him at first. Siyalo had doubted her twenty years previously when she was raped, and so she needs to take a moment before she says anything. She says: 'Siyalo, this time I want to tell you myself. I must, before it's too late. The last time I waited for you to come and ask me for the truth; you never came. This time I've come to tell you the truth myself.' (244). Jezile tells him what has happened, but Siyalo is powerless and blames his ancestors for deserting him. Jezile tells him that she had to do it. She is not telling him because she feels she needs help, but rather out of a decision she should have made long ago, to tell him about her rape; to clear her name, and any rumours of infidelity. Jezile's last words of the book sum up her feelings: 'I had to kill him. They've destroyed us, Siyalo. They broke our marriage, they broke our life here at Sabelweni, and they've broken all our children's lives

and killed many. He was raping our daughter. I had to defend her. We have to defend ourselves' (245). Although Jezile's situation is seemingly hopeless - that she will probably hang for the murder of the white soldier - she has finally won her own personal battle against white oppression, and black patriarchy and the laws that divided her from Siyalo for so many years. Through this seemingly self-destructive act she is able to survive, to scream out that she 'Didn't Die.' Driver argues that:

[T]he voice of difference is a voice incessantly and constantly at odds with all that would fix it into stasis. The fluctuating positions of the female selves are moments which begin to offer us the difference that slips out of repressiveness of orthodox alignments and takes us into a world beyond the rigid categories passed down to us in different versions of patriarchy. These are voices not usually available to us through the forms of mimetic or polemical literature, which adopts a severe and autocratic eye over reality. Instead they emerge in what has been called 'literariness', where the writer speaks out of an unconscious at odds with the dictates of officialdom ... Perhaps these are the voices which might start to change the South African mind. (253)

I think that Driver sums up the position of women very well. Her analysis is very pertinent to the issues that I have discussed. Although Ngcobo's novel creates consciousnesses rather than giving access to real ones, I believe it is a break-through because it gives access into the dynamics of African society, and how difficult it is to deal with so many oppressive systems at once. She gives a voice to many women who were silent before.

Appendix I

(This interview took place on Thursday 22nd of October 1998, at the I F. P. headquarters in Durban. The purpose of the interview was to develop some kind of understanding of the author's own ideas, and her sense of the situations she describes. Due to time constraints it was difficult to develop her arguments further. It was quite revealing, and alters quite a few notions I had about the novel.)

I have read that *Cross of Gold* foregrounded your inability to write about women. You say that whenever you began to write she [Sindisiwe] would 'die' on you. Why do you think that was?

As I have said before it is still my problem. I am not sure why she died on me, but I think that I tried very hard with the next book to write about women. I realise that at the time there were historical conditionings - women in my experience had always stayed at home, and let men do things. They had worked very hard but it was men who always went out and did things, that was one part of the conditioning. I think another part of it was simply that I had difficulties with coming to terms with the responsibilities that are left to women, particularly in the society in which I grew up. Women were expected to do so much, they were fathers, they were mothers, they were everything, they were pillars of society. The idea that women on the one hand had so much power, and that on the other didn't, worried me. I still think I am trying to come to terms with it. I don't know if it comes from a kind of rejection of society, or out of a kind of acceptance of the fact that you can't analyse yourself.

Do you think that *And They Didn't Die* gives women more of a voice, compared to *Cross of Gold*?

Certainly it was a very conscious decision. I was confronting the women that I knew, that brought me up. *With Cross of Gold*, I found the role of women in society very problematic. Here were great giants that I knew, my grandmother for instance was a very powerful woman, and my mother who overcame so much, and yet I couldn't come to terms with the way they were constrained, the way they were unable to do certain things, their inability to do things because of the way that society prescribes things. I couldn't accept that my grandmother was left out of important decision making. And my mother who did everything while we were growing up, had to look for a male guardian, to represent her, because it was not customary for a woman to stand alone. It was those conflicts in my mind which kept coming up

In an interview with Eva Hunter¹, you discuss one of the problems facing black women: the African man and tradition. In your novel it seems to me you don't address the issue of black patriarchy completely. Was there a reason for this?

That again is because there is a part of me which recognises the power that men have, and questions the fact that the power that men have in relation to women is not warranted. You see our society is not the same as western society. Women in our society are given a great deal of latitude within their own spheres, where they are able to exercise a lot of power, and sometimes this is recognised by men. There are areas where the men do not interfere at all, and there are areas where if they interfere, it is because they recognise the authority that comes from the women. I don't think that has been analysed sufficiently, in contradiction with the western model, i.e. men/women, relationships. It strikes me that sometimes we are tempted to interpret the African experience from

a western perspective, because of all the literature, and the vocal views from the western mind. This creates a different kind of conflict, there are times when I speak of African women's oppression, and of course it was there before. But it seems to me that there is more oppression now with this new sense of freedom; it was easier before, because as women we were so unified in the struggle against oppression. As women we struggled alongside the men for freedom. As I grow older I am so sorry that there is so little analysis of the real issues on the African side of things, which often sets up conflict with western views.

