

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE PORTRAYAL OF CHARACTERS IN
A.C.JORDAN'S THE WRATH OF THE ANCESTORS, MODIKWE DIKUBE'S
THE MARABI DANCE AND G.B.SINXO'S UNOJAYITI WAM

by

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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P R E F A C E

The characters encountered in The Wrath of the Ancestors, The Marabi Dance and UNojayiti Wam bear an African identity, and they reflect a purely African conception of life. The "Africanness" of their outlook can only be determined when measured against the real life African socio-cultural background. Therefore, as a starting point in this study, it has been essential to explore the various debates about African literature, in an attempt to reveal any common factors that can be used as the basis for a study of the portrayal of characters in this field.

Critics have made the observation that, though the writers may use the African novel to express an African outlook, it actually represents a form of artistic expression that is exotic to Africa having been borrowed from the west. This is one of the common factors drawn from the debates in Chapter 1.

Coupled to the above common factor is what appears to be the general consensus among critics that African literature draws its unique identity as such from the African cultural background. This, therefore, necessitates new forms of interpretation in the study of character treatment. An understanding of the African cultural values now becomes a basic necessity if one

needs to determine the intention of the novelists in portraying characters in one way or another and whether such intentions are actually fulfilled.

At the same time one should be able to identify the extent to which the novelists have been influenced by the traditional western techniques of novel-writing. Chapter 2 represents an attempt to do this.

In an attempt to reveal the influence of the socio-cultural background on the African novel, the characters in the three novels are studied against their own socio-cultural background as created by the novelists. In this way parallels are drawn between what happens in the real life situation of the African and what transpires in the fictitious world of the characters. Much time is spent in interpreting the actions and behaviour of the characters with the hope that the ideal situations against which the characters are measured will be discernible.

Much attention is also paid to the manner in which oral literature assists in the delineation of characters. Oral genres like songs, praise-poetry and folktales often help us to interpret the situations in which the characters find themselves while they may also give us vivid impressions of the character types as well as the roles they play at each given time.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Introduction

My primary objective is to analyse the manner in which characters are portrayed by the writers I have chosen. By using the chosen works by these writers I intend to explore possible answers to the questions of identity, leadership and the role of women within the South African black society. By South African black society is meant primarily the society as seen through literature. This, however, has a bearing on the real life South African society, though even that is not meant in the strictest scientific sense where, for example, one might expect realistic figures and statistics. The real-life South African society is highly sensitive to matters of identity, and the black segment of the society has an even more complex social structure than many of the other communities, with "urban blacks" being clearly defined and separated from "rural blacks"; with the questionable role of traditional leaders in society constantly generating conflicts between such leaders and their supporters, and ordinary people and their supporters; and with the women of the society having already begun to deviate from the traditions society has always expected them to uphold and fulfill. The complexity of the social

structure of the black communities is a recognised fact, cemented as it is by the Natives' Land Act of 1913. According to Plaatje (1916:21):

The 4 500 000 black South Africans [around 1913] are domiciled as follows: one and three-quarter million in locations and reserves, over half a million within municipalities or in urban areas, and nearly a million as squatters on farms owned by Europeans. The remainder are employed either on the public roads or railway lines, or as servants by European farmers, qualifying, that is, by hard work and saving to start farming on their own account.

It may be added that blacks are the only people who are confined to reserves in addition to locations. Furthermore, the problem has been compounded by the many additions or variations that have been made by the government since 1913.

My objective stems from the feeling that the chosen writers have not only moulded the characters in their works for sheer entertainment, but they also set out to educate society about its structures. To me this is a meaningful study if our real life society is to prepare itself well for a future of tolerance for each other. By my analysis I intend to demonstrate that fiction can actually teach and guide society.

Arguments identifying foreign techniques in the African novel

Since characterization is one of the central features of novel writing, it is imperative to start off by illustrating the attitude of critics in general regarding the influence of the west to the techniques applied in the African novel. The debate regarding theory of African literature promises to be a prolonged one with the scholars contesting viciously amongst themselves for fresh ideas. Nevertheless, most of them agree that what gives this literature its African identity and unique nature is basically the African cultural substrate on which it thrives.

To illustrate the above point it would be appropriate to recall Richard Rive's (Dorsey, 1982:12) remark,

Peter Abrahams described the Johannesburg location in Mine Boy and described his life and mine in Tell Freedom. A new world with which I could identify opened up to me. I now knew that there were others who felt the way I did, and, what was more, articulated it in a way I had never realized possible. I was now able to analyse my own situation through theirs. I could break with my literary dependence on descriptions by White folks and the Ways of White Folks. Native son had come of age.

To Rive it is obvious that not only was he coming of age, but there was also a turning point in the literature itself, which now made it more relevant and more meaningful to him. It appears that before this he had been wrestling with alien concepts of foreign world

literature, a world that made him instinctively "[run] away from the first three infant schools" (Dorsey, 1982:10). Before one can fully appreciate Rive's thrill at his discovery one should look at the form of literature that was probably taught in his time as a school child. Colonial literature introduced foreign values and concepts which had to be accepted as they were. The prescribed literature mostly consisted of excerpts from works by whites staying in and writing about Africa as well as those from European literature. Whenever a passage was on Africa the persuasion would be for the readers to look down upon the Africans and disassociate themselves from those people and their "primitive" if not downright "savage" ways. Mphahlele (Duerden et al, 1972:104) explains the African novelist's predicament more clearly when he says,

Although we have told stories in oral tradition before, for centuries, the novel itself is a new medium to Africa. The novel as an individual occupation, as an individual craft where you require an individual to sit down consciously and compose something in a form which also after all is a bourgeois form, it's a middle-class medium, the novel. Well, then, it is a new thing in Africa. Now, when we adopt the novel as a medium of literary expression, we are writing in a tradition which already exists, that tradition of the novel in the Western world, and we are trying to write about Africa, give an expression to something African through a foreign medium.

Mphahlele's admission that the novel is, in fact, of foreign origin and is new in Africa equally implies that even the techniques used in novel-writing would first have to be learnt and copied from the source material.

The techniques of character treatment, which are in any case quite central in novel-writing, can be expected to have received the attention of our writers. The three works chosen for this treatise cover the conventional techniques such as the adoption of a hero and a villain, the creation of anti-heroes and the application of humour and satire. Nelson's Readers, prescribed in the 1940's in South Africa at some seminary schools, has an opening essay titled, "Early Days" whose last paragraphs are:

Look now at the peoples of Africa. A warm sun helped the growth of the food needed. There was little labour required, and that little was done by the women, who were hardly better than slaves; they were bought with cattle, and were really the property of the men. Thus the men had no need to work hard. They required little clothing for warmth; they did not need to build strong houses to live in; they obtained food without any effort of their own. So they spent their time in hunting, fighting, and sleeping, and each generation was as backward as the one that had gone before it.

There was no progress. They were content, and while this is a good thing when work is well done, it is a bad thing when it is merely an excuse for idleness. Thus you see that while the European was advancing in knowledge, the African was standing still, and was sure to prove the weaker when the two races came in touch with each other. (Spensley, 1942:10)

All the above extract demonstrates is a deliberate effort to demoralize the African at a tender age, thereby preparing him to receive the new instruction. The chances were that when he left school he would be able to organize his life along the western guidelines. While literary works reflecting an African background tended to discourage any identity with African tradition, there was the complementary enthusiasm to draw the "native" school

children towards the assimilation of European taste. If one takes the point further, therefore, there seems no doubt that the product from such learning would automatically refrain from using characters that would upset this kind of thinking when, as graduates from this form of training, they set out to write at least their initial books. One can expect some form of distortion in characterization that might reflect the eagerness on the part of the black writer to please his European master.

Preferences by publishers and educational institutions also imposed limitations upon the writers. As Zotwana¹ points out, things got worse after 1948:

[By 1953] the mission schools ceased to be under the control of the missions. They were now directly under the central government, under the Department of Bantu Education, so that it was from missionary control to government control. But the printing presses (publishing houses) were no longer dominated by the church; but they were private enterprises with directors from the government, [being themselves] white owned. The interests of the government now had to be protected again; so still you couldn't just publish anything which was anti-Church or anti-Government.

In an introduction to an English prose book prescribed for either Std 6 or Native Primary Higher Teachers' Certificate students in the late 1920s and 1930s, the compiler (Longmans, 1926:iii) takes pains to explain, "Part II an effort is made to come closer to the main

¹ "Odyssey through Literature," interview conducted by Leonard Rubenstein, Pennsylvania State University, U.S.A., 1989.

tradition of English prose literature." He then concludes by suggesting,

The concluding third section will, it is hoped, prove an interesting experiment. It consists of what might be called gems of English prose, as regards both thought and expression. The teacher can pick and choose ... those which he thinks will appeal to his pupils, explain each carefully, and then invite the children to commit the passages to memory. What an "everlasting possession" some of them would be!

It will be seen that in Part II there is still a moderate amount of South African material. For the real every care has been taken to select passages likely to appeal to South African children. But, in spite of this limiting principle, it is hoped that the collection (Part II especially) may be found, even by experienced readers, to represent not altogether unworthily the great prose of literature in England. (Longman's, 1926:iv)

It is obvious from these texts that the first European teachers had to introduce literature from their home culture into African schools, and whatever colonial literature was produced, was based on European values and standards. So the first "educated" blacks could only think and talk of the novel in the European sense; and any creative writers could apply their sensitivity basically to the process of developing imitative art, possibly bearing in mind that any "African" thinking or presentation of characters might be easily disapproved of as supporting the "limiting principle" of Africanized thinking.

If the compilers and educators had such inspiration as the above, the brutality of the teaching process in a class situation was severe, especially on the victims who

may have been quite willing to be brutalized. It cannot be hoped that the writers who came out of such schools were given specialised training of any kind. They could not have been prepared to produce positive images and a complimentary characterization of African life. The agony of the spirit of Negritude is one example of the expressions of disillusionment Africans seem to have experienced in the hands of foreign teachers who were intent on forging new westernized specimens out of the school-going Africans. Zotwana quotes a story from one of the School Readers series which has as its hero Hans, the shepherd who refuses to leave his master's sheep to go and show a stranger the way through a forest. For his loyalty to his master he is dully praised and rewarded. Commenting on this, Zotwana² adds:

The thing about these readers is that they were either extracts from the Bible or they were adaptations of Aesop's fables, but they were all geared towards taming the students and the communities into [being] good servants. ...

The point about this is that at this time the white farmers in the Eastern Cape had problems with the farm workers, people who had moved from the rural villages to the farm, who were not used to being employed ...; so they would take up employment in the farms and then walk away to the next farm. So this kind of story teaches that if you take up a job with anybody, stick to that job, don't leave; and if you leave make sure that it's by agreement, make sure that it's only when there's a replacement for you.

Peter Young (Wright, 1973:26) also makes this observation about the earliest African writing in European languages,

² "Odyssey through Literature," interview conducted by Leonard Rubenstein, Pennsylvania State University, U.S.A., 1989.

which, he maintains, "is largely a product of cultural dispossession, or, put the other way, assimilation to European cultures."

In this work I shall attempt to accommodate Cesare Segre's³ hypothesis regarding analysis. Why I suggest an "attempt" to adopt his views is mainly because of the necessary caution regarding the desirable approach to African literature. In the first part of his work Segre concentrates on the universal attributes of literature, and, in the process, he tries to maintain his topic on a fairly abstract level. Regarding the author and the reader, for example, he (Meddemmen, 1988:8) maintains, mainly as a measure of unfolding his hypothesis,

It is difficult, it would seem, to immobilize and define both author and reader. The author does not really interest the reader of the text. Often he is unknown, or information covering him is slight. Hardly ever is what we know what we would like to know. The reader is not a specific person but an abstraction. A recently formulated hypothesis suggests that in narrative texts ... it is possible to individuate well-defined traits which are not those of the historical author but those of the author who reveals himself in the work, an author whose real features have been refined away and whose characteristics are those postulated by the work.

This comment, applied to the works in question, seems to imply that one has to look at how diegesis affects characterization. In UNojayiti Wam the narrator, who is also a character in the story is separate from and

³ John Meddemmen, tr., Introduction to the Analysis of a Literary Text (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

additional to the addresser who represents the writer in the story. In both The Wrath of the Ancestors and The Marabi Dance we experience extradiegetic treatment, whereby the narrator is also the addresser in the story. Even at this level, however, Segre does not go unscathed by the storming arguments on African literature. Dorsey's sweeping remark regarding the application of universal qualities leaves much doubt if works like Segre's remain exonerated from his indictment albeit indirectly related to the latter's work. Dorsey (1982:2) says,

Several a priori tenets have frequently distorted the perception of African literature. It is still occasionally necessary to assail the spurious criterion "universality," which is supposed to invest all literature of serious worth. Universality is a fact more appropriately manifest in those readers whose sensibility can be attuned to the full diapason of human experience.

But mankind is in reality one species, and there should be no alarm when some readers search for common factors in the works of the writers of the world; and, moreover, some writers do prefer to be interpreted in that sense. Segre never really mentions African literature, but it is a fact that his scientific treatment of analysis may enable writers of African literature as well to apply some of the concepts in their interpretation of this literature. For example, he (Meddemmen, 1988:10) maintains that a "narrative competence exists by which the addressee understands, from the addresser's discourse, exactly which gestures and situations are being spoken of by him." Admitting, therefore, the

influence of culture over literature Segre (Meddemmen, 1988:116) suggests:

The codes employed by the addresser, and his motivations as well, derive from the cultural context within which he is inserted, while the addressee will have recourse to the codes at his disposition in order to interpret the text. Behind the problem of interpretation there lies, then, the serious problem of an encounter between the two cultures, the possibility of one culture's understanding (and assimilating) an earlier one. Meaning systems are established inside a culture and constitute an integral part of it ... There is no need, therefore, for us to condemn a reading which confines itself solely to the text; it is sufficient to realise that it is not possible.

The implications of this statement as regards African literature are that while there should be universal features in this literature, the influence of African culture on it is inevitable. For example, for characters to have any credibility they should be seen against the matrix of a socio-cultural background. Already, such observation implies a tussle between the imported image of the European Christian stereotype and the familiar cultural figure, something like the initiator of the solli dance and the sema in Camara Laye's (1959:100-104) The African Child. As already stated the view that culture is the integral part of literature is supported by many critics. Larson (1976:11) even suggests that "culture frequently shapes literary form". Halperin (1974:17) finds some striking universality in the art-culture interplay, and expresses his opinion thus:

The idea that art is mimetic, that it imitates the action of the real world, is after all a premier theory of art from the time of Aristotle to the

middle eighteenth century. The symbiotic relationship between formal realism and mimesis only begins to break down as writers become increasingly interested in mental processes; such interest usually has as a concomitant an artistic form less mimetic than organic.

Despite the fact that the novel is basically diegetic, the introduction of characters into such form brings with it a definite mimetic quality, because characters introduce action and dialogue into the otherwise static picture.

In undertaking the task of producing this work, however, one cannot easily ignore the rage of theorists like Amuta, where he (1989:4) asserts,

The curriculum vitae of an average professor of African literature is likely to be replete with fragments of literal and reductionist readings of texts by varied authors in no particular relationship, essays not held together by any discernible theoretical framework and executed in singularly inelegant prose. These series of amputated reviews and empirical claptrap, mainly sponsored by European- and American-based journals like African Literature Today and Research in African Literatures, constitute the bulk of what has come to be promoted by imperialist media and publishing houses as the mainstream of African literary scholarship. This mass of pedestrian effusions does have a certain value nonetheless. It has become a ready commodity in the hands of profit-hungry publishing houses intent on satiating the rabid appetite of vast armies of certificate conscious students in African and European universities and colleges.

It is clear from the above quotation that many contemporary students of African literature would find themselves pinned against the wall, so to speak, by this work. Since I shall be mainly concerned with characterization, I shall not address the question of the

appropriate theory for African literature that Amuta is concerned with. I shall, however, partly apply a dialectic approach in my study of characterization in the chosen novels in Chapter 3. I am also fated to succumb to Amuta's condemnatory definition of the contemporary African critic as I would not know how to define myself otherwise. Amuta (1989:17-8) claims:

The literary critic is a member of the cultural arm of the neo-colonial intelligentsia which in itself is a product of colonial education. The critic is to be located mainly in the universities and earns a living as a salariat in the neo-colonial economy. In common with counterparts in most of the other disciplines, s/he belongs to something of a parasitic elite. This is not just in the sense that the critical "products" have had tangential practical relevance to the material circumstances of the majority of Africans but in the sense that the critic is like a tick on the body of the cattle of literary activity. ... [this] has more to do with the manner in which critics have practised their calling"

What Amuta says here is true not of literature alone, but also of the way of life in general. Advanced nations have already succeeded in carving a secondary world out of the original and everyone has to live by its fallacious rules. One may wonder how far the definition of a "parasitic" existence should be allowed to go. How much should those who live by observing a human heritage, and regarding it as their own, yield to those who see their heritage in terms of limits and boundaries? These words may be regarded also as a reminder of the state of affairs in African literature's critical arena, at a time when no African critic could say with certainty that a

fundamental theory of African literature has at last been well-defined and is now ready for application.

I feel justified, therefore, to make my own explorations even though my topic may appear conventional, reflecting, as it does, the "mass of pedestrian effusions" that Amuta writes about. It is from such familiar ground level as my title suggests that I intend to make explorations into arguably unexplored terrain in this discourse. I would also like to believe I am in agreement with Amuta's (1989:27) comment that the "African writer's incursion into the embattled arena of literary discourse and criticism" represents the basic attempt to clarify an otherwise obscure "social and philosophical outlook" as well as to "use this outlook as a basis for evaluating the works of his fellow writers." It is my belief further, that they have been sometimes quite misleading in lending what they believed to be true of Africa to the Africans through their works. Under the sub-title, "Leadership: Gender and Generation" in Chapter 3 (p.120) this aspect is discussed in greater depth.

In my treatment of characterization I intend to reveal any transgressions the novelists may have committed, before I then venture onto the battlefield of literary criticism which can only be done at a higher level than this.

A brief definition of the conventional terms I shall be using in this work also forms part of the mechanics of presentation applicable to the work.

Characters

According to Shipley (1960), the term "character" originates from the work of the Greek Theophrastus (d. 278 B.C.). Characters were designed for intellectual interpretation by his students. Shipley (1960:51) defines a character in this sense as "... a series of sketches probably designed to amuse and instruct students of rhetoric." Shipley (1960:51) further explains that, "All the sketches follow the same pattern: a definition of some undesirable social quality, then a description of how a man embodying such a quality will talk and act." Explaining how characters are used in a story or novel, Shipley (1960:51-2) says,

It is generally agreed that in most good stories the events follow logically from the natures of the persons involved. The writer may present his persons in two general ways; (1) directly, telling the reader the person's qualities; (2) through action, showing the person's deeds by which his character may be known. The first method is most frequent for minor figures; for the main figures both are usually employed"4

Scott's (1965:48) definition of characters matches that of Shipley. Since these patterned sketches are also central in the African novel I shall adopt the accepted

⁴ cf Satyo, pp 40-1 of this work.

meaning of characters and possibly differ from some critics in my interpretation regarding their creation and their role. Larson (1972:18) complains about "the African writer's frequent difficulties in writing convincing dialogue." Such comments have given me impetus to explore characterization. Without attempting to furnish an answer for Larson I intend to place the three South African novels against the cultural background which forms the basis of their composition, rather than compare them to the European novel, as Larson seems to do when he (1972:17) remarks:

Perhaps the most striking difference the reader of African fiction immediately notices is the often limited importance of characterization. From a Western point of view, many African novels are almost totally devoid of characterization--especially character introspection and character development.

In discussing characterization, the debate will spread out to encompass the creation of archetypes and stereotypes by these writers. Barnet (1960:8) defines an archetype in general terms as "the original pattern or model from which all other things of the same kind are made" and further concedes that this is a "somewhat broader [view] than its meaning in literary criticism." For further explanation, Barnet (1960:8) refers to Carl G. Jung's theory and says:

Carl G. Jung ... postulates the existence of a "collective unconsciousness" in men's minds, on inheritance in the brain consisting of "countless typical experiences ... of our ancestors." These experiences, such as perception of the perpetual rising and setting (birth and death, one might

say) of the sun, manifest themselves in dreams, myths, and literature.

My use of the term will stress the concept of an ideal or original character, but in the sense more or less of what is reflected in the above quotation. A. F. Scott's (1965:21) simplified definition of this term serves well to throw more light on the literary version that I intend to focus on, as he sees it as "the original pattern from which copies are made; a prototype". He traces it to a Greek origin where it means "pattern" or "model".

According to Scott (1965:277) a stereotype is a "duplicate printing-plate cast from a papier mache' or plastic mould". As used in this treatise, however, this term suggests characters that represent a common perception, whom we do not hesitate to give cliched labels and whose behaviour is quite predictable. The term is also used with reference to characters whose portrayal stimulates our sense of recognition of them as common types within our own realistic society. This process of recognition is often assisted by a "fixed, formalized or standardized (and therefore perhaps false) phrase, idea, belief" (Hornby, 1974:847) that the writer may choose. Explaining this term van der Merwe (1990:95-6) suggests:

'n Stereotiepplaat is 'n metaalplaat wat in die drukkerswese gebruik word. Van die een plaat kan duisende afdrucke gemaak word wat presies met mekaar ooreenstem. Op 'n soortgelyke wyse is 'n stereotiepe sienig een wat 'n groot getal mense gedeel word, sonder enige individuele verskille. 'n Stereotiepe sienig is eenvoudig, simplisties; dit kan moontlik 'n mate van waarheid bevat, maar dit is ongenuanseerd. Stereotiepe sienings is deel

van 'n tradisie wat van geslag tot geslag oorgelewer word; dit word deur die massmedia gehandhaaf en versterk.

(A stereotype is a metal plate used by the printing works. Thousands of identical impressions can be made from only one plate. Similarly a conception of stereotypes is the one that groups people into several types without consideration of any individual differences. The conception of stereotypes is a single-minded process, a simplistic view; it may even enjoy a certain degree of veracity, but even that is not strictly highlighted. Conceptions of stereotypes are part of the tradition that is passed from generation to generation; they are exploited and strengthened by the mass media.)

Whilst material from the works cited above only gives the basic support for my premise, I shall set out to reveal what, according to my observation, are the major factors of characterization in these works. My discussion shall weave the concept of characterization. The introductory explanation of this features in the next sub-heading.

Relevance of this study

A.C. Jordan's The Wrath of the Ancestors (later to be referred to as The Wrath), Modikwe Dikobe's The Marabi Dance (later to be referred to as The Marabi) and G.B. Sinxo's UNojayiti Wam (later to be referred to as UNojayiti), are standard texts which enjoy preference for prescription at schools, colleges and universities. They are generally used by both first and second language speakers in Xhosa and English. One of the reasons for their popularity could be that with an easily accessible

language and simple narrative structures they make it easy even for the beginners in English or Xhosa to follow the stories, whilst at the same time their deep structures can provide much substance for the advanced analyst and the intellectual.

What has not been given much attention, however, is the fact that these works also provide some of the basic examples of the stereotypes of the South African society. For example, Zwelinzima, the leading character in The Wrath, offers the best example of a westernized African operating within an environment dominated by the "illiterate" ochre people. This is a typical representation of the black South African communities of the late nineteenth century and the twentieth century. The Marabi presents washer women, spirit drinkers, and the marabi singers and dancers who are all stereotypes in the eyes of the South African society, especially the white division. These stereotypes represent twentieth century urban blacks. Stereotypes in UNojayiti (see Annexure for translation) represent husband and wife, where the man is dominated by his wife and his whole household affairs are virtually controlled by the woman. The Xhosa idiom is ukutsalwa ngumfazi ngempumlo, which, literally translated, means "the woman has him by the nose." Again this novel reflects a semi-westernized, Christianized black community of the nineteenth and early twentieth century South Africa. A close study of these stereotypes could help me establish a point of departure

in my attempt to reveal and analyse what these writers say about the leadership of their people and the direction future generations are likely to take. Van der Merwe (1990:96) points out how inevitable stereotyping is to a writer by adding:

In die letterkunde is daar meestal 'n reaksie teen hierdie vereenvoudigde sienings; die skrywers verwerp of nuanseer die stereotiepe beskouings van 'n samelewing. Geen skrywer, al lyk sy werk ook hoe rewolusioner, kan egter ooit 'n totale vernuwing bewekstelling nie; die normale is 'n aansluiting by sowel 'n verset teen tradisionele beskouings.

(In literature there is on the whole a negative reaction against this single-minded conception; the writers reject or highlight the concept of stereotype that is the product of co-existence. There is no writer, however revolutionary his work may be, who can as yet summon the genius to invent a totally new quality of work; the normal pattern is to concur with or else to go against the traditional view.)

The common feature in the portrayal of these stereotypes is that they are used by these writers directly or indirectly as effective comments on identity and leadership. Sinxo concerns himself with leadership at its point of origin, within a family setting, while Jordan endeavours to reveal the complications of leadership on an even wider political scale, with chiefs and villagers playing the leading role. Dikobe presents an interesting social set-up, dominated by anti-heroes and would-be leaders operating within an urban environment. What makes this writer's portrayal of leaders in his book so interesting is particularly the fact that he works hard

to tone down the prevailing tragedy in the existence of these characters as he brings out the hidden potentials for a meaningful existence culminating in leadership roles of the otherwise commonplace marabi dancers. Indeed, a more intensified study like the proposed one could give a clearer picture of this form of portrayal and its intended objectives. The above suppositions are only a pointer to the possible interpretation that can be applied to character portrayal by the chosen writers.

Identity is always a crucial factor to the leading characters in the three books and it is closely linked to the role of leadership. The tragedy in Zwelinzima's life in The Wrath is caused mainly by the absence of a common identity between him and his subjects; while in The Marabi Martha fights to establish her true identity as an urban black at the risk of denying herself the cultural heritage of her traditional past and at the expense of forfeiting her parents' blessings. In UNojayiti we watch Koranti's rather futile attempts to gain the desired status of a husband and man-in-charge over the family affairs, a position with which he identifies himself.

Furthermore, the topic I have chosen does not represent an isolated subject, but one in which many writers show interest; and, also, one that has not been adequately explored. Looking at characterization in general would necessitate the narrowing of focus to one writer, but since I am concerned with three works by three different

writers, I shall confine myself to interrelated themes, like the writers' vision of leadership. Many African writers have concerned themselves with leadership in their works, and the contradictions among them are vast. Ngugi wa Thiongo (1965) experiments with the main character in The River Between, one whose balance of ethics is achieved through adopting the positive features from traditional values which he then consolidates with some acceptable Christian principles. Wole Soyinka reveals the nobility of traditional figures in his plays, especially Kongi's Harvest and The Lion and the Jewel. A study of leadership as viewed by leading South African black writers would also be worthwhile, especially when we consider that by virtue of the decision to write fiction, the chosen writers may have achieved a certain degree of objectivity in their judgement as well as in the level of sensitivity to the nuances of social conduct.

In Chapter 4 (pp 166-227), however, I explore the influence of oral literature on characterization in the three works. Furthermore, as can be observed in my choice of writers, my classification of African literature aims at fusing the language barriers between Xhosa and English. I, therefore, intend to suggest thereby that I have no reason to recognize such barriers in tackling my present topic--at least none between Xhosa and English. This, unfortunately, cannot be adequately explained in this dissertation.

C H A P T E R 2

CONVENTIONAL TRENDS IN CHARACTER TREATMENT

Bearing in mind that novel-writing in Africa was first attempted by those who had some form of school background, it would be desirable at this stage to first explore the extent to which the western novel has influenced the writing of the three novels now being discussed. The conventional trends mentioned in the title of this Chapter are, therefore, seen in the light of the western tradition of novel-writing.

The actual implications of the abovementioned arrangements are such that they necessitate a two-fold manner of comparison. On the one hand the portrayal of characters in the three works is measured against the tradition of character development in the western novel. This, however, is done only so far as it demonstrates the influence of the western novel over the African novel. On the other hand the three works are compared with one another. The pattern of the argument is designed around the dominant features in characterization rather than the idiosyncrasies of each of the three writers. For this reason, the arrangement of the novels as they are being discussed is compromised in such a manner that it can be easy to go back and forth among them, so to speak, in a process to tie together common trends. Where certain

characteristics prevail in one novel and are not so dominant in the other two, then the novel concerned is highlighted for that purpose. This is intended to facilitate the fluidity of the trend of discussion. Cross-referencing among the three novels enjoys optimum flexibility in order to enable the collection of the hall-marks of the debate at strategic points in the course of the argument.

Though the narrative part of this Chapter may not contribute directly to the development of the debate it would be ideal to initiate the debate by a brief story-line of each of the novels. Admittedly, this may have no scientific value to the body of the debate itself besides the fact that it helps the reader to anchor firmly on the development of the ensuing arguments. Again no special emphasis is laid on the sequence of arrangement of these three works.

Contrary to the above proposal, a rigid sequence of arrangement in the presentation of these works either in chronological or alphabetical order or according to the language used would only serve to create a truncated argument and, therefore, a formless debate. Consequently, the order in which the story-line of each novel is presented is not according to paradigm.

The story-line: The Wrath of the Ancestors

Briefly, The Wrath is the story of Zwelinzima, the son and heir of Zanemvula, the Chief Supreme of the Mpondomise people of Tsolo. At first, Zwelinzima's parents are unlucky and have no children. Then a medicine woman makes it possible for the chief's wife to conceive and beget a child.

The name of the newly born baby is Zwelinzima and he becomes the cause of great rejoicing among the Mpondomise people. However, while Zwelinzima is still a young boy, he becomes severely ill. His condition deteriorates at such an alarming rate that, suspecting witchcraft, and fearing for his son's life, Zanemvula sends three of his trusted councillors on a secret mission to remove Zwelinzima to Gcinizibele, a relative who lives far away at Sheshegu, for adoption. Gcinizibele takes the weakling boy to the doctors and soon he recovers from the ailment.

In the meantime, Zanemvula dies, and all those councillors who know about the mercy mission to Sheshegu also die, with the exception of one old man. The sole survivor is Ngxabane, who flees Dingindawo's wrath and continues life at a village some distance away from his own people. Dingindawo is the successor to the Mpondomise chieftom. He is Zanemvula's younger brother, a wicked, hypocritical ruler who looks only after his own and his core family's interests.

Realising that he has grown too old already and will soon die, Ngxabane imparts the secret of Zwelinima's existence to Dabula, one of the trusted Mpondomise court councillors. Dabula lets Mphuthumi into the secret. Mphuthumi is a young man who by this time is pursuing his studies towards a Teachers' Certificate at Lovedale. Later in the story, he is destined to advise Zwelinzima to go and take over his rightful position as ruler in Mpondomiseland. Incidentally, Mphuthumi and Zwelinzima are great friends at school. This complicates matters, since Mphuthumi also realises, not without dismay, that he has to regard his friend as his liege, with him as an obedient and loyal subject.

It is in response to this call that Zwelinzima leaves his studies in Fort Hare and prepares to take over his position from his uncle. Some time elapses before this actually materializes. Meanwhile, Mphuthumi, his friend, and Thembeke his beloved, assume duties as teachers at St Cuthbert's. This then accelerates preparations for Zwelinzima's return to Mpondomiseland.

Meanwhile, Mthunzini, Zwelinzima's rival over Thembeke, warns Dingindawo, the reigning chief, about the secret preparations to oust him. At once the latter prepares for battle, and posts troops of men at strategic points to try and block out all possible entrances into Mpondomiseland. His intention at this stage is to

assassinate his nephew and retain the position of chieftainship for himself and his progeny. His plans to forestall Zwelinzima's return are, however, foiled as the latter enters Mpondomiseland by a car driven by a white man.

Sensing the futility of stubborn resistance, Dingindawo switches into a different tactic altogether, namely, pretending to welcome his nephew while he works hard to blight the latter's popularity among the Mpondomise people. He encourages the young chief, who has by now assumed his position of leadership, to marry a commoner, which the chief does much against the will of his people. Worst of all, he marries against his father's dying wish, a deed that bears little significance for him as a Christian, but which sows the seed of disparity between him and his people. The wife of his marriage is Thembeke, his former college girlfriend. Immediately he settles down with his wife, the chief embarks on various schemes denoting progress and development. While on the one hand his wife organizes a child welfare and home improvement society, the husband, on the other hand, founds an association called Iliso Lo Mzi. This association assists him in his administration and in the development of agriculture.

Zwelinzima makes a name for himself in conferences and at the Bhunga, the Central Board for chiefs. The people give him the name of Langaliyakhanya, a name that seems to fit

him well, as he works hard to improve the life of his people. The chief, however, overlooks the importance of some customs and traditions of his people. He advocates the abolishment of goats, stating as his reason that the people are deceived by witchdoctors who demand goats for their outlandish rites. In addition, his wife deliberately flaunts the customs, accompanies her husband to important meetings and treats herself like the proverbial "white lady." This behaviour causes much restlessness among the traditional people. This restlessness culminates in the final rejection of the chief and his wife, when she kills inkwakhwa, the revered snake of the Mpondomise people. Upon advice from Vukuzumbethe, Zwelinzima's cousin, Thembeke is temporarily removed from the presence of her enraged subjects and kept in the custody of her parents.

Clandestinely goaded by Dingindawo, the ochre sector of the Mpondomise people renews its dissatisfaction with the chief's marriage with a fresh complaint that the chief has all along ignored their pleas. He favours the converts, so they say. The chief is then finally persuaded to marry the Bhaca princess in compliance with his father's dying wish. It is a depressed and sorrowful Zwelinzima who witnesses the lobolo beasts being proudly driven towards the land of the Bhaca people one morning. Nobantu, that being the name Thembeke was given by her husband's people, also witnesses this event. Although she has now ultimately returned on her own to the great place

to continue life with her husband, she is a changed person who is also mentally deranged, because of the strain caused her by the nkwakhwa affair.

The death of Nobantu with Zululiyazongoma, Zwelinzima's only child, and his cousin, Vukuzumbethe, by drowning in the River Bedlana weighs Zwelinzima down with more sorrow. Even before arrangements for his second wife to be finally brought home to Mpondomiseland are complete, Zwelinzima commits suicide by drowning himself in a deep pool of the River Bedlana. At this stage a number of incidents have already taken place, marking the social agitation that so besets the land of the Mpondomise people. These include the division between the Mfengu people and the true Mpondomise and the death of Ngubengwe and Jongilanga, two of the most prominent councillors ever to be associated with the Majola dynasty.

The story-line: The Marabi Dance

The Marabi is basically the story of Martha and her stunted growth and development within a neglected segment of the urban community. She matures quickly and soon lets herself into the full complement of the activities of her people. In the process she also learns the true nature of things concerning herself and her people.

Doornfontein is a neglected but jolly township of a still developing Johannesburg of the thirties and forties. The township distinguishes itself with the heterogeneity of its dwellers who originate from the races of South Africa. This, however, excludes the whites, who mainly dwell elsewhere in the city.

The people of Doornfontein are generally poor; and they survive mainly by working for the white people at the latter's homes, businesses and enterprises, as domestic servants labourers and miners. Martha's father works in Tereplasky's Rooiveldt Dairies as a milkman. To try and boost their meagre income, the women illicitly brew homemade liquor in their yards, and invite customers to come and buy. The most successful of these "parties" include the marabi dance parties, like those organized by Ma-Ndlovu. Here the marabi dance becomes the soul of the occasion and the source of inspiration.

Conditions of living in Doornfontein are virtually grim. Families live together in overcrowded yards. Doornfontein has actually become a concentration of slums. Under squalid and unhygienic conditions people struggle for mere survival. Because of the absence of a common background the people of Doornfontein lack a common code of moral conduct and become exposed to acts of social injustice like murder, rape and abuse in general.

Martha is the main character of this novel. She is born and bred in Doornfontein. Although she is born black, she does not have any practical acquaintance with the way of life of country blacks, where Sephai, one of her boyfriends, comes from. Martha is withdrawn from school when she is doing Std 5. She goes out with boys and becomes involved in an affair with George, the pianist at Ma-Ndlovu's marabi dance parties. As replacement for school education, Martha attempts to establish herself as a singer. For this she receives training from Samson. In this she acquires limited success and has to forgo the practice when George forcefully renders her pregnant. On hearing the news of her pregnancy, George flees to Durban to continue his work as a bus company clerk.

Mathloare, Martha's mother, a washer woman by occupation, suffers much distress when her attempts to arrange marriage between her daughter and Sephai, a country fellow, are thwarted by Martha's untimely pregnancy. As a consequence of this and because of many other difficulties facing them, Mathloare dies of heart trouble even before Martha can give birth to her child. July, her father, also suffers much spiritual agony because of Martha's pregnancy and other attendant forms of pressure. He enlists in the army and is posted to Egypt, where under the stress of war, he learns to live with and understand his former master, Tereplasky, with whom he shares the experience of war. Martha is then left alone

with the children at home, faced with the difficulty of bringing up a fatherless child.

When the Doornfontein community is removed to Orlando, Mrs Tereplasky helps Martha to obtain a house at the new township. George returns when his son already attends school and asks for forgiveness from Martha. She forgives him, welcomes him back, and the two of them are married together by Rev. Ndlovu.

The story-line: UNojayiti Wam

UNojayiti is a patchwork of different episodes written, according to the writer's own confession, at different times, though all of them are built around Nojayiti, the chief character. Although those incidents provide a cumulative understanding of the relationship between Nojayiti and her husband, Koranti, they remain in themselves independent of each other.

Koranti recalls how his wife, Nojayiti, once forced him to abandon his drinking habit and to stay at home all day. For a start this arrangement goes on very well, until Koranti attempts to punish a child for losing his money. In defence of her child, Nojayiti accuses him of ill-treating children while he, on his part, is extremely lazy. Thereupon, Koranti pleads with his wife to forgive him and promises to assist with household chores. To

demonstrate commitment to his resolution, he enthusiastically picks up an axe to fetch fire-wood.

When Balafuthi, their youngest child at the time, steals the meat cooked by his father, the latter is immediately accused of the theft by his wife. He is then directly accused of staying at home all day indulging in a habit of cooking which does not benefit him as a man.

Nojayiti is a highly resourceful woman who makes decisions and takes initiatives without much interference from her husband. The husband tries, however, to tame Nojayiti and to reduce her to the level of an inferior role as a mere dependent in the house. This she resists with all her strength of will-power. After Nojayiti has applied severe disciplinary measures upon her husband for his vagabonding, he attempts to retaliate by threatening to beat her up. At this she runs away but the rumour that Koranti has brought home another woman sends her storming back to her house.

Her return to her house is marked by a great fashion fever that seems to catch her. Devoting her energy single-mindedly to her indulgence in fashion she puts the whole family, including her wretched husband on a reckless path of fashion. Once Koranti is overtaken by riotous boys and beaten up because, wearing the fashionable baggy pants called the Oxford Bags, he cannot run for his life.

Nojayiti's relationship with her children always shows indications that she spoils them too much. She is confident that her son, Ngqayimbana, will be more responsible at work than a neighbour's son. It turns out that the neighbour's son does very well, while Ngqayimbana becomes completely lost to his family, to return after many years with no money at all. Nomtyibilizi, is the favourite daughter who makes her mother believe that her performance at the seminary is very good. At the end of one year she comes home to confess that she holds the last position in a class of forty. However, Balafuthi suggests that she tells their mother that she is "Number One" as she comes first if the list is inverted, which they agree to do to save the mother from disappointment. In a different matter, Balafuthi, the last born impresses the family by his devotion to prayer, but they learn one day that he only prays to get the meals under way. Mbokreni, their nephew also enjoys his aunt's favours. After spending fruitless years in Johannesburg he returns home where his aunt insists that her husband slaughter a sheep for him. Thereafter, Mbokreni finds a job in town, but his aunt is not impressed by his purchase of a horse and cart, until he buys a big boar for the family.

