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FINDING SOME SPACE: SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS

Carole Boyce Davies

The writings of South African women writers have so far been relegated to the literary [critical] bushes. White male and female writers have for years maintained privilege in literature as they do in life: the literary establishment knows Athol Fugard and Alan Paton for example and has some degree of familiarity with Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing. Within the African literary tradition, South African male writers like Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, Peter Abrahams and Dennis Brutus have visibility. Few have ever heard of Noni Jabavu, Laretta Ngcobu or Miriam Tlali, whose almost completely unexamined works are the subject of this paper.

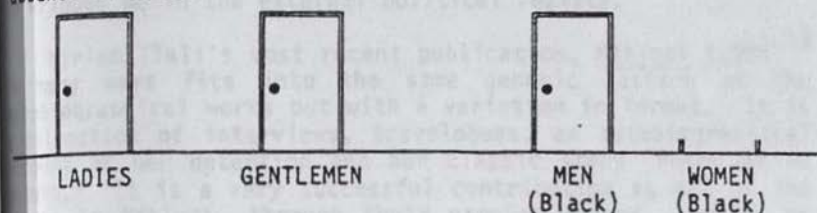
In her autobiographical work Drawn in Color, Noni Jabavu describes a scene which provides the thematic thrust of this paper. After having completed the legal technicalities of her widowed father's marriage to his second wife, the young Noni and her new step-mother decided to go shopping while her father terminated some other business matters, and as she explains:

But before investigating the shops, we found that, after all the excitements of the morning, we badly wanted to relieve ourselves, and the problem was that in Alice there was only one ladies' lavatory and it was 'Europeans Only' although strangely enough there were two for men, non-European as well as a European. So we had to walk to a deserted part of the town close by and squat in the short grass, overseas gloves and all (p.47)!¹

This, by itself, is a crude metaphor with which to begin a literary essay, but there is a level at which it is real, unpleasant perhaps, but nonetheless factual. The fact that the same "toilet" metaphor appears repeatedly in works of many of the women writers studied here suggests its importance in underlining the question of lack of space, literary and otherwise. The South African struggle is, of course, much more than the sharing of toilets. But the metaphor has strong validity here when we consider the question of the allocation of space and the concomitant exclusion, separation and marginalization of African women represented thereby.

Jacques Lacan² employs the toilet symbol to underscore his reformulation of the theory of sexual difference and the anatomical factors which come to figure in the gender question. But the South African situation presents a timely

and valuable reference point for examining how the question of race when added to sexual identity, further marginalizes the African woman. For our purposes then, it is necessary to extend Lacan's symbolic space allocation for it becomes clear that his theoretical conceptions of male and female assume the absence of race:



The obvious conclusions are: first, the albeit problematic possession of the phallus assures the African man some space. Second, the African woman's existence is totally negated.

The application of this theoretical model to the literary world is validated here. Women remain outside of the networks which facilitate the production of literature. Restriction which work against the creativity of South African writers as outlined by Mgyana in his "Problems of a Creative Writer in South Africa" are doubled when applied to women writers. Despite Lewis Nkosi's pessimistic [and dated] summation on the lack of creativity by South African writers, a fairly wide range of male writers are known. Miriam Tlali illustrates the life of drudgery for African women and the fact that she herself has struggled to write while encumbered by heavy domestic chores.

Ja, but you've got to read in order to write, Mthobi. The women are subjected to tedious tasks, confined to the kitchen. You've got to outgrow that. I had to outgrow the tendency to clean, clean, clean all the time. These meagre tasks -- men are not exposed to them. Even your way of thinking as a black woman is confined. As soon as you wake up, you think of the broom.

The obscurity of South African women writers may be additionally explained by their relatively recent appearance in publication and the unavailability of the literature, censorship and the like. But bibliographic works of House and Berrian point to a continuous presence. As with the study of women writers, in general, a major task is just to establish that they exist.