Jezile is obviously a very strong character, who in many ways is very empowered. She is politically mobilised, and yet bound by custom. With regards to traditional patriarchy do you think that there was scope (or is scope) within that kind of women's group² to empower themselves against traditional patriarchy? Or was it a case of what was first on the reform agenda?

Again we are getting to an area where there is confusion because of the apartheid situation, where women are all by themselves, and have to interpret the situation, in this case, from a rural perspective. When the women in the novel met on Thursdays to discuss issues, one must remember that they were slightly removed from tradition. It was in the church sphere, and it was strongly affected by the absence of men who were away because of migratory labour. But it would be a lie to say that without those constraints these women would have been free to say and do what they wanted to. There are traditional constraints within these groups as well, and in my opinion they are even more pronounced now.

Jezile seems to me, throughout the novel, to be constantly negotiating between a rural/communal identity and an individual identity. Could you comment on this?

It is the power which women flex, in their private lives, which is so strong. It would come as quite a surprise to many people to know how strong women are in their own households, how much they influence their husbands. I refer now and again to how powerful Jezile is in relation to the men around her, and yet at the same time how she is constrained. The way African women cope with this dichotomy is by holding these great ideas, and then channelling them through their husbands, or their fathers. In the novel I refer to the men holding meetings on their own, without any participation on the women's part. Very few of those meetings would end up with a complete decision. Most of the men would consult with their wives afterwards, and then would return with altered or confirmed views, thanks to the contribution of the women. It is the way that the society operates, through a system of difference. Quite often this difference allows women to channel their ideas through the men. When a girl is going to be married she is encircled by a group of women, who tell her how to operate in marriage. They tell her not to be too clever, of course you must be clever, but recognise him as your channel, because otherwise he loses his dignity, and in turn you lose yours. Always operate through him, sometimes you have big ideas in the home and he comes up with his clumsy ideas and you say "Oh well, I realise that, but if we did it differently," and he changes his mind, and says, "I was thinking about this issue." He won't say I was thinking about what you said, he will say "I think", and you say, "Yes, yes of course you are right."

Is that just from a traditional point of view?

Yes, it was a kind of value system. The wife who showed her husband that she was the brightest, often lost him because he became aggressive, or abusive.

Don't you think that this is exactly what should change?

There is room for change. It is the kind of change that is going to come from acceptance. If men recognise that women are just as bright as they are, then change will eventually come. By the time my own husband died, I had earned (I will call it earned) the privilege to sit down and discuss matters with him, and on a number of occasions he would come to me and ask me what I thought about something or other. I think things will change slowly. Change is a difficult thing, especially when one is bound up in age-old customs. And even on an individual level it is a long process. One has to look at an African model of identity, because we are so bound by western ideas. Identifying the problems and possible solutions facing black women will come by using patterns of behaviour, which are typically African. I know a lot of my fellow women will not agree with me on this one, but I think the slower we tackle it the better it is going to work. We as African women are all at different levels of adjustment. That is not to say that white women are all at the same level, I am not homogenizing any particular group. As fashions and ways of looking at things change, through education, and within communities, things are going to work out. It is no longer such an embarrassment for young black men to accept a wife as a thinker. All that is left now is for them to give her room to exercise her thoughts. A lot has changed from when I was a young girl, and a lot more will change.

You say that Mrs Potgieter and Jezile are in a sense both trapped by Mr Potgieter's abuse. Through this are you suggesting that some kind of solidarity can exist between white and black women? Do you think that women can transcend race, class, sexual preference etc. and come together on the sole premise of being women?