Regarding their neighbours and other people Koranti's family is at some stage bothered by their begging habits. To counter this they compose a tune to help them come to

an agreement on each person who comes begging. The whole arrangement collapses when Koranti misinterprets the tune and erroneously refuses their uncle the five pounds he has come to ask for. Nojayiti's quarrel with Maqandeka's mother puts her in the light of a forgiving person, for she later invites her to her home to conclude a truce. She later does the same with Qolwana, a destitute old man who spreads false information about them instead of acknowledging the help they give him when he has no food. Nojayiti and Koranti's tribulations are meant by the writer to continue right beyond the end of the story.

The heroes, anti-heroes and the villains

As already indicated in the first Chapter, the novel does not originate in Africa. Nevertheless, the art of narration has always existed in Africa as well. It is, therefore, not surprising that novel-writing was so easily understood and adopted by African writers. It is imperative to establish at this stage that these three works are basically influenced by the European novel. While Dikobe leans heavily on the realist qualities of novel writing in his book, Jordan and Sinxo, who belong to an earlier breed of fiction writers, reflect an even more direct influence of the European novel in their works. The Wrath and UNojayiti answer more directly to Norton's view of a novel than does Dikobe's The Marabi. Norton (1941:44) says,

The novel is an extended prose fiction. As fiction it is distinguished from history, which deals with facts, and from the essay, which often presents characters ..., but not characters in a complex and complete action. As an extended narrative dealing with many aspects of experience, the novel differs from the short story; and as prose it differs from various types of verse narrative which since the end of the seventh century it has gradually supplanted.

It may be observed at the same time that although The Wrath and The Marabi reflect recognizable historical and geographical features, both works are basically fiction like UNojayiti.

Because these three novelists fundamentally apply western techniques of character treatment, even some of the critics with a western training are tempted to measure these novels against the standards applied to the western novel. It is through such a process that Beuchat (1962:14) concludes that, "Most of these novels are very short and would hardly qualify as works of any literary merit". While the three novels under discussion do not seem to be affected by Beuchat's observation, her ensuing remarks regarding characterization have relevance in this debate when she says, "Characterization in most Bantu novels is poor. It is usually based on a good-evil dichotomy. Most characters are either strong, handsome, intelligent, virtuous, or else are rogues through and through" (1962:16).

It is almost inevitable that these novels should reflect characters that mostly represent good and evil. The books prescribed in early black schools contain many moral stories. The influence of the Christian philosophy was also instrumental in shaping the thinking of many a prospective South African black writer. The following extract from a lesson titled "Fairy 'Kind Thought'" from Chamber's Twentieth Century Readers Book I is an example of the constant persuasion by written literature:

7. 'Look, Polly,' said Fred, 'there are some eggs in this nest. Let us take them home with us!'
8. 'I hope you will not,' said a sweet voice, not far away. 'Who are you?' said Fred, looking round, but not seeing any one.
9. 'I am Fairy "Kind Thought,"' said the voice. 'Do not steal the eggs; think how much the mother-bird loves them.'
10. 'I never thought of that,' said Fred. 'I will not take them.' (1901:8-9)

There is, however, nothing wrong with lessons like the one above being prescribed; but it should be noted that most of these stories were set on western stereotypes and western background which could have led the pupils to believe that these values could only be found in the western social environment and the nearest they could come to Africa would be through the schools and later through the pen of the writers. However, the same comment Beuchat makes should also apply to certain works by western writers like The Prisoner of Zenda and Gulliver's Travels.

Mphahlele (Baker, 1976:15) points out quite aptly:

If our writers were judged by European standards, it was often because we produced replicas of European literature, especially novels (a particularly bourgeois genre that requires a leisured class with money and time at its disposal).

If a sensitive writer set out to create standard characters for his story, he would be bound to look first at the material available around him. The portrayal of the hero and villain in Jordan's The Wrath could be said to be reflecting characterization of the Victorian novel. Jordan's characters fit Foster's (1974:30-1) definition well:

The novelist, unlike many of his colleagues, makes up a number of word-masses roughly describing himself ..., gives them names and sex, assigns them plausible gestures, and perhaps to behave consistently. These word-masses are his characters.

Jordan can, therefore, be said to follow this basic technical pattern of character portrayal. Very much in the manner of a traditional European novel, The Wrath has a hero and a villain. In addition to these two main characters there are other supporting characters. These play a combination of roles from reflecting the thinking of society to displaying examples of egotism in its various forms and modes.

In the manner of a traditional English novel and contrary to Beuchat's thinking as already reflected, the hero must be handsome, charming, attractive, personable, positive, strong and successful in almost everything he does. The

traditional hero is designed basically to appeal to the reading audience, so that the thrill and suspense of the moment of conflict, tension and possibly even near-tragedy or tragedy can become the living intellectual experience of the reader. In all this the reader is more or less expected to fear for the safety of the hero, so that the relief, when the story finally provides it, or the tragedy, is deeply felt by the reader. Thriller writers have mostly observed this pattern.⁵

In The Wrath Zwelinzima represents the traditional hero. He is a royal figure; he is young, handsome and is loved by all girls. Old people and even the Bishop and the Sister admire and serve him well. More than anything, he is a student at Lovedale, which suggests a good upbringing. It should be noted that at the time of Jordan's writing of his original novel, Inggumbo Yeminyanya (1940), Christian upbringing of children and seminary education were the best features of progress and civilized life among the Xhosa people despite the persistent dominance of their customs in their lives. Zwelinzima's first appearance in the story is as a bright-looking and popular student at the highest educational institution known to blacks at the time of the writing of the novel. The novelist cleverly designs the story in such a way that we learn about the hero through the lips and language of his fellow students.

⁵ There are novelists like Jane Austen and her contemporaries who attempted a visible shift from the basic pattern of a morality story.

When he comes to the foreground at the end of Chapter 2, Thembeke, Nomvuyo and Mphuthumi have already prepared the stage, as it were:

At the very time when the two girls were having their confidential talk, there arrived at Beda Hostel, Fort Hare a young student from Sheshegu village, near Alice. He came in the car of his guardian Gcinzibele Majola, who was also his uncle. His name was Zwelinzima Majola. He was a young man of good height, well-separated from the clod. It was obvious that under favourable circumstances he would one day develop into a man of great physical strength and stature. His expression was frank and open, his face dark-brown in complexion and his general bearing indicated a wide-awake man. When in company he liked to talk, but if you should surprise him in a meditative mood you might experience a kind of awe inspired by his "heavy blood", a gravity of countenance which is said to be "characteristic of people of royal blood". (pp 26-7)

One of the most appealing features of the hero also reflected in the above extract is his capability to love and be loved. A traditional hero often has no problem with discovering the true meaning of love. Most fittingly, therefore, Zwelinzima enjoys the "perfect" love of the beautiful girl with a lovely name of Thembeke, suggesting the "faithful one". Indeed the description of him befits that of a noble fellow, worthy of such love. Jordan applies much skill and demonstrates his cleverness in portraying Zwelinzima such that the readers like him and identify with what he stands for. The amount of persuasion the novelist employs befits Satyo's (1981:76) observation regarding direct persuasion on the part of a writer engaged in character portrayal:

...banokutyhilwa ngendlela ethe ngqo: Le ndlela ke ihamba ngolu hlobo: umbhali usuka amchaze ngokwakhe umlinganiswa. Ngolu hlobo ke umbhali akamniki thuba lakuzifunela nakuthatha inxaxheba umfundi ngokuthi asebenzise ingqiqo nengqikelelo yakhe... Le ndlela ke imenza umlinganiswa lowo abe ngucalanye kuba sibona kuphela elo cala silityhilelwayo. Umbhali uye ke ngelinye ixesha ngakumbi apha kwiincwadi zesiXhosa asebenzise eli thuba ekuchazeni izimvo neenkolo zakhe ngokungafihlisiyo. Olu hlobo ke luthandwa kakhulu ngababhali ababhalela ukushiya imfundiso okanye intshumayelo ethile.

(... they may be created by a direct method. Here is how this happens: the writer deprives the reader of any opportunity to participate and investigate by using his own thoughts and imagination ... This method renders the character a flat character because all we witness are the features thus afforded us. Sometimes, and especially in Xhosa literature, the writer finds the opportunity to express his own feelings more overtly. This approach is mostly favoured by those writers who write to give a moral lesson if not to sermonize.)

In a clever fashion Jordan selects an occasion of the arrival of senior Fort Hare students at the Alice railway station, something that for many years has marked the re-opening of this university as well as the awakening of the little town of Alice with the return of the student community that has characterized its life for many decades. While such an occasion is well-known to many school people and has a special appeal to those who learn about it for the first time, the writer twists its commanding features and rearranges the scene around his hero, Zwelinzima. We, therefore, have no option but to look at a scene that has the hero as the central object of praise and admiration, rather than a general excitement that has no nucleus to pivot around:

Zwelinzima was not such a raw "fresher" as the young men from Johannesburg. What with all the Lovedale students having congregated to meet those of Fort Hare, there was quite a commotion at the railway station. Zwelinzima was hailed from all sides. "Major! Major!" cried the Lovedale students. He was a general favourite at Lovedale because he was free and easy with everybody. And besides, he was a great sportsman, particularly noted for his brilliant batting at cricket. ...

A shrill whistle announced the approach of the train..., there was a positive babble as the students shouted greetings to one another. Zwelinzima was delighted to find that most of his former classmates had moved up to Fort Hare with him. And "Major! Major!" sounded from every side. Even the old Fort Hare students were glad to see him, for while still at Lovedale, he had always been their greatest terror at cricket. (p.29)

As the above extract indicates, Zwelinzima virtually steals the show with his popularity. It is impossible for us to view the occasion without acknowledging the presence of Zwelinzima. The nick-name of "Major", the novelist chooses for his main character, is also designed to sound good in the ears, thereby, boosting Zwelinzima's positive image even more. Furthermore, as will be established later on, the name Zwelinzima, which means "life is difficult" has a special role to play later on in the novel. At this early stage the writer concentrates on building Zwelinzima's positive image; and a good-sounding name of no special significance (except for the fantastic glory of a "major" it commands) fits well as a temporary replacement for the more serious name.

In comparison with The Wrath, The Marabi has no character to suit the description of hero. Instead, we find the characters in this novel all operating on a more or less level plain, with no single character standing out above

the others. Martha, and her family, however, receive some measure of attention, but only as leading examples of the Doornfontein experience which Dikobe endeavours to dramatize in his novel. Here all the characters simply fall in to give life to the tragic drama of a severely restrictive existence, a dominating feature of the story whose urgency sends all the characters to a secondary position in the development of the story itself. It is mainly for this that the characters in this novel can basically be said to be stereotypes, especially because they are so predictable.

At her best performance, Martha, like Koranti in UNOjayiti, can be seen in the light of an anti-hero. In defining an anti-hero, A.F. Scott (1965:16) refers to Walter Allen's statement:

The anti-hero is indeed the other face of the hero ... He is consciously, even conscientiously, graceless ... One may speculate whence he derives. The Services, certainly, helped to make him, but George Orwell, Dr Leavis and the Logical Positivists--or, rather, the attitudes these represent--all contributed to his genesis.⁶

Martha's very parentage lends her the graceless disposition of an anti-hero. Her father is a delivery boy, employed as a wage-earner by Tereplasky's Rooiveldt Dairy Company. Her mother is a washer-woman, who fetches

⁶ It would be false to suggest any of the writers under discussion were influenced by either Orwell, Leavis or the Positivists. Instead, and especially in The Marabi, the social set-up has been the main influence to these writers where they create anti-heroes.

washing from the white homes to wash it for a meagre financial reward.

As the spirit of the marabi dance Martha's portrayal again presents the opposite of a traditional hero. About the dance itself the writer says "... Marabi parties run by Ma-Ndlovu ... were very popular but not favoured by respectable people. They knew Marabi as a dance party for persons of a 'low type' and for 'malala-pipe', pipe sleepers, homeless ruffian children" (p.2). In her role, therefore, Martha is closely associated with the 'low type' people the novelist refers to above. At her very best as the inspiration of her audience, where she works herself into a state of harmony with the song that comes from her lips and the piano notes from George's accompaniment, she almost features as the epitome of the marabi dance. Certainly, her audience regards her as such, but the bathos and irony of it all lies in the words of the song being sung in disturbing harmony with the buzz of flies:

Tjeka-Tjeka messie.
 Tjeka-Tjeka sebebe.
 Tjeka ngoanyane,
 Tjeka-Tjeka [ngoana] wa Marabi...
 (p.6)

The term "sebebe", harshly translated as "prostitute", and actually meaning a mere woman of loose habits and everybody's free girl, actually suggests an immoral existence and befits the portrayal of an anti-hero better than that of a hero. Zwelinzima in The Wrath is portrayed

as morally upright. It is decidedly inconceivable to imagine him indulging in any uncomplimentary underhand activity. But, despite her youthfulness and expected innocence, Martha's impersonation of the loose woman in her song is not unexpected to her audience. When, later on in the story, she is forced by George into bed and is consequently impregnated by him, it comes as no surprise both to the other characters and to the readers. She seems destined to wallow in endless misfortune and perpetual disgrace. Instead, her short-lived success in the singing career elsewhere in the story stands out as an exception in her life's experience.

Sinxo's intradiegetic story presents a typical example of an anti-hero. Here the characters are presented as they are or should be, to be judged by the readers very much in the manner commented on by Satyo (1981:76) when he says,

Kolu hlobo ke umlinganiswa uyazivelela okanye uyazivelisa ngokwakhe. Umbhali into ayenzayo kukubeka egcakini okanye etshatshalazeni izimvo neengcingane zomlinganiswa. Kulo pitsho pitsho wazo phambi kwamehlo ethu, sisebenzisa iingqondo neengqikelelo zethu ekufumaneni ukuba lo mlinganiswa ungumntu oluhlobo luni na. Izinto zenzeka phambi kwamehlo ethu ... asibaliselwa. Into oyibona isenzeka phambi kwakho ikuchukumisa ngaphezu kwento oyiva ngembali.

(With this type the character discloses or reveals himself. What the writer does on his part is to illustrate the feelings and thoughts of a character. Through watching their behaviour before our eyes we are able to determine the personality of each character. Things happen right before our own eyes ... they are not relayed to us. What you see happening before you has a greater impact upon you than hearsay.)

In UNojayiti, the narrator, who happens to be the husband of Nojayiti himself, presents himself on the foreground as the primary object of ridicule. The very first chapter titled "How She Trained Me" (Annexure, p.1)⁷ pivots around him and his seemingly senseless devotion to his wife which ends up humiliating him before the eyes of the church women. Throughout the story he is always caught unawares and often blunders more as a consequence of the limitations in his sense of imagination than as an occasional mistake. In fact, this is how he presents himself and his story to the readers. Although he often refrains from open condemnation of himself and his shortcomings, he works hard to help us see him as the fool of the story. The whole novel leans on this technique for its success. One of the best examples of Koranti's portrayal as an anti-hero features in Episode 13, titled "Victory" (p.56). Here a general meeting of the members of a local association called Masinedane enjoys a marked level of importance as the biggest event in Koranti's life. Like most other things, he describes it in superlative terms. According to him, this rather inconsequential local gathering of a section of villagers assumes proportions of a world assembly of sorts.

The tension and level of fear he is gripped with when his turn comes as the next speaker highlights the unassuming nature and simplicity of an anti-hero as much as it gives

⁷ For the rest of this work quotations from UNojayiti will be drawn from the attached Annexure.

credence to the enormity of the occasion as well as the professional demands of the roles played, at least in the eyes of the narrator: "I kept shifting in my seat, indeed scared to the bone. Right then, through the noise of enthusiastic hand-clapping for Gxidolo, Nojayiti directed her brilliant eyes to me, and the insistent message in them was quite unambiguous--saying, 'Stand up and speak!' I moaned inwardly in great distress, and pleaded with the heavens to bring forth a revelation" (p.59). It is clear from the manner in which Nojayiti appoints her husband to address the meeting that the meeting itself is not such a serious matter as Koranti makes it out to be. There is a loose arrangement whereby speakers who may not have been predetermined in any way merely harp on cliched matters of general concern like the importance of education and the importance of community projects.

Even the triumphant speech, when it comes, simply constitutes an example of bathos, as the speaker, who, if he had been treated as a virtual hero of the story, would have been the best speaker of the day, simply finds it hard to get his ideas together. The following speech marks a clever reversal of a possible climax to suit the anti-hero and prime object of the ridicule that his own wife initiates:

"Friends, Solomon says, 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard!' Y'see, y'see, a harnessed ox needs no mouth cover! Y'see beware of the coming fury! A donkey and an ox cannot be harnessed together. You know about a donkey, my dear fellow! Donkeys once

razed my field to the ground. Nojayiti knows about that ..."

"Oh, go away! Off with you, SekaNgqayimbana! (Father of Ngqayimbana) I'm no specialist at donkeys! That is not the point in question here. The agenda is money." So did Nojayiti burst out in unspeakable fury. (p.59)

Whilst the anti-hero in The Marabi and UNojayiti plays a visible role within the context of the story, the villain exists in the extratextual reality of the historical fact. In The Marabi, the villain can only be understood to be the white regime of South Africa. Tereplasky, his wife, Rambuck and the few other whites mentioned in the story represent only a feeble gesture, on the part of the novelist, to personify the true villain of the story.

In UNojayiti the villain is almost non-existent. At best the society can be said to carry out its own villainy upon itself. Nojayiti features more as the mirror of her community than a villain. Instead, she is as sensitive and vulnerable to society as the rest of the characters.

Once again, Jordan sets out to portray the villain in a purely traditional sense of novel writing. Highlighting the standard designs of heroes and villains; Jafta (Ngani, undated:[v]) says, "Abalinganiswa apha encwadini bahlukile. Kukho aba bamele ubulungisa kubekho nabo babhekisa eNdenxe naseBhakubha. Ubumnandi bencwadi buxhomekeke ekuphikisaneni kwala magela" (Characters in a book vary. There are those who stand for good and those who represent evil. The success of a book depends on the conflict between these groups.) Indeed for conflict

between the contending parties to be more thrilling, the odds between the hero and the villain should be on the balance.

The villain of a traditional novel is endowed with negative features. His outward appearance is rough, rugged and awe-inspiring. Facially he is normally dark, ugly and repulsive. His manners are rugged and his behaviour is savage and unpolished; he possesses a wicked criminal mind and is often adamantly single-minded; he also possesses brute-like instincts and cunning. Dingindawo in The Wrath represents such a character. He represents the evil mind in the story, with his self-centred calculations, senseless plotting and apathetic mind. His major limitation, however, is, like the limitations applied to most evil forces in traditional novels, his inability to effect a lasting spell upon his victim, the hero. His offensive has no effect beyond the physical domain which is partly his territory as well. While the hero upholds access to the metaphysical domain as his last resort, the villain's power expires with the annihilation of his physical domain.

Jordan refrains from giving Dingindawo a description of his physical features, but it suffices to associate his activities with witchcraft as such a stigma gives him no relief as an evil man. In the beginning of Chapter 5, Book II, it is stated that Dingindawo was "no longer a trusted man in his father's house" (p.74). More than

being distrusted by his subjects he is feared because he seems to threaten the safety of the subjects. Instead of functioning as the shield of his people, he acts as "a snake" among them (p.124).

It is, however, only up to the end of Book II that Dingindawo's portrayal as a villain remains effective. After that his control over his own designs is doubtful, and he no longer plans as before but simply depends on chance. Zwelinzima's resolve to marry Thembeke instead of the Bhaca princess, for example, can hardly be said to have been engineered by Dingindawo's cunning, while the ensuing events are also not basically initiated by him. All he does is to complicate an already deteriorating situation. The following extract shows Dingindawo's extent of importance and dependence on fate:

Dingindawo asked whether Zwelinzima was really determined to marry the girl. Vukuza assured him that his "father's son" would rather remain single if he could not marry Thembeke.

"And I must say I sympathise with him," he added. "If I had a girl like Thembeke I would never think of marrying anyone else."

"Excellent!" thought Dingindawo. "The chance I've been looking for has come." (p.139)

In the first two books, however, Dingindawo features as indeed a true traditional villain. Presented with a delicate situation of the return of a long lost son of the Mpondomise royalty and people, he fights to convince the very uncles who should be welcoming their child back home instead to reject him. His success in this can be attributed to his excellent speech which he uses to block

off any attempts by the councillors at dissenting. They are informed in direct language that an ancestor, namely, Ntakana, impersonated in his grandson, Mthunzini, has come to warn them against Zwelinzima's coming to Mpondomiseland (p.90-1). Although he maintains that "you will agree that I spoke the truth when I told you Ntakana is not dead," he knows very well that the ancestors represent uprightness and moral integrity, and would, therefore, never sanction an act of theft such as was committed by Mthunzini. He deliberately deceives them in order to win them over to his camp and succeeds. The meticulous nature of Dingindawo's preparations for war poses a great threat to Zwelinzima (p.120), and, as a result, Chapter 12 of Book II keeps us in great suspense and fear for the hero.

Another negative feature attributable to the villain is his affinity for barbarism or acts of darkness. It is the novelist's standing persuasion that school education brings about social progress and, therefore, light. Where he claims that "Dingindawo, on the other hand, was always opposed to anything progressive, and surrounded himself with illiterate, ignorant men whose outlook was rooted in the past" (p.18), the novelist seems to suggest that by his choice Dingindawo condemns himself to the influence of the powers of darkness and, therefore, functions as their agent.

Names of characters

Although it cannot be certain which western writings may have directly influenced these writers it is clear that the choice of the names of the characters in The Wrath reflects the tradition of some English writers like Dickens and playwrights like Sheridan. Characters like Dickens' M'Choakumchild and Mr Gradgrind who are responsible for child education in Hard Times, are given harsh satirical treatment by means of deliberate caricaturing by this novelist. Sheridan's caricatures like Mrs Malaprop, Sir Anthony Absolute, O'Trigger, and others, are basically designed to promote humour in his plays while the audience finds it easy at the same time to understand and follow the behaviour of the actors on stage, always identifying them by the names which stand for certain behavioural tendencies.

Jordan neither uses the names of his characters to enhance satire nor singularly to promote humour. Instead the names of his characters are intended mainly to reflect the serious roles played by the characters themselves in the story.

The main character, Zwelinzima, experiences a disastrous end to his rule, with the Mpondomise people becoming involved in a turmoil, rejecting his leadership and killing each other. His own family ends up in the raging waters of the flooded River Bedlana. He himself seals the

tragedy of his own life by committing suicide. In the circumstances, therefore, the name Zwelinzima, which means "life is hard," suits him well. The writer's deliberate choice of such a name becomes evident towards the end of the story, where this character begins to experience misfortune. The writer skilfully applies the use of this name in this story, so that its impact coincides with the onset of the final tragedy. All along, as the story develops, the name of Zwelinzima is carefully distanced from the main character. It mainly upholds the fading image of a fairy tale that surrounds the legendary figure of Zanemvula. Meanwhile, the more operative names used are that of "Major" which is associated with student fancies and fantasies; and that of Langaliyakhanya, ("the sun is shining") which pinpoints the popularity of Zwelinzima and his acceptance by the people during the trial period of his leadership. The title, "The Excellent One," simply represents Jordan's inability to translate "Mntwan'omhle", that being the address of a royal figure in Xhosa.

Dingindawo's name is a pointer to his attempt to usurp his brother's position of chieftaincy. The name suggests "someone who has no place of his own." This name is quite clairvoyant, as Dingindawo has to run away from Mpondomiseland after Mthunzini has exposed his malignity and surreptitious designs at the end of the novel. This name also becomes the only measure of reassuring us of the permanence of the villain's removal from

Mpondomiseland. It is almost as though we have to trust the novelist in the end as Dingindawo leaves Mpondomiseland, and hope the moment of reconciliation is impossible beyond the end of the story and Dingindawo's life ends up in exile; that in itself being a rather vain hope, however, as the Mpondomise had previously learnt to accept Dingindawo's rule in the absence of all alternatives.

The supporting characters are also given names befitting their roles in the development of the novel. Thembeke ("the trustworthy one") is the ideal faithful woman who never turns back in her love for Zwelinzima. The name, Nobantu, ("Mother of the People"), which she is given by her husband's people corresponds with Langaliyakhanya in reflecting the popularity of the couple in the eyes of its people. Mphuthumi ("someone sent to fetch") plays his role of finding Zwelinzima and fetching him from Sheshegu and school to the land of the Mpondomise. Quite significantly, after the task of bringing Zwelinzima back to Mpondomiseland is finally fulfilled, Mphuthumi recedes into the background and remains barely on the fringes of the story in the last half. However, it is Mphuthumi who comes to fold up the story by being the last person to have a heart-to-heart talk with Zwelinzima before he commits suicide. Consequently, one is left wondering if Mphuthumi is not meant to give us the impression that he is left to carry forward the task of restoration. Although he is a commoner, he gives his son the name

which is structurally a combination of the names of the royal couple, Zwelinzima and Thembeka. The name Zwelethemba ("land of hope"), appearing at the very end of the novel as it does, in the brief epilogue titled, "Umso" ("The following Day"), remains enigmatic. It, and its owner are certainly not part of the story. The name simply points outwardly, beyond the confines of the novel, and, as such, remains silhouetted on the periphery of the reader's mind.

Just as his name suggests, namely, "in the shade," Mthunzini becomes the shady character of the novel. His movements are stealthy and, in the middle of the night, he steals secret information regarding the return of Zwelinzima to Mpondomiseland. As an agent of darkness he appoints himself as a threat to the hero. He is the informer who covertly warns Dingindawo about the return of Zwelinzima. Mthunzini is also the blunderer who fails to win Thembeka's affection, a display of incompetence that in turn makes him moody and loathsome.

Jongilanga and Ngubengwe are ochre people whose names reflect the features of an open landscape of a rural nature. The name Ngubengwe ("tiger's skin") also suggests royalty. He is, in fact, one of Zwelinzima's uncles. The name Jongilanga ("face the sun") also suggests this character's stubborn nature as well as his courage and outspokenness. It is this outspokenness that accelerates

the conflict between "the Mpondomise of the soil" and the Mfengu "upstarts" (pp 207-8).

Ngxabane, on his part, functions as a link between the world of the living and the domain of the ancestors, by virtue of his venerable old age and his social standing as a reservoir of knowledge. Fittingly enough, he is not given the name of his birth, but is rather called by the clan name of his people, the Ngxabanes. This lends him the respectability that one experiences in Chapter I Book I, when the characters address each other by clan name to show the importance and active existence of their forebears in their lives. The revelation of the dying wish of Chief Zanemvula is his responsibility as much as the interpretation of the untraceable disappearance of Zululiyazongoma in the River Bedlana, about which he says, "You search in vain. The child has gone back to the ancient custom of the Mpondomise, whereby our chiefs were buried in water" (p.264).

Gcinzibele ("patron of compassion") possesses such a name because he takes compassion on the dying child, Zwelinzima, and agrees to adopt him. More than this, he treats him as his own child and takes him to school in a generous spirit of fatherhood. Of the other characters, Father Williams and Sister Monica are mere Christian stereotypes, whereas Dabula, by virtue of his surname and the clan name of Dlangamandla is a Mfengu stereotype. Nomvuyo is a familiar name meaning "joy". Vukuzumbethe

("walk through the dew") functions in the story as conciliatory sacrifice, as he dies in an attempt to save Zwelinzima's family from drowning. He is a representation of unadulterated selflessness and an uncorrupted sense of family love. Zululiyazongoma ("thunder is rumbling") stands as a solitary warning of impending danger. Like Zwelethemba, however, this character displays no active presence in the story. He exists virtually by name only and through the singular knowledge that he is in fact born, visited by inkwakhwa, and taken by his mother into the raging waters of the River Bedlana.

Sinxo draws up quite a panorama of laughable names for equally laughable scenes in which his characters are involved. The primary intention of the writer seems to be the promotion and sustenance of humour throughout the novel. The names and characters are invented with each episode, while the more central characters feature persistently throughout the novel. The names on their own are mainly designed to be indicative of the follies of society. Where clan names are used, however, they are realistic in that they replicate those used in real life. The most obvious function of clan names in this novel is, in fact, to indicate exaggerated admiration and overawed submission. Nojayiti, for example, is also characteristically called "MamNgwevu", "mNgwevukazi" and "Tshangisa" which are all clan names used to demonstrate Koranti's single-minded adoration of his wife. Clan names used as expressions of endearment achieve a similar

impact as terms like, Sikhomo, and Jayi or Jayijayi (which is a corruption of Nojayiti) or Fazile (a corruption of "mfazi" meaning "wife"). The following example shows the clan name, "Zulu" used as a term of endearment to help the pitiably subdued husband escape the fury of his wife unscathed if possible:

"Who do you mean! Who do you mean!" screamed my own Tshangisa furiously. "Did I even once--did I even once instruct you to treat my baby like a sand-bag!"

"Peace, Zulu, bear in mind that I bring them up under strict discipline, I discipline them for you." (p.3)

In his novel Sinxo designs a family circle very much in the fashion of real life families with father, mother, children and family adherents of all sorts. Even the manner in which they address each other is imitative of real life families. They still remain quite comical, however, because of the names attributed to them. Koranti the father and head of the family who is also the narrator of the story possesses a comical, nonsense name. It remains virtually a meaningless name, unless one accepts Nojayiti's interpretation of it as "white language for a newspaper" (p.37); but even there all it does is to reflect the purposelessness of those parents who named their little boy Koranti, a name that lacks any traces of affection and inspiration while it is at the same time devoid of any vestiges of parental inspiration. His wife often calls him, SekaNqgayimbana (Father of Nqgayimbana), which is typical of rural women who call their husbands by their first children.

Nggayimbana immediately features as the first child of the family even before this character receives any attention in the story. This name carries no clear meaning except in its sound. One can only conjecture that the name suggests qualities of a diminished size or flawed creation. It can, in one way, be felt that inggayi (a clay pot), which could be said to form part of the name, stands for something moulded from earth and, therefore, suggests a child, and mbana could be said to be standing for "flawed" or "ugly and little but impervious". The form mbana is, in fact, a diminutive form of mbi which means "he is ugly". It suffices, however, to regard the name as a nonsense name, because it is meant to be so by the writer. Any depth of analysis of the names here can reveal little more than their basic formative structures as comic names.

The family's eldest daughter, Nontwikunina ("the problem is with the mother") indicates a name that seems to have been intended by the family to suggest something, but, like everything else ends up being lifelessly flat and meaningless. Nontyibilizi ("the children's sliding surface") is another daughter whose name again renders her and the thinking of her parents laughable. It could be that one of the boys, Balafuthi ("count in quick succession") comes too close behind the child before him, hence the name suggests the parents' unwitting self-condemnation which no longer serves any purpose.

Added to these core names are the names of the sisters- and brothers-in-law and members of their families. Tawuse is the name of one of Nojayiti's sisters. In R.B.Siyongwana's Ubulumko Bezinja (published much later than UNojayiti), this name belongs to a clever and rebellious dog. Besides its implied suggestion of someone with a quick repartee, the name does not bear any significant meaning.

The Episode titled, "Christening a Baby" provides a good example of Sinxo's idea of fun regarding the use of names. As the following extract indicates, there is no profound wisdom in Christening a baby, nor is the ceremony properly prepared for by the parents. After the initial disagreement on the proposed names they all give up and await Nojayiti's surprise name, which turns out to be "Cannibal". In the said Episode the narrator says,

Nevertheless, the little one grew up and soon it was time for him to be brought to church for baptism. Arguments on the naming of the child then started in earnest. I had privately entertained hope that as the nanny who took care of the child day and night I would enjoy the privilege of Christening him myself; but it so happened that I had missed the point altogether. My wife's sister, Tawuse, silenced everyone by declaring that his name should be "Byforce". This name gave me quite an indigestion, whereupon I humbly asked for explanation of its meaning and linguistic source. "Whatever is the matter with this man!" interjected Nojayiti, "Eversince when did you not know that "Byforce" means Ngamadla?" (p.36)

All suggestions point to the shallowness of thought on the part of those involved. Nojayiti's brother suggests

"Zwelibharile" ("the land is drought-stricken" [p.37]) as a name for the child. The baby's father suggests "Tyhoboziintlanti" ("crash through the walls of cattle kraals."[p.37]). He further suggests "Nqikilitye ("lift open a stone") as the alternative. Meanwhile the baby's brother, Balafuthi gives him the nick-name, Macici, which in the final drama becomes the boy's ultimate Christian name. The mother's surprise name, Cannibal, brings about unexpected drama at the Christening ceremony where the presiding pastor gives the true meaning of the name to the consternation of both parents. All the other names in the novel suggest the kind of cock-eyed thinking that one experiences in this episode.

Unlike the main characters in The Wrath who have good, meaningful names, the beautiful girls in Episode 21, "The Beauty Queen is Overshadowed" (p.97), namely, Noziganeko ("events") and Nongemkile ("she would have been dismissed or deserted") do not lend any compliment to the beauty of these girls as described by the narrator. Instead, the names reflect the unrepentant thoughtlessness of the members of the society that gives them such names.

While all three of these novelists create their characters from their rich imagination using their sense of observation and also drawing from their experience of their society and from their knowledge of their people's history, their approach to characterization still remains markedly different. This disparity may possibly be

attributed to the concentration of effort on the part of each of these writers. Jordan can be said to be focusing on the creation of a good, entertaining and readable story with all the necessary didactic qualities built into it. Sinxo focuses on sheer entertainment almost at the expense of the structural development of the story. He seems to go out of his way to give the reader a good cause for laughing. Dikobe basically does the same as Sinxo, but, as will be explained in later chapters, this novelist in essence addresses the historical events and happenings of a real life society.

Dikobe's characters, therefore, are life-like in the sense that they experience the events that are known to have been experienced in real life without any attempt on the part of the novelist to disguise the fact that he is directly addressing history. Even though the names of the characters have been switched, they still remain the well-known and common names of people normally found in urban areas, especially in Johannesburg. Hofmeyr (1977:1), basing her remark on Tim Couzens' interview with Dikobe, reaffirms this view by saying, "the events of the narrative are very firmly set in the centre of Johannesburg in the thirties and early forties in an area centred around New Doornfontein, Doornfontein and City and Suburban." She (Hofmeyr, 1977:1) further points out, "The characters are based either on specific people or

general types."⁸ It even appears that Rev Ndlovu, alias Mr A.B.Tshirongo, could be Dikobe's literary version of Kaunda (Hofmeyr, 1977:1). George is said by Couzens (Heywood, 1976:79) to be "modelled on the pianist by the name of Thebajane."

The names of the characters in The Marabi do on their own what the whole story, including the names of characters, does in the other two novels, namely, they throw into our faces, as it were, the stark reality of real life South Africa as experienced by its people. Martha as her two names suggest (the other name being Moipone), lives a kind of dual existence, first as Martha, a name that suits her white employers to call her by; and, secondly, as Moipone as she is called by members of her own family. Quite significantly, in the novel she is faced with constant pressure to choose between two alternatives, namely, a continued existence within the squalor of her present environment, or to retreat to a remote countryside, away from the pressure of town, thereby retracing the steps of her parents who hail from the countryside. The name, Martha, can also be regarded as a generic name, representing black township street girls in general. As such the name can be said to represent a stereotype.

⁸ I shall deal with "types" in greater depth before the end of this Chapter (pp 64-84).

In a similar manner July's name lends him the dubious social position, and he can be viewed as a faceless character. The name "July" does not convey any significance of meaning nor does it reflect any cultural background. As such July features as a common street fighter and can be any man. Only his surname, Mabongo, lends him some element of identity as one of the members of the Mabongo family. The faceless name of July actually fits him well as he has deserted his home in the rural areas and all it stands for, to begin a new life in the urban areas.

Dikobe's method of naming his characters contributes greatly to the promotion of his basic intention to create township stereotypes. Even the manner in which some names are accompanied by titles while others are not strongly suggests this intention. The names of Martha, George and the other unmarried young black people do not often have the title "Miss" or "Mr" preceding them, while older people and married couples are freely addressed as Mrs Mabongo, Mr Mabongo, Mr Tshirongo, and so on. But all white names adopt an almost compelling title, like Miss Tresswell, Mr Rambuck, and Mr and Mrs Tereplasky. There are vestiges of racial prejudice in this manner of address, where the white person is always superior. It seems as though Dikobe wishes us to look at the titles, "Mr", "Mrs" and "Miss" as terms for denoting respect for old age or class as determined by colour. Black women are

sometimes addressed according to traditional etiquette as Ma-Ndlovu, Mathloare, Ma-Mapena, and Ma-Khumalo.

The stereotypes

Somehow, writers and readers seem to share or expect to share common interest through literary work. One can almost feel that there is an unwritten contract between the two parties, a contract that is, amazingly, often violated by one or the other of the parties, sometimes by both parties at the same time. Many literary theorists have used the apparently universal idea that the writer has his intentions in creating a piece of literature just as much as the reader has his expectations in reading the literature so created, as a premise to his/her often elaborate debates.

Some scholars indulge in the same debate seemingly inadvertently and unconsciously set out their demands, always from the writers, irrespective of whether the justification of these demands has been weighed and scrutinized beforehand or not. Beuchat's (1962:15-6) complaint regarding African literature, for example, that stories written by Africans in indigenous languages "are childish, oversimplified and do not represent life as it actually is," (which she claims is actually the complaint of some readers), represents the kinds of demands levelled at writers like the three writers whose works

are being discussed here. It is obvious from the content of the above quotation that Beuchat herself sees some relevance in this complaint. She actually condescends to suggest that although this might be the case, she, on her part, still sees some positive developments in African literature (1962:16).

As Segre points out in his treatise, the standards against which a reader or critic will often measure a literary work are the stereotypes, whether they be social stereotypes or otherwise. Consequently, the language used by a writer in his work will highlight certain recognizable stereotypes, which in turn triggers off the reaction of his reading audience. Illustrating this in more detail Segre (Meddemmen, 1988:18) says:

... culture uses language as its main tool; and language is not merely the most sophisticated means we have for communicating information but also constitutes a kind of filing system for safeguarding the massed information of the collectivity, its encyclopaedia. As a consequence, reality is revealed to the collective consciousness only by means of signs, stereotypes, archetypes, i.e., by the language of knowledge, without which our perceptions would be no more than undifferentiated flux.

Indeed, Segre's observation seems to throw much light on this discussion of stereotypes as observable conventional features of novel writing in The Marabi, UNojayiti and The Wrath. It is almost impossible for a novelist to create an amorphously displayed story without recognizable features and comprehensible action like, perhaps a poet can do; and it is basically by those

identifiable features that the story can be held to be intellectually consumable. There appears to be some justification in van der Merwe's (1990:96) observation that:

Stereotiepe opvattinge in 'n gemeenskap kom meestal die duidelikste in die newekarakters van 'n roman of drama tot uiting, waar daar nie ruimte vir individuele nuansering in die karakterbeelding is nie. Die hoofkarakters word gewoonlik meer genuanseerd uitgebeeld, meer as individue gesien, terwyl die ondergeskikte karakters as tipies voorgestel word. "Tipies" beteken hier dat die karakter as tipies van 'n bepaalde groep beskou word, maar ook dat die skrywer se opvatting tipies van sy' groep is--dit is dus 'n uiting van groepsdenke.

(Social stereotypes receive much clarity of expression as characters in a novel or in drama, where no effort has been spent in highlighting individuality during character portrayal. The main characters are normally portrayed more vividly, and they are seen more as individuals while the lesser characters are presented more as character types. Here "type" means that a character is not only seen to stand as a specimen from a certain group, but also judged against the type of the author's own group--this is thus group expression.)

Definition of stereotypes also answers to Foster's notion of "flat characters."⁹ These are characters who represent certain human characteristics and are only used in the story to reflect these characteristics. Forster (1974:47) maintains that, "One great advantage of flat characters is that they are easily recognized whenever they come in--recognized by the reader's emotional eye, not by the

⁹ Archetypes and stereotypes are defined on pages 16-8 of this work.

visual eye which merely notes the recurrence of a proper name."