The Works: Breaking the Screen and Detailing the Rigors of Apartheid

South African women writers deal primarily with the oppression of South African apartheid and the dehumanization which it confers on all African people. In this way, they are very much in the tradition of South African writers who define their task as a commitment to revealing the havoc which apartheid wreaks on African people's lives. Bessie Head admits:

Literature is very functional in South Africa and bound inextricably to human suffering; the death of South African literature is that it is almost blinded by pain; people hardly exist beside the pain.

For this reason although she found it impossible to deal with the South African evil in creative terms and from up close, her works cover, in her words, the whole "spectrum of South African preoccupation -- refugeeism, racialism, patterns of evil and the ancient South African historical dialogue."

It may be fair to say, therefore that Jabavu's two works begin the modern period of South African women's writing. In Drawn in Color (1962) and The Ochre People (1963) particularly, we see Noni moving outward from the rural family and safety to the harshness, noise, yet ebullience of life in Johannesburg. The writer journeys across much of the South African landscape and in doing so moves to a deeper awareness of the contours of apartheid and at the same time the resilience, dignity and variegated patterns of the people's lives. Although she approaches the history almost as an outsider looking in, as a dispossessed daughter with an element of nostalgia, she has a strong feeling for the people, the language and cultural variations. A sense of loss permeates the works which combine family/cultural history, autobiography and travelogue formats. We see with Jabavu, through her adult eyes and the reminiscences of her childhood, the destruction of families and the breaking down of cultural systems.

Joyce Sikakane, A Window on Soweto (1977)¹⁰ and Ellen Kuzwayo's recent Call Me Woman (1985)¹¹ utilize the same "autobiographical prerogative" to document history and detail the individual and group experience. Kuzwayo's Call Me Woman follows the same tradition and we experience through the author's life a sense of dignity in the confrontation with apartheid which is not muted in either case. One can infer that the overwhelming viciousness of apartheid on the people allows little space for the individual experience. Butterfield's conclusions on Black Autobiography¹² hold here. He finds that the self of black autobiography is not the

Individual with private career but a "soldier on a long historic march, one whose conscious political identity draws sustenance from the past and who passes on his endurance to the next generations. The autobiographical works of South African women writers fit this model completely. Each work has a distinct political function as each individual life is so wrapped up in the external political reality.

Miriam Tlali's most recent publication, Mihloti (1984)¹³ in many ways fits into the same generic pattern as the autobiographical works but with a variation in format. It is a collection of interviews, travelogues, an autobiographical account of her detention and her classic story "Point of No Return." It is a very successful contribution as all of the pieces in Mihloti, through their varying genres, combine to articulate the ideological approach outlined by Bessie Head, above. The author's prefatory remarks locate the text's purpose. Mihloti means "teardrops" and each piece she writes presents various shades of the pain, grief, strength and struggle that is Black South African life. There are many painful pieces. Her "Detour into Detention," for example, reveals all the pathos connected to Steve Biko's death and the mass arrest and brutal treatment of people who were attempting to journey to the funeral. "Point of No Return" which anchors the collection provides a dialogue on the need for self-sacrifice and commitment to a larger struggle than individual satisfaction. Her first work Muriel at Metropolitan (1979)¹⁴ had detailed the experiences of a South African woman as she works in a store which is portrayed as a microcosm of the South African apartheid system. It is an autobiographical novel and Tlali takes us through Muriel's unwitting collaboration with the dehumanizing system because of her work. Her position as a clerk in this department store places her in the uncomfortable position of being caught between her people and the Jewish owner and staff. Not only is her relationship with them a challenge but she has to participate in a system which exploits. She constantly describes herself as feeling like a traitor but except for a few outbursts, continues throughout her career at Metropolitan to do her job well. Muriel's final decision to leave Metropolitan is not an assertive resolution to abandon the system but is prompted by the fact that she is offered a higher paying job with better conditions elsewhere. She discovers unfortunately that she is not immune from apartheid's machinations as even in the promised new position, the question of the African woman's place recurs. Interestingly the "toilet" metaphor figures prominently at the close of the novel as if to underline her ambiguous position. Earlier in the text and at Metropolitan, the white female co-workers had expressed indignation at her using their toilet facilities and she had been instructed to use one down the

street. Her job at Continental Scooter Repairs is delayed because a special toilet has to be constructed for her.