Barring conditioning, I don't see the reason that would stop this happening. Essentially women recognise in one another the problems and weaknesses that they are facing in their own situations. It is, however, the unrecognised areas that are the problem. Black women in South Africa have lived with white women for a very long time, and they have seen each other's nakedness. Black women have seen a lot of weaknesses in white society, because they have lived in such close proximity. They have seen them being told off, ignored, being beaten, they have seen all this in the very personal sphere of the home. But often they have both failed to recognise the commonality. They have tried to preserve a distance; you could call it dignity or racial separateness. Black women have seen a lot of what white women suffer themselves. I think there is no longer a reason to pretend that we have such varied subject positions. Technically our circumstances may differ, but the situations are nonetheless oppressive. I recall the story of one white woman who came through to the kitchen with a blue eye. As her husband was getting into his car to go to work, she turned to her domestic worker, tears running down her cheeks, and said: "Do you know something? There is no difference between that man in a suit and a car, and that other man working and digging in the road." That is to show you that that particular woman got to a point where she could recognise the common problems. The unrecognised problems are racial, and perhaps even above racial is the problem of predisposed conditioning. We have been conditioned into thinking separately. Obviously there are many differences, including class and culture as examples, but I think that women can draw from one another's experiences.

Your character MaBiyela is interesting too. She is obviously an authoritarian figure. Could you discuss her role in the novel?

She is a woman like any other, but she is the creation of our African culture. I don't think I have a clear word for all these shades of differences of behaviour. In the western sense there is a creation

of male power. Men in our society don't want to meddle with women, and we have a big area of operation by ourselves. What these men do is co-opt women who are able to represent male power among the other women in the absence of men. The women that are chosen are usually not sexually active, therefore not a threat. They are elevated and given power to run the whole establishment. This status was necessary when migrant labour occurred, where men were away from home for extended periods of time. Their presence had to be exercised by someone. A co-option occurs, where a woman like MaBiyela guards male authority until a male figure takes over.

How do you feel about the traditional role of women as child-bearers, especially with regard to your rural characters Jezile and Zenzile?

Again, it was the awareness on my part, of the incompleteness in our apartheid society. Children often completed a woman's life. Where there was hardly a home, and husbands were away, children were often the link between the absent husband and the wife back home. Children were often used to perpetuate society. At the same time I am fully aware of the fact that coping with children, with no support was very difficult, as is the case with Zenzile. Perhaps this is one of the most realistic observations I've made. I had an aunt who did not have children, and she saw herself as worthless. And yet when I looked on the other side and saw mothers with a lot of children, with no means of supporting them, and all the suffering that went with it, I started querying what real choices these women actually had. When I was young many husbands and fathers went away, but they were mindful of the home and their family. Children became a bond between husbands and wives. A lot of people criticise African women for wanting many children. In those years children became a way of sustaining their community, and many people don't count the complications of that way of thinking. Because so many of these children were dying, women reproduced as an insurance against the deaths. Children occupied a very crucial, very confused sector of society.

In some instances in your novel it seems to me Jezile wants children to fulfill her own maternal needs, and not for any other reason. But in other instances it seems she is falling into the prescribed societal roles of women.

One must remember that Jezile has been brought up with these notions of womanhood and community identity, I could not create her outside of these ideas. Her internal conflicts are difficult, but I think I used her to suggest that women can want children out of a real need, and not just for the community's sake.

Could you discuss Jezile's rape?

Rape was so frequent in those situations. Many of the women who lived in white homes were very often the victims of the family set-up. If the family was not happy, she was often caught up in it. When rape occurred where was she to go, what was she to do, and how was she to avoid it? These were all questions I battled with, and how in that situation, trapped women like Jezile were. The whole experience was a keyhole into the world of women crossing the barriers into urban society. Women, like their husbands, had to venture, so-to-speak, into the white world. Their encounter with that world remains a very complicated one. It was often a very painful experience when they [the rural black women] crossed over into the cities. White cities were never meant for rural black women.

Your novel is interesting because it foregrounds the rural experience of apartheid, rather than a strictly urban one. What were your reasons for this?

My experiences are rural ones. You write the way you have lived, I write about life as I have known it, and how other relatives who went off into towns had related what was happening there. Town life has always been the 'other'; rural women who went into the cities would relay stories of what it was like, what people and especially the men did there. Sometimes it was quite frightening when the men got mixed up with politics, but at the same time politics stirred the women into furthering their own political resistance.

Could you comment on the pass law struggle, and the beer hall protests³. Were you yourself involved?

No, I was not directly involved. I was in Durban at the time; it was a time when the PAC was moving away from the ANC, and I was involved in other struggles. In the novel I refer to actual events in Ixopo, where many women were arrested and imprisoned for resisting pass laws. My own relatives were involved in the struggle, and at the same time other counterparts were involved in Durban. The beer hall protests were not really engineered by a particular party; it was women simply getting to a point where they felt they had to do something assertive

Could you comment on the title of the novel - *And They Didn't Die*?