It is also not surprising that characters in a novel may play a leading role in balancing the stereotype features of the story as a whole, since characters provide the literary replicas of people in real life. Again Segre (Meddemmen, 1988:118) illustrates this point by saying:

... texts, and literary texts in particular, are among the principal purveyors of culture. This is why relations among the various tributaries of literature, those belonging to reality and more specific ones, will find themselves transferred through the stereotyping filter of a sign system which will render them homogeneous and susceptible of combination ... This way of looking at culture will also help us to avoid too violent a separation of the conditions to which the addresser and his group are subject and the conditions which are ratified by linguistic and literary institutions.

The more specific issue of the creation of stereotypes by Dikobe, Sinxo and Jordan in their works is further exaggerated by the countrywide tragedy of reinforced provincialism whose basic cause is the social scourge of legalized apartheid (which has since been delegislated), a system whereby the races of South Africa have been made to live separately from each other for many generations. It is as a consequence of this that the writers of all races in South Africa (including the three writers under discussion) perceive their social environment through the spectral vision of a distorted cultural heritage of separate existence, something that obviously and almost visibly agonized Todd Matshikiza in exile, who cannot

help hating himself in Chocolates for My Wife (1961:42), and cries, "Me and my frozen smile. Frozen on my face like the butcher's display window freezes a pig's head and trotters, or sheep's head and trotters."

Moyana (Heywood, 1976:87) confirms this when he claims:

... both black and white literature in South Africa is one-eyed literature; concentrating on a section of the social spectrum. The artist has no choice. He knows his clan or tribe or race more than he will ever know others. The state presents him with a social referent with which to interpret what he sees, hears and thinks.

In The Marabi, Dikobe manages to assemble together a combination of comical incidents reflecting the Johannesburg, in particular Doornfontein, of the thirties and forties. Since he deals with real-life situations, his characters almost inevitably and consistently do and say things that are logically relevant to the Doornfontein of the time in focus. Hofmeyr (1977:1) aptly observes that the "spirit of the work captures admirably the particular social reality of being black in Johannesburg during that time." Regarding this very view Sole (Trump, 1990:214) makes the following observation:

Characters in the novel are either easily recognizable general types or specific historical people: in some cases fictionalized, in others not. Makgato of the ANC and Zulu Boy Cele (aka George) rub shoulders with totally imaginative characters like Martha.¹⁰

¹⁰ I do not think Martha is a good example of a "totally imaginative character." In some unpublished notes Dikobe says of Martha: "Martha was born in 1922."

As a stereotype, Martha is presented to us as a common street girl in a black township. In real life this kind of child is often without a father. Her mother is too busy brewing and selling liquor to attend to the proper upbringing of her daughter. Consequently, the child's progress at school, which she has to attend initially, diminishes fast and she drops off about the beginning or middle of her teenage years. She then either stays at home doing nothing, to the parents' annoyance or she half-heartedly tries one thing after another, but ends up joining her mother in the beer business or as a white man's domestic servant or washer-woman.

In the meantime a boyfriend impregnates her and denies responsibility for the baby. Her sordid life is exacerbated by the general poverty and squalor of the township together with the absence of common moral codes of conduct, since the people have diverse backgrounds. Martha, therefore, poses as a suitable equivalent of such a social stereotype. This idea is reinforced by the writer's own indirect declaration that here he sets out to write for the "low type" and for "'malala-pipe' ... homeless ruffian children" (p.2; also referred to on p.44 of this work). Secondly, this is reinforced by the fact that this is a typical bildungsroman novel, with a character who is supposed to be developing from childhood to maturity and adulthood. Martha seems inevitably to follow all the expected steps of a common girl in the black township. Her mother desperately tries to save her

from her fated existence, and even warns, "Women do not hang about on the street corners at night" (p.11). Martha's pregnancy is introduced to us by the novelist in such a manner that we have no choice but to see her in the collective image of all the young women of her lot,

That night she entered into the life of motherhood. Sleepless nights with the child crying. Sick baby to the clinic. Tender love of motherhood. Battle to bring up a respectful child. Problem of giving it a good education. Its future in a country where a person is not judged according to his talent but by his colour, denied the right to take part in the administration of the country and the right to do skilled work.

On this particular Saturday night Martha conceived a child, who, among millions of others, was to spend his life in and out of jail. (pp 78-9)

In addition to her pregnancy, further problems follow, like her father's departure from home for the war and her mother's death. Because the nature of her suffering is spread out over the whole social spectrum in the country, it does not seem to shock anyone, and does, therefore, render her plight a common experience and her person a common sight in society. The novelist sarcastically refers to this malicious stereotyping of members of the dispossessed segment of society, when he indirectly admonishes us against accepting Martha's predicament at the death of her mother as a logical conclusion:

Ma-Mabongo died in the hospital a few days after being admitted. She died poor but she left a legacy for the white people--that her daughter remains a servant to them, a nanny, housekeeper, cook, even to the extent of opening and closing the gates for the master's car. (p.92)

The occupations mentioned above are apparently seen by the writer as the only option open to the common urban black woman. They further reinforce the idea of social stereotypes whose function is to dwarf the black segment of the South African society. Segre's (Meddemmen, 1988:148) observation indirectly gives credence to this view of Martha and her situation as an example of Dikobe's stereotyping when he says,

Analogous considerations hold good for all the stereotypes whose existence has at one time or another been recognized: topoi, cliches traditional metaphors, themes, and motifs. The very way in which we select reality in order to name it is, to a very large extent, preconstituted. But this stereotyping does not involve language and cultural products alone. There also exists a stereotyping which demonstrates the very conditions of our existence in the world and categories of our perceiving, and the modes of our interpreting, reality.

As a stereotype, Zwelinzima, in The Wrath, plays a more positive role than Martha in The Marabi. This character is a typical example of a child who is a product of mission station villages which sprouted with the building of mission stations between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries in Southern Africa.¹¹ These villages were populated by converts and their families, and it is from them that people who learnt to read and to write originally emerged before they went to the seminary schools and colleges. Mission station culture also sprang from these villages. It became fashionable to regard

¹¹ J. du Plessis, A History of Christian Missions in South Africa (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911), p.7.

these young people as "the bringers of light." In the novel *Zwelinzima and Thembeke* are given the following instruction:

"From the great seats of learning at Lovedale and Fort Hare, they were told, they had brought the light of knowledge. Let them not continue this light within the narrow bounds of their domain, but place it on the pinnacle of the Bele Mountain so that its rays might stretch over the whole of the region of Tsolo and even across the Tsitsa and the Mthatha Rivers" (p.158).

Here we find a noticeable Biblical teaching ("light beneath the table") being reconstructed to suit a local setting.

Zwelinzima also possesses those qualities that reflect a Christian upbringing, namely, obedience, kindness, peacefulness, faithfulness and love for education. To demonstrate that he is indeed treated as a stereotype in the beginning of the story, the writer only appears satisfied with the surface impressions conveyed by the Christian pose that *Zwelinzima* takes. There is no evident attempt on the part of the novelist to vindicate the depth of faith *Zwelinzima* or *Thembeke* may have in the efficacy of prayer. It is enough for the writer that they are seen in the company of religious figures like the Bishop, Sister Monica and Father Williams, but we never really learn about the exact nature and form of the cherished values. During the Holy Communion conducted by the Bishop who "had a calm face, revealing a kindness which came from the very depths of his heart," *Zwelinzima*

fervently directs "his main prayer ... to the Father-of-All-Power to give him advice on this matter of the chieftainship" (p.36). The novelist continues:

[Zwelinzima] was in a particularly responsive mood to the prayer that was daily spoken at Beda Hall evensong--the prayer that remembers people in all walks of life: the students and instructors at this College and all other centres of learning, "the destitute and the sick, the tempted and the anxious, those who have no earthly helper and especially those who have none to pray for them" Zwelinzima felt that this prayer must have been composed by a very large-hearted man to whom he could open his heart. (p.37)

Even here the focus of the novelist is on the eloquence of the prayer and not on its efficacy or on Zwelinzima's ability to command an efficacious prayer. All we are supposed to derive from this is the idea that Zwelinzima is a Christian child without being able to probe the depths of his own understanding of the Christian values and philosophy.

Similarly, Thembeke is forged to suit the well-known stereotype of a youngster from a Christian family, well-trained in matters of devotion to a man and to God, but equally restricted from effecting any change in the development of events, by perhaps using the powers lent her by her privileged position in proximity to a powerful man and an even more powerful God. She approaches Sister Monica to "help [her] and pray for a friend," (p.130) something she evidently feels inadequate to do by herself. This seems to be all she can really do at this stage, but still the novelist refrains from indicating if

and how prayer helps to change the circumstances. It is, therefore, clear that according to the writer, the fact that Thembeke is seen as a child brought up under Christian instruction is enough. The stereotype subsequently achieves its dominance in her personality at this stage.

The measures of progress introduced by Zwelinzima in Mpondomiseland are used by the novelist, much like the prayer, not so much as a pivoting point in the development of the story, but, instead, as a measure against which we judge Zwelinzima as a Christian and a product of mission station culture. How much of the western values he understands is not the issue. The stereotype again comes to the foreground, supported by easily recognizable terms like the "association", "home improvement society", "President" "Committee", "farmers' association", "tennis and netball", "cricket league", "the Girl Guide and Boy Scout companies" and many others (pp 159-160). The terms simply introduce the idea of novelty into the story more than an indication of thoroughly ingrained value systems. It may be for this reason that the Mpondomise of the soil easily eject the new structures represented by Iliiso Lo Mzi and new positions like that of "President" during the time of crisis in preference for their own old, and to them, more meaningful structures. But still we never learn of Zwelinzima's own interpretation of his highly cherished "improvements".

Beuchat (1962:14-5) regards as a "stereotyped plot" the structure where a young man leaves home and goes to town and later returns home to experience social disturbance "usually associated with cultural and emotional conflicts." She (1962:15) further observes, "if ... town life and education have transformed him into a paragon of virtue and wisdom he then reforms everyone around him." Why the plot is a stereotype is basically because the character, in the first place, has been rendered a stereotype.

Similarly, Gordimer (1972:5-6) observes as common "themes", "Countryman-comes-to-town"; "The return of the Been-to"; "The Ancestors versus the Missionary"; "The Way it was Back Home"; and "Let My People Go." The first three themes reflect something of Zwelinzima's portrayal and, once again Gordimer's themes reflect varied attempts by many writers to portray the stereotype in such a manner that he can be easily recognizable. Many African writers have also made it their duty to confront reality and to draw the attention of the reading audience to it. This can best be done through stereotyping.

Gordimer (1972:6) describes the fourth theme ("The Way it was Back Home") as "the theme of recent novels dealing with emotional stresses inherent in the traditional way of life"; while she defines the fifth theme ("Let My People Go") as "the theme of the political struggle for

independence." Again stereotyping in The Marabi consistently reflects the above themes. Characterization in this novel suggests that the story is drawn from the experience in the writer's own life, which he conveys to us through use of stereotypes that we can easily recognize throughout the story. Moyana's (Heywood, 1976:93) observation may be regarded as a further explanation of this when he says,

... the black writer in South Africa does not, unlike in other countries, belong to a bourgeois class of detached elites, that can come to observe the masses and return to the tranquility of their refined suburbia to write. They live these violent experiences day and night.

Dikobe takes pains to reproduce the institutions that help us identify the individual characters for what they are. Couzens (1976:71-2) recognizes a few of these, and maintains, for example, that the 'Bantu Men's Social Centre' (B.M.S.C.) in Eloff Street was indeed a meeting ground for blacks. He (Heywood, 1976:79) maintains that while the B.M.S.C. and Inchcape Hall were used by the middle class blacks and the school people, the marabi music thrived in the shebeens and "low" halls in Prospect Township, where terms like "sponono" were originally created. These set structures mainly function to aid us to picture the social stereotypes that frequented them as we follow the story of the novel, so that we are further prepared to prejudge or identify the behaviour of the characters easily enough. We are also in a better position to interpret Martha's appearance at the marabi

parties and her later performance at the 'Bantu Men's Social Centre' as a marked form of advancement in society.

The historicity of The Marabi is actually achieved, not only through the use of the standard features of Doornfontein life, but also through use of stereotypes in such a way that they can in themselves be seen to be identical with the true material of historical reality. It could be because of this that Hofmeyr (1977:2) is able to detect tangible historical material in this novel and to regard the novel as a whole as a "documentation of an unrecorded history." Explaining the true identities of Ndala and Martha, Hofmeyr almost inadvertently refers to the historical equivalent, the "kafir-farmers", which is, in fact, a social stereotype. This provides clear evidence that stereotyping in The Marabi does affect the thinking and interpretation of the reader or critic. Hofmeyr's (1977:2) explanation drifts to a definition of the historical stereotype when she says,

Ndala and Martha's grandparents, being rich, probably belonged to that group of commercial farmers who in the past century successfully resisted, for many decades, white colonial attempts to proletarianise them. These 'kafir-farmers', as Bundy has illustrated, made a substantial living off their land, producing sufficient crops to pay taxes and compete favourably with white farmers. But non-market factors were brought to bear ever more heavily on these peasants and finally they were forced off the land.

A necessary remark about the above comment, however, could be that Hofmeyr's effort to resist any conventional regard of these black farmers as "kafir-farmers," in the light of what society or Bundy calls them almost fails her at the end, as she still sees the former as "peasants" anyway, very much in the language of the feudal system. One explanation could perhaps be that she herself experiences a limitation where, despite her determination not to discount the humanity and dignity of her subjects, she still experiences the shortcoming of not knowing them well enough to perceive them beyond the stereotype.

Even where Hofmeyr (1977:4) consciously dismisses the presence of the conventional stereotype, where she states, "One stereotype we do not have is the 'Jim comes to Jo'burg' type where a naive country boy is gulled by smooth city slickers," she still sees township life, onto which "newly arrived country people" easily "cotton", as a continuation of the process of breeding the stereotype. To confirm this she (1977:3) states that "Martha is caught between a retreat to the tribal world she herself has never known and destruction among the chaos of the Marabi parties and the city gangs," a statement she (1977:3) further modifies by adding the comment that, "Martha is caught between the stereotype of town and country."

The theme of Christianity features on the margins of the story in The Marabi just as it does in The Wrath. However, like Jordan, Dikobe uses Christianity only to delineate the stereotype, and not to demonstrate any fundamental adherence to Christian principles. In fact, Dikobe goes further to develop the humorous anti-climax of a wayward priest. For this reason Rev. Ndlovu behaves in a manner unbecoming of a true Christian cleric by cheating a widow of her funeral collection and ultimately stealing all that money. Behind the guise of priesthood, the following is virtually what Rev. Ndlovu thinks about the bereaved Ma-Ndlovu:

'If I win her confidence, my next step is to make love to her, then my way to wealth will be easier. I am going to spend every night at the vigil and preach and preach. ... If I get the money, I shall take the first train to Rhodesia. I want to be called Mr Tshirongo. Damn Ndlovu! That is not my name.' (p.13)

By making Rev. Ndlovu a phoney, Dikobe helps us to see the stereotype more than the individual. The whole process of Madonda's funeral lacks the expected solemnity as the main actors play the role of stereotypes, and as such are untouched by the tragedy of death. In contrast to this funeral, Mathloare's funeral has a more convincing sense of loss. A further comparison with Jordan's treatment of the clerics in The Wrath reveals the seriousness with which the latter handles the theme of Christianity. That his Christian characters still remain stereotypes happens almost accidentally through a shift of focus.

While Hofmeyr's (1977:6) comment when she refers to "the severe disillusionment on the part of the blacks with traditional Christianity," serves to explain Dikobe's presentation of Christian stereotypes in The Marabi it would almost certainly suggest the opposite of what Jordan intends in The Wrath, which seems to base itself on the fashionable view regarding Christianity during Jordan's time of writing.

The best created stereotype in The Wrath is Mthunzini, who, by virtue of his being the loser of the story promotes humour even before he can come into action. A loser ¹² is always a subject of humour in society and his incompetence with women has been used by great comedians like Sheridan (Acres in The Rivals), Shakespeare (Malvolio and Sir Andrew Aguecheek in Twelfth Night) and others. It is a well-known Xhosa innuendo that a young man who has no girlfriend of his own spends his time on his back on the mat counting the poles that make the frame of the roofing. After Mthunzini suffers a strong rebuff from Thembeke at St Cuthbert's he is found by Mphuthumi, "lying on his back in bed, completely crestfallen" (p.55). He is also said to ask his parents to initiate his marriage with Thembeke on his behalf (p.25). Later on he appeals to Father Williams to help him win Thembeke's favour (p.58-60). Quite predictably all their efforts fail dismally. When Mthunzini attempts

¹² The Xhosa term for loser could be isishumane.

to acquire Nozihlwele as his wife, the chief, her uncle, sends young men to beat him up.

Sinxo employs a method similar to that used by Jordan in portraying Mthunzini, quite extensively in UNojayiti. In this novel the main intention is to entertain the reader with humour. Once again Sinxo uses a recognizable social stereotype, the docile, subservient husband and the willful, bullying wife. Xhosa communities regard such a relationship as unfortunate but not really tragic. It is often said that such a woman has her husband by the nose, something people often make a joke of and laugh about. The couple in UNojayiti, therefore, plays a similar role to that played by Mthunzini in The Wrath.

The opening episode presents a situation that is mostly unacceptable among Xhosa communities, where a husband is instructed to stay at home the whole day everyday. It makes things even worse when the husband actually accedes to this, thereby submitting his rights to her. Consequently, he now fits awkwardly into the family pattern and operates out of rhythm with the rest of the family. This is exemplified by the ineptitude which leads him to beat up a child and to have meat he has been cooking stolen from the pot. The following passage leaves no doubt that the writer intends us to see the couple as stereotypes of a particular chosen type:

[Zixinene] responded to this by giving me elaborate advice with much cautioning. He harped

on the waywardness of modern women, their lack of respect for their husbands. He told me that his own wife too was once like that, and that what finally brought her back on the track was a lesson in good manners with a stick. He told me in my face that I was just a thing Nojayiti had by the nose and even a baby knows about that in the whole village. (p.6)

As soon as the writer establishes the stereotypical nature of his main characters in the first episodes, he continues in that trend, concentrating more on the variety of incidents in which his characters are involved, more than on the portrayal of the characters themselves. Consequently, for each incident the reader is more interested in the action and reaction of the character types while he already has foreknowledge of their behaviour. The characters are of necessity flat characters, and even the supporting characters are mere caricatures representing certain, often laughable, features of human personality. The brothers- and sisters-in-law are unbearably impudent; the neighbours and villagers often make themselves a nuisance in one way or another; Ketile is ugly and greedy, wins a beautiful girl but jilts her at the last moment because there is a feast of pork he should attend to; Nojayiti's sister-in-law is an aggressive and extremely lazy divorcee; and Madondile is the most shocking miser on earth: almost everyone contributes something to make us think of a village full of very sick people indeed.

Just as Jordan deals with rural stereotypes, the black elite of the countryside, Sinxo concentrates on the same.

The only difference is that Jordan focuses on the royal elite while Sinxo portrays 'school people' as his elite. The suggested influence of the church and school education in Sinxo's novel gives a strong impression that the village under focus is built around a mission station. Church women and church activities like preparations for Easter and the Sisters' worship on Thursdays are central in the story, and the proximity of the school is suggested by Koranti's membership to the school committee. This is, on the whole, a typical mission station culture.

The conventional qualities of characterization in the three works seem to cover a number of aspects worthy of discussion. The Wrath reflects a formal and well-contrived approach to character treatment and thus, for purposes of this discussion, poses as a standard work. The Marabi is a contemporary work where the writer adopts an intensely realistic approach. UNojayiti deals with a semi-westernized community and concentrates on a family unit operating in relation to its social environment. It is mainly a casual novel that lacks the seriousness of the other two novels. Evidently, all three novels do not reflect a common approach in character treatment when judged against the conventional methods of novel writing. But, as shall be illustrated in the next chapter, they register a form of departure from convention that lends them their uniquely African or specifically South African texture as far as characterization is concerned.

C H A P T E R 3
C O M P A R A T I V E A N A L Y S I S

To echo the debate in Chapter 1 and to attempt to define the limits within which the analysis of these three works is to be conducted in this chapter, Amuta's (1989:125) comment is used here as a standard reminder when he says,

In the face of overwhelming empirical evidence to the contrary, it would be stupid to argue or pretend that the novel is an indigenous African form. Nor can scholarship predicated on the racial identity of a literary form, no matter how energetically polemicized, provide any meaningful insight into the manifestations of that form as an art form either within or outside its immediate genetic home.

It is mainly in recognition of this argument that the historical course is taken as a basis for the ensuing debate in the chapter. Amuta's (1989:125) principle sums up the debate around the choice of the dialectic-material approach adopted here when he adds:

... once born and nurtured in a given socio-historical environment, a literary form is propelled outside its native soil onto new ground by determinate historical factors which in turn will give it a local identity which, though reminiscent of its original "genetic" properties, will obey the laws of its new environment and baptise it into a new definition.

A close study of the characters used in these works should unequivocally reveal the nature of persuasion by each writer regarding the socio-cultural designs as he sees them and/or as he hopes for them to be. The

historical context should help much in conveying the realistic circumstances which in turn give credence to the characters. Amuta (1989:90) observes three historical phases that seem to have influenced African writing in general, namely, the assimilationist phase, where the native writer basically emulates the style and approach of the works from the colonizer; the cultural nationalist phase, where the native writer realizes the dehumanizing effects of affiliation to a foreign culture; and the nationalist phase, which represents efforts at democratizing the process of writing with more emphasis being laid on the rights of the common man.

The debate in Chapters 1 and 2 is intended to illustrate that without any doubt the conventions that were reflected in the colonial novel are also evident in the three works, where characterization is concerned. It may be for this reason that one may expect Sinxo and Jordan, in particular, to be classified under the phase one writers of Amuta's historical grades. But somehow it is not really so, because of the subtle deviations the two writers have so cleverly employed in their works. The whole issue of these deviations pivots around the historical context within which these writers find themselves, their sensitivity to this context and their ultimate reflection of it in the chosen works. Because of the evident mass domination in The Marabi, Dikobe may be classified quite fittingly in the third category, with one possibility that some grudging complaint may in the

same breath be directed at his lack of biting sarcasm in his approach which in turn may be said to be misleading as it is coated with much impotent humour. It is, however, the said deviations that seem to have affected the content and form in these works more than anything else. It is also clear that in these works, the writers relied heavily on the spontaneity of reaction generated by the "high voltage", so to speak, of their intense sensitivity. What now follows is an analytic study of some points of concern in the works under discussion, designed to illustrate the benefits gleaned from the processes of this intense sensitivity.

Identity: the individual and society

A writer is directly influenced by the audience he writes for and the social class with which he identifies himself. The difference from writer to writer is mainly dependant on how much of his own control over the work he surrenders to this influence as well as the dexterity of his writing skills. Amuta (1989:94) sums up the class differences on a broader scope thus,

... among the colonized, we can identify the culture of the urban Western-educated elite, of the religious leaders and "traditional" rulers on the one hand and the indigenous cultural expressions of the rural peasantry, untrammled by the encrustations of foreign impositions and appropriations.

It can thus be expected that in producing a literary work the writer also betrays his own identity as an individual in society. His sympathies can also be reflected in the portrayal of his characters, especially the main characters. A conclusion drawn by July from his study of other African works can be adopted here. July (Beier, 1967:232) identifies a persistent search for cultural identity which he says is reflected in the writings he is studying. This identity first expresses itself in "the need for historical roots" based purely on African values; a second aspect of cultural identity is seen by him as "the need to establish and express a sense of human dignity"; and the third aspect is "the desire to make some positive contribution to contemporary world culture."

All the three works together reflect the main characters operating against the neatly woven fabric of their social background. The very fact that although the novel is borrowed art, the three novelists engage characters of African identity, operating within a realistic African setting, is sufficient to answer to July's first issue in the need for cultural identity. Furthermore, all three of these writers emphasize the need for human dignity by demonstrating the opposite view of the incompleteness of life without this. Education, which features in all three works is a clear indication of the writers' intention to adhere to the contemporary world culture, since this is a cultural attribute of universal nature. Their approach in

the novels concerned is best explained in Segre's (Meddemmen, 1988:102) language when he says, "When we narrate, we necessarily have recourse to the same stereotypes which we employ when we perceive, interpret, and speak of day to day events."

In The Wrath one is made rather uncomfortable by an ending which seems to suggest the triumph of "evil" over "good". Indirectly expressing where his own sympathies lie, Riordan (1961:54) maintains:

From the beginning to the end the sympathy of the reader remains with those characters who are the symbols of the new order, even though they be allowed to suffer defeat. This is especially true of the king himself.

To make the readers think only in terms of good and evil, however, does not seem to be Jordan's central concern in this novel. Instead, one finds two individual characters, Zwelinzima and Dingindawo being weighed for what they are worth in society. The standards of measurement used to determine their worth are drawn from the culture and history of their community. Perhaps to validate the historicity of the approach adopted in this Chapter, and to further illustrate that Jordan was not just preoccupied by the idea of good versus evil, it would be fitting to recall from the oral history of the Hlubi people of Matatiele that part of Chief Ludidi's family background that finds relevance in Zwelinzima's story in The Wrath.

The Mfengu people originally came to the Eastern Cape around the early nineteenth century as refugees escaping the Zulu impis during iMfecane. The identity of these people is still distinct today, held together as it is by their clan (or family) names and some of their customs--those that have survived the exodus. The main streams settled in the districts of Peddie, Ngqamakwe, Qumbu and Tsolo. In the Qumbu and Tsolo districts some of the Hlubi princes and their followers settled down among the Mpondomise people whom they found there. Others crossed the Tsitsa and Thina Rivers to the present day Mount Frere district and, after a successful alliance with the Bhaca people against the Mpondo people, they crossed over the escarpment to settle in the valleys of the Kinira River up to the Drakensberg Mountains. That section of the Hlubi people was under junior prince Ludidi. The name, Mfengu is a derogatory name meaning beggar (as many historians have also suggested), and was used by the people who played host to these refugees as a term of identification. The larger groups, however, in the Matatiele, Mount Fletcher, Herschel and Sterkspruit districts occupied mainly vacant tracts of land and, therefore, retained their old identity and name as the Hlubi of the Great Langalibalele of the Tugela or specifically of Mtyezi.

There is also a well-known story in the Ludidi royal family concerning his two sons, Mditshwa and Mzondo.

Mditshwa, the elder brother reached a stage in his growth where the Hlubi people had to find a wife for him. In their eagerness to strengthen the ties with the Bhaca people, the Hlubi royalty decided to find the prince's wife among the daughters of Chief Wabana of the Bhaca people. This was arranged and the bride was brought home. It is reported that Mditshwa vehemently rejected his prospective bride on sight. He compared her to a liver on which the men make several penetrative lacerations before roasting it, because her face bore the incisions that are customary to the Bhaca people. For fear of retribution from the Bhaca chief, the Hlubi decided to hand the bride over to Mzondo, the younger brother, rather than return her to the Bhaca royal place, and Mzondo accepted this arrangement. Mditshwa then married a woman of his own choice.¹³

Arrangements for the Bhaca princess to be brought to the Hlubi had involved a transfer of a large herd of Hlubi cattle to the Bhaca royal place as ikhazi.¹⁴ For this reason the offspring of Mzondo, which is presently in its third or fourth generation, claim to be the rightful heirs to the Hlubi chieftainship in the Ludidi principality. Their claim is that the child who is to be heir is identified through the status of his mother.

¹³ I have gathered bits of this information from various sources among the Hlubi and Bhaca people in Matatiele and Mount Frere.

¹⁴ This is still the prevailing practice today among many African communities whenever marriage arrangements are made.

MaZulu, the Bhaca woman was brought to the Hlubi royal place with Hlubi cattle and she had been clearly identified as the mother of the people.

Ludidi's section of the Hlubi people broke away from the great place where Mtengwane had been given land and the right to rule over his people by the great Mpondomise chief, Matiwane, in the district of Qumbu near Tsolo. Another section of the Hlubi people was given land adjacent to the Mpondomise of Tsolo. As can be expected, conflicts sometimes, on a large scale, have always existed between the Mpondomise and the "Mfengu". The last serious skirmish so far reported occurred in 1986, with whole homesteads being burnt down and people being killed. In that battle a prominent Mpondomise leader actually died.

Having been born at Mbokothwana, near Tsolo, where he also grew up, Jordan was fully aware of the history of the people of that region. Although it cannot be confirmed, some historical material has been derived from the socio-cultural environment of the Mpondomise of Tsolo and Qumbu to be used in the portrayal of Zwelinzima, the hero of the novel, and Dingindawo, the villain. This historical material is significant because of the African identity it lends to the story. There are evident common factors between Mditshwa's marriage arrangements and those for Zwelinzima's marriage, especially as both preparations involve a Bhaca princess.

In his work titled Towards an African Literature, Jordan makes repeated references to the Hlubi historical background, an attempt which further reflects his profound interest in these people and his knowledge of their background. The relevance of the Hlubi history to the fictitious story of Zwelinzima is confirmed, for example, by one such well-informed comment Jordan (1973:22) makes about them as he says,

In the experience of the present writer, the tradition of the praise-poem is strongest among the Hlubi. Now scattered all over Southern Africa, the Hlubi were once upon a time the most powerful of the Nguni tribes. Their power was broken after the death of the legendary Bungani.

The names of the characters are Mpondomise or Xhosa names and the social fabric replicates that of the real life Mpondomise in many ways. Zwelinzima's identity as offspring of the Majola family is credible in realistic terms. It is well-known that Matiwane, Tsobho and many other Mpondomise royal figures belong to the Majola dynasty. As a consequence of this, they are all bound by the family name of Majola.

Zwelinzima, therefore, fits in the social pattern without question. His identity is sealed by the family name he uses as his surname for official purposes. Regarding Zwelinzima's registration the novelist states that he (Zwelinzima) "had to go from one government office to another answering endless questions as to his identity as

Zanemvula's son and heir"; that "Gcinizibele had to produce moth-eaten documents to establish the facts"; and that, "it had been revealed that Zanemvula had saved money and had left a will bequeathing everything of which he was possessed in favour of one Zwelinzima Majola who, it was stated, was under the guardianship of Gcinizibele at Sheshegu" (p.133).

Contrary to what one would expect of the black Christians of the era in focus in Jordan's book, Zwelinzima does not seem to bear more than one name where one of his names, always of western origin, would be regarded as the Christian name and the Xhosa one as the native name. Instead his own Xhosa name is used throughout and is generally acceptable to whites and blacks alike. This could be attributed to the fact that he is a royal figure, and as such, he is an embodiment of traditional life. His father, Zanemvula, and his uncle, Dingindawo, likewise possess Mpondomise names as first names. This cannot be said to be accidental as the choice of names was quite an important issue in Jordan's time of writing. In fact, all his characters without exception possess Xhosa names only. Jordan's own names, Archibald Campbell, which are both of foreign origin reflect the dominance of mission station culture and the prevailing spirit of the era that had hardly changed when he started writing. Mqhayi in Ityala Lamawele (1970) also employed this approach in most of his writings, preferring to use

family names even more than the first names which are always Xhosa names.

Jordan uses identity as a key factor in the story of Zwelinzima. He also uses it to implant the grains of tragedy. Nobantu's alleged misbehaviour and her killing of the revered snake at the critical stage of the story's development mark the onset of tragedy rather than the source. It is solely because Zwelinzima is identified by the Mpondomise as their own traditional leader that a plot to bring him home is initiated. Quite in agreement with the historical pattern of the Mpondomise life already sketched above, the issue of birth plays a central role in lending the necessary attributes to Zwelinzima. Therefore, Chapter 2 ("What a Fairy Tale!") provides the key story, which features structurally as a story-within-a-story, this being the story of Zwelinzima's birth. A positive element warranting the undertaking to bring Zwelinzima to Mpondomiseland and his subsequent claim of the position left him by his father among the Mpondomise people, is thus introduced by the story of his birth. This ensures that Zwelinzima as an individual has a place of his own in his society, and in his case it happens to be the position of leadership as well. This positive element is intelligently enshrined by Jordan in a praise poem designed for the occasion of informing Zwelinzima of the social responsibility that awaits him:

Bayethe, Offspring of the House of Majola!
 Mighty monster of the blood of Vukuz'umbethe!
 Tough-snouted even as the wild boar.
 It plunged into the Mthatha waters
 And tunnelled its way through the earth
 To emerge beyond the Xesi of Rharhabe:
 You whose arm is nauseating from the spittle of
 Dingindawo's dogs!
 Beware, Gcinizibele, lest mongrels snarl at his
 excellency!
 Hail, worthy prince! Hail, Child of Kings!

 See Zanemvula's flocks and herds ravaged by hyenas
 and wild dogs!
 Why do you linger,
 Fondly trusting they are guarded by the drongo
 bird? (p.33)

As discussed in Chapter 4 (pp 190-206) the introduction of a praise-poem in a work of prose adds more than the dramatic effect it is intended to achieve. This structural design is strategically used to solemnize and sublimate the occasion. The first two lines serve to put Zwelinzima squarely on the family chart of the Majola family; and the use of the name of Vukuzumbethe is probably designed to fit him with his contemporaries on a generation scale. The glaring image of the wild boar suggests an indomitable spirit and a strong will to survive. Associations with water serve to echo the story that is told after Zwelinzima has disappeared from Mpondomiseland, namely, that he died on the bank of the Mngazi River. A wild boar is known among the Xhosa people to survive immersion in water over long periods of time. It is noticeably after recalling the events that lead to Zwelinzima's removal from his original home that Mphuthumi, the praise singer, then directly addresses Zwelinzima as "prince" and "Child of Kings". It seems as though he feels satisfied that he has now given enough

justification for himself to acknowledge the prince's true identity. Thereafter, the praise singer hints at the responsibility awaiting Zwelinzima. What the last section of this praise poem mainly suggests is the necessity to fulfill a social task and the need for this task to be fulfilled by someone who is socially suited to do so. Role and responsibility are recognized by birth. We already know that Dingindawo is ruler over Mpondomiseland, but because of his birth he is regarded as unsuitable and a usurper.

Already, the praise poem neatly conceals the weak link in Zwelinzima's birth and growth, namely, his poor health. His father has to give up his responsibilities because of ill-health and he gives way for his younger brother, Dingindawo, to rule the Mpondomise people on his behalf. Secondly, to beget a male issue is quite a struggle and when he finally has an heir, it is only one boy and there is no possible substitute from the main house, to function in times of need. According to traditional etiquette, such misfortunes can also parade as weaknesses before the eyes of prospective rivals to the position of leadership and can be open to challenge. Nyamende (1990:8) makes the following remark about the study of some folktales:

The urgent shuttling between one office and another with official documents replaces the shield and assegai that were once the means of settling matters of leadership. Dingindawo shares common qualities with the prospective leader in the ["birds choosing a leader"] story. He also

shares common characteristics with Sikhuluma in the "Sikhuluma" folktale. Further than this, he shares common qualities with the self-made, illustrious Nguni leaders of the past; like Hintsa, Ndlambe, Ngqika, Makana, Shaka, Soshangane, Mthimkhulu of the Hlubi kingdom and others. The common factor among these leaders is that those who were born into the position of ubukhosi had to retain that position by demonstrating constant strength and ability; those who acquired it later in life did so by excelling ... As in folktales, leadership among the Xhosa people is not a closed circle. It seems that anyone who betters the others for a particular period and is ambitious enough can take up the reigns.

It is, therefore, not surprising nor is it acutely immoral of Dingindawo to root himself in his brother's rightful position and to attempt to resist Zwelinzima's claim. The concealed grain of tragedy in the lines, "Tough-snouted even as the wild boar," is that Zwelinzima's escape from possible rivalry was not engineered by him in person, but by his fearful father. In this line he takes credit for an event in which he features as a mere object and not the main actor. Why this remark is important is because Zwelinzima's passivity recurs in the story. He is termed the "Excellent One" even before he can demonstrate his excellence; he is simply smuggled into the land of his subjects by a section of his people, and without him playing any noticeable heroic role in the difficult process of engineering his return. People think and do things for him. It can, in the circumstances, be concluded that the "wild boar" image disguises an over-emphasis of the quality of identity which becomes evident later in the story, when the young chief succeeds to

entrench himself using "moth-eaten documents to establish [the] facts" of his birth (p.133).

As an individual and a hero, Zwelinzima stands above the rest of society. He is different from the rest of the characters mainly because he possesses "royal blood" and he has obtained education from one of the best black colleges, namely, Lovedale. He has also remained in Fort Hare for a year and a half. The other characters function only to boost Zwelinzima's image in this novel, this being one way in which characterization in The Wrath differs from that of the other two works. Even Dingindawo who appears as the antagonist of the story only works to intensify the sympathy we have for the hero by threatening the latter's life.

Zwelinzima features in his society both as a private individual and as a public figure. He spends his life at Sheshegu and at school and college as a private individual with private interests and concerns to fulfil. Thembeke, his beloved, fits into this sort of life . When he finally decides to return to Mpondomiseland and take his rightful position as Chief Supreme of the Mpondomise, however, his profile in society also changes to that of a public figure. Thereupon, society makes its demands and most of these demands are governed by custom and tradition. It is at this stage that Zwelinzima fails to reconcile the desires of a private individual with the

demands attached to a public role in society. Making a similar observation, Scheub (1970:87) adds,

Zwelinzima is no longer his own man in the sense that he, as the chief, has become something more than the collegiate Major living the carefree campus life. He has become the Chief of all the people, of both worlds; hence whatever his personal vision, whatever his own principles, he cannot overlook the needs of both worlds.

True to his Christian upbringing, he feels that marriage is a matter that concerns himself and his beloved to the exclusion of any third party. On the contrary, custom and the will of the people take precedence over private desires where the planning of a royal marriage is concerned. The story of Masalanyana in The Marabi also presents a society that takes upon itself the matter of marriage with the bride being seen to be marrying more as a social duty than a matter of love as will be demonstrated later.

Thus, Zwelinzima accepts his role as a public figure in a qualified manner. To him the call to come to Mpondomiseland represents a romantic adventure more than a calling to duty, hence the novelist remarks,

All this ... could be likened to the love that an English child would have for the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table--a love for something far off and dim. Or it might be compared to the love of an Afro-American boy for Africa, the love of a boy who is proud to learn that his ancestors once reigned in Africa, but has never imagined that he would one day be invited to the royal seat of his forefathers. (p.35)

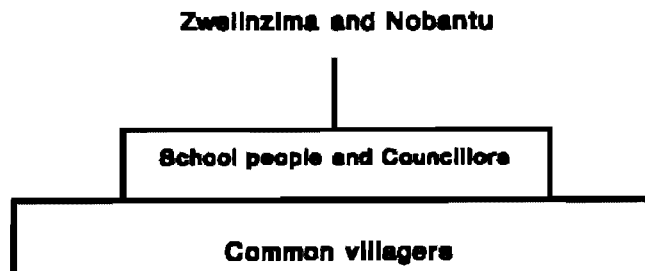
Even Mphuthumi's praise poem is "like a voice of one calling to him from a great distance, out of sight" and it has transformed itself in his mind into "the voice of one who had gone out in quest of a vagabond who had disappeared many years ago, leaving his father's cattle and sheep at the mercy of ravaging beasts of prey (p.36). This romantic streak is enough to blind Zwelinzima about his relationship with the Mpondomise people. Somehow he seems to believe that he is bringing salvation and, indeed, sees the Mpondomise as helpless "cattle and sheep," to put it in terms of Mphuthumi's praise-poem, that cannot help themselves and are hovering in perpetual darkness. It is no surprise, therefore, that, almost like a mercenary, Zwelinzima bargains with the Mpondomise for the acceptance of his tough terms which force them to compromise their marriage custom and their former leader's dying wish. As a public figure, therefore, Zwelinzima still upholds the individualistic principles of a private person as a priority. Everything else is secondary to that.