Amandla (1980),¹⁵ her second novel, describes the activities of Soweto youth in their struggle against the system. We see the resourcefulness of the youth who are now engaging in guerrilla warfare. The burning of an administrative building and the ceremony for the raising of a grandfather's tombstone, provide the forum for ongoing debate and dialogue [largely by men] on the mode of dismantling apartheid. The work provides a vast canvass of characters and activities which seems to mirror the turmoil of South African life.

Obviously the most substantial contribution, Lauretta Ngcobo's novel Cross of Gold (1981)¹⁶ examines the growth from innocence to experience of a young South African man and the consequent dehumanization which the system forces on him. The steps he takes to regain his humanity include his resolve to work for the dismantling of apartheid. Cross of Gold devotes most of its attention to the continuous assault on African men in South Africa. Mandla, her protagonist, grows and matures rapidly to an understanding of the life/death that is set out for him. His mother, Sindiswe, a freedom fighter is, introduced first but the bulk of the novel tells Mandla's story. Sindiswe dies in an attempt to leave South Africa and with her death goes his childhood. His becomes a limbo-like status where he is denied both manhood and childhood and instead suffers physical and emotional anguish. The total absence of any Christian God in this environment of hopelessness is something the author makes definite. Instead there is a vicious cycle of imprisonment, escape, re-imprisonment at the core of the book. Death and life are also central images. The only hope resides in a donation of self to the future.

In all of the works considered here, little space is given to the telling of the individual female story. As we have shown, even the autobiographical works are definitely committed to a larger exploration of apartheid. Even in Muriel at Metropolitan which deals with the life of a woman, her own African female self is quietly tucked away.¹⁷

Locating the African Female Self

The individual African female story is revealed only within the context of the larger thematic emphasis on racial oppression. Yet the way in which race, gender and power intersect is of particular relevance towards understanding the position of the African woman in South Africa. For her experience includes the larger system's oppression of all; the immediate oppression of African women by white women; and

further the sometimes abusive relationships between African men and women.

The relationship between white women and African women then is of pivotal importance in locating the distinct African female self for it identifies the unique way in which, for South African women, racism becomes a more important issue than sexism and further, how the expropriation of African female labor defines these relationships. All of the writers in this study devote some space to the revelation of this important facet of African female experience. Tlali's Muriel at Metropolitan, for example, details the white female co-workers' contempt for Muriel. The discrepancies in the pay scale of white and African women typify the relationship, as do the hostilities which the white women show to them. At the root of the hatred is the white woman's acceptance that the African woman's only role is to serve as maid to her. This appears in this text, for example, when Muriel is asked to serve them tea, an incident which provokes her first major decision to leave Metropolitan. Interviews with African domestic workers titled "They Want to Be Called 'Madam'": in June Goodwin's Cry Amandla¹⁸ describe the tension involved. Jabavu's autobiographies also detail this confrontation at key points in the narrative. One such scene is when she is chased away from a drugstore, by a white woman, during the course of her travels. Importantly, all of the African women are shown walking away from this dehumanization.

Ngcobu's Cross of Gold has a major sequence in which the African woman/white woman conflict is examined through Sindiswe. Sindiswe's awakening, for example, has to do with her rejection of a passive 'girl' status while her people outside are being destroyed:

Until then I had drifted about the work like a shadow, a mere mechanical, impersonal creature, obeying orders with apathetic resignation. From then on they could no longer ignore me for I had suddenly solidified into a real person and by my very presence I formed a climate of opinion in that household. I was no longer prepared to suffer the torment of pretence. How could I avoid being myself; living side by side with my body? I was no longer the same Sindiswe she had known before; I had been tossed in the great upsurge that had rocked the country, and like many other people I was waking up to a new life. And pink people, as usual, were blind to these eloquent changes (p.31).