There was a lot of dying during this period, a lot of wasting away. I don't know if I thought that deeply about the title. It was wonderful to know that people were triumphing. Remember I was giving the title of this novel at the end of 1988, and we could see where we were going by that time, and that we had survived! I was beginning to think it was actually possible for me to die in South Africa, after being in exile for over thirty years. It was a kind of celebration that we had survived the terrible years. It can also be argued that at that time many people were still dying in South Africa.

But being in exile, I was looking at it from the point of view of all women I had been with in the struggle, and the fact we were weren't going to die out. I remember looking at parallels with the Aborigines and the Red Indians, who had diminished; black South Africans were not dying out. It is not something that I thought about as clearly as I say it now, but it was a recognition of the survival of the black South African people.

Being back in South Africa where a lot has changed, and a lot still needs to change, what do you see lying ahead for South Africans? What would you like to see change with regards to women, especially black women in the future?

Painfully enough I recognise the need for a protracted struggle - getting women to a point of freedom, to think freely. I know that there are a lot of policies forcing women to think in certain ways, and these themselves can cause complications. I think that genuine change has to come from the women themselves. Taking all kinds of models into consideration complicates the picture, and it is real freedom which is often not achieved. You go into exile and you think when I get home surely things must have changed. But when you get home you find that in fact things are still the same, nothing has been really been altered. Men in South Africa, not just black men, have to stop thinking separately. In the past I just thought of black men, but when I returned I had a lot more access into white thinking, a lot more access into Indian thinking - especially the oppression of their women. I found that our own culture had a lot of loopholes, where people could achieve mobility. For instance it is said that black women cannot inherit anything, and then suddenly when you are confronted with issues of property and inheritance this view is altered. My own grandmother had so many cattle, more than my grandfather did. How could this be? An example: when a girl gets married she is regarded as nothing by her in-laws, and because in our custom she won't be able to eat the meat, or drink the milk from the in-laws' cows, the girl is given two or three of her own cattle. If

there is any custom that has been totally misunderstood it is the custom of Lobola. Everyone assumes that the bride is bought, yet on the day of her wedding she arrives with her own cattle, the cattle reproduce and so forth. My grandmother had so many cattle that she was able to give them as presents to all her grandchildren. Some women land up with so many cattle, in other words so much property. What I am trying to draw attention to, is the fact that these issues get excluded in so many writings. To understand and analyse African custom and culture, you have to actually do more than read the main headlines. You have to get into it, find out the exceptions, the loopholes, the allowances, and only then can you fully understand it. Lobola is a very complicated system, and many people dismiss it completely without any understanding. That is what I mean when I say that there are many loopholes in the system, the way things work. You can't say this is the situation, without investigating it first.

How do you see yourself as a woman writer in South Africa?

I am actually feeling very frustrated at the moment because I got roped into politics, which was of course a big part of my early life, but really it is in conflict with my creative self. Politics is rigid, so shaped by solid lines, and it is not my first love. I worry that I will be unable to write when I get out of it. But another problem facing me is that it seems South Africa is not conducive to my writing.

Do you think that is due to the fact that you were in exile for so many years, and that your perspective has changed?⁴

From childhood I had the instinct to write, but I wrote nothing I considered worthwhile. As soon as I got outside of South Africa it just came to me. Now that I am back in South Africa I am so enclosed socially that there is very little room for writing. But even that is not a good enough

reason, because when I was living in England, my children were very young and very demanding, and yet I still wrote. I can't pinpoint what it is about South Africa, but I don't want to tell myself I can't write here. I just haven't felt settled.

Do you miss England?

I do, England had really become a second home. That is not to say I would give up South Africa for England, but I will never be able to stay away altogether. I have been back twice. There are things over there that I associate with normal life, and I think I am still trying to come to terms with the transition. I will always recognise the two places as home.

Do you see *And They Didn't Die* as a feminist novel?

No, not feminist in the classical sense, it is feminist in that it deals with women's issues, which I regard as universal. Feminism, for me, has more to do with solutions.

What about Alice Walker's term 'womanist' ?

I suppose so, that is what someone called it, a universal woman question. I don't know if I would call it that, but I am not against that term. The only difference I think is that feminism has more to do with different ways of tackling the same problem, otherwise the question is universal.

Any Closing Comments?

I am dying for a new analysis of the African situation. With the power of the western word, and ways of thinking over our own ways of thinking, we have had the problem with people who have been exposed to too many western ideas. These people whose words have been listened to, are town people. Often town people no longer identify with the Africanness of the African. They will choose beads here and there for convenience, but they do not have the genuine need for analysis. The reason people do not know the intricacies of many African customs, is because the people who write about them are western-minded themselves, and want to be western-minded. The need for new analysis is being delayed, and the longer it is delayed the more chance there is of African culture being lost. We don't have enough black women analysts, who are rooted in the genuine African experience. I am anxious to get people who are analytical about the African question, and therefore place it squarely alongside other customary, or traditional practices. Once you look at the African experience in its totality, then you are bound to come out with a more objective analysis of African practices. Change is difficult, and has to come from within.