This is a clear indication that his devotion to society is not total but measured. There is the element of love which he upholds more and above any other demand by society, yet the writer refrains from demonstrating how far this rather exotic value outweighs all the Mpondomise values put together. Instead, one senses that Zwelinzima employs to his new role the principles of a private individual who is employed to do work by a contract and

is fully paid for his work. In that sense the worker maintains his private interests and individual needs even in the place of his employment. The consequence of this manifests itself in trade unions, pickets and workers' associations. All this, however, negates the traditional role of a chief, a leader who is himself the authority, patron of the people and an appellate institution. The following comment by Nyamende (1987:65) regarding marriage as reflected in The Lion and the Jewel by Wole Soyinka seems to fit well as an example of what could be expected of Zwelinzima had he been humble enough to submit his private needs to popular demands:

In as far as marriage includes in it an element of sacrifice on the part of the woman, Laye's mother is comparable to Sadiku in Wole Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel. Sadiku, "head of the Lion's wives," as Sidi describes her, sets out to convey her husband's marriage proposal to Sidi, the belle of Ilujinle. ... The verbal exchange that makes the first meeting ... delineates Sadiku as a woman whose behaviour is dictated [to] by her profound commitment to social norms and conduct, and the assertion of her own importance for all time as a woman in society.

It is obvious from the above quotation that the ochre sector of the Mpondomise too regards marriage as part of an individual's duty, like the Lion's people. The outlook on the concept is basically material and the selfishness of love for wife or husband is no justification nor is it upheld as a licence to fulfill personal interests at the exclusion of the rest of society. Diagrammatically, the relationship between Zwelinzima and his people could be illustrated thus:



In terms of Amuta, Zwelinzima could, in fact, be looked upon as, unwittingly enough, a representation of colonial and imperialist principles. If we did not accept this it would be difficult for us to understand why, after all he is supposed to have done for them, the Mpondomise people encourage him to get himself "crushed to death" instead of protecting their chief (p.242). Nyamende (1987:63) explains this as a "strong desire by the people to cleanse themselves as a tribe, so that Zwelinzima's self-sacrifice serves not only as a warning to his people, but also as an act of purging the land of the evil [of empiricism] embodied in him."

One could possibly wonder as one reads about Zwelinzima's tragedy, how the novelist could possibly fail to fulfill the reader's expectations by depriving his hero of a

glamorous ending that would be filled with triumph. We refuse to accept that Jordan's story goes out of control at any stage of its development. Zwelinzima's ultimate suicide is carefully planned by this writer and cannot thus be viewed as a half-hearted attempt to come to some conclusion of the story itself. In the story a "new-look" leader is weighed and dismissed just as the old traditional leader is also weighed and dismissed, though not so permanently as the former. Jordan's awareness of the pitfalls of cherishing a doomed hero and a dangerous imperialistic ideology is indeed made clear in Zwelinzima's death which seems to give the Mpondomise the desired break to sort out their own affairs. In this way Jordan evades the likelihood of Amuta's criticism being directed at him as a type of African writer. Amuta (1989:129) makes this uncompromising observation,

... because the African novel is the product of an ideological position that stands in opposition to capitalist imperialism and its attendant alienation, the schizoid hero, who is so relentlessly at the centre of the classical Western novel, hardly finds a place in the African novel. Nor do we have the rugged individualism and angst-ridden existentialist inwardness on which the schizoid hero thrives. On the contrary, most African novels feature heroes or heroic collectivities who are created to interrogate the values of capitalist societies.

The interrogation that Amuta writes about features dominantly in the treatment of the Mpondomise people as characters in Jordan's novel. The "schizoid hero" becomes isolated in the story, and then sacrificed. This, however, does not in any way underrate the tragic

elements of the story itself. Instead, the fact that Zwelinzima is the well-known son of the Mpondomise people, that he as an individual loves them and basically identifies with them and they on their part also love him; that they can only sense the evil and danger immanent in the new imperialistic ideology without being able to define it in material terms; all these make the story even more tragic. This tragedy can be compared to the death of Ikemefuna by the machet of a man he loves and regards as his father in Achebe's (1958:55) Things Fall Apart, a man who loves him too, an act which Nyamende (1987:72) calls a "willing sacrifice" and a painful means of buying identity at will. For the Mpondomise too, identity is a crucial necessity desired for the smooth-running of their lives. It frustrates them extremely when they cannot identify their own son because of intervening forces which are never fully explained. It can also be noted that Zwelinzima on his part does have high respect for his people's customs. Like Gugulethu who cannot defy his father in Tamsanga's Buzani Kubawo, Zwelinzima finds himself being immobilized by tradition. Dingindawo then takes advantage of this immobility to launch his own challenge.

The "heroic collectives" that Amuta refers to are most evident in Dikobe's The Marabi and in Sinxo's UNOjayiti. In these two novels the main characters stand out from the rest of society only in so far as they exemplify the effects of common elements affecting the community as a

whole. Amuta's (1989:95) comment clearly shows the dividing line between a story with a hero of Zwelinzima's nature and that with a main character like Martha or Koranti and Nojayiti when he says:

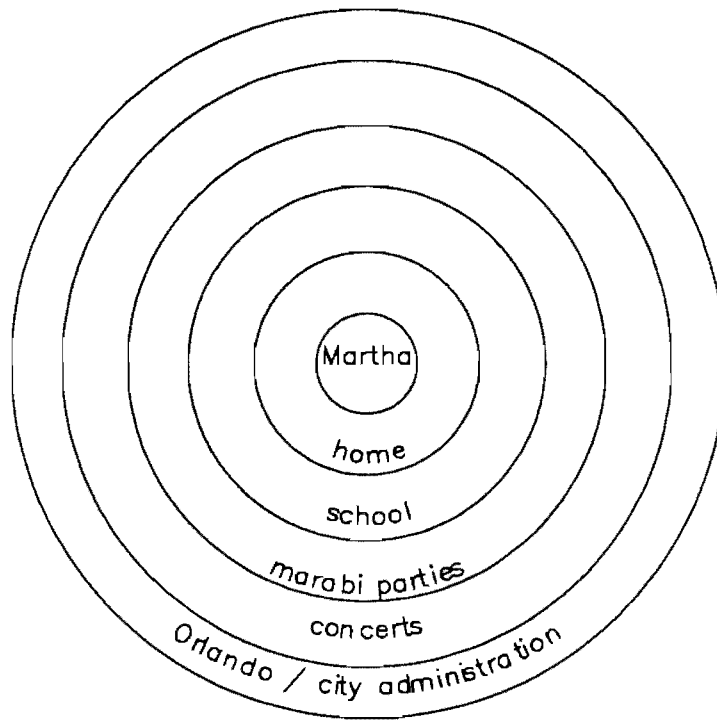
In societies with a horizontal atmosphere, class differentiation is minimized and cultural expression is relatively uniform with variations only along individual or age-group lines. On the other hand, in societies with a vertical structure, cultural expression varies from top to bottom in broad conformity to the class character of the society. It is in the later societies that colonialist culture grips the upper classes and converts them into caricatures of Western man, producing the psychological condition of mental colonization.

This, of course, happens in real life and the reality is reflected in the novels being studied. As we trace the relationship that exists between the individual and society (which process the novelist compels us to do by the very structure of this work) we become more aware of how the society functions than we are of what the main characters like and dislike as individuals. Referring to novels which appeared in Africa recently, July (Beier, 1967:218) also suggests,

Each work presents a major character and a number of lesser figures whose lives are made by the world they live in, and whom we can see as authentic modern Africans presenting the rich detail of internal mental stress, external physical action, and environmental force whose tensions balance to form these particular African personalities.

One is at once aware of the imaginary concentric circles of the interrelationship among the characters that cements them together under one common cause possibly in

the manner of, for example, the inter-locked mode of experience the following diagram is intended to show:



As can be judged from the above illustration, the main character exists only in so far as she highlights the experience of society in general. On her own as an individual, Martha is not so important in this story, hence the use of a generic name. What is important is her plight in the circumstances under which she struggles to survive, a predicament that is expanded to encompass a large segment of the South African society, namely, the dispossessed black people. Our concentration is, therefore, mainly focused on what happens to the characters in the story and how they react to this. The controlling factors as we find them in the lives of the residents are neatly summed up by Hofmeyr (1977:3) when she says,

... history of land dispossession, to most characters in The Marabi Dance, is something only vaguely remembered; to Martha it is totally alien. For her the only reality is an urban one, but Dikobe's reference to this back-drop of land dispossession makes clear why urbanization is permanent. A return to a rural existence is out of the question for most or others like Sephai must seek work in town to pay poll-taxes.

Like Zwelinzima, Martha is brought up within a hybrid culture. But unlike him her own home is "also a home to more than twenty other people" (p.1). While Zwelinzima thrives in an elitist existence, Martha wallows in the squalor of a poverty-stricken section of Johannesburg. Like Zwelinzima, her ancestry can be traced back to the rural communities. But almost as if by intuition she senses that her identity is somewhat different from that of a country girl. She experiences difficulties facing up to her true identity mainly because, as a child she should inherit elements of this identity from her own people. In her case, however, the people among whom she is born and bred are virtually a mixture of Zulus, Ndebeles, Tswanas, Venda, Indians and other black races. As many of these still practise their old traditions from day to day, it is not easy for Martha to identify common trends. The western influence of city life is quite dominant, but the people of Doornfontein are not fully absorbed into the full rhythm of western life. They are made to keep their own section of town where they practise uncoordinated traditional systems of order and etiquette.

The binding qualities include the general suffering caused by poorly paid jobs and the absence of good opportunities. Martha as an individual rejects the identity of a country girl her parents try to impose upon her. Implicitly, Martha's rejection poses as a stark refusal on her part to be grouped according to birth or according to colour. It appears as though the social environment that has shaped and influenced Martha's personality also lends her her true identity. Driver (Trump, 1990:232) explains this sense of identity much in the language of Derrida thus:

'Self' is constructed in dialectic with others or another: one cannot see oneself in the absence of projections from the world around one. What the self is awaits its determination by or from those outside the self, those who say 'me' to me, or who constitute the self for which I strive.¹⁵

George is singled out as someone for Martha to look up to, but unfortunately for her he begins as an irresponsible and ruthless young man. Martha does not have a simple choice to make as her own parents insist on her following on the path of country people. Her mother insists on the unquestionable right of the parents to enforce the identity of their child upon her. She openly declares,

Do you think I have given birth to you for nothing? If you don't listen to what your father and mother tell you, you must get out of our house. (p.28)

¹⁵ Also refer to the argument about July's use of the collective "I" in p.106.

The very use of "father" and "mother" in the Third Person suggests a standing principle that is destined by the realization of birth. To ensure that she claims unquestioned control over the child by virtue of her being a parent Ma-Mabongo expresses her distaste for her daughter's manners thus, "I wish God had denied me children" (p.28).

What matters most to Martha, however, is not to seek her roots in an unknown country environment but rather to assert her identity as an urban black. We cannot help but admire her when, to achieve the latter, she resists even her own parents' influence, thereby daring to face her present predicament as a dispossessed urban black, single-handed. Defending her right to receive singing lessons from Samson she retorts to her mother,

I won't keep quiet to see myself turned into a country girl who is forced to leave school early and work in the white people's kitchen! (p.27)

It seems as though the novelist is making a point about the justification of Martha's resistance of any effort to link her birth to a life in the rural areas. July (Beier, 1967:221) also observes the inclination by metropolitan African novelists to correctly attribute "... the African city with its way of life, its physical appearance and its values so different from those of the traditional villages." He identifies certain "forces" that, according to him, "have shaped the African city dweller, making him in turn equally different from his country cousin"

(Beier, 1967:221). In the African urban social setting July (Beier, 1967:220) observes three main trends which he illustrates as follows:

At one extreme is the unself-conscious amorality of the gangsters, implicit in their actions and, of course, never articulated. The middle ground is occupied by the ordinary citizen--decent, hard working, vaguely aware that his life lacks something but unable to understand what it is and how to go about getting it. The younger people, hopelessly unable as they are to deal with their lives, and encumbered with values which only a lunatic might find of service, at least do have some conscious standards and the warped courage to live by them.

Martha clearly represents the last trend in July's analysis. As part of the alienated segment of the urban society in South Africa her attempts to assert her true identity reveal an even more "warped" identity on her part. Hers is a continuously negative process of development within a community that continues to generate a warped culture. It could be for this reason that social resistance which Martha and her people stand for becomes the central virtue of her moral rights.

For Martha to effect successful resistance of the dehumanizing legislation of an unjust society she requires collective effort. It should also be noted that her needs are not the vision of an individual with a purpose and a task to liberate and lead the people out of suffering, but just a highlighted example of what is the plight of everybody else on an equal level. This collective resistance, represented, prophetically enough,

by the funerals in the novel, seems to bind the people together irrespective of background, in an act of solidarity that functions like an unbroken contract.

An interesting passage in The Marabi reflects a number of characters, who can be regarded as a cross-section of the Doornfontein community, giving their different interpretations to what may be a moment in their ostensibly separate lives. In this passage Martha's parents discuss a prospective marriage between Martha and their cousin, Ndala's son, which to them, will be a fulfillment of an outstanding customary requirement. This requirement is that July should now receive the stock that would have been his had he married his cousin's sister, Sarai. At around the same time, Mapena, the old man of the Molefe Yard, recalls the ancient rain ceremonies of the past. Thereupon, he goes outside and, after studying the heavens, predicts that it is going to rain, which it later does. The novelist then gives us a glimpse of the family prayer in the Indian shopkeeper's house. There is certainty here that Allah will give an answer to the parents' pleas. The Mabongos eat their food in silence after which children go to play "Black Maipatile" (pp 30-31). Then, in a paragraph of only one eight-worded sentence Dikobe presents Martha almost as if in a painting, also studying the skies:

Martha moved aside and gazed into the sky.

Some distance away from the Molefe yard, men pulling rickshas pounded the ground with their bare feet, the dust rising high into the sky. The

leader threw himself flat on the ground, turned his face upwards and pointed one assegai to the skies. "Siyafa makhosi--we are dying, chiefs. Siyafa Senzangakhona, Siyafa Chaka, son of Senzangakhona. Come ye long sought. Ye wombs with dew for my feet to tread. (p.31)

The diversity of activities reflected in this part of the novel does not seem to represent any common code of behaviour on the part of the participants, nor does the writer attempt to explain the meaning of these. Indeed they reflect the heterogeneous nature of their socio-cultural environment. But in the midst of it all is the girl, isolated in the novelist's narration by a remarkably brief paragraph. She does not, like the rest, seem to draw any meaning from the sky, but, like all the others mentioned, she then focuses on something that lends some meaning to her life. For her it is neither the bride's stock, the starless sky nor Allah, but just the Molefe Yard, rickshas working to earn a living, dusty streets and bare feet in the street. Rickshas are found in South Africa only in the cities, those being Durban and Johannesburg. They were once very popular to tourists. A "ricksha boy," as these men were called, does not feature in African traditional life. One wonders why Dikobe's ricksha man has brought an assegai with him and why he behaves the way he does in the story. In what capacity, for example, does he address the "chiefs"? The one explanation one can give to Martha's realistic vision is that the Yard, the dusty streets and the ricksha man all function as a pointer to the common factor that binds together all these people who feature in this isolated

moment with Martha, that being the uniformity of their suffering--"Siyafa".

On the contrary, the futile results of their isolated attempts to redress their existence, are summed up in Mapena's complaint when the rain finally comes, "The gods have answered our prayers and now we are engulfed in this yard" (p.31). Rain represents relief from suffering which is further represented by the hot and dusty day. Like Jordan in Book IV, Chapter 1, titled, "We die of Drought", Dikobe uses drought here to suggest a general crisis which is more of a social crisis than a natural disaster. These characters prefer to address the crisis through the traditional language of their forebears, and the reality of it all is that, in the absence of a consolidated effort to address and correct what is in fact more of a deliberate calamity callously designed by fellow-mortals, their prayers are futile. They wrongly attribute their suffering to their gods, and, meanwhile, the real transgressors continue to cast darkness upon the "ill-fated" races. The glaring result of it all is also seen through the eyes of July Mabongo:

Martha's father, guided by the carbide light of his cycle, splashed through the yard and waded his way ankle deep through the pool of muddy water. It took him all his strength to pull his feet and boots out of the slush. One of the lavatories had overflowed and the excrement and urine mixed freely with the mud and water. The stench polluted the air which had been purified by the rain. A tin of skokiaan which had been dug into the ground, to conceal it from the police, lay uncovered and threw a yellow circle of colour, and the whole yard smelled of bread and yeast.

Mabongo stumbled further until he reached the gate.

"Morena! If this is how we live, then God, suffer us all to die." (p.32)

This image of July's life is not viewed by one individual alone as his personal problem. But, like Martha and the other individuals in this story, July witnesses this as a testament of the suffering of his people. The "we" and "us" replace the "I" and "my" of Zwelinzima's outlook on life. As already stated, the scenes of funerals in The Marabi further exemplify the general spirit of solidarity cherished by the oppressed segment of society. Ma-Mabongo's funeral provides one example, where the Indian shopkeeper now becomes as involved as any of the others in bemoaning the suffering of the people. The people who follow Mathloare to her grave are not necessarily the members of her family alone. The writer explains that, "The mourners were mostly the same people who met every Sunday in Doornfontein in a joyous mood" (p.93). The writer's use of pathetic fallacy,¹⁶ whereby the birds also seem "to be silent with grief" and the bees fly away to look for honey somewhere else, reinforces the idea of the individual being seen as a representation of her society and her suffering being a wound inflicted upon society itself. The song sung at the funeral represents the voice of the oppressed masses, especially the line, "With pains and sorrow it was afflicted," and "It should never happen again that the people suffer" (p.93)

¹⁶ Scott (1965:213) explains "pathetic fallacy" as "the tendency of poets to ascribe human feelings to inanimate objects."

To further add to the view that the individual in The Marabi is seen in terms of his society and the society is viewed in terms of its individuals, one should note that the characters themselves are not necessarily described for what they are. Even the sketch description of what Martha looked like is barely important in delineating her as an individual. Instead, it functions to illustrate the potential Martha seems to possess that could have helped her to be a more useful citizen. We sometimes even tend to forget how old July Mabongo is. He is around thirty-five years old, but because of his troubles he sounds very much like an old man. It is always the suffering that receives more emphasis than the individual, the actions as well as the prevailing circumstances.

UNojayiti can easily mislead readers to underrate it, with its surface humour, but this is essentially a moral novel. Again the characters are used to display certain moral principles. All the characters that come and go are, to use Forster's term, flat characters reflecting certain behaviour patterns that may pose as examples of a bad or complimentary attitude. The village of Njwaxa represents a society that is becoming awake to the strong western influence. There is much artificiality and posing as a result of efforts by individuals to outdo each other by effecting a more refined existence. The prevailing social obsession is about progress, and the western way of life provides the necessary but exotic material from its mother cultures. Here a typical mission village

culture thrives with the church and the school being the most influential institutions. Tracing the origin of the mission village Zotwana says:

The first missionary came in 1799. ... This missionary and the rest that came after him set up mission villages and mission stations and they started learning Xhosa themselves ... and committing it to writing.¹⁷

The novelist directs his satire at the general floundering for relevant values for which the society is responsible. There is a competition to copy what the western societies do and to prescribe these as the values of the society at Njwaxa if not throughout the land of the Gqunukhwebe.

It is because of this floundering for correct values that individuals are seen to practise much opportunism. In Episode 19, Nkwilinkwili, an influential man in the village, agrees to be member of the School Committee, hoping that his son will soon receive a teaching post in that school. Consequently, the strong influence he has as Chairperson of the school is not generated by any sincere commitment on his part. The crucial factor is that the school actually manages to survive a crisis through using the influence of this character. As a learning centre the school represents the transference of good moral codes of conduct to the children. It is, therefore, likely that the children, and through them the society as a whole,

¹⁷ "Odyssey through Literature," interview conducted by Leonard Rubenstein, Pennsylvania State University, U.S.A., 1989.

are nurtured on artificial values by individuals who do not necessarily practise them in their own lives. The true state of affairs is that certain individual leaders are prepared to practise corruption in order to achieve a position that enables them to influence society to live by their own standards. The novelist gives us a vivid picture of Nkwilinkwili, a leader who would rather change society to follow his example than let himself follow social stipulations, when he says:

There is a big concert, all the parents are here, having come to hear reports regarding the work of their children, everyone is in high spirits. On that very hour we were seated on the front stage with Nkwilinkwili, who effected much air of dignity being the Chairperson of the concert, with me as his vice; oh, yes, he sat there, a complete specimen of a ceremonial figure (p.91)

The above is an individual who manipulates the society basically for his own benefit. The society is expected to see him in the misleading light of a man of virtue. Yet the novelist imparts to us that which gives him so much self-aggrandizement is the false belief that the teacher is soon going to announce his resignation, thereby opening a vacancy for his own son to occupy. Episode 25 features Gxelesha, Tawuse's husband, who even gives up drinking for a while so that the villagers may elect him as headman. Soon after the congratulatory ceremony which is held after his successful election to headmanship, Gxelesha declares, "I shall enjoy liquor, and the women, and the meat, now that I have finally got the headmanship of this village" (p.123). For six more episodes after the

latter, the novelist devotes more time in demonstrating efforts by various characters to manipulate society for their own personal benefit. Satyo (1977:76) also associates this form of character portrayal as Sinxo's way of commenting on the superfluous values of a fast changing society when he says,

Sinxo's works are not just an attack on bad manners and bad people. They are pessimistic commentaries by the author on an important development of the civilization of his time.

While the leading characters, Nojayiti and her husband Koranti, often feature at the receiving end of the other characters' frantic search for small personal conquests, all the characters, including the children, feature on an equal plain with the odds being the same all round. There is also much emphasis on the dominance of family units. All characters are seen strictly in terms of the families to which they belong. This set-up is reinforced by the novelist's frequent use of clan names. Almost constantly the writer adopts a narrative pattern whereby he proceeds to call him by his clan name. In Episode 28, titled, "Pandemonium", for example, Nziphonde is introduced to us as "a fellow from the Qadi families" (p.135). From there on the novelist persists in calling this character either by his own name or by his clan name as "uQadi".

Nojayiti and her husband feature most of the time as a family unit. This functions to dilute any absolute individualism. The two episodes, "Our Son's Income" and

"The Weeping Bride" demonstrate clearly that though the individuals may like to distance themselves from their society, the society soon reclaims them. In the first of the two episodes Nggayimbana, the eldest son, abandons his family. His mother hopes and prays that he returns home, which he finally does. Upon returning home he brings home a wife of his own, leaving his father to settle the bride's stock. The second episode features Nomtyibilizi who, while accepting the idea of getting married, still refuses to abide by the tradition of weeping when she leaves her home. Hidden in the horse cart, Balafuthi, fools the onlookers into believing that it is the bride crying, thereby fulfilling a social expectation on behalf of her sister, who, therefore, still remains acceptable to society at the time when she hopes to register her individuality.

All these three novels reflect main characters who operate against influential social backgrounds. We watch individuals manipulating society and society building or destroying the image of an individual.

Leadership: gender and generation

Leadership among the African peoples is a highly debatable issue. Two major forms of leadership actually emerge, namely, leadership in crisis and leadership on a

customary basis. Leadership in a crisis situation is normally taken by a person who is deemed capable enough to handle the prevailing crisis. This is usually a renowned hero and patriot. Many leaders in the history of black South Africa acquired their leadership in this manner. Chiefs who established their own kingdoms during the Mfecane era include Mzilikazi, Lobengula and Soshangane, who were originally regiment commanders. Leadership that is determined by customary stipulations is still as common today as it was in the past.

Of the three novelists, Jordan approaches the question of leadership more directly in his novel. Dikobe and Sinxo do not appear in any way determined to address the question of who is to be a leader in their works. Instead, the idea of leadership seems to feature almost incidentally. But what seems to appear in all three novels is concern about the influence of the western culture on the values of the African culture including those of leadership. While The Wrath and UNojayiti portray the rural communities, these works still reflect, quite extensively, the introduction of western values to this rural environment. As a metropolitan novel, The Marabi naturally reflects more of this, but more than that it reflects the frustrations of being alienated from the true urban setting. Amuta (1989:85) correctly observes that,

... the contexts of works in contemporary African literature are varied and sometimes contradictory.

Essentially the situation is one of conflicts and polarizations, of options and choices between two sets of antagonistic proportions, between imperialism and the forces of anti-imperialism.

UNojayiti offers us the fundamental features of a good leadership with a married couple and their children as an archetypal social unit. Although there is constant reference to the headman in this novel, this is not used essentially as a comment by the novelist on the justification of leaders of this nature in society. The case of the leadership debate exists mainly within the family structure of Koranti's house. The gender stereotype is deliberately misrepresented by the novelist, and where we expect the husband to take the initiative in family matters, the wife becomes the sole decision maker of unlimited powers. It is equally apparent that the writer expects us to see in Koranti a weak-willed character who cannot exercise effective control over his wife and as a consequence, depends solely on her whims. In Episode 20, the novelist, using Nozamile as a spokesperson, spells out the view that the readers may also have about Koranti as a social stereotype in the following extract:

She also told us what Nkibitsholo says--that Nojayiti is a wicked woman who enjoys her domination over a dunderhead for a husband, whom she is landing into incredible debts by her exorbitant spending of his money. Nontlola on her part, was incredulous of a hag who had bewitched her husband in broad daylight, so that he became the very fool who feeds on cow dung(pp 93-4)

But this relationship seems to be accompanied by tremendous success as the narrator himself claims that

they have been married for twenty years, but he "would not be able to say which of us is the direct cause of the success of our marriage" (p.1). Early in the novel the narrator attempts to follow Zixinene's advice and commands his wife to stop interfering with his rightful status as a family head. Confronting Nojayiti about this he demands,

Here in my house, here in my house there is one bull--one, not two! I will never again be controlled by a female! (p.6)

He goes further repeating that there can be only "one bull" in his house (p.6). This leads to a complete misunderstanding between the two of them and results in bitterness and the ultimate act of separation. The main reason for the separation itself, namely, that Nojayiti is nearly beaten up by her husband, is virtually a petty confrontation of wills and would be bound to take place whatever the reasons. Fortunately for this couple, the conflict is finally resolved through the help and subtle mediation of Nohombile, Nojayiti's sister. There is indeed a flexibility of sorts that prevails within the family after this, whereby both parties involved are prepared to compliment one another in all they do. Sinxo uses exaggeration to maintain the humour of his episodes, but even through this we can sense the harmony that is borne of an initial rejection of absolute leadership that prevails even when one leader shows evidence of shortcomings that necessitate the partner to take over

for part of the time. The following passage suggests this harmony:

Nojayiti's return, marking an end to our quarrel and subsequent separation, transformed the thorny earth into an enchanted paradise. After the hard lesson I had learnt, I decided that from the day she came back to me I would spoil and pamper her in a manner no woman was ever spoiled before.

She too came back showing signs of having been hard-hit. It had never been easy for her, after being the mistress of the house and giving orders for so long, to find herself being given instructions by other women. So she came back a much more devoted wife who also seemed quite determined to savour the pleasures of marriage to the last. (Annexure, p.14)

As can be judged from the above extract, the major factor contributing to Nojayiti's unhappiness with her brothers is loss of a commanding role. Here the role is dictated to by the prevalent social structures. That Nojayiti is a direct sister to her brothers does not lend her any precedence over their wives. The option of birth, therefore, works against Nojayiti who features here as a minor. Nojayiti's brothers themselves do not seem to be in any position to dominate the scenes brewed up by their wives. On his part Koranti is left alone to practise his initiatives and control over the family in the absence of his wife. As he himself admits, he becomes virtually inadequate to do this. He explains that he feels "like a rat in a calabash" and the children become quite dirty (p.8). Of the two, therefore, no one can in reality be said to be absolutely in charge.

It is mainly through recognition of this symbiotic relationship that the family unit manages to survive the many tribulations it experiences within the wider society. As an archetypal unit Koranti's family reflects the essence of leadership on a small scale before it is then expanded to larger proportions at village level. It is indeed at the latter level that the reader can easily accept Koranti's role as a community leader. Despite his modesty, we are able to detect that he and his family are highly regarded by the villagers. Their home is where villagers come in large numbers to pass the time and to drink coffee. In Episode 19 Koranti actually features as Vice-Chairperson of the School Committee. Although we are never told how he comes to be on this position, we can nevertheless be certain that it can never be because of his own manipulations trained at finding him a lucrative position, as his Chairperson, Nkwilinkwili, does. The other members dominate the committee meetings by petty arguments which only reflect their own follies and flaws as community leaders (pp 86-7).

The contradicting opinions of the committee members are decidedly not constructive. Instead, they demonstrate a lack of flexibility and are governed by opinionated sentiments about the teacher. It is quite clear from this that as the influence of an individual dovetails from family to society many distortions of the guiding principles of interaction are affected by much posturing and the general artificiality that functions to displace

the virtue of sincerity. The villagers of Njwaxa, therefore, can be said to be highly self-centred and egotistic individuals who use the slightest opportunity to display their ill-fated disposition. Episode 30, titled, "They Warn you Not" fully demonstrates this posturing through Evangelist Chophile and his second-in-command, Qabelisile, who both unashamedly give the general impression of themselves as austere Christians while they steal to do the very things they purport not to do. Koranti discovers them in the middle of the night eating meat said to be "impure" by the Christians,

What! The room was full of people and at the head of the row of men Chophile, our honourable evangelist was gracefully seated, eating with relish the fat sacrificial beast, with his chief elder, Qabelisile, at his side, knocking out marrow on a piece of stone, and Maweni, Machibini and Gxamntwana were surrounded by their wives, Noziyunguma, Nontwikunina and many others of the red ochre category, all of them enjoying the nice-smelling meat of the sacrificial ceremony. (p.150)

While Sinxo portrays a society that is vulnerably contented with its shortsightedness and its artificial values, Dikobe presents an urban community that has finally come to terms with the reality of its life. Like the society in Sinxo's novel the Doornfontein community demonstrates a casual resignation to the prevailing social circumstances. But already there is the awareness about their deprived circumstances and the limitations imposed upon them. This awareness seems to be growing from generation to generation and the standing hope is that the future generations will correct the wrongs that

have been perpetrated upon the past and present generations. Martha becomes the archetype of the urban black. Here we find family units disintegrating and individuals being adopted by the larger community. The residents of the Molefe Yard, "where Martha grew up" are, in fact, a cross-section of the Doornfontein community. Sole (Trump, 1990:214) sums up this view in the following manner:

The Marabi Dance is based around the young woman Martha in order to allow Dikobe to focus on the home and family life of lower class black people where women predominate. In the main, he deals with Martha's search for identity as she is attracted to Marabi on the one hand and desires respectability on the other. (Trump, 1990:214)

Though Martha is daughter to Mathloare and July, she tends to represent anybody's child. Her grandparents, Mapena and his wife are not related to her own parents in any visible way. They simply play a role as grandparents and they are adopted in order to fulfil certain tasks the real grandparents would have fulfilled in the traditional setting of the countryside. What qualifies her as an archetype is that she is born and grows up in Doornfontein. The confusing social set-up of Doornfontein becomes crystalized in her own personal experience of life and forms up her personality in its totality. As she rejects the influence of her parents, she begins to look upon the irresponsible George for guidance. She openly tells her mother, "I was born in town. I don't know the laws of the people at home and Sephai is not a boy like the town ones" (p.67). Two of the songs that Martha sings

according to the story, do suggest her strong adherence to George, her regard of him as someone with a common fate as herself:

U ndishiyelani sithando-sami.
 U ndishiyela Zweni lobu khoboka.
 Mina nawe sidibeni e marabini,
 U ndishiyelani sithando-sami. (p.44)

'Why did you leave me my love.
 Why did you leave me in the land of slavery.
 You and I met at the marabi,
 Why did you leave me my love.'

and,

Make me young to dance Marabi.
 Prospect Township, Ma-Ndlovu's house was gorgeous.
 At the side of George I danced and sang.
 It was nice when Ma-Ndlovu's seepa mokoti served
 us with skomfana.
 Oh! take me back to marabi, take me back. (p.96)

The first song is sung by Martha for the people at Mvuyane Church. Ndala also attends this concert to hear Martha sing. Sensing the danger that Martha might soon be lost to his son he concludes that, "Sephai, my son, must make haste to marry her before that boy who was playing the piano gets her spoiled" (p.44). Martha sings the second song to entertain the people who have come to spend the night with her family after her mother's burial. On hearing this one Ndala now concludes that, "My son would have been lost if he had married such a woman. ... What can a farm boy do with a town girl?" (p.97). Both songs strongly suggest Martha's true identity as an urban black. They also convey to us the tragedy Martha faces as she has no one to follow. The road pointed out

by her parents does not belong to her, and George leads her to many forms of frustration including extra-marital pregnancy.

Martha has no option but to pioneer her own way as an urban black herself. All the examples she can possibly follow are not examples of the illustrious leaders she might hope for but a bunch of downtrodden people who only exist from day to day almost under a perpetual emergency situation of a poverty-stricken refugee camp or a neglected concentration camp. Women characters like Ma-Ndlovu, Ma-Khumalo, George's mother and Bitch-Never-Die exemplify the resilience of women under pressure. They train all their energies on survival, an effort that puts them at the top of their people, not as leaders, but as survivors. Martha herself is one such survivor. She is fearless and faces the odds as they come. She is destined to win the readers' hearts when she does not flinch from the likes of Maria and Bitch-Never-Die, hard-hearted women who spend their time with the gangsters of the city. She solemnly declares to herself,

Maria, George's girl, will not last a minute in front of me, and I am not afraid of Bitch-Never-Die. ... if she is a bull-fighter, she will meet another bull-fighter. (p.74)

She then despises George, who is frightened of the gangster women, and compares him to "soft porridge" (p.74). In this manner Martha shows a departure from the conventional role played by women in a patrilineal

society. She takes the responsibility for herself upon her own shoulders, expecting no one to serve her as her protector. This attitude is also evident with the other women. George's mother performs better than George in claiming the money owed to George by Ma-Ndlovu. In fact, she even manages to get probably more money than was due to George for his performance at the marabi dance. Ma-Ndlovu herself presides over everyone at the marabi parties. The novelist traces Ma-Ndlovu back to her first days in Johannesburg, when she is still a good-mannered lady and a direct product of proper rural upbringing and orderliness. The chaotic social set-up in Johannesburg soon convinces her that in order to survive she should be rough, scrupulous and should learn ways of spurning the institutions of order and "righteousness" because they are not meant for her benefit anyway. Thus Ma-Ndlovu becomes the host at the marabi parties.

The characters organize themselves around merry-making occasions and funerals, but in reality there are no apparent leaders organizing them and preaching to them what is good and what is not. Instead, there is a spontaneous reaction to a common suffering that in turn renders the participants as a collective whole more as a mass force that has been caused to avalanche as an ominous force of destruction by decades of suffering. Suddenly the women's efforts to maintain their survival become an important base for the growth of a new culture, borne of suffering, bitterness and resistance. Motloatse

(1981:6) confirms this when he points out, "ours is a culture that does not isolate in us the experience of any facet of our lives, be it death or birth." Motloatse (1981:6) further explains,

All these activities invoke the whole community, just as the birth of every black baby is always an event in the black community despite the squalor and poverty and oppression we live under. Life always surges ahead even if we are forcibly bantustanised by the bundu chain-gang and its indunas.

Judging from Motloatse's comment one could possibly conclude that the women in The Marabi, provide the necessary surge of life. Their resilience gives birth not only to a tradition of resistance but also to a new and more determined generation, something again qualified by Motloatse's (1981:5) comment, "At least we know now that we shall not transfer another legacy of fear to the coming generation." Curiously enough it is the children, both newly-born and unborn, who function as potential leaders for the women in The Marabi. Regarding Martha's unborn child Mathloare's "unspoken wish" is, "God, help my child to give birth. The child will take my place" (p.93). In a broader perspective Mathloare can be seen as one of the women who have learnt to take charge of their lives and lead. Often she even fights to protect her interests from her own husband. She is , therefore, one of the "bull-fighters" of the story. She and her lot have been trained by the conditions of their suffering, and, as a result, they do not waste all their energy in the exercise of vanity as Nojayiti does in Sinxo's novel. In

taking Mathloare's place, therefore, the unborn child will be taking a place of command and power. Again Motloatse (1981:5) expresses this view by saying, "Today I may be powerless--so it seems--and tomorrow I may not only have power, but BE power itself."

Towards the end Dikobe's story erupts into a poem¹⁸ where the child features as a symbol of hope and victory. More than that the speaker, who is clearly a woman and probably Martha, openly declares, "This child will be my mother and father" (p.99). This is a clear indication that although Martha is herself the archetype of urban black society she is not a leader, but looks up to the on-coming generation to have the people's leaders within it. Her own child occupies the leader's position in her heart, and, curiously enough, displaces the mother and father. Her leader is, therefore, the object of her own making, something she had no power to do to George though she wished. The novelist also explains,

Africans look upon the birth of a child as a blessing. It is regarded as an asset to the family: 'I have borne myself a man. He will kill my enemies and he will work for me.' (p.99)

It is also quite significant that right from the start Martha guards and protects the identity of her child. While Ma-Mapena insists that the child shall be called Ndala, Martha silently deplores the name as an "old-fashioned" name suitable only for a "farm boy" (p.99).

¹⁸ This poem is also discussed in Chapter 4 (p.199) where the influence of oral literature is explored.

She calls him Sonnyboy, a name that embodies the grim life of the marabi dancers. The name is derived from a marabi song, "Climb up on my knee, Sonnyboy. You are only three, Sonnyboy. There's no way of saying, there's no way of mourning--" (p.113). It is quite clear that besides Martha's bitter experience the child has no other form of heritage. The only rescuing factor in his life is provided by the leadership role he is expected to play.

What Dikobe does with Sonnyboy, Jordan does with Zwelethemba (Land of Hope). One may even wonder why Jordan, almost without warning, creates a character like Zwelethemba in a story that is dominated by traditional figures. Like Sonnyboy, Zwelethemba appears too late in the story to engage in any action. Both these characters remain vague and enigmatic and they appear and disappear barely on the fringes of the stories.

Zwelethemba is born of commoners and does not seem to have any claim on leadership. Yet the novelist deliberately singles him out as an object of hope for a brighter future. One thought could be that he is intended to play a role similar to that played by his father, Mphuthumi, that being to ensure that the rightful leader is instated. The inscription by which the novelist addresses the boy, namely, "Stand firm and confident on your feet, young boy!/There are glorious fields for you to conquer!" (p.277) suggests someone far more than a messenger of the future, but rather a future restorer of

proper order over the land. The portrayal of the character, however, discourages any speculation, as the writer refrains from availing any action around him.

Just like in real life, the roles of the men and women are dictated to by custom and tradition. It is mainly for this reason that leadership based on an individual's birth rights is highly cherished. The suitability of Zwelinzima for leadership, therefore, is not questioned by the loyalists and he is installed into his position without any doubt regarding his capabilities. He, however, demonstrates an element of immaturity as soon as he assumes the position of chieftainship, first by leaving a meeting of councillors while they are still discussing his envisaged marriage (p.142). This act achieves nothing beyond the fact that it is a show of discontent. Furthermore, the act demonstrates Zwelinzima's inability to confront other men on a matter about which he feels strongly. He shifts from direct communication with the councillors to letter communication. Far from being a strategy this act falls flat as a futile demonstration of frustration. Quite often, when confronted by a crisis, Zwelinzima withdraws into himself, a form of behaviour that spells action that is governed by emotion rather than resourcefulness and decisiveness. Thus it can be said of him that the novelist weighs him, finds him not fitting perfectly and dismisses him.