The African woman's awakening of self directly hinges on her rejection of all forces which stultify her. It is the awakening of a self submerged and obliterated by so many

layers of oppression. Sindiswe's attempt to get at this self, therefore, involves simultaneous tearing away of all of these layers. Sindiswe's development from passive maid to freedom fighter articulates this, although this growth is not the central subject of the text. Freeing of restraining bonds including motherhood are all implicated. For example, Sindiswe's attempt to flee with her sons and to be a protective mother to them leads directly to her death. Her friend Zethu is unable to assume the mothering of the boys. The most she can do is relay Sindiswe's story to Mandla. The grandmother in the rural village is too far removed to fill this maternal gap consistently. This may be read as a demystification of the Mother/Africa symbol and the projection of an individual responsibility motif for the youth.

This idea is pursued in a different direction in Muriel at Metropolitan where part of Muriel's struggle has to do with her desire to be self-sustaining. For example, after she refuses to make tea for the rest of the staff, her husband tells her to resign. Yet she persists in working. One can surmise that her decision is influenced not only by the financial security which she is offered but by desire to maintain a separate career distinct from wifehood and motherhood. We learn from her that once when she had stayed home with her sick child: "I had found the days long and had read when I was not attending to the child. But gradually I kept thinking of my work" (p.88). Ironically, however, the South African racial biases constantly impinge on this desire for self-realization. An aura of suspicion, not about her ability but about whether she was going to contaminate the staff greets her early return to work.

The African woman's ambiguous position is therefore at the crux of Muriel's life at Metropolitan. She describes herself as being "between two fires":

My own people on the one hand and the white staff on the other. I have a lot of trouble with our African customers. One can understand their attitudes and forgive them. They are suspicious of anyone in a position like mine.... The men hate it when I ask to see their passes. They feel they are being subjected to unnecessary scrutiny and they can't stand that from a woman. But what I can't stand is their attitude, I said, indicating the white women seated on the other side. With them there is a deliberate effort to push me out. They are afraid I am here to compete with them and possibly push them out.... If only they could accept that I am just here to do my work and earn my living, all of us would be happier (p.81).

Wilfred Cartey had earlier pointed out how the usage of the impersonal third person "they" conveys the sense of persecution and distance between the two races. But gender is crucial here too. The tension at the center of Muriel's life is that between a self which she defines largely through productive work outside of the home but which at the same time is denied that realization by South African apartheid which puts her in an untenable situation between "them" and her people. Thus her own people also become the "they" who fail to see her. This is the peculiar struggle of the African woman which Muriel at Metropolitan describes and possibly its major strength. It is important, however, to compare Muriel's eventual departure from Metropolitan with that of Daisy, the young African female clerk-typist who had been hired to assume some of Muriel's former tasks while Muriel is promoted. Whereas Muriel tries to prove her own humanity and self-worth and shies away from criticizing Daisy's inhumane working conditions, wanting not to be perceived as an agitator, Daisy, with little or no deliberation, walks away from Metropolitan and finds another position with better conditions. Daisy's actions clearly articulate the impatience of youth with what they perceive as an overbearing slowness of their elders to change the situation and a stronger determination not to tolerate inequities.

The titular emphasis of Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography Call Me Woman (1985) brings into focus the location of the submerged female self within the larger context of struggle. Echoes of Sojourner Truth's "Ain't I A Woman"²⁰ are implied in the title. Her own female identification is locked into the detailing of her version of the South African story. Searching for the female self, though, we find that, at a crucial juncture in her life, this self-definition is linked to her rejection of the unjustness of a bad marriage. Ellen, within the limits of propriety, does not reveal many of the details of her husband's ill-treatment but we know that it was abusive enough to spark a protracted illness, an agonized departure without her children, and a night spent hiding in a cemetery. This particular sequence becomes emblematic of a type of rebirth, as from this point Ellen grapples to reclaim her dignity and continues to move persistently forward to confront the larger hazards of South African society. The self-conscious steps that she takes to regain her confidence as a teacher lead to her becoming a social worker and community activist. Again a female self is linked to the larger group personality.