The challenges we still face

■ Every minute a woman is raped in South Africa, and every six days a woman is killed by her husband or boyfriend.

■ Most poor, unemployed and dispossessed people in South Africa are Black women. Over one third of all households in South Africa are headed by women. The level of income in female headed households is half that of the poorest households headed by males.

■ Three quarters of the people in South Africa who cannot read are women. Illiteracy in many rural areas, where women are in the majority, runs as high as 50 per cent of the local population.



■ Over half of the six to eight million people in need of homes are women. They face an even tougher time than men who earn low incomes in getting loans from the private sector, with which to build homes.

■ Traditional law still discriminates against women, even though the Constitution holds more legal power. This is not likely to change in the short term.

■ The average woman in a rural area works 16 hours a day, feeding the family, tilling land and other responsibilities. Fetching water alone takes about two hours in the wet season – one reason the new Water Act is so important for women.

■ Although women hold 25 percent of seats in the National Assembly, they have only 19 per cent of Senate seats, and 17 per cent of those in local government. Although the proportion of women in senior management positions in government has increased from 3 to 10 per cent, there is a long way to go before the civil service can be said to be representative.

■ Most women have no land or property rights.

Notes: Introduction

1. Ngcobo, L. *And They' Didn't Die*. Johannesburg: Skotaville, and London: Virago. All further references, in the following chapters, are to this particular publication, and will be included in the text.
2. From this point I will be using two interviews with Laretta Ngcobo. The one interview is taken from the Nelm Interview series, while the other is taken from the interview I conducted with her. The latter is included under Appendix 1.

Notes: Chapter 1

1. The responsibility for African urban and rural communities was transferred from municipal control to regional administration boards under the Bantu Administration Department (BAD). They controlled influx into cities, the issue and renewal of pass books, and implemented other apartheid laws.
2. Lodge, T. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983. Lodge gives a vivid account of women protestors in the beer hall and the pass law struggles.

3. I use Homi Bhabha's term 'hybridity' here, as is articulated in Farred's essay, taken from Bhabha's essay "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817," in "Race, Writing and Difference", ed. Henry Louis Gates (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 163-184.

Notes: Chapter 2

1. Taken from Lodge's book. He is quoting from Ken Luckhardt and Brenda Wall, *Organise ... or Starve: the history of the South African Congress of Trade Unions*, Lawrence and Wishart, London: 1980, 304.
2. Farred refers to the 'dumping grounds' of South Africa. He is referring to the homelands.

Notes: Chapter 3

1. Again Lodge offers an understanding of the Land Act, and its various implications.
2. The Kikuyuean story comes from *Source of All Evil*, (see references). I thought it would be interesting to look at another culture, and the way they represent women.
3. Although I do not look at oral literature per se, Schipper's analysis is useful in setting up a basic idea, and to isolate some relevant aspects.

Notes: Appendix I

1. Hunter, E and Mackenzie, C. (eds.). *Between The Lines II: Interviews*. National English Literary Museum: Grahamstown, 1993. This interview took place in October 1992.
2. The group which I am referring to is the Methodist Mother's Union. This somewhat conservative women's group was crucial in the development of a consciousness that would guide them in their own rural struggle against apartheid's racially imposed poverty.
3. In 1959 the beer hall protests reached their height. The origins of the anger can be traced back to the beginning of the century when the Natal Legislative Assembly, in order to prevent African women from earning a living in the town by brewing *utshwala*, decided that municipalities should exercise a monopoly on the brewing and selling of beer. Ngcobo investigates the role of rural women in the pass law struggle. Based on actual events, Jezile and other women burn their passes, and finally join women from several districts in drawing up a petition, which they deliver to the Bantu Affairs Department in Ixopo. Here the women are arrested, and later sentenced to a period of six months in gaol in Pietermaritzburg. Lodge records that the protests on which Ngcobo bases these scenes were widespread in the country areas of Natal and that retribution was sharp: "roughly 20,000 women were actively involved and nearly 1,000 were arrested ... [before the] demoralising effects of heavy fines and long prison sentences began to take their toll" (Lodge 1983:150).

4. Laurretta Ngcobo was in exile in England for over thirty years. She worked as a teacher (and later a principal) in various primary schools in London. She returned to South Africa in 1994.

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