As a leader, Dingindawo demonstrates much decisiveness and insight. As he prepares for war with Zwelinzima, he performs admirably before his men and gives clear commands regarding what has to be done. His use of the mbhongisa bush (possibly *genus diospyros*) as part of his strategy suggests that he is also experienced in this form of warfare. This is a bush of dark-green and densely growing leaves and can be seen quite clearly against the sky at a great distance as a black spot resembling a human head. In spite of all this, however, Dingindawo is also weighed and dismissed, mainly because his methods of leadership are too obsolete for his changing society, and virtually belong to the past.

In The Wrath women play a secondary role. In the beginning of the novel Ma-Miya only appears as a feature of the traditional background but does not play a leading role. Ma-Miya and Nozihlwele mainly stand for obedience if not dire subservience. Nomvuyo and Thembeke seem to pioneer a new role for a woman in the society of the novel, but this pioneering effort is thwarted where Thembeke is concerned.

Of the women characters, Thembeke makes a notable attempt to establish herself as a leader, but the social constraints repress her and limit her scope to the mere traditional functions expected of all royal women. It is her attempt to disregard these limits that finally discredits her in the eyes of the larger section of the

Mpondomise people. Thembeke's cultural background contributes much towards her tragic end. It is, in fact quite remarkable that all three novelists seem to expect us to see their characters, not as isolated individuals, but against their socio-cultural background.

Character and background

Much has already been said about the socio-cultural background in the three novels, especially where the question of identity is mentioned. By way of recalling some of the arguments already discussed in the previous pages a statement by the Congress of South African Writers (1989:4) can be used here as a summary of the views on culture:

Culture is a way of life that is shared by a particular group or community of people. It incorporates the shared values and the life-style, the way we communicate and the way we dress. Our culture in South Africa is a reflection of our experience from the streets to the shebeens from the schools to the factories, from the bus-stops to the political rallies. Our culture is also one which is split into two by apartheid and capitalism. On the one hand there is bourgeois culture, the SABC culture of the rich ruling class and on the other hand there is the culture of the oppressed majority.

The cultural background reflected in The Wrath is indeed African culture, but it is, nevertheless, used in the story to boost the new image of a westernized and, therefore, "enlightened" individual. Jordan permits this

fashionable talk to prevail in the story perhaps because it would have a positive appeal to the audience of his time of writing. However, the present day African critic is likely to detect in this an effort on the part of the novelist to create an elitist class and a new breed of African that is meant to dominate the society of the future. The author's own vanity and the romantic nature of his story also play a part in validating this view.

Although Thembeke's people live in the same region with the Mpondomise, her values and cultural background reflect a different perspective from that of the ochre people among the Mpondomise. The following description of her behaviour also reflects a different cultural background and upbringing and a typical mission village culture:

The woman never had the grace to wear a shawl. Instead she adorns herself with coats of all colours and has paraded in short skirts ever since she came here. While other married women cover their heads in a fitting manner, she wears a hat, or goes bare-headed, as if she were a daughter of this House, and not a wife. ... How could Majola reveal himself to a woman who does not even think it improper to appear naked in his presence. ... Do you think, Jola, that Majola would reveal himself to a woman who was surrounded by White People at her confinement, or come near the babe of the House of Majola when he was being kissed by all those pale-faced women? Do you think Majola is not ashamed by such an abomination? (p.170)

Nobantu apparently sees nothing wrong with her behaviour. Her own cultural background does not seem to impose any restrictions upon her especially where adopting the western culture is concerned. In this she comes second to

Dabula and the Mfengu men who participate in Mpondomise affairs. These Mfengu people seem to have adopted and adapted to the Mpondomise way of life with ease. Dabula is said to be distanced from his own people's culture so much that "no one in the land of the Mpondomise had ever referred to [his] Mfengu origin" (p.207). In Thembeke, and subsequently in Dabula, we detect a people who, as a rule, thrive in the championing of a hybrid culture. If one traces the historical background of the Hlubi people, one comes to the conclusion that after the Mfecane catastrophe, which scattered them over large distances, their original culture was in part displaced by the frantic demands of refugee life which necessitated much improvisation in order to survive. When this went on for generations and there was no way to return home to the reinforcements of the original culture this will to adopt and adapt became centrally situated in their value systems. Jongilanga's observation is a pointer to the existence of such a process in the Mfengu outlook when he complains,

Because of you and your kind, Mpondomise nationality is no more. To-day we don't know what to call people like you. We have no voice in the affairs of the House of Majola because of these Mfengu people, some of whom make too much of the fact that their forefathers once paid tribute in cattle in order to have unrestricted rights in this land of the Mpondomise. But let me remind you that those cattle were wiped out by the rinderpest, and there isn't even a trace of their manure in these cattlefolds of the Majola House. We are in our present unhappy position because of these Mfengu people who made us disregard our customs and traditions, so that we have been deprived of our rights in the land of Majola. (pp 207-8)

By virtue of the fact that the Mfengu are so removed from their own traditional cultural domain, it appears that they have become flexible almost to a fault. Thembeke and Dabula fail to detect the seriousness of corroding a people's cultural foundation, and consequently they apply their own flexibility to a situation where the white culture is seeking avenues by which to infiltrate the Mpondomise social order. Because these characters primarily lack a solid cultural background of their own, they experience no problem in internalizing the colonial culture and in allowing themselves to become tools for spreading it into Mpondomiseland. Thembeke and Dabula have virtually nothing to lose where the Mpondomise cultural identity is threatened, as the following conversation also demonstrates:

"Nobantu, Child of Khalipha," [Nozihlwele] said. "Do you mean to tell me you don't know the significance of that snake among your husband's people?"

"Can it be that you are talking about those idle tales about the Majola snake that the Mpondomise are said to hold in reverence? Is that the nkwakhwa that I know?"

"Oh, Nobantu! How can you speak like that? cried Nozihlwele, trembling with fear. "What would the men who sit near the cattlefold say if they heard you?"

"Oh, leave me alone!"

"Oh, well, perhaps you're right. I'd better leave you alone. You're an innocent baby. But I'm warning you--"

"Look here, you two!" interrupted Nomvuyo. "Do tell me about this nkwakhwa business. I still don't know what it's all about."

"Neither do I," said Thembeke. "I've never bothered myself about it. Ask Nozihlwele, since she is a niece of that nkwakhwa," she said laughing. (p.168)

The attitude Thembeke adopts towards the nkwakhwa here echoes the episode Maqhubela recounts early in the novel of how he and the Mfengu boys killed a nkwakhwa at school at St. Cuthbert's, an act that started a furious faction between the Mfengu and Mpondomise boys (p.10). Furthermore, in including this episode and consequently the Mfengu attitude, Jordan must have been aware of the clashes between the Mpondomise and Mfengu people frequently caused by the Mfengu's killing of the nkwakhwa which is known to have happened so many times in real life.

It is by the accident of growing up away from home and out of the strong cultural influence of his people that Zwelinzima is now possessed by a cultural flexibility that poses a danger to his own people's cultural identity. The Mpondomise people's order of life becomes threatened from the leadership angle, which demands much courage for them to face the problem squarely. Chapter 1 of Book I puts us in the picture concerning the Mpondomise outlook on life.

The ancestors are presented as being active in dictating to and shaping the order of life among the Mpondomise, with the characters themselves apparently playing the role of vassals carrying out the orders of the ancestors. The introduction of the idea of a clan--a larger family--suggests that the individuals operate under the banner of their larger families and under the name of some ancestor

or other from the family tree. Dabula, like the rest of the characters, and like most characters in UNojayiti, possesses a name that cannot easily be said to be a first name or a surname. In fact, it is quite possible that we are never told his first name, because "Dabula" is normally a surname among the Tolo families to which he belongs, and therefore, the name of an ancestor, unless Jordan means the original ancestor of the present day Dabulas of the Mount Frere, Qumbu and Tsolo districts, which is most unlikely. In addition, he is described as a man "of the Tolo clan" and is sometimes simply called "Tolo", "Zulu", "Ngwenya-nkomo" and "Dlangamandla" (pp 4-5; 207). These are all ancestral names functioning to reinforce the idea that he operates in the name of and on behalf of his ancestors. It becomes a fitting appeal, therefore, when Ngxabane uses the name of Dabula's father in giving him an important task and says, "Rise up, son of Thomalele, and do something notable before your joints grow stiff" (p.8).

In the same chapter Mzamo refers to his house as though it belongs to someone else, and the implication, in fact, is that it belongs to his ancestors: "Whose horses are these that fill Mpayipheli's yard?" (p.5). Mphuthumi, the young man, receives recognition through the mention of his father, Mpayipheli. He is then called by his people's family name as "Mashiya". The woman, Mzamo's wife, is not called by her first name, but by her own people's family name as "Ma-Miya". As already discussed, the old man from

the Ngxabane families is never called by his own first name. The name of the late king Zanemvula is linked up to the great ancestor, Majola. Legendary names of kings Mhlontlo and Matiwane also feature in the conversation. It is apparent that the lives of those who are still living are shaped and controlled by their ancestors. The dying wish of Chief Zanemvula, which is referred to in Book II is one example of such a relationship. It is destined to shape not only Zwelinzima's life but that of his family as a whole. However, he chooses to veto such influence over his own life.

As a Christian, Zwelinzima is described by Dabula as "very different from the chiefs of our great-grandfathers" (p.140). This remark seems correct as Zwelinzima does not seem to possess testimony of any contact with the ancestors, including his own father's ancestral spirit. The novelist explains that Zwelinzima "had no memory of Zanemvula, nor had anyone ever come to Sheshegu to pay him homage as chief" (p.35). In his anxiety Zwelinzima asks himself the following questions,

Why did I ever consent to do this thing? What am I going to? Who are these Dabulas who are coming to fetch me? What do I know of this Zanemvula whose son I am said to be? Do I know his grave? (p.107)

These questions are a pointer to the problem his background might cause him when he lands in Mpondomiseland. As a chief, he is an embodiment of tradition. He sanctions all the customary rites of his

people, and the most sacred rituals become his sole privilege to perform. The socio-cultural identity of the Mpondomise as a whole finds its ultimate expression through him. The philosophy of life, the outlook and order of existence of the Mpondomise people receive the height of expression as well as the depth of understanding in him as a traditional leader. But the Mpondomise soon realise that his ways do not represent their cultural values. Instead, they find that he embodies a different and rather hostile set of values against which it becomes necessary for them to defend themselves. The Mpondomise cultural life does not seem so unbearable to commoners, because at this level the schools and mission stations which seem to have existed for quite a long time are allowed to play their role freely. But a leader personifies the recognized values of his people. Zwelinzima functions quite well, but only as an organizer and not as a true people's leader. He possesses the hybrid values identical with those of his wife and her people, the Mfengu, who uphold no cultural identity of their own in the story.

Dingindawo scores his points where his background is concerned. Having stayed with his people all his life, he understands the strong points of the Mpondomise cultural background like any Mpondomise chief is supposed to do. It is for this reason that the moment of crisis sobers even him and, at least for that moment, he registers the seriousness of Nobantu's transgression in killing the

revered snake. It is spontaneous reaction to try and save the situation that makes Dingindawo touch his daughter-in-law against all "customary taboos" (p.184). This serves to give the impression that what Nobantu has done is an act of extreme violation of Mpondomise customs. After this calamity the Mpondomise people club around Dingindawo in his home, not because he is popular, but perhaps because he is the only alternative leader who shares common values with them (p.185). The following passage shows Dingindawo in the true light of a recognized leader and an embodiment of his people's cultural values:

"Will the elders please say something? We younger men feel helpless in a situation like this."

At this all eyes were turned to Ngxabane, but he in turn looked straight at Dingindawo, who had been sitting silent, his mantle over his face. ... So, addressing the crowd, Ngxabane said:

"People of Zanemvula, of Ngwanya, of Majola, if I am silent, it is not because I don't want to speak ... Indeed, I think it is for the Child of Kings himself to speak."

"If it is too much for you, Ngxabane, how much more difficult is it for us to speak? In truth, it is when such a calamity happens that we realize what babies we are. This is a matter that only men of experience can handle, men who are acquainted with calamity, men like yourself, Ngxabane. As for me, I am dumbfounded." (p.188)

The interaction between Ngxabane and Dingindawo suggests that the latter, by virtue of his position as a royal figure and a custodian of Mpondomise customs is compelled to play a leading role in giving direction. That the incident that has taken place brings him on a common understanding with Ngxabane, is enough to lend him

credibility in the role he must now play. Also Dingindawo's diffidence here suggests that he is well acquainted with Mpondomise cultural values enough to see the immensity of the calamity now before him. Perhaps it can still be said of Dingindawo even at this stage that he may still not be entirely honest in what he says. He has all along been presented as a shrewd debater and fighter, and one who is known to seize his opportunity whenever he finds it. He knows how to soften the ochre people, and he has come to realise that this is where Zwelinzima fails dismally. Zwelinzima on the other hand does not clearly convince us that other than his temporary separation from his wife the calamity itself means anything to him.

In a different fashion, Martha in The Marabi, is also faced with a choice between the background in which she has been brought up and that of the rural people. For Martha the options come in the form of marriage, where she has to choose between George, who has just impregnated and deserted her, and Sephai, who will take her to the rural areas where she will enjoy possessing her own stock and property. The broader implications of her choice, however, are that in choosing to remain in the city and to bring up a fatherless child, she picks a life of suffering and constantly frustrated efforts to tame an unfriendly cultural background of the slums. On the other hand, deceiving Sephai into taking her for wife promises some relief, but an unfamiliar cultural

environment. In addition to this there is the compelling urge to get married. In a manner that might have surprised Sephai about her lack of restraint, she confronts the former with her request,

"Sephai," she resumed after a few moments of silence, "I want you to marry and take me to your home. I want a man who will give my parents cattle and take me to church. I want to wear the nkitsing earrings worn by married women." (p.81)

While Zwelinzima is torn between university education and a subsequent elitist life of the school people of his time, and an elitist life of a royal figure, Martha has to decide simply between a rural and an urban setting. Both options promise her no change in social status, as she will continue to be regarded as a common street girl and later as a simple township woman in the urban environment, while a life in the rural areas can only offer her the status of a severely deprived and neglected existence in the backwaters of the land, so to speak. Her mother, however, tries to sharpen her desire for marriage by a false suggestion that life in the rural areas could be very smooth. She says,

"Oh! you talk about cattle! Two kraals full! They milk, and give to the pigs. Other people just come and milk some of the cattle for themselves and in exchange for the milk give their children to look after the cattle. They are rich my child. If he marries you, you won't want to come to town any more. (p.67)

Before this, Mathloare has been suspicious about the proposed marriage between Martha and Sephai. She changes her mind only after her husband convinces her that Sephai

can afford the bridal stock. Her account of the wealth of the rural people, therefore, is more of an exaggeration borne of nostalgia about her people's past. She also deliberately romanticizes country life in order to lure Martha into marriage.

Martha's recognition of her present identity, on the other hand, is contained in the following extract,

Whilst she was washing outside Moipone lighted the primus stove and brewed tea. The 'house' where the Mabongo family lived was not more than 15 by 20 feet. In summer the mealies were cooked outside and some of the household goods of little value were kept outside in the yard. Martha had slept in the same room as her parents from babyhood to womanhood and felt little inconvenience, except when she had visitors. She did not complain.
(p.66)

The sentence, "She did not complain;" sums up Martha's attitude towards her background. She links up the matter of her background with the experience of those who have been born and now grow up under these circumstances. For example, as soon as the subject of her marriage to Sephai is introduced to her, she loses her concentration in singing and her voice deteriorates. She sees as the cause for this "this business with Ndala's child," and declares that "I was quite happy with George, but he is a crook" (p.65). Even when the negotiations for marriage are about to begin between Sephai's people and Martha's parents, Martha still sees her future in terms of her background. "Today is today," she says to herself, and then "[thinks]

of George: 'A crook.' ... imagined Sephai: 'Faithful.'
But ..." (p.88).

Like Dingindawo in The Wrath, Martha's parents have been brought up within a traditional environment. In spite of the different social setting surrounding them they still hold tenaciously onto some of the traditional practices. For example, Mathloare goes to a traditional medicine man, "a doctor who still had connection with the gods," to obtain medicine for her daughter (pp 59-62). July slaughters a goat and engages his cousin, Ndala, to preside over the ritual to remove madimabe (p.56). Again just like Dingindawo, Martha's parents use some of the principles applicable in traditional life for their own selfish ends. Martha's marriage to Sephai is important to this couple not necessarily because it should atone the ancestors for the marriage that did not take place between July and his cousin, Sarai, but because "bogadi" is seen by them as a relief from poverty as the following conversation demonstrates:

"Today your people are ready to forgive you because you have a daughter who is old enough to be married. Ah! They think they can save bogadi. Never! You have not paid even a fowl for me. Who are they to claim my daughter's bogadi?"

"My cousin is not coming to claim my daughter's bogadi. He is interested in his son marrying Martha and I also want them to marry. He has a lot of cattle and goats. All I would have inherited from his mother, has been given to his son. ... He would return all that I would have got, in the form of bogadi. Over twenty cattle and forty goats. ...

"Hau! Ntate Moipone! ... I did not say he would claim the bogadi. ... I shall tell Moipone to put on her mochikisa. She shall look like a

woman! Modisane! Your cousin will never let his son disappoint him! ... Modimo ona le mogau--God has mercy." (p.30)

Mathloare's sudden change of tone as soon as she hears of Sephai's legacy clearly indicates where the emphasis lies as far as she is concerned. While Dingindawo is willing to sacrifice his nephew Zwelinzima for the benefit of his own child, Vukuzumbethe, Mathloare is anxious to exchange her daughter for wealth. Understandably, her poverty-ridden life has contributed to her distorted vision of custom and ritual.

The rescuing factor for Martha is that unlike her parents, and unlike Zwelinzima and Dingindawo in The Wrath, she turns to face the circumstances that assail her, keeping her under constant pressure. Indeed, like the "bull-fighter" she claims to be, she manages even to change her attitude towards the birth of her child. While Mathloare dies of heart failure and July goes to the army Martha indomitably faces her fate by adopting an aggressive stance against the circumstances of her grim background, instead of a mere effort to survive that we see with the other women. The birth of her child marks the beginning of her attitude. The novelist claims that, "Martha did not curse her `sin' when she became pregnant. `This child is going to work for me'" (p.79). As already stated, the work that this child is expected to do is to carry the aggressive stance to its logical conclusion-- "He will kill my enemies and he will work for me," says the writer later on in the story (p.99).

While Jordan constructs a serious story to reveal the cracks caused by imperialism to the Mpondomise culture, Sinxo does this indirectly through extensive use of humour and exaggeration. Dikobe neatly balances humour and bitterness in his novel. One can never escape the many humorous incidents.

In UNojayiti we find the characters operating against a rich moral background. There are the expected standards of performance against which we are supposed to measure the characters in order for us to derive the entertaining reward of humour. It follows, therefore, that if the reader fails to gauge the performance of a character against the desirable standards, perhaps for lack of details regarding what is expected of the character, then the reader misses the humour and the moral of the story altogether. For example, anyone who is acquainted with a purely socialist life in Africa, a kind of life whose social order ensures that every individual fulfils certain responsibilities in society, and because of the role one plays one occupies a certain niche in society where one is well-provided--anyone who is acquainted with such values may not find it easy to accept Nongemkile's behaviour as warranted in Episode 32.

This old woman poses as a virtual beggar and a nuisance. We are also made to feel that she has no right to bother Koranti's family for food. The traditional identification

system, which is also a faultless system, is that of family names, often called "clan" names. This system ensures that one is never really a complete stranger in a village, and, just as Nojayiti also discovers there is some form of remote relationship between her and the old woman.

That the old woman is painted in negative terms as one who exploits Koranti's family is also a clear reflection of the callousness of capitalism that now appears as a common way of life in this village. We have a clear division between those who have and those who have not, with the have-nots also being expected to draw from resources that do not exist for their own survival. This bigotry is permitted to prevail in the village with the result that Nongemkile and her lot appear as undesirable elements, opportunists and exploiters of society. As the narrator also suggests the whole process of class division appears absolutely undesirable, since even those who pose as being better-off can hardly feed their families in times of drought. People face up to the causes of their common suffering independently as individuals instead of doing so together as fellow-sufferers, just as the people of Doornfontein do in The Marabi. Thus, the reader can only enjoy the humorous development of events in this episode, that culminate in Nongemkile's triumph, only if he understands and accepts this character's moral rights in her society. Other than that any reader could be obliged to feel that the episode

ends with the most unacceptable conclusion as Koranti and Nojayiti continue to play victim to the behaviour of their community.

The background against which the individual characters feature is itself one of mixed cultures with the missionaries having contributed quite a dose of western values to the existing African values, eliminating most of the latter in the process. The fusion is complete and the new set of values represents a new cultural background. There is no white individual among the villagers, for example, working to install the cultural values of his people anymore. There are also no villagers fighting to preserve any of their own cultural values. As already indicated, a culture like this has sprung up from the villages around the mission stations first, some of which even have as their second name "eMishini." Presently, however, these mixed values exist almost uniformly in all South African villages as schools have also increased to at least one school to a village generally. It seems as though the mission village culture is the archetype of present day culture in the villages in most of its facets.

Because of the restricted reinforcements of the values of western culture due perhaps to the absence of white villagers at Njwaxa, the individual villagers have apparently succeeded in modifying whatever values they have absorbed from the western culture to the pattern of

their own value systems. Episode 17, titled "A legacy and its Harzards" provides a clear example of this. Here Nojayiti's brothers and sisters contest the bequeathal of their father, Siqithi's goats to Nojayiti. Concerning Siqithi's legacy the writer says, "As custom dictates, he left his estate to the eldest, Macholi, and, in addition, he bequeathed his large stock to him" (p.76). One would normally expect that the arrangements of a dead person are respected, especially by his children, but, like Zwelinzima in The Wrath the children are bent on satisfying themselves first. While in The Wrath the novelist makes it to appear as an isolated incident, in UNojayiti it is taken as an accepted social practice. It is quite clear that though the Mpondomise in The Wrath are determined not to make an exception in the case of the marriage of a royal figure, the commoners could disregard the dying wishes of their own late ones with impunity.

As Siqithi's children go to the court of law which is a western institution, nothing is said about the inadequacy of the provisions of the custom. Instead, one finds that these claimants have much more manoeuvring space to wage their contest at the level they like than would have been the case for a purely reactionary individual of either western or African origin. The urge for self-satisfaction becomes the controlling factor over the stipulations of custom and western institutions. As a result of this, the individuals appear freer and more inventive. For example,

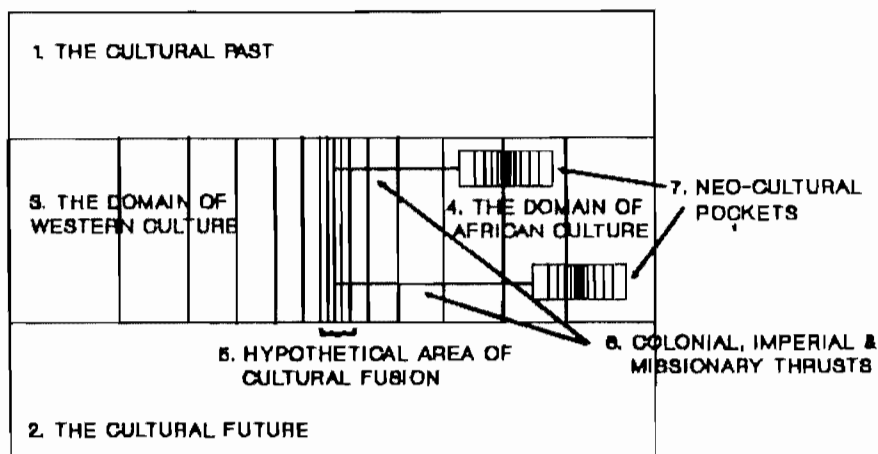
applying the facilities provided by the western legal institution, Nojayiti and her brothers and sisters each "[has] his or her own lawyer" (p.77). In addition, all, except Nojayiti exploit the availability of traditional medicine magic by consulting "medicine men to doctor the proceedings" (p.77). Payment in kind or in the form of money underscores all the decisions taken. Describing the enormity of the case the narrator says,

This turned out to be a sensational case. For days thereafter we spent our time in and out of the courtroom, and the trial went on interminably, with intermittent delays caused by postponements; and, in the meantime the lawyers and the medicine people kept hiking their costs. It was as though, however, the family was not conscious of these expenses. (p.78)

It is at this stage that Nojayiti invents an unusual solution to the conflict, by slaughtering the goat and dividing its meat. It could be argued that why the solution becomes acceptable to the rest of the family members and their witnesses is because of the traditional appeal of Nojayiti's presentation speech, a speech that inspires Macholi so much that he erupts into an enthusiastic praise-poem performing act. Judging from Nojayiti's speech, especially her confession that she "took the law upon [her] hands, in [her] attempt to stop [them] going to the court" (p.80), one is inclined to conclude that the need to hold the family together as a traditional unit far outweighs other more self-centred efforts. Justification of Nojayiti's solution, therefore, is sought from the family rather than from custom or

court. Nojayiti's initiative draws its strength from this combination of value systems. We, therefore, witness here a more flexible cultural environment that can accommodate a variety of apparently contradictory value systems.

The above is also the experience in the Doornfontein of The Marabi, where, because of a fusion of a diversity of cultural practices, even the purely immoral deeds of, for example, "kissing on the pretext that they were sisters and brothers" or making love "to mothers and their daughters" (p.1), are drawn inside the almost imperceptible boundary lines demarcating the moral from the amoral. While in The Marabi and UNojayiti we deal with the lives and background of common people, The Wrath deals with the elitist minority, the royal family. We are, therefore, not given any opportunity in the latter book to see how the cultural background influences the common people from day to day. But all three books reflect a cultural background that seems to have formulated itself in a manner that can be illustrated diagrammatically as follows:



EXPLANATION:

1. The cultural past remains basically invulnerable. Mankind can apply to it from any angle whatsoever. What cultural interactions there were and what influences prevailed we cannot tell nor alter.
2. The dominant features of the cultural future cannot be entirely predictable and there can be no fixed proportions.
3. By the domain of western culture is referred to the western cultures as we know them.
4. By the domain of African culture is referred to the African cultures as they might have been.
5. The Area of hypothetical culture middle ground represents a cultural fusion between the western and African cultural streams.
6. The colonial/imperial thrusts brought the European way of life and culture into Africa, mainly in the form of town, the mission stations, the schools and the trading posts, etc.
7. The neo-cultural pockets are represented by the Doornfontein of The Marabi. Those that are not linked to the horizontal lines representing colonial/imperial thrusts stand for areas where the colonizer has withdrawn his person with the subsiding of the colonial spirit, leaving behind his influence. As seen in parts of The Wrath and UNojayiti, the foreign cultural values soon acquire local characteristics and become part of a new form of culture.

Imaging and other related techniques

Sometimes the novelist draws up the word picture of a character in such a manner that the reader is able to create from this a vivid image of the action taking place. Imaging in characterization reinforces the skills of caricaturing and stereotyping. Imaging with characters is, however, not a commonly debated topic. Scholars mainly concern themselves with the techniques of stereotyping and/or caricaturing. It should be conceded, however, that though a stereotype may be understood to behave in a certain special manner, the actual details of his behaviour depend entirely on the skill of the writer and his power of observation. The result may not be the same from writer to writer. The image of one stereotype that a reader may derive from the description by the writer may differ in intensity and clarity where two or more writers portray one form of stereotype.

Mthunzini in The Wrath and Ketile in UNojayiti both represent the typical loser who has no success with girls. But while Jordan refrains from giving a detailed description of Mthunzini's physical features, Sinxo relies heavily on such description. Here is Sinxo's description of Ketile from Episode 21:

He was a dwarfish fellow with bendy legs, a squint with rubber-thick lips and a wide mouth that stretched from one ear to the other. Stocky as this fellow was, his feet were so long that he wore size nine, which made him to waddle along like a duck. Did you say voice! There has never

been such a big one before; when he spoke it sounded like thunder and forests threatened to split open. ... The fellow was also gifted in the art of jesting. ... In addition to all this he had a big handicap, that being an abnormally gross appetite. (p.99)

Here the novelist creates a negative image of someone who, because of his appetite can be said to live only for food. He is said to possess an instinct for detecting the presence of pork. Decidedly, he does not possess the qualities of an ideal lover. The novelist emphasizes the point of Ketile's ugliness so that the readers have no doubt in their minds that he is not destined to be a lover. It, therefore, becomes as much of a surprise to us as it is to the other characters when the beautiful Noziganeko agrees to marry him. The image, which is, of course, highly distorted by the novelist's exaggeration, is basically that of an idiot. Even his behaviour during the marriage negotiations is cast in the irrational reaction of idiotic stupidity. He does not seem to feel any indignity as the men spring to their feet in shock and dismay at the girl's acceptance, and also when Koranti calls him "a clod" (p.101). Instead, he maintains a broad smile of triumph. Typical of his personality, Ketile totally forgets about his wedding, as he has discovered where they have killed a pig in one of the neighbouring villages.

Towards the end of the Episode Ketile is actually termed the "box-chest" by the writer, which denigrates him and lowers him to the level of a mere object. His appearance

as well as his behaviour and habits are collectively used by the novelist to mirror a compelling image of the stereotype portrayed.

While Sinxo uses unbridled appetite to create the image of a loser, Jordan makes use of theft and deviousness. Chapters 3 and 4 of Book II in The Wrath are devoted to Mthunzini. Here Jordan creates the negative image of a loser by following his manner of thinking and his actions, as it were, what could perhaps be viewed as a typical example of the "stream of consciousness technique" (Scott, 1965:278)¹⁹. The title of Chapter 3, namely, "The Spirits of my Ancestors are with Me," represents a direct quotation of someone's testimony. This, of course, is ensured by the use of "my" and "me", so that as we read the title for the first time we wonder who the speaker could be and what sort of circumstances bring about such a testimony. We are at once deceived into contending that the speaker is someone virtuous, the act is pure and the circumstances are conducive to worship. As we read the story we discover, to our dismay, that the speaker is Mthunzini, and he has just acquired information not meant for him through an act of stealing. This deed cannot in reality be sanctioned by the ancestors. Already we know that the Mpondomise people revere their ancestors. Furthermore, the Mpondomise people clearly prefer to believe that the ancestors are

¹⁹ This is the technique "for revealing thoughts and feelings flowing, in perpetual soliloquy, through the mind of the character" (Scott, 1965:278).

responsible for the smooth-running of life among them. They could, therefore, not be associated with an immoral act of stealing. It is in Mthunzini's rationalization of his theft that we discover his devious nature, and the novelist conveys this to us by seeming to quote verbatim what Mthunzini says to himself as the title suggests.

In the next Chapter, "Thief!" the novelist excels in imaging this character through suggested action. Again the writer seems to quote someone warning a thief, whereupon, we are bound to wonder what circumstances warrant this sort of action. We may at this stage be quite suspicious that it is Mthunzini who is the thief. In order to reinforce the idea of Mthunzini's degrading conduct, the novelist uses animal imagery to describe the stealthy movements of the thief. First he appears fearful like a timid little animal. He lingers "in the dark" and hardly falls asleep. He seems to be behaving instinctively like an animal. The writer says,

He was so nervous that the faintest sound outside--even the rustle of a leaf--was sufficient to set his scalp tingling, whereupon he would blow out the lamp and peer outside. (p.70)

This description echoes that of the previous Chapter where the novelist even uses animal attributes like he "leapt to the table"; he "grabbed" the letter; he becomes "startled" by the contents; and then he "flew out of the room" (p.64).

When Mthunzini approaches Dingindawo with the information he has discovered regarding Zwelinzima's return to Mpondomiseland, he becomes noticeably scared of the chief's person. His fearfulness spells out his lack of courage and his uncertainty. By his awkwardness before the chief he casts himself in the image of cowardice, wilfulness and treachery.

On the contrary, Sephai, the "skapie" of Dikobe's The Marabi casts an image of strength and uprightness. Though Martha hesitates to accept his plea for marriage she accepts that he is stronger than George, her favourite boyfriend. She says, "George is weak. He has tried to hold me like this and I just pulled my hand away easily" (p.70). Sephai fails to win Martha for wife, but this failure does not render him a virtual loser. In fact it becomes more welcome than his imminent success which seems to threaten Martha's sense of identity.

Sephai casts the image of a rich and gallant young fellow who is willing to do what is expected of him in order to rescue his cousin, Martha, from the evils of the city. Unlike Mthunzini and Ketile, Sephai's actions complement him and give him an aura of dignity. He stirs curiosity when he visits Martha in the Molefe Yard. The novelist says, "People in the yard stared at him. They were people `looking at mokgoenyana--bridegroom'" (p.69). In this manner he features in the light of redeemer of sorts, a

role his father plays effectively when the Mabongo family lands in misfortune and the experience of death.

The image of ultimate power and authority, however, is vested in God, the African gods or the ancestors in all three of these novels. In The Marabi there are occasional references to the gods, the ancestors and such important ancestral figures as Senzangakona and Chaka to whom the man with the assegai appeals (p.31). The following extract features Ndala appealing to the gods of Mabongo and Mathathakanye:

Holding the knife tightly between his teeth, he turned the goat's face towards the East and murmured inaudible words, understood only by his cousin.

"Take ye gods of Mabongo and Mathathakanye. Wash all that is in your child. Sleep (peace) for your child."

The goat bleated an agonized cry.

...

Moipone went down on her knees and Ndala smeared her face with undigested grass and bid her drink the blood from the skin.

"Get down on your knees." Mabongo got on his knees. "Robalang ngoana wa lona--give peace to your child." (p.55)

Ndala's direct address of the ancestors reveals that the latter possess powers that can bring "peace" to July. July himself, a fully grown adult is now presented to the gods as a "child". He features in the whole ritual very much on the same level as his daughter, Moipone, who, perhaps by virtue of her being even physically a child, becomes the first to be introduced to the gods. Kneeling here suggests a position of humility, complete dependence

and devotion to the authority now being invoked. Thus the characters reflect the child image before their gods.

The title, The Wrath of the Ancestors, suggests that the spirits of the ancestors have direct influence on the lives of the living. In fact this title serves to forewarn the reader about the impending calamity where the ancestors are meant to avenge themselves upon the living. This calamity does befall the people of Mpondomiseland. In this novel too the ancestors seem to control the lives of the other characters. They enjoy a vague, uncertain presence due to their being physically inaccessible, a phenomenon that can only mystify the reader. Zwelinzima's life is redirected by the call for him to come and rule Mpondomiseland, a call that has as its seal his father's dying wish. His invitation, conducted in a lofty, poetic language by Mphuthumi, resembles "the voice of one calling to him from a great distance" (p.36). Thus, the ancestors are imaged as patrons who supervise the lives of their successors thereby tempering with the latter's destiny. Mbiti (1969:75) explains the level of ancestral spirits thus,

Broadly speaking, we can recognize two categories of spiritual beings: those which are created as such, and those which were once human beings. These can also be divided into divinities, associates of God, ordinary spirits and the living-dead.

Both Dikobe and Jordan are content with informing us only that the ancestors are invoked, but we are never let into

the council at the upper chamber, as it were, in the manner that Wole Soyinka, the playwright, does with Ogun, Esu and the other gods in A Dance of the Forests.

Sinxo, on the other hand, deals with a Christianized community, where the well-known Christian doctrines prevail. The women of prayer and Nojayiti's favourite church songs feature prominently in the episodes. The novelist, therefore, makes no effort to design an inspiring image of the feared God. He obviously assumes that God is understood to all his readers. We are not to wonder when Nojayiti sings, prays and fasts for proper education of the children of the village in Episode 28, titled, "Pandemonium".

Though The Marabi is a metropolitan novel focusing on the more contemporary times, many common trends regarding the relationship between the individual and society, aspects of leadership, the individual and background and imaging have been proven to exist between this novel and the rural Xhosa novels focusing on a more remote past, namely, The Wrath and UNojayiti. Characterization in these three novels is quite important because it reflects purely African characters with all the attendant tribulations and joys as well as the complexities of their culture and how these affect them. It is mainly in this field of characterization that the African writer finds the opportunity to bring what he believes characterises Africanness in life, other than in the

language and geographical setting which tend to confine him to a specific place and people. A character may speak Xhosa, or Ibo or even English, like Clarence in Camara Laye's The Radiance of the King, but it is still easy for the reader to identify the Africanness in him.

As already reflected in the overall argument of this chapter, aspects from oral literature, like praise singing, ritual performance and folktales feature significantly in the three works under discussion. It would be ideal now to look at the influence of oral literature on characterization in the works under review.

C H A P T E R 4
THE INFLUENCE OF ORAL LITERATURE

As already demonstrated in previous chapters, the three works under discussion qualify as African literary works not just because they were written by Africans, but essentially because they reflect characters who possess African features and are set on African soil with the themes and plot being governed by a purely African cultural force. Naturally, the direct influence of oral literature on these works can be detected. Strangely enough, The Marabi, a metropolitan novel, compares much more favourably with The Wrath, in the abundance of qualities drawn from oral literature, than does UNojayiti. UNojayiti mostly radiates almost fiendish sophistication based on fiercely unquestioned assumptions. It is for this reason that this work will be handled separately and compared to both The Marabi and The Wrath together.

Finnegan's (1970:20) view of the co-existence of oral and written literature is used as a starting point for this chapter when she says,

It is already widely accepted that these two media can each draw on the products of the other, for orally transmitted forms have frequently been adopted or adapted in written literature, and oral literature too is prepared to draw on any source, including the written word. To this interplay we can now add the fact that when looked at comparatively, the two forms, oral and written,

are not so mutually exclusive as is sometimes imagined. Even if we picture them as two independent extremes we can see that in practice there are many possibilities and many different stages between the two poles and that the facile assumption of a profound and unbridgeable chasm between oral and written forms is a misleading one.

It is, indeed, a pity that the debate on the status of oral literature among world literatures has almost drawn to a close, because arguments that equate oral literature to written literature in the manner that Finnegans' comparison does leave behind a lopsided view of oral literature, which in turn tempts the analyst to view oral literature as inferior. In brief, spoken language is part of man's basic nature, but the written word is based on invention by man and, therefore, represents a secondary world--the world of human civilization. Other media like the film and television are a further development from the written word per se. A story is written and a film can be produced from it. There is, therefore, something of a linear relationship from the spoken word through the written word to a television series as man's civilization progresses.

By virtue of its being experienced through the use of voice oral fiction is closer to the spoken word than other forms of literature. At the same time the spoken word could be seen to be standing closer to absolute reality than the various forms of literary art. In absolute terms, therefore, the spoken word should be the mother of all literatures. It then lends some of the

absolute virtues to oral literature, and further to written literature. Oral as well as written literatures are based on experience and experience itself, which may be interpreted by the co-existing word of the moment of its occurrence, remains the final pointer to absolute fact. Many critics often recognize that the writer's credibility rests on his sensitivity about his background which forms part of his own experience, and his skill in compensating the experience of this socio-cultural background with his work of art. Jordan (1973:viii-ix) puts it thus,

Like every member of society, the writer has a role to play. To be relevant, he must reflect the hopes and aspirations of his society, its struggles and tribulations, its triumphs and failures. But this, he can do, only if he is part and parcel of his society, which is the base on which he stands and from which he can draw sustenance.

As can be noticed, Jordan's statement emphasizes the deep significance of experience, be it a collective social or individual experience. Apparently it is the consistent recognition of this experience that lends "relevance" to a work of art. It is mainly for this reason that Jordan's (1973:vii) complaint that, "most of the books on Africa by American and European academicians are far too superficial, because most of these scholars have only a superficial knowledge and understanding of Africa," can be justified. This critic (Jordan, 1973:17) further explains his standpoint thus,

... we find that in the indigenous languages of Southern Africa ... there is a wealth of traditional poetry covering, in its subject matter, the whole range of human experience and emotion--of the young child excited about the "funny" movements of the frog, or curious about the timid little bird that hops and flutters about from twig to twig; of the youth in the joys and pangs of love; of the vigorous hunter or warrior; of the aging man longing to rest with his fathers in the land of the spirits; of the clan or tribe reliving its past tribulations and triumphs, etc.