Unfortunately, in many of the works, there are uniformly weak female images. In Cross of Gold, except for Sindiswe, women are portrayed in stereotyped, limited postures of dependence. Mandla's girlfriend, later his wife, Nozipo, is unable to be a supportive helpmate in the struggle but is

there only to carry the child. She says, "we girls wait, we always wait" (p.252) to describe the passive postures of rural women while their men are away. Like the other women, she is portrayed as lacking initiative, and as helpless. This image of women is, however, in opposition to Sindiswe's spirit, which takes Mandla through his struggles and pushes him to fight to the end, to track Dube who had betrayed her and also to become a freedom fighter for his people. When Dube is finally shot, it is Sindiswe whom he sees as he dies. Sindiswe's early removal from the landscape of the novel in many ways weakens the novel and arrests the positive portrayal of women.

The inability or unimportance of clearly defining the African female self seems to lead to an overpopulating of the work. Tlali's characters in Muriel are the majority of laboring masses, oppressed by the higher purchase system and by a political machinery which condones it. In a sense, her superfluous introduction of the various customers does not allow for sufficient development of the major characters in the text. We get glimpses of Daisy although the entire text is Muriel's story. Yet, we get a retiring view of Muriel who is clearly not heroic but mainly a character who accommodates and eventually walks away. In Amandla too, there is a large canvas of characters against which we try to follow the activities of Pholoso and Felleng, his girlfriend. Felleng, while she has a role, is peripheral to the struggle. But we see the rudiments of some consciousness of woman's role being articulated during one of the discussions.

In "Point of No Return," Tlali's classic short story, we see another image of the waiting woman while the man has already committed himself to a life of struggle. But Mihloti is an advance in the Tlali portrayals of women and this comes not through the fiction but through the placing of specific women in history. Two interviews are placed in the center of the collection, one with a seamstress, the other with Lillian Ngoyi. Ngoyi had, in the 50's, headed the ANC Women's League, fought for all South African people but articulated women's rights also. She had suffered detention during the famous Treason Trials. Ascribing an important place in South African history for Ma Ngoyi, Tlali provides an important counterpoint to the fictional women.

This highlights the specific generational aspects of the South African woman's experience. A dying generation of women of strength is revealed for example in Amandla through the grandmother, now reduced to bedridden status by a stroke. Her daughters are a shallow, hopeless lot. But Pholoso, her grandson who has a life committed to struggle, has her complete support. Her small granddaughter, nicknamed Mummy, assumes responsibilities and service to a degree which far

exceeds her years and contrasts with her aunts' self-destructiveness. A picture is clearly painted of a heroic older and younger generation, with the intervening group of women seeming to be suspended and without the wherewithal to respond courageously.

To further support this argument, Jabavu describes a largely patriarchal society but gives prominence to Big Mother, Aunt Daisy, in Johannesburg. Aunt Daisy who was the most brilliant young woman of her day was denied her dream of becoming a mathematician by the machinations of apartheid. She becomes a successful journalist but marriage removes her from true career success. The image of Big Mother is one of elegance and defiance, "the only woman in a group (of career men)" (p.106). From Big Mother she learns large chunks of family history, especially as it pertains to women. For example, she learns that one of the causes of early death among the women of her family is persistent childbirth coupled with overwork. The point she makes has interesting implications for the discussion on the value of traditional social systems, here polygamy. She had explained: "Christian husbands were not able, like polygamists, to give their wives the proper three years rest from intercourse after the birth of a baby. Women increased the family too often. That is the main reason for your succession of grandmothers. They were worn out" (pp. 255-61). By contrast, Noni and her sister are uninvolved reactors, with no obvious involvement in bringing change.

African male/female relationships did not figure prominently in any of these works. As far as the African woman is concerned, there seems to be a tendency towards the acceptance of an automatic exclusion from engagement in important activities and an assumption of female subservience. This is validated in Cross of Gold. Yet in Tlali's Muriel at Metropolitan, Muriel's husband is a marginal figure. In Amandla, there is a focusing on male experience, and responses to apartheid. Yet in the midst of the turmoil being recorded is a woman, Agnes, working through an abusive relationship with her husband. The husband is described as a basically kind person, yet reduced to a drunken stupor at times. The author suggests that the dehumanization which apartheid creates leads to anti-social behavior in men. But Agnes's final departure from the home, coupled with the students' Christmas campaign to stop the excessive consumption of liquor, combine to produce Joseph's rehabilitation. One outstanding example of sexism detailed occurs in Jabavu's description of her East African visit. Her sister's marriage provides Noni with the means of comparing their attitudes on women's rights: "My sister...was softly feminine, had turned out from childhood more trusting, less self-reliant in temperament...therefore especially precious, especially loved

by them.... Her demeanor fitted into their sense of a woman's place and they thought her natural, her manner preferable. Mine didn't, though God knows I'm no feminist" (pp. 157-158). This obviously explains the sister's acceptance of subjection.

The most vicious and oppressive of African men though are policemen. In Tlali's autobiographical account "Detour into Detention" she describes witnessing an African policeman, penis erect and exposed, attempting to rape a young girl at the back of the van and in the presence of the other detainees. Amandla further pursues the corrupt private lives of the policemen.

The literature reveals that the South African woman's definition of self is, at this point, circumscribed primarily by South African racism.

Developing a Voice

The fact that South African women are writing and finally getting published, suggests that the African female self is beginning to be articulated. That the overwhelming nature of apartheid limits the development of the individual African woman is revealed as a direct reflection of the limiting structures and relationships existing in her society. One can project that with the removal of the oppressive force, there will be enough room for the development of artistic creativity and concomitantly, the exploration of the African self -- female or male. It is significant that these writers are writing now at a historical period when sexism has been identified in a number of spheres and with the benefit of a fairly substantial corpus of feminist/womanist writing and criticism in existence. In particular, the African-American literary tradition, emerging from a similar history, provides models.

Now, overall, one notes in all of these writers several structural weaknesses without which these works would be important artistic achievements. In Tlali, there is an overabundance of conversation, little character development, too much crowding of characters, and an insufficiency of literary images and symbols. Tlali has herself pointed out that the flooding of the work with details and characters fulfills the function of breaking the screen from the eyes of those who would not see apartheid for what it is. These works, as do much of South African literature, have a definite political function, a commitment to the enfranchising and rehabilitating of the South African. So, an aesthetic which works for South Africans and further for South African women still has to be, or perhaps is in the process of being developed. Subsequent analysis may well prove what has been

defined as weakness, using Western critical models, to be aspects of a valid, distinctly female convention. Tlali seems to have much more control in the short story form. "Point of No Return" in Mihloti is tightly drawn and shows a greater mastery of craft. In it we see man and woman grappling with the emotions that go with acceptance of struggle and the foregoing of individual happiness for a larger good. One sees much more from the story than from her novels that Tlali has the potential to be a substantial writer. In this story, for example, certain images like the woman carrying the child recur. This maternal symbol is clearly important to African women writers. But Tlali does make S'bongile conscious of the child's weight (p.130), the "strap cutting painfully into her shoulder muscles" (p.134) as opposed to the enjoyment and ease which is normally conveyed with this image. Also, we see Mojalefa, her husband, feeling "a strong urge to relieve S'bongile of the child, pick him up in his strong arms and kiss him, but he suppressed the desire. It was at times like this that he experienced great conflict" (p.134). The tension inherent in Mojalefa's inability to express his emotions seems partly his fear that emotional engagement would affect his unhindered participation in his anti-apartheid activities. One wonders also if a male inability to bare such emotion is not also being conveyed. In this story, the entrapment motif returns but there is a hope as in Cross of Gold. Another story "Just the Two of Us,"²¹ yet unpublished, is described as an engaging look at the South African situation through the seduction of an African woman on a train by a white ticket collector. The ironies and conflicts of apartheid seem starkly revealed through the selection of characters and details. This is why aesthetically, the collection Mihloti is perhaps her most impressive accomplishment to date. With its portrayal of heroic women, her own autobiographical pieces "Detour into Detention" and the story "The Haunting Melancholy of Klipvoordam" which captures the isolation of Bantustan life and the search for peace amidst the turmoil of apartheid, Mihloti achieves its purpose: the reader gets the necessary journalistic information and both the author's direct experiences and her imaginative mind at full bloom.