One of the many critics who also clearly uphold this view is Thuynsma (1987:79), who elaborates thus,

African story has tended towards themes that emanate from human nature: the human nature which comes to terms with the way people commune with each other. To complement, if not to cement this prime function, they resort to the fantastic via the supernatural--not merely as references to folk-magic, but as religious, ritualistic underwriting of social function. It may indeed be this ontological imperative which grants African art slightly easier access to the uninitiated than does African literature.

The above debate is embarked upon purely to establish the significance of oral literature on its own, and to demonstrate its relevance in the study being undertaken in this treatise. Indirectly, this chapter is planned to bring into the ensuing debate what should be the basic feature of the works being compared here, namely, the influence of oral literature. This chapter is also expected to be dominated by a defensive consciousness, best illustrated by Finnegan (1970:19) when she says:

Even in a society apparently dominated by the printed word the oral aspect is not entirely lost. Perhaps because of the common idea that written literature is somehow the highest form of the art, the current significance of oral elements often tends to be played down, if not overlooked completely.

The romantic treatment of characters

The romantic novel of the Victorian Era must have captivated Jordan with its taunting paradox of accessible remoteness. By the latter is meant the power of a positive and inviting experience that though perfect seems to be almost part of possible reality, and yet it is also accompanied by the awareness that such things can only happen in fiction. Oral literature, being itself an art, also possesses strong romantic qualities. Almost intuitively, the three writers often rely on oral literature for the promotion of romance in their works. Evidently, Sinxo's novel lacks much of the romantic touch that is experienced in The Wrath and The Marabi. Thuynsma's (1987:76-7) general observation regarding the influence of oral literature on written works is used here to sum up the whole background argument that might be necessary to explain the bold association of romance with oral literature, when he says:

It is not enough that the student of African literature be content with a knowledge of the links between the oral literary forms and the written examples, links that have begun to constitute an increasingly popular critical statement in the study of African writing. So far, actual exposure to texts from the oral tradition have been restricted to poetry and perhaps the re-written types of narrative. Little, for example, has been made of the many specific devices that Thomas Mofolo borrows from the oral tradition to impel his fictional account of Shaka. One does not realise the full extent to which Mofolo has

absorbed his many sources; why he slips so easily into the panegyric mode and continuous tenses; why his narrative involves what must rank among the widest and most versatile uses of repetition; why the extensive and very obvious packing of one episode upon another or why he uses what we have narrowly come to call authorial comment or even worse, authorial intrusion. If indeed these traits are recognized, how often has it been acknowledged that Mofolo the story-teller takes much the same attitude towards his reader as the oral story-teller takes much the same attitude towards her/his listeners?

The debate regarding Mofolo's example, given in the above extract applies equally to Jordan, Dikobe and Sinxo. The strong similarities between the works of Jordan and Dikobe make interesting comparison because of the difference between these two writers in background, period of writing and the subjects and techniques applied in characterization.

First of all, a common understanding on the use of the term "romantic" should now be cultivated. Defining the term "romance" Scott (1975:250) states that it is "something written in the popular tongue, not in Latin; hence a tale of chivalry." But much closer to the conception adopted in the use of the term "romantic" in this treatise is Scott's (1965:251) apt description of "Romanticism":

The term is characterized by the qualities of remoteness, desolation, melancholy, divine unrest, passion, and the all-embracing adventure, of never-satisfied aspiration after the unknown or the unattainable.

Following the above description one can conclude that The Wrath and The Marabi do display a gentle touch of the

romantic. The introduction of aspects of oral literature lends to both novels a remoteness that in turn involves a delicate sense of nostalgia. The beauty of it all lies in the fact that it is never overdone by both novelists, yet one cannot miss the presence of this romantic touch.

The well-composed titles of these novels themselves introduce an amorphous body of characters who are never clearly delineated as individuals in the novels. Jordan's title, The Wrath of the Ancestors possesses a positively haunting sensation as it strikes the reader as referring to the spirits of the dead. At once the loaded meaning of the rituals and customs of the romantic past is brought into focus. The whole unrecorded oral history and culture of the Mpondomise becomes fully implied in the title. Mention of the ancestors, who are, in fact, the subject of the title, brings with it the remote past into the presence of the story. Just as "wrath" suggests unfavourable relations, it also introduces what Scott calls the "melancholy" and "divine unrest". It is mainly because of the remoteness of the ancestors that we feel at liberty to choose whether to regard them as characters in the novel or simply as deus ex machina. Thus we turn to the pages of the novel with a full expectation to encounter the angry ancestors. It need not be mentioned that this title gives Jordan much scope to work the reader's interest into the fabric of the story and already begins to stimulate the reader's feelings of suspense, a typical feature of a romantic novel. At each

page to which we turn we expect to witness the wrath of the ancestors. Without doubt the ancestors are always associated with rituals and customs that generate much oral literature. As characters they fit more naturally within a text of oral literature than in a written novel. Their presence in Jordan's novel brings with it the inevitable romantic quality.

In a similar manner the title, The Marabi Dance implies in it a dancer if not a body of dancers who are the initiators of the dance itself. These characters are never clearly delineated in the novel. There is, however, one highly melancholy scene of the marabi dance at Ma-Ndlovu's house. Even there we know that this is just a cross section of a typical scene at a marabi dance, that not all the dancers are physically encompassed by this dance, and that the participants range from the dancers mentioned in Ma-Ndlovu's house to dancers in other marabi parties that night and at other nights, and further to all the potential dancers and the imaginary dancers.

Again the subject of Dikobe's title is a "dance", which suggests that the dance is itself a central feature whose function is to lend identity to the marabi dancer, very much like a people's traditional dance would normally do. Such traditional dancers normally feature as part of oral literature. The example of the marabi dance Dikobe gives us possesses allusions to traditional life of the rural black people, and hence to oral literature:

The dancers swayed from side to side like mealie stalks; the right and left feet moving forward and back like springbok crossing a river. They sang as loudly as they could, singing for joy to the spirits of their forefathers. George ran his short fingers over the black and white keyboard as if they were moved by an electric charge. He sang with his face pitched to the ceiling. (pp 6-7)

The image of "mealie stalks" suggests a rural setting, while reference to a "springbok crossing the river" reinforces the idea of being closer to nature and, therefore, momentarily away from the urban environment. As the dancers are claimed to be "singing for joy to the spirits of their forefathers," we are compelled to experience a definite shift of identity, on the part of the dancers, from ordinary marabi patrons to ritual dancers invoking the ancestors.

All this, however, is mere allusion, as the novelist strives to juxtapose the highly romanticized rural life to the reality of a deprived black community in South Africa, as a device to achieve maximum impact. This deliberate juxtaposition is more evident when the novelist now switches over to images that are more directly connected with the immediate environment. At its extreme the black and white keyboard of the piano could be said to represent the desired harmony among the races that make up the South African society. As one reads further references to objects that suggest an urban setting are introduced in quick procession, namely, the "ceiling"; "a cocopan full of mine sand"; an

"intersection"; and "train coaches between the stations of Langlaagte and Croesus" (p.7). One wonders about the possible reception of this song if indeed the spirits of the ancestors are being engaged in the proceedings, when we have to concede that the song itself epitomises a prostitute, and it is sung in harmony with flies. The dancers are swayed by this song and by the fumes of liquor. Instead of the existence of the domain of the ancestors in this picture, the musicians and dancers are presided over by the imposing ceiling, beyond which is a flurry of excited rats.

As already indicated, Dikobe alludes to song and dance of a traditional nature in a bid to emphasize the grim reality facing the marabi dancers as a collection of characters. Instead of the dance reflecting cultural virtue and well-being in a manner that a traditional dance would be expected to do, it mirrors the general tragedy and decadence of the life of the community to which the marabi dancer belongs as well as the poignancy of the scene. As the participants sometimes fall on their faces, "sleeping where they had fallen" (p.7) one cannot help being reminded of a pose of death in action, something one could possibly expect in a battle-field. This dance could, therefore, be interpreted as a dance of the fallen races of South Africa, because its function is to mirror the current predicament of such people. The allusion to oral literature brings with it a touch of the romantic as it serves as a reminder that the dancers and

their lot once had a cultural base of their own, but all that is now irretrievably lost to them.

Many South African writers often design titles for books, poems and short stories in such a manner that they give a romantic reflection of a traditional culture that has been sustained by oral literature. Such titles as Sounds from a Cowhide Drum, a book of poetry by Mtshali, The Return of the Amasi Bird, a collection of poems edited by Tim Couzens and Essop Patel, Shades of Adamastor by Van Wyk Smith, lend the works so titled the added impression that they are immersed in the culture of a certain people.

In many cases allusions like this cannot be explained by the writers themselves, but in the case of the two novels under discussion there is a marked effort to address the subjects of the titles, namely, the wrath of the ancestors and the marabi dance. The roles of the main characters are romanticized through the close association created between these roles and the romantic past.

In The Wrath Zwelinzima possesses not only the family name of Majola but also the right to address himself to the spirits of the illustrious Mpondomise leaders of the past. The latter is possible for him because through his father he is a direct descendant of these leaders. The novelist even takes the privilege to suggest that because of this, Zwelinzima possesses "heavy blood" that gives

him "a gravity of countenance which is said to be 'characteristic of people of royal blood'" (p.27). This romantic allusion contributes the element of mysticism that lends the novelist the required margin in which he works out the unpredictable nature of Zwelinzima that consumes him down to the shocking act of committing suicide. It is also this aura of mysticism that allows the novelist to leave several questions unanswered. We are more often than not keen to learn how Zwelinzima interprets his father's dying wish for himself. Does he experience the wrath of the ancestors deep down in his heart? Is he daunted by the killing of the revered snake? How deep-rooted are his Christian principles? How does he see his own love for Thembeke?

Zwelinzima features as a key figure in what Thembeke aptly describes a "fairy-tale" in Jordan's translation. In the original text Zwelinzima's story is referred to as "UNongqawuse", a term that now means a misleading story of the type Nongqawuse told and caused the historical cattle-killing of the Xhosa people (Jordan, 1979:17). The presentation of him as a prince in a fairy-tale lends him a remoteness that in turn stimulates our curiosity when he becomes manifest in the reality of the story. Riordan (1961:54) compares Jordan in his romantic approach to Vilakazi, about whom he makes the following interesting comment: "The imagined glories of the past become an obsession and his cry a nostalgic utterance."

Martha, on the other hand, always features within the limits of the reality of the story in The Marabi. Nevertheless, she seems to obtain some of the virtues that ensure her credibility as a black person from the ritual performances and traditional practices her father performs, as the following extract suggests:

The boys were led into a dark hut. Masekosana and the doctor undressed them, leaving only a strip of skin-cloth around their loins. The two adults then sang mournful songs calling upon the spirits of the dead. 'Woza nina Mabongos--come all Mabongos. Let not your spirits desert the two boys. Let no medicine pollute their food. (p.29)

The song here represents an item of oral literature. It is also quite curious that marriage is mentioned in close association with the ceremony of circumcision. But the more important point at this stage is that July is ultimately father to Martha, hence she is also made to participate at the cleansing ceremony conducted later on by Ndala (p.56). For Martha, as for Zwelinzima linkage with the past no longer offers indispensable guidelines for the future. Her own cultural background is a heterogeneous one, with mixed values drawn from various mother cultures, and with the strong western influence prevailing within the urban setting of a western-style city. It is the romantic quality in the treatment of Martha that functions to restore her dignity as a human being. Like Zwelinzima, she gathers much respect from her parents' past and from her close association with Ndala. This borrowed identity helps us, the readers, to see her not as the commonplace stereotype and social misfit the

urban administration is intent to impose upon her, but as a balanced human being. More than this, the novelist allows himself enough scope to persuade us to look at Martha as a respectable character with her resistance to oppression posing as an epic battle for survival. As such she could even be epitomised as the archetype of urban black as well as the mother of the culture of resistance, hopefully to dissolve itself into a culture of the future co-existence with the other races.

Characters in the story-within-the-story

Both Jordan and Dikobe make effective use of the story-within-a-story technique. This technique is designed by both novelists to support a variety of magnificent designs insulating the plot in both novels as well as the sub-plot in The Wrath. What is important for this discussion, however, is that both these in-built stories are designed after the manner of traditional storytelling.

In The Marabi, Ndala actually sets out to narrate a folktale. It is in the evening and a group of women swell the Mabongo family, having come to spend one of the customary nights of togetherness after the death of Martha's mother. This is the story of Masalanyana, a teenager who was married to a husband "whom she had never seen." After the marriage feast she is kept in the

seclusion of a hut and is not allowed to talk to other girls of her age. The mother-in-law keeps her occupied with domestic chores, but still the husband does not materialize. After several months of waiting, Masalanyana finally experiences her first period, whereupon the mother-in-law sets out to the river by herself. On the appointed night she is told to expect the arrival of her husband and not to close the door. When he arrives, accompanied by a "big wind," he proceeds to reveal himself to his bride. It turns out that the prospective husband is a huge, slippery snake. In great panic, Masalanyana escapes to her original home where she is remarried--this time to a chief, with whom, hopefully, she lives happily ever after. The snake is killed and its eye used to make Masalanyana's beads (pp 94-6).

As can be observed, this is a complete tale with its beginning, dramatic climax and satisfactory ending. What makes this tale even more effective than any ordinary written tale is that it is brought in together with its context, something almost all authorities agree is essential to storytelling, but few ever really set out to prove its importance. At once we have the primary characters whose reaction to the tale we are at liberty to observe. It is at night and the family and associates are all huddled together as protection against the enormity of the recent experience of death, which naturally stands in the place of the evil creatures and savage, wild beasts of a world visited only by

practitioners of witchcraft--the dark, sparsely populated earth and dense vegetation of old, untamed Africa at night, at a time when the forces of nature dominated the primitive societies. All this provides the context of the tale. One can summon the courage to say that almost by instinct, Jordan (1973:4) seems to stumble onto the all-important idea of context in storytelling when he says,

The world of African traditional literature is inhabited not only by man and animal, but also by ogres and other monsters--grotesque figures, so stupid that in spite of their superior physical powers, man triumphs over them. Some live on land and others in deep black pools of large rivers.

Jordan, however, fails to go on and explain that such imagination is possibly borne of the general experience of the Africans on a land that is so much dominated by nature and its untamed forces. It should be observed in passing that even their scope of exaggeration in telling the stories they originated was wider and more tolerable when taken in together with the contextual environment in which they lived.

The secondary characters, who are actually the characters within the story itself, are completely independent of the primary characters. To further complement the context of the tale, the narrator wisely refrains from using any part or character from the tale itself to dictate any moral lesson. It is quite interesting how this novelist adheres to what has best been explained by Scheub (1975:15) when he says,

The performer does not explicitly interpret the narrative plot; that interpretation is embodied in the total performance. It is released in the cross-flow of imaginations, as the artist seeks to control and direct the imagination capabilities of the audience.

It, therefore, happens as a result of this form of storytelling that Ndala's audience finds itself having a free scope to comment on the story as it develops. Martha sighs, "Ah! ... She was a cruel woman," when she hears of what Masalanyana's mother-in-law does to her (p.95). The women cry, "Yoo! You frighten us," when Ndala describes the snake-husband of Masalanyana; and at the conclusion of the story Martha feels at liberty to coin a morale for herself from the story, and, therefore, allows herself to believe, "that Ndala was making an example to her that if she had married without love for [Sephai] she would have led an unhappy life and ultimately been divorced" (p.96).

One can deduce from the reaction of Ndala's audience that the secondary characters possess so much personality that they actually influence the audience either in the manner of a thriller by frightening them or, as Martha also demonstrates by indirectly addressing the real problems of their lives. While all this takes place, there is neither preaching nor direct teaching from the storyteller. Even where a digression is made it is only to explain a hidden point, but even there, no effort is made to dwell on the comment. It seems as though the content of the tale and its characters are sufficient to

convey an important message on their own specifically to suit the current state of mind of each and every individual present. Referring to Ndala's tale, Hofmeyr (1977:5) makes this observation even more clearly when she says,

This tale, like much oral literature, has a 'social function'. The standard example of this socially oriented literature, as Finnegan explains is the 'myth' that serves as a 'charter' to uphold the current system.

Like Martha in the larger story Masalanyana represents collective duty. Her marriage is not a personal matter facing her as an individual in society but it is an act of collective responsibility with every participant having a role to play in the process of the marriage itself. It is apparently for this reason that her people take the insult upon themselves when the bridegroom and his mother and strangely enough the isolated individuals of the tale, fail to play the role expected of them. A husband who turns out to be a snake implies cruelty and ill-treatment of the wife as some folklorists observe. However, there is yet another version of this story where a snake turns into a prince, thereby changing the fortune of the bride and turning the whole relationship into a success. In this case a reversal of the situation applies. Marriage here is a social duty, and since Masalanyana's marriage fails not because of her, her people take it upon themselves to reward her with a well-admired husband and a good marriage. The villain and evil-doer is punished by death which further profits

Masalanyana as she obtains the rarest sort of jewelery--the eye of her ex-husband--that is in turn a crystallization of a story that has won her a "medal" of triumph.

While Masalanyana acts on behalf of her people and therefore carries out a duty on their behalf, the woman who is her mother-in-law proves to be quite devious and acts selfishly for her son. In her plans she seems to exclude the other people, so that when her snake-son arrives the people of the village become eager to secure their own safety without making any attempt to interfere with the woman's arrangements. Msimang (1983:121) observes that the typical feature of characterization in folktales is the creation of what he calls "faceless characters," because they are mostly collectives or "nameless" individuals highlighting only the action far beyond their own physical appearance. Stressing this point Msimang asserts,

Reference has been made to the fact that there is very little direct description of characters in folktales ... What is more very few such characters have names. Usually they are referred to by their sex and status, such as inkosikazi ..., inyumba-katali ... umfana ... intombazana ...

Two other authorities make remarks similar to that of Msimang, namely Segre and Scheub. Segre (Meddemen, 1988:229) observes:

In folk tale texts, characters are virtually identified with the actions or the series of actions they perform, whereas in literary texts

they take on a psychology of their own, complete with contradiction, and, as a result, the way they operate through actions is not so clear-cut and direct.

Scheub's (1975:14) comment in this regard cannot be left out as it tallies with the observations made by the above authorities. He claims:

The core-cliches, the apparently interminable repetition of words and plot, the seemingly 'flat' characters--these must be viewed and can be understood and appreciated only within the context of the performance and taking into account the ordered intimacy that exists between artist and audience. It is then that ... characters gain shape and dimension

The snake, as already indicated, sometimes objectifies cruelty and also witchcraft. It is further portrayed as a natural force, hence its movement from place to place is associated with a hurricane. It cannot, therefore, be said to be absolutely evil, because out of it comes the jewelery that is made from its luminous eye. At the same time while pursuing Masalanyana the snake never really harms her, in spite of the destructive forces under its control. Instead, it somehow renders itself victim to the men sent by the chief to kill it. Confirming that the stories of such monstrous snakes are familiar in storytelling, Jordan (1973:7) adds,

There are some tales about the Kings of the Waters, snake-like monsters that could make the rivers flow or dry at will. These monsters travel from one place to another in a cyclone. They are very much attracted to human girls and very often "call" them into the water by their powers and make them their wives.

The relationship between the woman who finds the bride for the snake and the snake itself is never fully explained in these tales. But one is always left with the impression that such relationship is unnatural and therefore undesirable. In another version of this tale the snake actually detains a girl, called Nomalanga and puts her in charge of its wealth. On learning about this, Nomalanga's younger sister attempts to share her sister's marriage and wealth with her, but she starts off as a rude and disobedient girl. Thereupon the snake gives her a whipping with its long tail and sends her home with nothing. Thus the snake can pose as a misdirected force, as it does in Masalanyana's story, or as a disguised blessing or voice of morality.

Unlike the folktale in The Marabi, the "fairy tale" in The Wrath is merely an allusion. It is used more as a literary technique rather than a story on its own terms. The characters who participate within the built-in story are the same characters who feature in the main story. What is important in the story of Zwelinzima's early life is the teasing remoteness and apparent improbability that turns to be the pleasing reality of the story. Its legendary nature is meant to give the ultimate impression of things that happened long, long ago and with which the characters never expect any close physical association. As a central figure in this narration Zwelinzima is lent a firm identity and a positive appeal as the "living

legend" of the story. Making a similar observation Riordan (1961:54) says,

... Jordan gives these Africans aspirations, and the beauty and dignity of the tribal way of life, due recognition, without losing his balance of perspective.

It is, therefore, evident that he would have appeared unsuitable for the Mpondomise seat had he not been lent the accorded "dignity" before the eyes of the readers. Incidentally, Jordan somehow felt he had to re-organize the original story in his translation of it, so that some sections have either been cut off or compounded to the remaining ones. As a result of this, Book I has eight chapters in the original version and five in the translation; Book III has eight chapters which have been reduced to six in the translation and Book IV has eleven chapters, reduced to ten in the translation. Chapter 2 of Book I which has been compounded to the original's Chapter 3 on translation, actually bears the title, "Ntsomi Yakwabani!" ("What a Folktale!"), a title which specifically addresses Zwelinzima's story as a folktale.

Witchcraft is one of those obsessions that are highly dramatised in storytelling. Thembeke simply dismisses belief in the existence of such a practice as "ooNongqawuse," translated by Jordan as "a fairy-tale" (1979:14; 1980:14). However, she does not argue the matter any further than this resigned comment. Dingindawo, according to the supporting story, is

regarded as a wizard, but still the Mpondomise people have resigned themselves to suffer in submission to his rule. His witchcraft is almost taken as part of his personality and tolerated. Zwelinzima becomes the subject of beliefs in witchcraft and his early life is turned upside down by these beliefs, very much as it would be expected to happen to the hero of a folktale. His father consults the diviners and there is apparently no need for him to question the dictates of the diviners. It is, indeed, as a consequence of this that Zwelinzima is divorced from his parents and entrusted to the care of a foster-father at a time when one would expect him to be kept in the comfort of his own home.

Thus, witchcraft becomes a necessary catalyst in the transformation of a hero just as it does in the context of a folktale. One may even associate this supporting story to the tale of Sikhulumi, sometimes lovingly called Sikhulumi kaMlombulozana by the seasoned storytellers.²⁰ Sikhulumi who begins as a dumb child desires to marry a beautiful girl. To do this he has to foil several attempts by his prospective father-in-law, a wizard who is determined to kill him before he gets to his daughter. As can be expected, he triumphs in the end and wins his bride, who happens to be untainted by her father's evil practices. Like Sikhulumi, Zwelinzima as an adult

²⁰ I possess unpublished recordings of this tale from Mrs E. Matshabalala Mkhumbuzi, the storyteller from Rolweni, Matatiele.

demonstrates independence from witchcraft and the influence of the ancestors.

It should be noted, however, that there is no evident attempt on the part of the novelist to show that he intends us to compare Zwelinzima to Sikhulumi or to effect any direct comparison between the two tales. It is only in Jordan's manner of presentation that allusion to storytelling can be experienced. He seems to adopt the traditional way of storytelling as part of his individual writing skill, something he seems to be doing for entertainment and for the romantic effect rather than as an effort to reveal the profound qualities of folktales or oral literature in general.

Though a folktale, the story of Sikhulumi does not possess legendary qualities. His uprightness, courage and bravery, as well as the knowledge that such things (perhaps with the exception of exaggerated conceptions on magic), could have happened among the ancient communities is often enough to tempt some storytellers to present it as a legend. Jordan's presentation of the supporting story also resembles something of a legend. In this section Zanemvula is presented as the last of the legendary rulers of the Mpondomise of old. Even the birth of Zwelinzima, associated as it is with the medicinal power of the Zulu medicine woman, becomes part of the legend, which continues until the latter disappears at Mngazi and is thought to have died. It might be essential

to include Scott's (1965:161) definition of a legend. He explains,

Originally it was an account of a saint's life which was read aloud as a duty. ... Later the legend was extended to include stories of other kinds, generally of a marvellous character. Then the legend became a traditional, popular tale with a basis of fact, but including imaginative material.

In the above sense, therefore, it can be argued that the legendary tale surrounding Zwelinzima is told with much imagination mingled with the factual reality of the story. However, it is apparent that this allusion to legendary tales is done here merely to romanticize Zwelinzima's profile. Later on he is presented as a Christian, a role that sets him off from his legendary past. He advocates the abolishment of goats because he believes they are used by diviners who are themselves undesirable, as they "were misleading the people" (p.176). Yet, judging from the legend of his birth and the dog bite, it can be said that Zwelinzima owes his very existence to the power of traditional medicine and the advice of the diviners. In the reality of the novel he seems to distance himself from that past and to look upon himself as a new being, answering to a different calling.

The singing, praise-singing and dancing characters

Jordan and Dikobe make much use of singing and praise-singing to promote the dramatic quality in their stories. To do this both Jordan and Dikobe seem to go out of their way to bring the said genres of oral literature into the stories. Dikobe's novel, a highly rhythmical work, displays modifications of songs rooted in oral tradition. The spontaneity of composition suggests the improvisory qualities that are dominant in traditional song and dance and in praise-singing. The very first song we come across in the story seems to be a recent invention that addresses the very situation of the marabi dance. Here again is what Martha sings:

Tjeka-Tjeka messie.	Give give, girl.
Tjeka-Tjeka sebebe.	Give give, prostitute.
Tjeka ngoanyane,	Give girl,
Tjeka-Tjeka [ngoana wa]	Give, give, girl of
the	
Marabi ...	Marabi ...

The social position of the singers here is betrayed by the manner in which they express themselves in as much as it is demonstrated by the subject of the song, namely, a prostitute. It can be noted that the Afrikaans "meisie" is pronounced as "messie" by the singers, that being a clear measure of their class level. Knowledge of proper pronunciation would normally be a matter for school people. The song specifically idolises the marabi girl, which is a clear indication that it is a recent invention designed for the marabi dance. In spite of the decadence of the environment we still perceive the unpretentious fervour with which the participants sing and dance.

Somehow this even gives them a momentary redemption from the grim reality of their present circumstances. For a moment they escape into the sanctuary of their heart from where they can relish the blissful hours of song and dance, very much like the Zulu traditional dancers who feature later on in the story.

Concerning the Zulu war dance next to the Social Centre the novelist stresses the "contrast between the western [inside the Centre] and the African dance" (p.73). At this stage, however, his focus is directed at other matters in the story. The juxtaposition of the Zulu dance and the western dance does not, in actual fact, appear to have occurred accidentally. Throughout this novel the writer persists in creating a close association between traditional and western values. Signifying the purity of the Zulu dance against the sinister nature of the western dance the novelist remarks,

The one, a shuffling of the feet, and the other, a vigorous stamping. The latter a dance of people witnessed by a large crowd and the other of dancers unwitnessed, men and women locked to each other. The free air swept away the perspiration of the Zulus. The closed air polluted the hall and when the music stopped there was coughing. (p.73)

Once again the dance prevails over the individuation of characters. The participants remain an amorphous body of movement while the features of the dances, the movement of the feet and the clinging of the dancers to each other, are brought to the foreground. It is also quite remarkable that, unlike the marabi dancers whose dance

remains a unique performance, the dancers in the Social Centre seem to mimic their white counterparts. It is perhaps for this reason that the latter dance receives the writer's sarcasm and is viewed with a cynical eye by him. Through his description of the Zulu dance in contrast to the dance in the Social Centre, the novelist seems to regard originality and tradition as prime virtues.

To celebrate her successful recovery from bereavement after the death of her mother and to demonstrate that her well-being has once again been restored by her community, Martha breaks into spontaneous song and dance (p.96). However, she sings the marabi song and dances the marabi dance which are part of her own cultural heritage. It is, as already discussed in Chapter 3, a new mould of culture whose foundation is suffering and poverty, and whose prime virtues are based on survival and resistance. Almost like the Zulu dance, her dance draws members of the community to come and watch. The onlookers seem to be part of the song and dance and they appear to identify with Martha, as the following passage suggests:

The people in the yard blocked the door and from the next yard others craned their faces over the corrugated fence, screaming at the top of their voices for repetition: 'Encore, encore, Moipone, hamba wena. Hamba ngoanyana wa Marabi--the Marabi girl.'

Martha sang again and a piano could be heard playing a few houses away. (p.96)

The noteworthy piano player becomes a fitting complement to Martha's song. This is a clear indication of the broadening arena in which Martha is main actor. Like traditional song and dance her performance involves active audience participation. The general atmosphere is reminiscent of a typical traditional scene of singing and dancing where everyone is invoked to action and participation. In the rural areas the sound of singing is carried over open landscapes to reach individuals across a remarkable distance. The above passage also enacts that kind of effect which seems to be felt despite the obstructions of a built-up area in an urban setting.

Surprisingly enough, there are hardly any references to traditional song and dance in The Wrath. This may, however, be explained away by the fact that, unlike Dikobe who works with an urban setting, Jordan does not need to work hard to demonstrate the prevailing cultural trends. With a rural setting and rural communities being the dominant features of the story, other matters can be taken for granted. Even the scene of the royal wedding severely lacks in descriptions of song and dance. Instead, the novelist concentrates on the novelties of a Christian marriage and the glamour of school people.

But Jordan has no problem in demonstrating that his characters are steeped in their cultural background. In a life-like manner most of his characters are versatile and quite capable of fittingly accommodating the demands of

each given occasion. Traditional praise-singing is one feature that this novelist handles with great skill. Here again Dikobe merely reflects the similarity of pattern and the resemblance of a given situation to its original traditional replica. His poetry is designed to look like improvisation and yet exists somewhere between the western approach and the traditional skills. At the same time it is designed to play a functional role of addressing the prevailing circumstances in which the people of Doornfontein find themselves.

In The Wrath, Mphuthumi amazes us with his skill in praise-singing. One would have expected this character to be one of the councillors in the chief's court as an adult, but he later drifts off from the centre of action. His knowledge of traditional etiquette as well as the skill with which he presents his mission in a dramatic praise-poem directed at Zwelinzima show that he has been properly nurtured in his people's culture. His performance is fitting and well-timed. The opening line of his praise-poem is used in the Xhosa version as a title of Chapter 5 of Book I, namely, "Bayethe, Ngwanya kaMajola!" (1979:27) rewritten in the English version as, "Hail, Son of Zanemvula" (1980:32). The accompanying actions employed by Mphuthumi also enhance the quality and possible impact of his performance, very much like a traditional praise-singer would do. Naturally the whole drama is presented much more vividly in the original

version than in the translation as the following passage indicates:

[Inggumbo] UMphuthumi wathi ukuba ambone
uZwelinzima wesuka wema ngeenyawo wakhahlela
wambonga esithi:-

"Bayete, Ngwanya kaMajola!

Silo sakuloVukuz'umbethe, esimpumlo

Inggongqo ngokweNgulube.

Santywil'eMthatha, savunduz'umhlaba,

Seza kuvumbuluka Phesheya kweXesi

likaRharhabe.

Ntw'ingalw'inezotho zizinkcwe zezinja

zikaDingindawo.

Nqanda, Gcinizibele, iingqeqe zingagrameli

uMhlele!

Bhota, Mntwan'oMhle! Bhota, Mntwan'eNkosi!!"

... UMphuthumi wamthantamisa wamhlalisa engubeni
awayeyendlele wamthi wambu ngenye, wahambisa
embonga. (1979:33)

[The Wrath]Mphuthumi leapt to his feet, saluted
Zwelinzima in a manner befitting a chief, and
began a praise song in his honour,

"Bayethe, Offspring of the House of Majola!

Mighty monster of the blood of Vukuz'umbethe!

Tough-snouted, even as the wild boar.

It plunged into the Mthatha waters

And tunnelled its way through the earth

To emerge beyond the Xesi of Rharhabe:

You whose arm is nauseating from the spittle
of Dingindawo's dogs!

Beware, Gcinizibele, lest mongrels snarl at

[H]is [E]xcellency!

Hail, worthy prince! Hail, Child of Kings!"

... his friend, still treating him with the
deference he would give to a chief supported him
gently, helped him to a seat on a rug he had
spread for him on the ground, and covered him with
another rug. Then he continued his praise-song
(1980:33)

Though the praise-poem may look rather short, the
accompanying action gives it an added flavour. Action
mainly suggests a royal reception and it is further an
enactment of the robing ceremony with Mphuthumi playing
both the role of officiator and praise-singer. Action

quickly builds up to the climax, which is marked by the impressive figure of Zwelinzima seated on a rug and "robed" in another. Both the action and the praise-singing are genuine and life-like to the point where one can sense the uplifting quality of the scene.

Mphuthumi's eloquence at praise-singing and his skill at performance are again displayed when he arrives late at a teachers' meeting. Once again the novelist arranges the scene in such a manner that we are in an ideal position to view him with all the characters present concentrating on the performance itself. Here a horse, which has become part of the cultural life of the black people, gives added fervour to the performance. Mphuthumi's performance here is both narrative and in the form of a praise-poem, with the latent actions of the horse being brought to life by the speaker and the praise-poem being reconstructed. We, therefore, have a double consciousness, an awareness of narrated and past action and a perception of the on-going performance. The original and translated versions appear thus:

[Inggumbo] Zathi zisemi zisisiqhu iititshala yee
 thaphu inkabi yomfo kaDumakude igibiselekile, yaza
 kuthi gxishi phambi kwazo, watsho phantsi
 uMphuthumi sezibukele iititshala neetitshalakazi.
 ... wathi, "Bafondini! Kukufa kwehash'oku,
 ndiyanixelega. Ndithe ukuba ndibek'unyawo
 esitibilini lalahl'ingqatha. Ithe isithi qithi loo
 ngqatha ndabe sendiwel'uMqunya. Ndithe ukuba
 ndithi gubhu phesheya koMqunya ndalithuka, ndathi:
 'Goloz'edingeni engasayi kufumana nto,
 Nyok'enamanyal'eyachith'umbusw'emyezweni,
 Yatshibilik'[inkuku] akhal'amantshontsho.
 Tshibila, mntwana, uthath'unyawo lukanyoko!
 Khonkotha, ntlokwenja, ngokuhlwa

ndakukuph'umphothulo.'

"Hayi ke, ntanga, lasuka lawaxhom'amanqina! Ndathi ndakuphos'iliso kwangasemva ndafik'ezizikotile, itshoba lilithwalel'apha. Ndalithath'itshoba ndalifak'engxoweni yebhatyi!!" (1979:84)

[The Wrath] The teachers were standing in a group waiting, when his horse appeared in full career and came to an abrupt stop on its hocks right in front of them. Mphuthumi leapt down and, ... said: "Fellows, this is a marvel of a horse, I tell you! No sooner had I placed my foot in the stirrup than he let fall a pellet of dung and--would you believe it?--by the time that pellet struck the ground I was already crossing the Mqunya. As soon as I reached the other side of the river I swore at him. I said:

`You who linger at the trysting-place in
vain,
You shameless serpent who destroyed the peace
of Paradise,
Hear the chickens screeching, terror-stricken
As the hen-mother skids away, out of your
path!
Scamper away, baby-fowl, scamper after your
mother!
*Howl away, dog's head, and tonight I'll feed
you on Mphuthulo.'

"You should have seen how high he lifted his hoofs at this. I threw a glance at his hindquarters and saw his hoofs turned up like saucers, and his tail cocked high. I seized his tail and thrust it into my coat pocket!" (1980:87-8)

It is quite normal in praise-poetry to find praises of a loved animal like a horse. Although Jordan may have added his own skill, the basic framework is that of the praise-poetry normally performed by herdboys. The first two lines and the last line of Mphuthumi's praise-poem are recognizable as traditional cliches often used by herdboys. They stand on the same level as the familiar lines for praising a bull: "UJujuz'umagegw'amdaka./ UBholokodlel'imfen'am ndiyayihlinz'iyahleka."²¹

²¹ These are drawn from common knowledge.

Mphuthumi's acquaintance with traditional praise-singing helps us to reach the conclusion that this character represents someone who has been brought up in the rural areas and nurtured in traditional culture. Consequently, it becomes easy for us to accept that though he has a meaningful school background like Zwelinzima, his role in bringing Zwelinzima to Mpondomiseland is not a misplaced role at all. Mphuthumi's ability at praise-singing has no comparison in the other two novels.

What can best be compared to Jordan's skill regarding the use of praise-poetry is Dikobe's unexpected poem in The Marabi. Although the poem is composed in English, its presentation is almost in the form of a traditional eruption into praise-singing, where the artist often crystalizes an event or deeds that have already been or are presently being witnessed. Dikobe's modification of the praise-poem actually stands out of the text, and here one can sense that the writer is making a direct appeal to the reader having halted the progress of the story for the moment:

Sorrows that grieved my mind are now amended
 Months ago I was orphaned and bereaved
 And many nights I spent in meditation
 And blankly cast to the skies.
 Friends came to console me,
 Hunger they drove away, and thoughts that
 Would have ruined me flew away.
 Now at my side, tended and little,
 A flesh of my own.
 ... (p.99)

By its operative nature the lyric could be a song, probably sung by Martha and presented in celebration of solidarity. Indeed one would expect that if Martha is the intended speaker in the lyric, it should, therefore, be seen as a song. But whatever genre this falls under, the oral quality is enough to make us think in terms of audible song, poetry or even opera.

The very idea of poetic structures being introduced into prose represents a skillful way on the part of these writers to use the former genre to boost the quality of the latter. Just like songs, poetry represents a condensation of strong feelings and emotions. Within a limited space a message in verse can offer a literary experience that might take pages in prose to unfold. Consequently, whenever a novelist erupts into poetry the incident being narrated is immediately lent a form of upliftment. The character who performs the praise-singing or on whose behalf the praise-singing is done acquires much nobility, grace and respect. Mphuthumi is actually forgiven by the other characters even before he can utter his apology, and it is his poetic genius that helps to thaw down any possible animosity resulting from his late coming. The novelist explains that the "other teachers roared with laughter, and the president forgot even to reprimand him (p.88). The reader may also be inclined to admire Mphuthumi even more. Similarly, the reader may see in Martha the noble qualities of gentleness, love, respectability and even purity of soul in spite of the

knowledge that she is a common marabi girl and an acquaintance of the "malala-pipes". It is partly through the use of poetry that she is lent such redeeming qualities.

One other allusion to praise-singing in The Marabi is witnessed when the leader of the ricksha men engages in a quaint performance in which he appeals to the "chiefs," namely, Senzangakhona and Chaka, as well as to the "wombs with dew for my feet to tread" (p.31). As already discussed, one can neither fully explain the traditional calling of the performer nor the literary status of his utterances. But the general impression the whole picture gives is that of a traditional praise singer. For this reason it can only be said to bear the quality of allusion to traditional praise-singing.

Jordan's approach in the above regard is much bolder and explicit. In fact, this novelist openly displays a scene of praise-singing in each of the two occasions where he intends us to think in terms of a traditional praise-singer. The first of these two occasions is the installation of Zwelinzima. Here the national bard salutes the great day by "singing praises to the Mpondomise people" (p. 133). The bard recalls the great events of the past. In his brief portrayal of the bard, who, nevertheless, remains curiously obscure and, therefore, anonymous, Jordan devotes his descriptive powers to the creation of a vivid picture of the scene

where the praise-singer features together with his audience, as the following passage demonstrates:

The bard alluded to the darkness that had temporarily enveloped Mpondomise people during those years when the king's child, Zwelinzima, had vanished. He compared the return of the young chief to the coming of the dawn, and the rays of the sun to the far-flung benefits flowing from the benevolence of a true chief. Then he broke forth into ecstatic song:

"Make way, for the Ngwanya offspring of
Majola bestirs himself!
Arise and behold, most glorious of glorious
suns!

Arise and gaze in admiration,
Glittering eye of the Prince of Heaven!"