Jabavu's two works hardly qualify for the autobiographical designation. Yet one gets the sense that she intended to write autobiography but instead saw family or group history as more important in a system which attempts to deny the Africans their history. The lack of self-revelation and the over-abundance of ethnographical detail make them tedious books to read. Drawn in Color particularly with its air of condescension is difficult reading in parts, except when she is discussing her attempts to pull her sister away from an unhappy marital life in Uganda. Instances of best writing are those which recall experiences while travelling alone and away from family. Her encounters on the train, or

her introspection on the plane looking down at the East African topography are examples. Ellen Kuzwayo's Call Me Woman and Joyce Sikakane's A Window on Soweto are works in the same tradition as Jabavu, committed politically to a presentation of the maintenance of community life in the face of one of the most vicious examples of inhumanity in the world.

Lauretta Ngcobo's Cross of Gold is one of the best South African novels around, and a major contribution. Although Mandla's story is central, there is potentially another story (Sindiswe's) which is arrested. So, much of Sindiswe's story is communicated through the diary which her son reads after her death and which charts her awakening to her part in the struggle. The rest of it involves the difficult task which Toni Morrison masters in Song of Solomon²² of entering the male consciousness and telling his story. Her three generational span does make for some structural weakness which could have been its strength. The abandonment of Sindiswe so early and the fanciful ending are its greatest flaws. Sindiswe's story from the point of her awakening to her death is not told. Also we have to imagine Manqoba's path to becoming a freedom fighter. The epilogue raises more problems than provides solutions and seems too much of an authorial intrusion. Piet Swampoel's (the white soldier Manqoba had saved) revolutionary act seems too contrived. Perhaps, there was an inability then to see any immediate resolution of the South African situation which caused the transference of struggle to the babies and the younger generation, even to white soldiers.

No story is complete until all sides of the story are told. The truth embedded in this kernel of folk wisdom has relevance to the place of women writers in literary analysis. For literary criticism, male and white oriented, has a tendency to take only certain aspects of the story and yet make literary judgments on the entire story. What this does is reduce the one whose story is not told to the level of non-existence or non-personhood. This is why it is so unfortunate that in introducing Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography, Nadine Gordimer describes her as "not a writer,"²³ attempting to negate in one sentence an entire life recorded. Alice Walker's comments on Flannery O'Connor are important here for she was discussing O'Connor within the context of Southern American racism very much akin to South African apartheid and within the context of literary exclusionism. Her discussion of O'Connor's "Everything That Rises Must Converge" centers on a sequence of events which lead to the striking of a white woman by an African woman. According to Walker, O'Connor tells us the story from the point of view of the white woman. But what about the African woman who dealt the blow? What is her story? Commenting on the relevance of the African woman's

story vis-a-vis the white woman's story and all the other stories which make up literature in general, she says:

I believe the truth about any subject only comes when all the sides of the story are put together, and all their different meanings make one new one. Each writer writes the missing parts to the other writer's story. And the whole story is what I'm after.²⁴

The South African woman's story is just beginning to be told and while it may seem that these writers have continued the marginalization of the African woman character, and that they themselves are somewhat marginalized, one can argue that with marginalization comes a particular vantage point. South African writer, Boitumelo, in "Women Writers Speak,"²⁵ amplifies this statement expressing the need for a woman writer to 'create a picture of what a woman is to her society.' A South African woman, she says, cannot simply look on from a distance detaching herself from the society's ills. Instead she has to actively contribute to the analysis of the situation and the solutions which must be taken to remedy it. For the South African woman writer, telling her story is a simultaneous structuring of her own space.

NOTES

¹Nontando Noni Jabavu, Drawn in Color: African Contrasts. (New York, St. Martins Press, 1962).

²Jacqueline Rose, Introduction II to Feminine Sexuality. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), p.42.

³In Aspects of South African Literature, ed. by Christopher Heywood (London, Heinemann/New York, Africana Publishing Co., 1976), pp. 85-98.

⁴"Fiction by Black South Africans: Richard Rive, Bloke Modisane, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma" in Introduction to African Literature, ed. by Ulli Beier (London, Longman, 1967). p.212. Although Nkosi was condemning the inadequacies of South African writers, he was simultaneously by examining their work giving them exposure.

⁵Staffriders Speaking: Miriam Tlali, Siphon Sepamla, Mthobi Mutloatse. Black Writers in South Africa, "Staffrider, 4:3 (November, 1981): p.43. Tlali has another interview in Mineke Schipper, ed. Unheard Words (London, Allison and Busby, 1984): pp. 55-68. In this latter interview she makes some important points about feminism in the

South African context and about women combining domestic chores with militancy.

⁶Amelia House, "Black South African Women Writers in English: A Preliminary Checklist" (Evanston, Northwestern University Program on Women, 1980).

⁷Brenda Berrian, Bibliography of African Women Writers and Journalists (Washington, D. C., Three Continents Press, 1985).

⁸"Social and Political Pressures that Shape Literature in Southern Africa", World Literature Written in English, 18:1 (April, 1979): p. 22. We recognize Bessie Head's substantial contribution and see her as a leading figure in South African women's literature. The decision was taken not to focus on Head in this paper as there is a substantial amount of criticism of Head's works and nothing on the writers of this study. This paper wanted instead to focus on those works which never get critical attention.

⁹Nontando Noni Jabavu, The Ochre People: Scenes from South African Life. (New York, St. Martins Press, 1963).

¹⁰Joyce Sikakane, A Window on Soweto. (London, International Defence and Aid Fund, 1977).

¹¹Ellen Kuzwayo, Call Me Woman. (San Francisco, Spinsters Ink, 1985).

¹²Stephen Butterfield, Black Autobiography in America. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1974): 2-3.

¹³Miriam Tlali, Mihloti. (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 1984).

¹⁴Miriam Tlali, Muriel at Metropolitan. (London, Longman, 1979).

¹⁵Miriam Tlali, Amandla. (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1980).

¹⁶Lauretta Ngcobo, Cross of Gold. (London, Longman, 1981).

¹⁷Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Selves in Hiding," in Women's Autobiography. Essays in Criticism. Ed., by Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980): pp. 112-132, sees this as a pattern in women's autobiographies. For comparison with South African women writers, see Regina Blackburn, "In Search of the Black Female Self: African-

American Women's Autobiographies and Ethnicity", pp. 133-148 of the same text.

¹⁸Interviews in Cry Amandla. South African Women and the Question of Power, ed. by June Goodwin. (New York/London: Africana Publishing Company, 1984), pp. 111-120. See also Leslie Lawson, Working Women. A Portrait of South African Black Women Workers. (South Africa, Sechad Press/Ravan Press, 1985) which portrays the drudgery of South African women's work.

¹⁹Whispers from a Continent, (New York, Random House, 1969), pp. 110-111.

²⁰African American abolitionist and women's rights activist's famous speech in Akron, Ohio, 1852).

²¹Tlali discusses this story in an unpublished interview with Peter Nazareth in Iowa, January 6, 1979.

²²(New York, New American Library, 1977).

²³Preface to Call Me Woman, p. xi. Importantly, however, the foreword is provided by Bessie Head who provides a historical framework to Ms. Kuzwayo's contribution.

²⁴"Beyond the Peacock: The Reconstruction of Flannery O'Connor" in her In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens (San Diego, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), pp. 42-59. Ursula A. Barnett, A Vision of Order. A Study of Black South African Literature In English (1914-1980). (London, Sinclair Brown-Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1983) includes some discussion of some of the writers in this study within her larger topical focus.

²⁵Originally published in Staffrider Magazine, 2:4 (November/December, 1979) Appendix A to the House bibliography, pp. 19-21.