He paused. Then from the throats of all the men of the visiting clans there thundered forth the royal salute, while the womenfolk chanted ceaselessly. Novices in the art of praise-song also tried to emulate the national bard, declaiming their praises while he took his rest. But these were but poor imitations of those of the master. Then once again the voice of the bard arose, swelling into praise so majestic and strong that the fiery youth felt their blood tingling, and their spirits burning with new courage.
(p.134)

Of the bard Jordan (1973:60) himself says, "... the African bard is a chronicler as well as being a poet. The chief is only the centre of the praise-poem because he is the symbol of the tribe as a whole". The role of the bard as suggested in the above passage from The Wrath is a vindication of Jordan's belief. Here we find the bard playing a central role and functioning very much as a harbinger bringing to his people information from the past to mark the significance of Zwelinzima's installation.

We are expected to accept the anonymity of the individual who masquerades before us as the bard without question. There is no description of physical appearance and no mention of any personal name. Dikobe also achieves this stance in his brief portrayal of the ricksha man. Even in his scientific explanation of who the bard really is Jordan uses the term "bard" more as a generic term than a title that highlights individual achievement alone. He (Jordan 1973:21) explains,

The bard who was both composer and public reciter, was versed in tribal history and lore, as well as being witty. He held a position of honour in his community. It was therefore the greatest ambition of every boy to be at least a public reciter, if not a composer.

Private achievement would thus be seen in the light of public approval and not just according to the standards an individual might set himself. Thus the bard remains both as a powerful figure in the story whose uttering should be taken seriously, as well as an elusive character whose private feelings and experience remain hidden away from us. This character is only a voice and a manifestation of the people's wisdom, an image beyond which we cannot hope to perceive him.

The content of the reported praise poem aptly befits what Jordan (1973:21) says about familiar subjects of such praise-poetry in his comment,

The subject of a praise-poem may be a nation, a tribe, a clan, a person, an animal, or a lifeless object. The poem may be partly narrative, or

partly or wholly descriptive. It abounds in epithets, very much like the Homeric one, and the language in general is highly figurative.

The second of the two occasions where Jordan displays traditional praise-singing scenes is towards the crisis, where the ochre people demonstrate their disenchantment with Zwelinzima's rule. Here the novelist says,

Even the praise-song delivered by the national bard on this occasion was indirectly critical of Zwelinzima. The praise-song concluded ... "Say!
 What manner of rain is this we have this
 day--
 This rain that moistens only portions of the
 land
 Alas! We die of drought, we simple fools
 Who thought today we lived in a rainy land!"
 (p.176)

Here the novelist refers to the praise-song as a measure of Zwelinzima's declining popularity. Once again the character who is responsible for the performance becomes secondary to the praise-song. One cannot help feeling that the praise-song itself possesses a power of its own, and thereby renders the praise-singer, as a character, a mere instrument of communication. Perhaps this is so merely because of the common understanding that the bard cannot, as an individual, be held responsible for any direct criticism he may inflict upon his subjects. Explaining what he calls the bard's "licence" to do this, Jordan (1973:26) points out,

But it must not be thought that these bards were flatterers. While they drew attention mainly to the good and praiseworthy, they also had the licence to make sharp criticisms of the habits of their subjects. It is here that the bard has found the greatest scope for his wit. (1973:26)

Thus the "habits" of Zwelinzima are put into the spotlight by the subtle criticism of the bard. This character functions very much like the chorus in some ancient Greek plays and the bard here seems to comment on the development of the story without himself necessarily becoming part of the story. As the previous quotation from Jordan's (1973) work indicates, Jordan did see some common factors between the literature of classical Greece and traditional African literature. Classical allusions to the heavenly bodies, the landscape and rain being associated with the bard are reminiscent of Jordan's own awareness of this similarity. Scheub (1970:81) even goes to the extent of calling the whole novel "a vast and highly successful praise-poem dedicated to the magnificence of man," an observation that could best suit the description of a classical epic.

Sinxo makes no serious reference to praise singing and the only songs that dominate his work are church hymns. Sometimes the speaker in the novel refers to his wife as a praise-singer, but even that is Sinxo's way of promoting the comic quality of his episodes. It is only when Nojayiti calls her husband names that he regards her sarcastically as a praise-singer. It may, however, be possible that the hymns are an adaptation of traditional songs. The fact that the songs always have a bearing on what is happening in the novel may help us to view them as comments directed at the events themselves and meant for the ears of those involved rather than communication

intended for God alone. Jafta's (1978:48) comment regarding traditional songs actually accommodates the role played by the hymns in UNojayiti when she says:

All social songs are a product of the social structure in which they occur. They are not just a social heritage that is passed from generation to generation for entertainment only. [They] help to stabilise society and help to inculcate certain group values that are highly cherished. Like all folk songs they also promote group solidarity and identity.

Nojayiti's favourite hymn, whose one verse says:

"Give us the likes of Samuel,
Give us the likes of Deborah,
To steer this bandwagon
Of Your Evangelism" (p.28),

compliments her appreciation of Mbokreni's achievement and, therefore, contributes more as a comment on what he has done than a single-minded address to God. Her remark:

"Our prayers are received by the Creator. Indeed, we are given those Samuels and Deboras. Behold this little one, Mbokreni, who has stopped fooling around--who has put an end to buying horses, useless objects that cannot be enjoyed as a meal ..." (p.29),

actually confirms the role of hymns as structures that have been adapted to African culture.

Diction and the idiom

Scott (1965:77) defines diction as the "selection and arrangement of words in speech and writing". Diction

usually dictates the nature and intended personality of the character speaking. This device receives much attention from the three novelists. Allied to this is the use of proverbs in the language of some characters. In order to demonstrate these much more clearly quotations from The Wrath and UNojayiti will include the original versions in Xhosa.

Despite the fact that The Marabi is written in English, the traditional idiom is not lacking in this novel. To make his diction reflect realistic situations and in order to present his characters in a more lifelike manner, Dikobe uses snatches of familiar Sotho or Zulu expressions in relation to the manner his characters speak. Sometimes full sentences are used. Early in the novel a child talks to Madonda, demanding sweets and says, "Baba, ape ama sweet" (p.2).²² Ma-Ndlovu's first appearance in the novel is assisted by an abundance of terms denoting Zulu or Sotho speakers. Ma-Khumalo addresses the new comer and says, "Hau mfazi, you come to my house and do not greet me" (p.2). Later, when Ma-Khumalo quarrels with Vuzi she pleads, "Hau Baba! Hau Baba!" upon which Vuzi shouts, "Puma! Puma!" (p.3) Such diction brings the language spoken by the characters much closer to the spoken language of the township. George's mother, like Martha's parents does not only use

²² The incorrect spelling, etc, should be something to be borne in mind with understanding if we consider the necessary interference of those who may not have been conversant with African languages who helped the novel through to publication.

Africanized dialect but also reflects in her language the familiar beliefs and superstitions of her people when she says,

'Ma-Ndlovu has robbed you by not paying you, my son, but the spirits of your forefathers will revenge you! Haul! I am going to send her Mafufunyane, the madness that causes one to see chimpanzees, before her husband is lowered into the grave.' (p.8)

Mathloare and her husband freely apply the traditional idiom in their language. Terms that would normally appear as strange in English usage are used by these two characters as a matter-of-fact, as the following conversation shows:

'You are a bushman. You don't understand the laws. You are his uncle because you are his uncle's son. He should come to you when he has got madimabe. You have stayed too long in town and don't know the laws. O se tlaela sa monna--you are a fool of a man. How can Ndala be an uncle to you?'

'He said that if he doesn't wash me I shall get more madimabe, and that when Moipone is married her bogadi will go to his mother.'

'Oareng? I must get into pains for other women and go for nine moons and sit the whole night without sleep. Molimo, they will get it when I am dead. I am going to call my brother to take the cattle. You have not paid anything for me and you have no right to receive the bogadi. You must first pay mine.' (p.54)

While terms like "madimabe" "bogadi" and even "moons" suggest the technicality of the two subjects being discussed by the two, expressions like "O se tlaela sa monna", "Oareng" and "Molimo" reflect the highly dramatic situation as the woman remonstrates with her husband. This dialogue poses an interesting circumstance where

traditional idiom impinges itself upon the English language thereby giving the speakers more of a rural identity than any reflection they may give as urban and westernized people.

The negotiation of marriage between Martha and Sephai is also carried out in traditional fashion. Here Martha is referred to in traditional idiom as "a bowl of water." This suggests the major role she is likely to play if she is taken as bride among the rural communities. In her eagerness to accelerate the negotiations towards a conclusion, Martha's mother even attempts to open the aspect of the bride's stock. This she does in the typical traditional style by proclaiming the envisaged loss and deprivation of the family if Martha is taken away. This is an indirect indication that ample compensation is expected. Dikobe takes pains to reconstruct the idiom in such a manner that the realistic nature of the whole negotiation is not missed at all. The following passage gives a clear indication of this effort:

'Le bomang?'

'I am the mouth and ears of these two women,' replied the maditsela.

'Le tsoa kae?'

'We come from Malethlane. On my right is Ndala's wife's younger sister, and on my left is his cousin." The introduced women smiled and shook hands, then forestalled the big indaba with idle talk.

'We come from far. Our feet are pricked by the thorns.'

'We give birth to be troubled by the children. They take us to people we don't know.'

...

'We have come,' she began her mission, 'to ask for a bowl of water. We have been sent by our

child because he has seen a woman in your kraal and he would like to marry that woman.'

'We have only one bowl of water. We don't want to lose it,' answered Mrs Mapena.

'We know that you only have one bowl. When a person marries from a house where there is only one child he knows that he marries the parents of the woman. He looks after them just as he looks after his own parents. (pp 88-9)

Almost every detail of this extract appears in the traditional idiom for negotiating a marriage. Though we have been informed that these visitors are expected, we still find them being asked to identify themselves. In doing this maditsela claims to be "the mouth and ears" of the other women. This is apparently sufficient to explain her role in the negotiations. The statement that, "We give birth to be troubled by the children," is, in fact, not intended to be a complaint, but a proverbial observation that all this effort of negotiations is undertaken on behalf of the children which is a recognized role of the parents in carving the future of their children. It is mainly because of diction and the idiom that the characters feature more in the traditional light than as ordinary city folks engaged in an act of bargaining for profit with their naive visitors. The speakers qualify to speak by virtue of the roles they play. It is for this reason that Ma-Mapena sees it fit to negotiate her role with Martha's parents as a spokesperson for the girl's people even before the day of the negotiations. She is clearly conscious of the fact that by convention she does not well befit the role she now plays, as she is not a blood-relation of the Mabongos. It is interesting to note that because of the

impact of the idiom used even the Molefe Yard is for the moment "transformed" into "your [July Mabongo's] kraal." Furthermore, even though the maditsela ostensibly complains of having been "pricked by the thorns," no one seems concerned about this, for it is accepted as a formal way of saying that since the visitors have taken trouble to travel all the way to the Mabongos, their request must be given due consideration.

Unlike Dikobe, Jordan and Sinxo achieve direct access to the traditional idiom since they set off to write in Xhosa. In their selection of diction these two Xhosa writers have a less complicated task of having to choose words that suit the occasion without having to battle with the technique of having to adapt them to the structure of the English language. As far as Jordan is concerned this can be said of him only when one considers the original Xhosa version, Inggumbo Yeminyanya. In the English version, namely, The Wrath of the Ancestors, he struggles considerably well with the translation of the pure Xhosa idiom into English. The ultimate result of it all is that the entire idiom ranges from obscure expressions to brilliant translations.

First of all the choice of the titles for his chapters boosts the idiom and, by the nature of the diction chosen, helps the reader to determine the prevailing circumstances in the chapter even before reading it. The Chapter titled, "Ndlela-ntle!" (Chapter 1 of Book II)

already gives one the impression of a character or characters setting out on a long and most likely adventurous journey. Indeed Thembeke and Mphuthumi set out on the quest of adult experience in the Chapter. Another equally striking chapter is Chapter 8 of Book II, titled, "Vingc'amazibuko!" ("Watch the Fords"). This highly dramatic chapter is set in spoken language and denotes a character or characters who frantically try to prevent the onset of trouble. This is actually what Dingindawo and his camp attempt to do in their determination to foil any plans by the opposite camp to bring Zwelinzima to Mpondomiseland.

The subsequent Chapter, titled, "Kunyembelekile" ("Things Look Bad"), suggests that the main actors are poised for action. Almost all the chapters in this book are designed to reflect the actions or thoughts of the characters, and, thereby, to stimulate interest on the part of the reader. They often reflect the idiom that would suit a particular situation. A further example could be Chapter 4 of Book II, titled, "I-i-i-wu!" ("Thief!"). Such an utterance can only be made when someone is seen stealing. Its sustained pitch suggests distance, the distance the thief ensures by acting in isolation from the rest of society in order to pull off his surreptitious act. As the title of Chapter 1 of Book III in the original version (missing in translation), Jordan uses a proverb, namely, "Deda Mhlangala Endaweni Yenyhwagi" (1979:119).

This functions as a pointer to Zwelinzima's possible success in taking over chieftainship from his uncle.

The diction and idiom used in describing a character fits naturally in Jordan's Xhosa version, as the novelist selects words and expressions that would normally be used even in a real life situation. Describing Zwelinzima, Jordan says,

[Inggumbo] Lo mfana wayesukile egadeni, ephakathi ngesiqu, phofu enamathambo, kubonakala ukuba uya kuba nesiqu xa selenendawo yakhe, ukuba uyahlutha. Ubuso bakhe babuthande ukuba banzi, entsundu ngebala. ... Kodwa nabani na ombhaqa ezolile wayengathanda ukurhwaqela kuba igazi lakhe lalinzima ... (1979:27)

[The Wrath] He was a young man of good height, well-separated from the clod. It was obvious that under favourable circumstances he would one day develop into a man of great physical strength and stature. His expression was frank and open, his face dark-brown in complexion ... [If] you should surprise him in a meditative mood you might experience a kind of awe inspired by his "heavy blood" ... (1980:26-7)

In spite of Jordan's good conduct of the English language, one may be inclined to wonder if the translated idiom still gives the same profile of Zwelinzima's appearance and dignity as it does in the original version where the traditional idiom appears as it would in normal life. Expressions like "well-separated from the clod"; "he would one day develop into a man of great physical strength" and "heavy blood" may possibly cloud the meaning in the translated version, but in the original

they present quite a vivid picture of Zwelinzima and his potential.

As already demonstrated in previous chapters, Ngxabane functions as a link between the world of the living and the domain of the ancestors. The diction and idiom attributed to this character are specially selected by Jordan. One of the best examples of the special diction selected by Jordan for this character is the dramatic speech of revelation where he announces the king's dying wish to the other councillors. Here he addresses the other men as "young men" something he only says because he holds a position of respect by virtue of his age and wisdom. The following passage abounds in figurative expressions and historical allusions and reminiscences:

[Inggumbo] "Yini na le bafanandini! Yini na le! Kodwa nithi lo mzi kaNgwanya woba yini sakufa, xa nje aba Dabula besithembe bona baza kuyiloza benjenje. Yinto owakha wayibona phi kodwa, Dabula Dlangamandla, le uyithethayo? Owen'umsebenzi sewuyintoni na, xa inkosi iza kuzifunel'umfazi nikho nje? Amehlw'esizwe aye phi, inkosi seyiza kuzibonela nje? Hi awu! Le ntw'isiko ayisaziwa kusini na kulo mzi! Azi soba yini na!

"MaMpondomise, xa kunje makuthethe thina boThambo-dala-kade-bemqongqotha, thina boDiza-dala-kade-bemkhwahlaza, thina boNgxabane. Lo mntwana wabelekwa ndim ngobusuku ukuya eMthatha, mhla waya eSheshegu; uyise amehlo wawacinywa ndim lo. Ndisisankonde nje namhlanje, ndilibal'intw'ebithethw'izol'oku, kukho nto inye endingasayikuze ndiyilibale--ngumyolelo woyise walo mntwana." (1979:130-1)

[The Wrath] Shame on you, young man! What's to become of this House of Ngwanya after our death, if the Dabulas on whom we pinned our faith are going to blunder in this way? Dabula of the Dlangamandlas, where have you ever heard of the things you've been suggesting? If the Chief is

going to choose his own wife, then what is your work? What has become of the eyes of the people, that the chief must look for his own wife? So! This thing called custom is no longer known in this House. Alas! What is to become of us Mpondomise people? At such a time as this, it is we who must speak--we, the old bones whose marrow they're forever sucking, we, the old maize fields from which they're forever gleaning--we, the Ngxabanes.

"It was on my back that this child was carried to Umtata the day he went to Sheshegu. It was by me that his eyes were closed in death. Although I am a withered old man, forgetting today what was spoken yesterday, there is one thing I shall never forget, and that is the dying-wish of this child's father. (1980:141)

It is quite noticeable that, continuing in the tone in which he opens his speech, Ngxabane no longer calls Zwelinzima "the Excellent One" or "Child of Kings" but simply refers to him as "this child" or "the Chief". This serves to emphasize the capacity in which he now addresses the councillors. He now functions as the mouthpiece of the dead Zanemvula. As such his position would be expected to be unassailable. The proverbial language he uses when he identifies himself as "boThambodala-kade-bemqongqotha" and "boDizadala-kade-bemkhwhlaza" (whose translations cannot be expected to be entirely accurate) functions to seal Ngxabane's position of unassailability and to lend finality to his utterances. He alludes to Zwelinzima's early removal to Sheshegu but merely refers to this in a few pregnant expressions. For a man to carry a child on his back would normally be regarded as unusual in Mpondomiseland. Knowing that this should invite interest, Ngxabane deliberately drops the subject, a move that is probably intended to make the listeners feel inadequate and

incompetent to make a judgement in the affairs of "this child." His further suggestion that he closed Zanemvula's eyes at his death is apparently intended to have a similar effect to the listeners. When he finally broaches the matter of the dying wish he has already drawn much from the resources of traditional rhetoric. His eloquence owes its weight to a combination of proverbial language, praise-singing and brief narratives of a legendary nature.

Curiously enough Jordan applies the same expression Dikobe uses with regard to people going to negotiate marriage, namely, "the eyes of the people." This is a clear indication that, like maditsela in The Marabi the Mpondomise councillors should function as "the eyes" of the Royal House. To find a bride for a young man must have been an undisputed role of the family or the community if he happens to be a chief. But what is equally important is the identity such diction and idiom lends the speaker. What Ngxabane says becomes even more credible than what he does. The same can be said of Jongilanga, another eloquent traditional figure. At a meeting to discuss the crisis caused by the killing of the sacred snake by Nobantu there is an altercation amongst a number of men, one of them being Jongilanga. Jordan presents the altercation thus,

[Inggumbo] "Mampondomise, nicing'ukuba ndiyabhoxa. Andincedi, ndibhanxekile. Nithe ngubani na laa mfokazi?"

Kwavakala uMabhozo ekhwaza,
 "Yid'uphum'egusheni, Jola. Abakuva."

"Hayi unyanisile, Mlungwana. Abandiva.
 Mfokazindini ugqib'ukuthetha, lo Ngwany'uthetha
 ngaye uyamazi?"

Tu. Wahambisa uJongilanga, "MaMpondomise,
 ndicela laa mfokazi, nayo yonke laa mpi
 imngqongileyo, ukuba bakhe basishenzele kwezaa
 zihlalo. Sifun'umntwan'enkosi uDingindawo apha
 lo mcimbi. Asibaz'abaya bafokazi. Sebethetha
 ngoNgwanya nje asizanga sibabon'apha mhla sasize
 kukhuz'inkosi."

Le ntetho yalandelwa sisiphithi-phithi,
 amanye amadoda esithi uJongilanga makawatyebisele
 le ntetho yakhe, amanye esithi "Niyaxoka, niyeva."
 (1979:187)

[The Wrath] "Mpondomise people," he said,
 "Please do not think I am deliberately causing
 trouble. I can't help it. I am rather confused.
 But tell me, who did you say that fellow is?"

"Come out of the sheep's skin and speak
 openly, Jola! They don't understand you," shouted
 Mabhozo.

"You're quite right, Mlungwana," observed
 Jongilanga. "They don't understand me."

Then, addressing himself to the pastor: "You
 there, who have just been speaking, do you know
 the Majola you are talking about?"

Silence.

Jongilanga went on: "Mpondomise people, I
 wish to ask that fellow, and all those sitting
 round him, to oblige and leave those seats. We
 want Dingindawo, the Child of Kings, to preside at
 this meeting. We don't know those men over there.
 We are surprised to hear them speaking of Majola
 even though they were nowhere to be seen when we
 came to the Chief to voice our sorrow after the
 sad event."

A commotion followed these remarks. Some
 speakers insisted that Jongilanga should fatten
 his statement for their benefit, while others
 shouted, "You lie! You understand him well
 enough!" (1980:205-6)

Here the answers to the questions Jongilanga asks appear
 obvious, but, as Mabhozo also seems to suggest these are
 part of the idiom used in traditional circles to indicate
 those whose identity renders them undesirable company.
 The term "phum'egusheni" does not appear to be an
 extension of the idiom, "ingcuka eyambethe ufele

lwegusha" (wolf in a sheep's skin"), but can rather be seen as a different idiom altogether denoting a plea to use straightforward language. By using such an idiom Mabhozo seems to indicate that Jongilanga is using proverbial register which is not easily understood by people who only know the common language. This further stresses the point Jongilanga is trying to make that the matter under discussion can only be efficiently dispatched by "the Mpondomise of the ashes" (p.206). To clarify his point Jongilanga uses the recognized measure of determining identity by family (clan) names and demands that the men seated in front be asked "what their clan names and praise names are" (p.206). Such a demand is intended not only to validate his stand point but also to delineate him as a strict observer of the traditional order of life among his people. The demands that Jongilanga should "fatten his statement" are a clear indication of individuals beginning to catch up with the level at which he addresses them.

Like Ngxabane, Jongilanga ensures that his address of his audience is in tune with the line of thinking he now adopts. He addresses them as "MaMpondomise", thereby stressing the fact that he shares this discussion with them in their capacity as Mpondomise people. The derogatory term "Mfokazindini" suits Jongilanga's purpose because it renders those addressed in this manner incompetent to handle the matter at hand by virtue of their undesirable identity. It is for this reason that

this insult can only provoke the Mfengu people to impotent anger with the only alternative open to them being the resolution to leave in disgust. Since the insult does not really challenge their physical ability to fight but to be at the meeting, they can only grudgingly allow Jongilanga to get away with it, if we are to judge the situation to have actually deteriorated to the level where fighting can easily break up.

All the meetings in which the ochre people dominate by their presence and contribution in The Wrath are marked by the use of the special idiom and the well-chosen diction to suit the occasion of the meeting. It is mainly for this reason that they are so realistic, dramatic and highly entertaining with the witticisms that Jordan builds into such scenes. The participants are clearly defined, not by any account about their appearance and what they wear, but by what they say and how they say it.

Sinxo: realistic or artificial?

Sinxo actually depends on both description and traditional idiom to delineate certain characters. However, all this is distorted by his persistent endeavour to bring out the absurd out of his characters. This intention happens to overshadow any genuine attempt to portray a character's traditional ways through his use of traditional idiom. Whatever diction he coins for the

episodes is mainly directed towards the generation of humour.

Almost all the episodes in UNojayiti are based on a moral lesson. The narrator is the one who always observes this lesson in each episode. The traditional idiom is mainly based on the speaker and as such it permeates the whole novel, forming the basic standard of the text. In the final analysis it is the writer's own language and the characters act and speak in its medium. Since the narrator is involved in every episode, one can safely assume that the titles of the episodes are virtually utterances by the narrator himself. The most obvious titles are, "Ndicetyiswa Ukululeka Umfazi" (Episode 3); "Sithiya Umntwana Igama" (Episode 9); and "Intsebenzo Yenkulu Yethu" (Episode 11). Sometimes the proverbs used in the titles suggest the moral aspect of the episodes. Three episodes bear the morally charged proverbs, namely, "Ukunganda Ihlahla" (Episode 15); "Ephandela Enye Yenethole" (Episode 19); and "KwaSizibayeyela" (Episode 20). These titles all suggest the actions and behaviour of characters.

The title of Episode 15 indirectly suggests that some characters (and in this case the narrator and his family) fight to protect themselves against trouble. This is, however, a much smaller trouble than the one suggested in "Vingc'amazibuko" in The Wrath. As the proverb suggests the title of Episode 19 indicates that one or more

characters are involved in the process of safe-guarding the interests of their children. This is what Nkwilinkwili does in the Episode. The title of Episode 20 suggests characters who set out to attract and detain others. This is what Koranti's family is accused of. It may also be observed that on the whole the titles to these episodes promote the satirical mode which is mainly directed at the artificial values upheld by the society of the novel; this, however, being at the same time an indirect criticism by Sinxo of his own real life society.

In order to stress the element of absurdity the novelist often uses the common idiom of everyday talk. This often does not complement the speaker as it does in The Wrath, but, instead, it becomes some indirect sarcastic or ironic comment on a character's weaknesses at a time when s/he believes herself/himself to be at her/his best. One of the best examples involves the women of prayer who unjustifiably condemn Koranti whom they believe has stolen and eaten up all the meat in Episode 1. The following remarks show the women off as inconsiderate, while the same remarks expose Nojayiti as contradicting herself:

"Tyhini, what is Koranti doing now? How can he be so greedy? I dare say his wife will never have an ounce of fat on her bones because of Khenkebe--the greedy one here!"

"What business had a man with pots any way?" so said my wife to crown it all. "What sort of man is this that dangles his beard over the pots!"
(p.4)

Nojayiti initially suggests that her husband should stay at home and help with domestic chores including cooking. Here she now denies the arrangement. She uses her knowledge of the traditional role of a husband as her argument in her attempt to escape from the situation she has herself created. In her apparent desire to embarrass him she uses the well-known and traditional idiom. This approach is supported by her sister's reference to Koranti as Khenkebe, this being an extremely greedy character and wife-deceiver in one of the well-known folktales among the Xhosa people.

One of a number of instances where Sinxo goes out of his way to select the diction that denotes a particular situation is in Episode 23, where a harmonious relationship between husband and wife is effected by Nojayiti and her husband. This peaceful scene is noticeable mainly because it is one of a few scenes where Nojayiti and her husband display so much mutual affection for each other. But even here the reader may be held in suspense by the very calmness of the passage, expecting a sudden explosion of emotions at any moment. All along it is the husband who idolises his wife, but she often does not seem to requite this adoration adequately enough. The satirical mode is also still evident as one reads between the lines, as it were. The following passage is a clear demonstration of how Sinxo weaves the idiom and diction to spell out the abundance of love between the couple,

their feeling of self-fulfilment as well as their contentment with life:

[Xhosa version] Ngokuhlwa kwaloo mini buqaqambile luvuyo obo buso ndibuthanda kunene bomfazi wam wavakala ehleka ngelo zwana lakhe limnandi ebuza, esithi, "Hina, Bhayeni, alikangeni na nanamhlanje oku ilizwi lam elithi, kulungile ukuyenza nakakubi na into kunokungayenzi mpela?"

Ndabuza noko sendigonda apho aya khona ndisithi, "Ngokuba, Bhedeshekayo?"

"Nditsho, sithandwa, ngenxa yokuba nangona uMadondile ebephe kakubi, kodwa ke oko kupha kwakhe kulizele ibandla nenkabi yenkomo nomzi wonke nomninawa wakhe obe eyingqola negqolo elingaphezulu lee kunaye."

"Asikuko nokuba undincamisile, Tshangisa," ndatsho icula intliziyo yam luvuyo, "kuba yilaa ntshumayelo yakho ingummangaliso le yonke le nguquko."

"Ewe, Tipha, asebenza njalo amandla kaThixo, asebenza nangezitya zomdongwe ezisithi. (1986:107

[English version] On that same day in the evening, her adorable face radiating with joy, I heard my wife's sweet little voice as she laughed, and she asked, "Well, Bhayeni, have my words not sunk yet; remember when I said it is far better to do something haphazardly than never at all?"

Sensing the purpose of her words, I pretended to ask, "Why is that, my Adoration?"

"I mean, love, that though Madondile may have given a meagre gift, his gift has brought an ox and the entire family of his younger brother who was by far a greater miser than him."

"You really astounded me, Tshangisa," I said my heart singing with joy, "because it was your wonderful sermon that brought about all this repentance."

"Yes, indeed, Tipha, that is how God's power works; it works even through clay pots like us." (p.113)

The idea of a loving couple lingers in the background of Sinxo's episodes. It seems to be the only matter that is lent a realistic touch in the novel. There is much seriousness and goodwill generated by those occasions when Nojayiti responds positively to the love of her

husband or succumbs admirably to his fervent devotion to her and his flattering. Although Nojayiti seems to torment her husband most of the time with her sharp tongue and often unreasonable demands, she never quarrels with his affection for her and his use of the many terms of endearment he coins especially for her. At their extreme, these include terms like "Jayijayi", "Fazile", "Bhedeshekayo", "Fazi" and "Bumnandi". In anything else the characters appear to be rather artificial. The values they uphold do not appear to be an end in themselves. Instead, much attention is paid to the general panache of the characters.

In a curious manner church literature like hymns, quotations from the Bible and certain moral observations play the part that would normally be played by oral literature within the community of Njwaxa. Quotations from the Bible are used as proverbs by the characters. For example, in an attempt to make her sister, Tawuse, see reason and to stop her overt protection of Qebi, Nojayiti says, "Susa kugala umqadi osesweni lakho phambi kokuba ususe isibi esisesweni lomnye, Tawuse" (1986:77). The direct translation is, "First remove the beam from your own eye before you clear the blot in someone else's eye, Tawuse" (Ann. p.83). In seeking reconciliation with Koranti's family Qolwana quotes, "Akusayi kumxolela kasixhenxe nje kodwa okonileyo, kuloko uya kumxolela amaxesha angamashumi asixhenxe aphindaphindwe kasixhenxe!" (1986:112); translated as, "[You] will not

forgive him who wrongs you seven times only, you will forgive him seventy times multiplied by seven!" (Ann. p.119). These quotations seem to play the role of proverbs because they are intended to give finality to the matters being argued by the characters. They also represent Sinxo's skill to poke fun at the Christians who often do not practise what they preach.

Sometimes even when Sinxo uses an idiom he applies one of western origin. For example, in Episode 25 he says, "Lithi iqhalo labaMhlophe isizwe sinikwa iinkokeli ezifana naso, lithetha ukuthi ukuba isizwe sikhohlakele neenkokeli zaso ziya kufana naso, zikhohlakale ke, iqhalo ke elo likhanyisa into yokuba akuncedi lutho ukugxeka abo bakhokeleyo, abantu bona ngokwabo mabazibhence bazikhangele balunge" (1986:113). Translated, "An idiom of the white people says a nation is given leaders who are reflective of its own aspirations, the meaning of this being that if the nation is wicked its leaders are likewise wicked, an idiom that suggests that it is no use blaming those who are wicked, the people should themselves do some self-searching and introspection and improve themselves. (p.120).

In this novel there is also an abundance of song sung with the spontaneous gusto one experiences in the singing of traditional songs. One can sense that the songs are not necessarily sung from the hymn book but, like traditional songs, are sung from memory. In a way they

seem to replace traditional songs and to play more or less the same role played by traditional songs. However, there is much posturing and superficiality accompanying the singing. For example, in the first Episode the women chant their "Hosanas" and "Halelluyas" in anticipation of the meat that is expected to come out of Nojayiti's pot soon (p.4). In Episode 7, the women again sing heatedly as they celebrate Mbokreni's purchase of a pig, because, as Nojayiti says, "one day [they will] relish its sizzling layers of fat" (p.29). Praise-singing seems to have been replaced by passionate and energetic preaching. Most of this preaching is reported by the narrator, but one can sense that because it is a form of improvised performance it features well in the line of traditional praise-poetry. The following extract gives us a vivid picture of what can best be described as an improvised form of performance:

[Xhosa version] Nazo, iintokazi zomthandazo zibeka, zihlala. Nanko uNojayiti eshiyeka emi yedwa edwabulula izandla, ekongathethekiyo umoya, ethetha, esithi: "Ewe, bafazi bokuthandaza, nibizwe ndim. Imithandazo yethu iyeviwa nguMdali. Ewe, siyabaphiwa ooSamweli nooDebhora. Nanku ngoku nale ntwana uMbokreni iyiyekile imfeketho--iyekile ukuthenga amahashe, izinto ezingatywayo, omalahlanofele ..." (1986:30).

[English version] So the great dames take it up standing on their feet before again sitting down. In the midst of it all, Nojayiti remains standing all by herself, her arms spread out in a show of profound possession, as she says: "Indeed, ladies of the prayer, you've been called by me. Our prayers are received by the Creator. Indeed, we are given those Samuels and Deborahs. Behold this little one, Mbokreni, who has stopped fooling around--who has put an end to buying horses,

useless creatures that cannot be enjoyed as meat, such as are thrown away skin and all." (p.28)

Nojayiti's remarks cannot be said to be a delivery of a speech nor can they explained away as preaching. She adopts the tactics of a traditional praise-singer and thereby creates a compassionate appeal to her audience.

Sinxo's novel is dominated by Christianized characters. Yet we are almost never given to see how well-understood these new values are. The influence of oral literature is a generally suppressed phenomenon in Sinxo's novel. It is as though this novelist identifies it with illiteracy and a heathen way of life to be shunned by the morally upright. Nevertheless, Sinxo does not commit himself to either openly rejecting or accepting the active presence of this literature among the people he attempts to portray in his work. He openly uses clan names, however, and seems to revel in them.

Sinxo, therefore, differs from Jordan and Dikobe by way of his guarded inclusion and austere control of the aspects of oral literature. The other two novelists get out of their way to ensure that the influence of orality is felt in their works. The use of oral literature by both of them in fact becomes part of their writing techniques and thereby lends their works much more substance than Sinxo's novel, which only capitalizes in humour and the moral content.

C H A P T E R 5

CONCLUSION

Apology

Part I of Segre's approach to the analysis of the literary text is purely objective and abstract, so that it does not owe allegiance to any single one of the known theories of literature. As a consequence of this any number of literary theories can be accommodated in the first section of his treatise. It is mainly because of the above features that Segre's treatise can provide a firm foothold for a fledgling scholar venturing into the field of textual analysis and criticism. In his preface Segre (1988:xi) says of his work,

The first part, the more didactic part, of this book tries to exercise the virtue of modesty, avoiding wide-ranging theoretical problems and remaining on the level of analytical techniques and strategies. Rather than discuss principles and methods, I have attempted to put forward in an organized fashion what I judge to be the operations which can most profitably be applied to a text. Modesty has not reached the point of merely listing the techniques for analysis, although these make up the material of the exposition ... Indeed, I have attempted to sketch a general program of the operations which can be applied to the literary text so as to face progressively the problems it poses ...

Segre (1988:xi) goes further and explains, "If the program sketched out is valid, it should be possible to accommodate within it those techniques of which I make no

mention, either because of my plan of exposition or because I doubt their utility or because they did not come to mind."

Chapters 2 and 4 of Part I of Segre's work, titled "The Text" and "The Text Historicized" respectively, have been read specifically for this dissertation. Regarding the historicity in Segre's approach, which is evident in Chapter 4 of Part I of his work, there are noticeable overlaps between his approach and Amuta's debate (1989). These have been given some attention in Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of this work.

However, there is need to state at this stage that no attempt has been made to enter the general debate on the novel. Instead, the various concepts regarding the historicity of a literary text have been applied in the practical analyses of the chosen texts. Consequently, Chapters 3 and 4 lean heavily on the historical and cultural dynamics of the texts under investigation. The elements of culture and history should in fact be viewed as instrumental towards the definition of the African novel. Any lack of clarity could possibly be attributed to any shortcomings that may accompany the reconciliation of Chapter 2 with Chapters 3 and 4. Although Chapter 2 reflects a standing desire to commit a selected approach to this dissertation, there has been an equally determined thought not to condemn this work by demonstration of any fervent devotion to some chosen

theoretical approach. The basic attention is to the interpretation of the chosen texts. In addition to the above texts one might expect some reflection of a study of other theoreticians of the Marxist school of criticism. Such approach, it is felt, would invite a host of predetermined ideas that might cloud the original intention to make an intensive study of the chosen writers' approach to character treatment in a novel.

Apology is sought also for involving novels that do not appear in one language. As already indicated, The Wrath of the Ancestors is a translation from the Xhosa novel, Ingqumbo Yeminyanya. In translation this novel is, however, treated as an independent work. Because of the inclusion of a debate on the influence of oral literature in Chapter 4, the Xhosa version has had to be used as well. The Marabi Dance appears in English only, but this work abounds in "Africanisms" that ultimately affect its "standard" of English as might be observed by authorities in this language. These "Africanisms" lend it the special qualities of a typical African novel written in English. UNojayiti Wam is a novel that is written in Xhosa, which I translated into English for the purpose of this work. This is bound to have a bearing on the already heated debate regarding the definition of African literature and the standard of English in African literature. The debate in these pages is patterned along the lines of the cultural and historical background reflected in the works. Meaning is drawn from the various traditional view

points made by the characters and recognized also in real life. The language used in the three novels mirrors the reality facing the society being portrayed, namely, the South African society.

The only reason for such a combination of literary works in this study is simply that the field of interest is African literature. Fittingly enough, the Department under which this work is being produced happens to be the Department of African Languages and Literatures; and by its name, the Department defines the scope available and limits within which a scholar may operate. This further suggests that if a scholar's competence should be recognized in two or more African languages including the colonizers' languages nothing should bar that scholar from studying the literature written in the languages concerned. I agree with Kunene (1986:37) when he says,

The writer's first duty is, of course, to maintain a dialogue with his black brothers and sisters whom he must constantly inspire with the message of hope. In doing so, he must come to terms with the fact that these brothers and sisters speak either Setswana or Xhosa or Sepedi or Ndebele and so on. So the linguistic challenges multiply. The immediately contemporary South African situation highlights these problems in a most singular manner. This is because one of the demands on the author today is that he, like the oral narrator, must stand face to face with his audience and harangue them with his own voice. Again, as in a typical oral narrative situation, the audience feedback is immediate and not always concurring.

Consolidation of the main features of the debate

Chapter 1 of this work gives a broad outline of the debates that may have directly or indirectly affected it. Chapter 2 is a study of the conventional features of novel-writing and characterization in the chosen three works. Here the influence of the western novel is brought under focus. Chapter 3 centres around the socio-historical and cultural influence on the three works presently being discussed. This is intended to demonstrate how these novels qualify under African Literature. Chapter 4 is an extension of the latter debate with special focus being directed at the influence of oral literature over the novels being discussed. It is believed by the writer that the above arrangement of the debate should help in the attempt to highlight the strong points of the writer's arguments as suggested above. Characterization is a wide field and, therefore, any debate in this field requires some measure of control if it is to make sense at all.

The idea of a comparative study of characterization in the three novels provides the first measure of control, as it necessitates a selection of common factors and comparable differences. Chapter 3 is an attempt to bring into the debate issues that may be of interest to other scholars, regarding the individual and society, leadership: gender and generation, character and background and imaging and other related techniques. An

attempt is made to delve deep into the finer points regarding the portrayal of Zwelinzima in The Wrath. There is an effort to go even beyond what Jordan may possibly have expected us to read out of his main character. For example, the argument about Zwelinzima's Christian background and his partly fulfilled university education suggests that Zwelinzima may not have acquired that much insight into the said forms of background. On the contrary, the writer seems to suggest that Zwelinzima had a scintillating record as a westernized African and something of a 'black European'.

By comparison my debate presents Martha whose struggle for identity and human rights redeems her from the condemnatory view of her as a common street girl and an unprincipled flirt. Instead, her struggle for sheer survival within the urban environment lends her an aura of dignity, respectability and nobility. She is epitomized as an archetype of the black urban dweller, but remains an anti-hero throughout the novel.²³

The false values demonstrated by many characters in UNojayiti have received much attention in this discussion. Much emphasis has been put at how these characters are portrayed with the main intention being to promote humour. The reassuring harmony within Koranti's

²³ In a letter Dikobe wrote to me he states that he has sent another pamphlet to Ravan Press, a sequel to The Marabi, where "Martha is now an old woman. She ventures to find her father's home." This could possibly prove that Martha is indeed a survivor.

family unit provides the more serious side of character portrayal in this novel and has also been discussed to some extent.

It can, therefore, be concluded that though novel-writing is a new art in Africa, characterization in this art lends it a new and unique quality as the African novel. Whether it is written in English or one of the indigenous languages characters are one of the major factors to suggest a purely African quality. Their very names suggest a marked departure from characters in, for example, a typical English novel.

To study the sensitivity of the writers towards socio-cultural change has also not been in vain. It was possible to detect how the three writers register the making of a leader in modern society and how they depict the roles of children and women. All three of them seem to observe a fusion of western values and traditional African principles. Even in The Wrath where one experiences a cultural clash we may be satisfied that whatever conflict is reflected is as a result of a clash of the Mpondomise values with those foreign values that have already been internalized in Mpondomiseland before the arrival of Zwelinzima. Mission schools and hospitals are already accepted western institutions. It has been possible in this study to follow the observed qualities of leadership and other important social values the three writers are sensitive to.

Furthermore, this study indirectly demonstrates the possible need to know the socio-cultural background before one can effectively embark on a study of characterization in these works. For lack of appropriate material on the study of characterization in these novels, works of a more general nature on African literature have been used. This is also an indication of a dire need for intensive scholarship in this field. The title chosen for this study, therefore, may appear familiar and quite simple and straightforward, but, in actual fact, as an intensive study of specific works, this debate had to lean heavily on originality, in a manner one would not experience with, for example, a similar topic on Shakespeare or Dickens.

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ANNEXURE

UNOJAYITI WAM

(a translation)

Submitted with the M.A. thesis by:

Mzayivane Abner Nyamende

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1. How she trained me

My wife, Nojayiti and I are, today celebrating our twentieth anniversary. But still I would not be able to say which of us is the direct cause of the success of our marriage. I am quite ready to admit one thing, however, concerning my dear Jayiti: her tongue is sharper than that of the most nagging woman in the world; so much so that our children have eventually given her the appropriate name of Nogqwashu, the spitfire.

There would be no peace in this house, both for my children and myself, had it not been for her marvelous affinity for direct talk. As for me, I prided myself in being the obliging father of the house, always exuberant with love and endearment. Encouraged by this high esteem of myself I was bold enough one day, when their mother, Nojayiti, was away to sound my children on which, of the two of us, they loved better. I was quite certain of the answer I would draw from them. Imagine my disappointment when it turned out they loved their mother afterall! To crown it all, Balafuthi, my last born endeavoured to give the reason--it was ma who had any food to give them. My efforts to explain that I was in fact the bread winner were in vain; he just would not accept such a story.

My own contribution of weaknesses and shortcomings included an overindulgence in a pot of beer, a weakness which brought me into constant conflict with Nojayiti, for she was a convert of the first waters. Another weakness was vagabonding, spending hours into each night in the company of other men.

These two practices rendered me a regular victim to the hawk-eyed justice of my one and only MamNgwevu. Ever so often I had to use by-ways into the house. At times I would let myself in through the window, and I would then pretend I had long been in the house. Even that would be discovered by my dear Tshangisa, and you would hear the commotion as she likened me to all sort of creatures that ever were, in so much

that it would come as a surprise to me when, on looking at myself in the mirror, I found my tail missing.

After a while, my manly wisdom warned me that this habit of vagabonding would soon separate me from my family; so I withdrew. You could see me in my newly acquired grace, an isolated figure, wallowing about the house from morning 'till nightfall, watching my lady busy cooking. Ah! Ah, then! How she swung with diligence and skill at her cooking!

One of the tasks I am sure to perform without blemish is the disposal of meals from my plate. If any one, I would be there when the pot released its aroma of nicely cooked food, talking enthusiastically, moving about actively and failing not to notice at the same time that the good lady enjoyed, in the manner of all women to be engaged in a conversation with her husband.

We went on enjoying ourselves in this way up to a point: one day we sent our last-born to the shop. He lost all the money--ten shillings! I was mad with fury, to think that this child had thrown my last penny into the water. His mother had always pined about my not giving her enough money for groceries; now comes this crazy imbecile along and loses a whole ten shilling note!

I went hissing to the boy, chased him about with my switch and took him over a considerable stretch, the eager twig feasting on him. At last I returned. And on my arrival, home had turned into an asylum with her cursing, squaring and stamping. So did the great poet call me names!

"You lazy lout, you flabby water-bag! You layabout, shunning the company of other men! What, you think you can fool around with my baby! The day the creature has money it starts walloping my kids! What sort of man is this anyway, who keeps tailing his wife!"

"Please, please, darling," I immediately succumbed pleading fearfully, as I saw that lioness coming straight for me, her buttocks working hard and pumping energy, "it was you who said I should keep away from other men, and stay at home!"

"Who do you mean! Who do you mean!" screamed my own Tshangisa furiously. "Did I even--did I even once instruct you to treat my baby like a sand-bag!"

"Peace, Zulu, bear in mind that I bring them up under discipline, I discipline them for you."

"Bringing them up for me! What else have you ever done for me, you lazy lout? A creature that spends the whole summer day on his back pointing his paunch to the sky, and not caring to help me do even the easiest of my duties!"

All of a sudden there I was swearing and sucking my thumb, promising that in future I would help her in everything she did. At this the storm showed signs of abating, whereupon I began fervidly to coax, "Peace, Fazile, peace, Sikhomo, papa's daughter-in-law, from today on you yourself are going to witness how completely changed I'll be, with the diligence of a man totally different from what you are used to."

"Hear, hear!" the good lady exclaimed, "Horses can grow horns if an idler like you can ever busy himself."

As I looked at her, watching her pretty smile which caused those dimples I worship ever so much, I swore, like the one mentioned by David--one who swears and never turns back through thick and thin--swearing that from that day on I would never acquaint myself with idleness.

There and then I took an axe and went to make fire-wood. On returning, I went to fetch water and without stopping for a break I proceeded to fetch cow dung and smeared the floor. From then on I became a cook, sweeper, nanny and washed blankets; yes, I worked from the fields to the pots, and this was good news in our home.

By this time, I was already patting myself at the back, praising my genius for creating such a friendly atmosphere in the house. While I was still in my last heaven, on a certain day, my wife attended the women's congregation. She left me behind to cook some meat. As an obliging husband I did as told and soon the meat was ready and cooked.

Promising myself a good lunch, I took a stroll outside, leaving Balafuthi in the house. My return home coincided with the arrival of my wife, accompanied by four other women of the

prayer, whom she had invited to feast on the meat. They settled down leisurely, and my wife spread white table-cloths amid the noise of heated conversation on the cause of the Evangelism they had just attended, what with the "Hosanas" and the "Halleluyas".

Just then we were startled by a high-pitched cry from my wife, her upper frame suspended over the pot with a lid in her hand.

"SekaNgqayimbana! SekaNgqayimbana! (Ngqayimbana's father!) Where is the meat which was in this pot?"

As I stared at that pot, stupefied, I was shocked dead. Then suddenly it occurred to me who the possible thief might be, and at that idea I rose, bellowing out words.

"Balafuthi, why did you eat your mother's meat, boy?"

"Ye he! exclaimed Nojayiti, clapping hands, "There is no end to evil! The husbands of today are so greedy! How can it be that after eating the women's meat you blame my baby?"

Smitten by anger, surprise, disappointment and shame, I was stifled and incapable of even defending myself. Imagine those women eyeing me and then glancing at each other, all of them silently cursing me, the rapacious male whose guilt is spelt out by inability to say a single word to defend himself against that stream of words coming from Nojayiti.

The words which came from Nojayiti's sister as the accusers were streaming out, never did the least to relieve my tormented soul, as she said, "Tyhini, what is this Koranti doing? How can he be so greedy? I say, the woman will never have an ounce of fat on her bones because of this Khenkebe--the greedy one!"

"What did a man have to do with pots anyway?" So said my wife to conclude it all; "What sort of man is this who dangles beard over pots!"

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2. Someone gives advice on wife taming

What my wife had done to me created a deep wound. The fact that she could and did disgrace me in the presence of so many people--and the women of prayer at that--that she could declare me a glutton who ate whole pots of food, a villain and a thief who subjected his children to starvation; all this disturbed me very much. It would have been quite a relief for me had I recovered my voice and spoken for myself while those people in whose presence she had disgraced me were still there. But hers had been the last say.

For days I was as sulky as a bear and just as speechless, with every now and again a sigh as deep as that of a puff-adder. By so doing, I was punishing Nojayiti, so that her conscience would be piqued and she would have nobody to talk to. On the contrary, I had missed the point.

For the rest of that week Nojayiti worked with increased diligence, walking with brisk steps and humming workless tunes; tunes, however, which were clearly intended for snobbish husbands--men who brought misery to their families by their gluttony and dire theft. Even when she was reprimanding a child I would hear her implicating all the members of my clan, eMaThipeni, accusing them of all their transgressions, especially those of gluttony and theft. This was indeed a very unpleasant week for me, cowering as I did under those humiliations and the scathing sarcasm.

Because of loneliness I decided on one of those days to visit other men. I found them in Malongo's home, drinking. At that I took a heavy pull from the beaker, and when I left I had the self-confidence of ten men more than the isolated sucker I had been on my arrival--such is the stuff. I left there buzzing and made straight for home. On the way I met Zixinene Landinkomo, a decedent of the Khuma people. We exchanged the usual inquiry after each other's life, upon which I began to impart to him the bitterness of my feelings, telling him all the wrongs Nojayiti had ever perpetrated upon me.

He responded to this by giving me elaborate advice with much cautioning. He harped on the waywardness of modern women, their lack of respect for their husbands. He told me that his own wife too was once like that, and that what finally brought her back on the track was a lesson on good manners with a stick. He told me in my face that I was just a thing Nojayiti had by the nose and that even a baby in the village knew about this.

These words were like coal in a steam engine, every second took me flying to Nojayiti. The moment I entered the house I was saying, "Here in my house, here in my house there is one bull--one, not two! I will never again be controlled by a female!"

"Ye he, good people!" exclaimed the wife.

"Nojayiti! Nojayiti! For whom are you doing that 'Ye he' thing here? I'll show you!"

So saying I made for my hard wood stick; soon I was back shaking it, bellowing, kicking dust.

"Here! Here! Here, in my house there is one bull!"

"Ye ha ye! You happen to be afraid of other men though you are armed to the teeth, armoured against a woman.

"Nojayiti! Nojayiti, bring here a man I was ever afraid of!"

"You, too, bring here a man you have ever beaten!"

As soon as the wife said this, I remembered that, in actual fact, there was not a single man I had ever fought with in that village; how could I ever begin by someone else's baby to raise my hand. At this I threw away the stick and lay on my mat, dreadfully ashamed and disappointed.

"Go ahead, beat me, what's the matter? Why should you spare your ritual drum? Go on beat up, beat up!"

"Shut up, Nojayiti, shut up," I kept on saying, in such a loss what to do as never before. After a while of pleading, coaxing, promising her everything on earth--what I had and what I had not--she finally stopped talking, and only sulkiness remained lingering in the air. While that was still to do, she scathed me, leaving me a pile of shame during the evening prayer. This particular evening she took up the prayer

herself, declaring her condition as an orphan to her Heavenly Father, stating the bitter marriage life, where she and her children were facing the danger of becoming hunchbacked due to the hulk they stayed with. It became such a monotony, Nojayiti reminding of her giving up good men, only to land with a creature who would shake a stick at her.

At long last she terminated her prayer and straightened up. She carelessly pushed my dish in my direction with an explosive, 'Eat, eat, but people are amazed at your behaviour!'

On that night I was swept into a long, troubled sleep by exhaustion and woke up after sunrise the following morning. The eye stole a look at the wife's bedding. I couldn't believe what I saw! Wife, there was none!

"Balafuthi, Balafuthi, where's your mother gone to?"

"Tyhini, can't you see, tata, that she has left with all her belongings."

"Did you see her, boy, when she left?"

"Of course, I saw her."

"Then why didn't you wake me up?"

"And whatsoever have you beaten her for?"

"I didn't beat her, boy, don't ever talk about something you don't know!"

"I know it. Do you think she just left? And she warned that if you dare set foot at her home trying to bring her back she'll unleash her brothers, the same who almost killed her brother-in-law, unto you.

That put me at a loss what to do. Days went by and became weeks and the wife continued to stay away. Going to the in-laws meant sure death. I lingered on the river banks, niched myself among cliffs like a lizard, keeping a look-out for my wife so I could plead with her to return home.

There is nothing more depressing than to find yourself suddenly living like a rat in a calabash, fidgeting about in the house, after having lived together with your wife. That big house we lived in became so imposing and oppressive. People who used to pay us visits suddenly by-passed us saying they would not stop in a house without its mistress. Hunger

began to encroach upon us, while we were eating half-cooked food; the children became dirty, with tattered clothes, while little Balafuthi kept saying that he was going to follow his mother and that he could not see why she had been sent away.

I lived that way--like an owl in the bush--until one day it occurred to me to visit Zixinene, so I could copy the mode of life of a man who had straightened his wife in due time.

It took me considerable time to get there. While I was still at a distance I could hear a disturbing din. It was the high-pitched voice of an excited woman. Just then Zixinene shot out of the house and kept running with the wife aiming a log of firewood behind him, foaming about the mouth and shouting, "Off with you! Off with you, imbecile of a man; think you can stay indoors while my babies are bitten by the cold in the open veld, looking after stock for you!"

"Please! Please, dear wife!" so pleaded Zixinene as he disappeared in the distance, having not seen me. "Please! Please, dear wife, I'm joining the kids right away."

3. One of the ways of persuading

One of the most traumatic ordeals one earth makes itself felt when, after enjoying the company of a woman, she suddenly leaves you in a squabble. As soon as Nojayiti left me in the same manner, I felt like one who has lost his mind. I developed the habit of roaming the veld, looking for her. I used to sit by the way side and haunted the stores which the wife frequented, with the sole determination to make her come home.

However hard I tried, my wife just would not even talk to me; and when at times she did speak, it was only to shower me with a torrent of invectives, telling me of my misdemeanours and comparing me to all sorts of creatures that ever walked the earth.

She used to go to the store attended by those bloodthirsty brothers of hers, fellows who grinned at me, apparently itching to land a blow at me at any time, while surveying me from toe to top. I would have borne all that spite well, but for the frivolous Magada who had become their intimate companion, a creature who did nothing besides jesting boastfully and engaging my own wife in his silly jests. This infuriated me so, because, although I am not jealous, at least such intimacy between my wife and another man, at the time she was away from me, did not give me any comfort. Anyway, I kept appeasing myself with the precious knowledge I had that Nojayiti was the most faithful of all the women of the world.

To aggravate my predicament, my wife became plump and radiated a rich complexion, so that even a fool could see that she was happy at her home. How could I say that my expectation, on her desertion, was that she would never be happy at her home as she had always been in her own house; and I was justified in so thinking, because, as today sees her leaving me, we have stayed together for ten years in which she has never set foot at her home, though her home is so near to mine. I normally teased her about this, asking her to tell me who she killed at her home such that she did not dare pay a

visit. But now this joke had turned against me, for, every time I tried to reason with her, she would fire back with, "As you can see, I never killed anybody at home; keep your house, dear, and leave me alone.

While this situation continued to daunt me, reducing me into a vagrant, one whose everything in the house was blighted, Balafuthi, my favourite, inflicted a further injury upon me, one day, by fleeing from home when I reprimanded him; away he was in the direction of her mother's home in a hurry, shouting, announcing to the whole nation, declaring that he would never stay with a wicked creature who sent his mother packing. However hard I chased, asking him what I was supposed to have done, I could not help but cause him to intensify his proclamation, saying, "I am leaving you, you saddist; you dare ask me what you are supposed to have done to me, yet, what was it you had done to mother so she left you?"

It did not take long after this child had left, when the spiritual wounds became a physical agony. I began to feel weak; then one day I was caught in a shower of very cold rain indeed, and that was the beginning. I arrived home choking with high fever, dropped down to sleep and immediately lost consciousness.

Days passed while I mumbled endlessly, all the time uttering the names of Nojayiti and Balafuthi. While that was still the case, fortunately, there arrived Nohombile, my sister-in-law. She had travelled distances, from her own home, coming to see us after all those years. She had left her home without any knowledge of the separation that had kept her sister at her parents' home. She was shocked on arrival to find a sickling who was already at death's door and to find her sister long gone to her home. She could have proceeded on her way that very day, had she not realized the necessity of constant vigil over the now dying patient; so she forced herself to stay.

Nothing is worthier than a kind woman. I experienced relief on the very first day this woman had arrived. She nursed men with great care and skill; let alone her marvelous cooking as she supped and dined me on all kinds of diet worth

for a sick person. Soon I was dragging myself along wobbling about in the yard, always under the friendly care of my sister-in-law. In no time I was enjoying good health once again.

During the course of my recuperation the rumours from the in-laws were that Nojayiti was no longer happy where she was. It was rumoured that her brothers' wives leagued against her. Everything she did or said brought her into open confrontation with them and they did not spare her at all, pointing out to her the way back and telling her point blank that her behaviour was the cause of her separation and that she should go away to manage her own homestead and leave them alone in theirs. At first this took the form of simple women's talk, but soon enough her brothers joined in, showing a savage eagerness to belabour her with the mellow sticks.

I have already acknowledged the worth of a kind woman. Now my home was a warm place once more, because I was no longer a lonely owl with Nohobile, my sister-in-law, making herself a helping hand. But throughout the time of her presence in my house I was constantly puzzled by the dawning realization that she was no longer anxious to return to her home, but was quite happy where she was. This was pretty unusual, to be sure, for another person would, on discovering that her sister had abandoned her home, have hit the road without delay, leaving the man alone as her sister had done before her.

Actually, I forget something, that before I was laid down with forever I had made the last desperate attempt to plead a come-back-home. In all that time I received no positive answer. Instead frantic efforts would be made to restrain the uncouth exhibition of the flailing sticks of the sons of the Ngwevu family from attacking me, whereupon Nojayiti, the only person I could trust, would be the very person to incite them, saying, "Strike the creature down if it dares to play mad at you on your very doorstep. Strike the creature, so we can see if it can fight other men in the same way as it does when hitting women!"

On my last day of persuasion the Ngwevu families sealed me off by ruling that if I still wanted my wife, I should pay to the last cow, all those cows I still owed them in lobolo. Mind, I had fifteen herd altogether to pay for lobolo, of which I had already paid only ten. This made it quite difficult for me to pay all the remaining five herd on one single day.

It so happened that the naughty Balafuthi struck one of the little ones at Nojayiti's home. The little one ran to the mother bowling. The mother made for Nojayiti, putting all the blame upon her for disturbing their peace by bringing to their home that unruly child, who kept hammering their babies. She should not have done it. The exchanged strong language until the other woman realized almost too late that she had stirred a hornet's nest. Thereupon, she sought the assistance of Macholi, her husband. The husband flew at Nojayiti mad with fury. Without wasting words he pointed the way out to Nojayiti, adding that they had given her away in marriage and did not expect to see her back with them again, bothering their wives. He had not finished these words when Nojayiti cut in with a bold declaration that her own home was not leaking and she could go back there at any time.

After that incident life became difficult for Nojayiti as she kept a gloomy silence in her father's house, her conscience goaded by Balafuthi's constant prodding with a monotonous, "Mama let's go away from these people; they are wicked."

During that very period just as Nojayiti was living through such an ordeal, there came to her one called Nodathini, a worthless gossiper. She spared no words in furnishing her lies about me.

* * * *

One particular night I was sleeping alone in my room when I was shocked by the door suddenly crashing open. Imagine what I saw! There stood Nojayiti, a mask of fury, holding an old

axe in her hand, hissing and muttering, "You lecher, where's this woman? Where's the woman you're making your wife?"

I was so stupefied I could not say anything in reply. Without waiting for an answer she dashed for the private bedroom, struck the door with one blow of the axe and it flew open. In great confusion, I clumsily gave chase, wondering as I did what sort of rabbis had caught my wife this time.

I came along just as she threw down the axe and passionately embraced her sister kissing her, saying, "Nohombile! Nohombile, could this be you, mama's baby?"

"Yes, papa's darling," replied her sister laughing, "please forgive my treachery. It is I who sent Nodathini to go and tell you lies about your husband having married another woman. I remained here to confirm that false alarm, so that the locals should continue to see an unknown woman here."

"By this deceit then, Hombi, what did you hope to achieve?"

"I knew, Tshangisa," replied Nohombile, "that jealousy is a sure means to send a person back."

We exploded into laughter, being full of joy.

4. All those fashions

Nojayiti's return, marking an end to our quarrel and subsequent separation, transformed the thorny earth into an enchanted paradise. After the hard lesson I had learnt, I decided that from the day she returned to me I would spoil and pamper her in a manner no woman was ever spoilt before.

She, too, returned showing signs of having been hard-hit. It had never been easy for her, after being a house mistress and giving orders for so long, to find herself being given instructions by other women. So she came back a much more devoted wife who also seemed quite determined to savour the pleasures of marriage to the last.

The great mNgwevukazi showed this partly in the enthusiasm about fashionable clothes with which she became infected. She and her children pestered me, saying I am clumsy, I dressed badly and I was going to disgrace them, adding that I was not with it.

Just at about that time there dominated a strange fashion among women folk. The first person to put on such a dress in our village was Nojayiti. It was a narrow dress which had the effect of bottling up the wearer, hampering the movement of the legs in walking. You could see mNgwevukazi's remarkable self-assurance through that bandage. I was obliged to show approval, though secretly wondering how someone could loathe herself so much as to confine herself into such imprisonment.

Our women were taken by the storm, tying themselves up, while we men folk looked on, filled with pity and misgivings about the danger of accidents our families precipitated over, their minds fixed on one thing only--that we were not with it!

However hard it peals in the sky though, the thunder storm does eventually pass on. Soon we were relieved by the hand of freedom, our families having forgotten about the narrow Hobbleskirts, which were now regarded as old fashioned. How I admired the wife I had got through herds of my father's cattle when she relapsed to her old self again I cannot tell--

being once again that well-known lady of a measured walk and a steady, broad figure.

This break became too short. We now had another surprise waiting. Behold the women folk making awful exhibitions. Behold the skirts retreating to lengths above the knees. This nakedness of an otherwise respectable woman stifled my sentiments. We had many arguments about this but I was finally subdued and shown my own folly. My wife told me that she was shocked by my reaction to mumble complaints just when fashion was in my favour, showing me that relatively little material was required to make these skirts, a revolution that would save me a lot of money, making me so wealthy that I would no longer need the warmth of the fireplace within a remarkably short period of time. Moreover, she paraded before me her most beautiful legs, asking me whether I imagined in my stupidity that such splendour was ever made to stay hidden under the skirt forever. Thereupon, she volubly explained to me that the men who misguided me into opposing this fashion did so because their women's legs were ugly and they envied me doting on hers which were like those of a statue moulded by a celestial being. After all she said it began to dawn on me, and henceforth I began a constant survey of that miracle of mNgwevukazi's legs with absolute delight. I must own, however, that her mother-in-law, my aged ma, did not at all accept Nojayiti's point of view, whereupon she swore by her crippled brother that she would never be content to see her daughter-in-law parading in bare legs and knees before the people. All that admonition was like a voice in the wilderness, and I felt sorry for her for having exposed herself to Nojayiti as a live specimen of the type that were not with it in the whole round of the Maker.

While we were still watching that, the plague of fashion soon caught up with me. All about me men were applying scissors on their trousers, narrowing them. I asked surprised what all this meant and someone told me this was called "London". While I was still investigating this I noticed Nojayiti busy, fretting over my favourite pair of trousers, reducing its size. She gave me no chance to acquaint myself

with this calamity, and emphatically refused to subject herself to derision in the company of a scraggly creature flapping large pants in the street. What was there for me to do, my good friend! Who wishes to be a scraggly creature? Who wishes to forfeit the privilege of strolling with his wife? Throughout the months in which that fashion reigned there I was, looking like a wheel, an effect caused by my bendy legs which are the worst in the world--an experience which put me under a great stress and shame.

While I was still suffering the agony of being the wheel I was made to be, the heavens smiled on me, for one day I was surprised by my wife who came into the room smiling and saying, "Well, SekaNgqayimbana, you are going to stop being like a wheel. Gentlemen of class have now taken to Oxford bags. Behold my tormentor pulling out a bag-like object which she called a pair of trousers. I got into it compensated only by the fact that my thinness and my bendy legs would be swallowed up, but, wait--the real trouble was still coming. Those baggy trousers tormented me day in and day out by wrapping around my legs as I walked. This was made even worse by the fact that just at that time fashion had put us in the predicament of wearing shoes with high heels. Though this appears to be minor, it nearly got me killed once. I was walking with a friend of mine who did not follow fashion one evening on our way from church in another village. We were then attacked by a group of boys and we took to our heels. I tried hard to run but the large pants kept wrapping around me, while the heels continued to twist awkwardly--bhukulu--I would fall and all that time the boy's stick was feasting on me. I went tumbling like that until the boys of our own village came to view, and the enemies turned tail and ran away. There was my friend who did not wear Oxford bags, already entering the safety of his home.

As I was still struggling with those bags there sprang up a new fashion for women. Soon we were now "new look". I can still remember Tshangisa's great surprise even to this day as I inquired what the matter was with those legs that I so adorned that they should now be hidden away. She laughed into

my face asking whether I was deaf that I could not hear her mother-in-law's complaint about her indecent manner of dress that scandalised the homestead. So saying she called the old woman who surveyed her beaming with satisfaction as that lovely hammerhead turned this way and that before the tall mirror. The old woman agreed with her that I must have been crazy to try preventing someone else from wearing like a decent married woman.

When it came to this, I surrendered myself to admiring this attire. My soul was at rest for I thought by this dress she marked the end of her race for fashion. But--no! One day we were going to a morning service. Nojayiti tarried in the room for quite a length of time. Just then the priest summoned me and I was obliged to go without her. The service went ahead for a considerable length of time but Tshangisa did not show up, which got me a bit worried wondering what could have cropped up. And so it happened, just in the middle of the pause marking the first reading of the scripture, the candid footsteps of the eminent lady were heard. We all turned to look. There walked a spectacle, there walked Nojayiti herself, sporting the most splendid new look, her ear rings something like two bunches of grapes, with something on her head which at first thought was a log, but was, in fact, a great hat of the latest fashion. A low-down moaning escaped from inside of me and filled my whole body with frustrated anger and pity for one who could so misbehave as to carry a bundle on her head on her way to attend the Evangelism of salvation.

That day, whether this happened intentionally or not I could not say, the priest emphasized the sin of worshipping gods in his sermon. He rubbed in the fact that by this he no longer refers to the idols for they are no longer worshipped. He explained tacitly that for everyone's consumption in that service that now the sermon referred to over-indulgence in anything generally, like money, pleasure, drinks, and many more such things--even more particularly clothing. He summed up by saying that those who worshipped wool degraded none but themselves.

That very afternoon I was met by Nojayiti's high pitched laughter as she said, "SekaNggayimbana, of all people who are not with it in the world I have never before come across one who is as backward as that creature you call Mfundisi!"

In reply I gave such a hypocritical answer that I am even today still ashamed of myself. I said, "Leave the bums to their empty words, dear Fazi. They are employed to do so. Just continue to put on what you like so long as your Koranti is still alive."

"Ehe!" the dimples sank deeper in a million dollar smile, "I have never before come across someone who is with it like SekaNggayimbana here."

Thereupon she kissed me, I was elated, and I swore inwardly that though a thousand priests would come to criticize all worshippers of idols a good woman like that one would wear what she likes as long as I had a penny to spend.

5. She dotes on the children

I would not be able to say whether Nojayiti's attitude towards her children was a positive one or a bad one. The woman, as I have all along been saying, is one of the fussiest people on earth, though all that mood often vanished as fast as it began; hardly a minute and all is over with her.

Disguised behind all that fuss was the purest kindness ever. She was a pleasing creature to everyone else; let alone her children, most of all Balafuthi, the youngest, and also Nggayimbana, the eldest.

In the height of her affection there was still this that she single-mindedly saw less potential with other people's children when compared to her own. But it was clear in my mind that all we had given birth to was a set of mediocres--neither good nor bad.

I recall the day this little chap, Nggayimbana, left with his friend, Totobayo, to seek work. The family's dove had already started her tongue wagging; already she was counting the cattle her son would purchase from Johannesburg and describing their colours. The great mNgwevukazi sang it all so well that we too became excited as though we could already discern those herds of cattle already showing by their horns. Indeed the tongue knows no law, for a well-wishing parent will say this, and the child will do the opposite. Years passed by and Nggayimbana never returned from Johannesburg.

Even today I can recall with clarity that day when his friend, Totobayo, returned. His whole family was cast in jubilation. We too joined our neighbours in the rejoicings as their son had returned laden with money, though inwardly our hearts were pained as we thought about our own child. I was even more troubled to think of Nojayiti and what she used to say after these boys left for Johannesburg--that Totobayo on his part would be outpaced by Nggayimbana like a donkey racing with a horse when it came to income. Wasn't she disappointed! Anyway my wife was justified to entertain such a feeling, because, honestly, as a young boy Totobayo was an undisputed

idler. Such a smooth beginning at work in Johannesburg on his part gave us all quite a surprise. As for me, I learnt the truth of what they mean when they say the mist crowns one mountain today, tomorrow another.

We continued to exist in that misery, waiting for our dearest son who would not come home. Then, on a day I shall never forget for the joy it brought us, there thundered home our own eminent one. The sight of a healthy, well-dressed fellow assured us that at last we were going to get our fencing done and completed. Days came and passed with the young man having come home, but he produced nothing, until one day his mother and I inquired.

"No, Khehle," came the reply from the eminent fellow, "don't you worry. I have entrusted my money to a Xolonxa man to carry it for me, for fear I might lose it if I took it with me."

At once my wife was beaming with the smile of joy and hope, to think that our own first born had managed. The joy painted on my beloved infected even me with hope, though my pride had already been dampened by the very manner in which I had been addressed, being called "Khehle"--old man, though I could see nothing on me declaring me an old man.

Days passed while we waited for the Xolonxa man. Search me! We stared until our eyes were red; we waited and waited until I felt sorry for my darling wife who was losing weight by the day, awaiting the fulfillment of her joy. When it came to this I could not bear to spend one more day watching wretchedness taking possession of my beloved wife. I thought deeply and finally came out with an idea.

* * * *

My wife was with several other people, mostly women of the prayer, when I gave them a surprise filling their hearts with joy as I stood there before them counting a sheaf of notes, telling them that I did meet the Xolonxa man and he had given me the money Ngqayimbana had entrusted to him. There it was--thirty pounds. The mother was madly overjoyed, and so

became the other women who were with her. A hot prayer was immediately raised blessing this child who had worked so much for his parents, and all this time the big fellow is like a house on fire, beaming with a smile, and considering himself in his seventh heaven. Had they inspected my heart just then while they were all so happy, and uncovered my desperation caused by anxiety over the question of my ever being able to repay the white man such a large amount of money. Had they known this what would they possibly do? Woe unto me, who so loved another man's daughter that I would get into so much debt just to save her from being disappointed by such a child as this.

Time passed by but Nojayiti continued to dote even more on her children without any sign of abating. Our daughter, Nontwikunina, who follows after Ngqayimbana, is rough featured and hairy, and takes after me much like someone who had come prepared to quell all arguments about a questionable parentage, but her mother never ceased to create such a wonderful picture of a beauty queen when talking about her. But there is this elder one--Nomtyibilizi--who is her jewel.

By this time Nomtyibilizi was at a secondary school. Every now and again her mother would tell me to my heart's content of her progress at school. As for MamNgwevu, she was quite confident that eversince her arrival in that school, Nomtyibilizi always clinched the first position in all her examinations.

We waited happily one year, as she was coming home for holidays, expecting to see her name in the first position in all those papers she was coming to show us. MTiphakazi arrived on her appointed day. Now in structure this lass had taken after her mother and it was no surprise that the mother expected her daughter to be equally brilliant.

Nomtyibilizi did well to find me alone in the house with Balafuthi. We exchanged greetings joyfully, both of us celebrating the long period that had separated us; meanwhile, Balafuthi, began chattering ominously, demanding that we be shown her school progress reports. His sister was in no doubt

that she was at the bottom of her class--in a list of forty pupils her name blocked up from the rear.

I felt a huge lump in my throat and I was in desperate need for words as I tried to comfort my most adored little darling who would not be consoled even when I told her she was not in the least adrift from the expected, for I myself do not remember a time when I did not close up the class list from the rear during my school days. While I was still battling with this problem, agitating about how to breach the news to Nojayiti, I heard Balafuthi saying, "It's nothing, dear sister, just tell mama you are Number One!"

"Balafuthi! Balafuthi, how can you, boy, just how can you advise your sister to commit a sin, to tell an untruth!"

"Steady on, father, that's no lie; if the list is turned upside down her name is the first to appear at the head!"

To claim that I made a reply would be a deception and there would be no truth in me. On that day, when the lack of truth in this little fellow brought relief, my wife was saved from yet another feat of disappointment.

6. How some converts testify

Nothing on earth is more of a problem than raising children. Nojayiti, my very good wife, dotes on her children beyond control. Virtually, just like any other parent, there is just one thing she longs for where they are concerned, and that is to prepare them well enough to excel any other children.

The fulfillment of such a wish was always quite remote. There is our eldest, Nggayimbana, who, from the very day of his going to work decided to stay away from home, only to return empty-handed, without a single penny, except that, because of the plan we devised, his mother enjoyed the mercy of being ignorant about this. There are her daughters too, who would return having done nothing successful every time they went to school. As for me, I was much worried by the condition of these children, but I kept referring everything to the Creator of all, consoling myself at the same time by the understanding that children were, afterall, a worldwide problem.

Domestic life was still going on uneventfully when we were brought to attention by Balafuthi's dramatic conversion. Actually, this one is the mischievous little devil we have never, of all our children, counted on, for comfort. As for me, my only ambition, judging by his countless tricks, was that he should be a lawyer. But to hear me talking like that would bring Nojayiti down on me in a rage, expressing her dismay at my ever wishing her child to be a perverter of the truth. Actually among the Xhosa it is never considered that the law profession is not in fact an exercise in lies, but rather a service in legal representation of the public and in the execution of various legal duties on behalf of companies.

While I was still toying with this idea of my ambition it soon became clear that the boy's calling was not in this profession. On early mornings we would hear the commotion of the great fellow, ringing the bell--in reality old boxes--calling the invisible numbers to an invisible church. After a

while he started preparing bags for himself, which he would wear full length, tying himself up with a string in the middle and saying he is John, the Baptist. We, the parents, watched this, all the while his mother fully assured that Balafuthi had indeed repented and abandoned his sins. On my part, though I did not venture to reject his mother's hypothesis for fear I might dampen her spirits, I suspended my belief that Balafuthi's present attitude would come to anything at all. I kept to myself, turning in my mind the words from the Bible which pose the question whether the Ethiopian can change his colour or the tiger do the same.

As the days passed Balafuthi became more and more infected by this behaviour. While still asleep, with him on his usual mat, we would hear him announcing, "Ma, Pa! Let us pray!" At once we would bring ourselves into attention and say the morning prayer. Then again towards the lunch hour the great fellow would launch his challenge at us, "Ma, Pa, let's give thanks!"

At this his mother would hurry her preparations for the midday meals so that they coincide with the prayer as is the usual custom before the meals. At this time I used to return home to a warm conversation with our sweet last born, on whom I doted so much more now that he did so much good to delight his mother. As we talk, the little one would make a count down keeping track of the hours as they passed towards the evening. As soon as it was sunset you would hear the great fellow exclaiming, "Let us pray!" Thereupon the whole family would stir, fetching books and making the evening prayer.

Balafuthi continued to do this, and did it so consistently that I too became convinced that this child was possessed by the Spirit, that his route was now in obedience to a direct calling. We then reached consensus that we should prepare him for priesthood. The very thought that the heavens could smile upon us too, a lowly family and carve out a priest, the Lord's servant, amongst us brought us great joy.

* * * *

Then one day there was the great wedding feast in the neighbourhood. Food was plentiful and meat was in abundance. Everyone ate to his fill. The boys and girls were stuffed to the gullet, and our own Balafuthi was there. After the wedding the family proceeded home. At home we talked about the events of the day until it was time for prayers. As the time came and passed my wife and I were surprised--What is the matter today! Where is the family devotee! We searched for him indoors and out, in cattle kraals and along the streams, with no avail. We hunted all night long, but as for that day we were completely unsuccessful. Then by midnight, while we were tossing about sleeplessly, our tears streaming down our cheeks, there came a great yawning from a person right under the bedding. It was Balafuthi waking up from a deep sleep. He had been lying there when he was overcome by sleep, for he had stuffed himself beyond all care with the wedding delights.

In great joy his mother and myself both rushed to embrace him, exclaiming, "How now, our baby, how is it you slept without praying?"

"I had already supped, mother," said the great fellow in reply, still pushing ahead a belly so stuffed it was in danger of bursting.

The truth at last, so all this time the man did not so much as care for prayer as such but he was aiming at the food he would use only after the prayer.

7. The day that saw her approval

Nojayiti's nephew, Mbokreni, went missing somewhere in Johannesburg and never came home for a long time. In all those years the reports about him were not favourable. All that could be gleaned about him were alcoholism, fighting, house-breaking and arrests. While this boy was thus bustling in Johannesburg, I do not remember a single day when we went to sleep without Nojayiti mentioning his name in her prayers. Everyday she would harp on the Anglican hymn which goes thus,

"Yesu, sivelele,
Khaka, Ngaba yethu;
Siza, Nkosi, kuwe
Neziphoso zethu.

'Look after us, O Jesus,
You who is Shield and Fort to us;
We come to you, O Lord
With our imperfections.

* * *

Lwel'inzala yethu,
Iintombi noonyana,
Mabalwe uSathana
Nenyama nomhlaba."

Defend our progeny,
Our sons and daughters,
Must fight off Satan
The flesh and the world.'

Aye, and so would the belle, who has no business in being a mortal at all, sing on, the red-winged starling, dowry of my father's stock, would sing on thus,

"Siphe ooSamweli,
Siphe ooDebora,
Baqhube le ngwelo
Yevangeli yakho.

Give us the likes of Samuel,
Give us the likes of Deborah,
To steer this bandwagon
Of Your Evangelism.

'De iintlanga zonke
Ze-Afrika zithi,
Ma'bongwwe uYesu
Osenyangweni.

'Till all the races
Of Africa say
Praise to Jesus
In the heavenly sanctuary.

Yet though we sang this song, praying in good faith, years passed without any reply to our prayers. I shall, therefore, never forget the happiest day of all, when, as I was in the fields, there came my little boy, Balafuthi in great haste to inform me that Mbokreni had arrived. At once I returned to the village and made straight for the home of my

wife's sister where I found her large room already filled to capacity by the people. Actually, my wife's sister was a very poor widow, who survived by doing washing for the whites. Nojayiti greeted my entrance with: "We are waiting, SekaNggayimbana! The sky is a limit! Everyone is looking upon you, wondering which of those fat hemels you are going to drop down and slaughter in welcome of the prodigal son!"

Even though I continued to smile there was this nagging feeling. To me a sheep is no meat at all; all I am aiming at is the sale of wool. The prospect of rearing sheep only to slaughter them for the wayward members within the families of my in-laws was no longer any matter to laugh about as far as I was concerned. But I could not utter a word of refusal. All I heard next was my wife giving instructions to the boys, telling them which sheep they should bring along. So the fat hemel was slaughtered and there was much feasting and rejoicing, with the daughters of the church singing and praying.

From that day on, Nojayiti took over the duty of remonstrating with the young man. It became clear that she had found a willing disciple in him, for soon enough, Mbokreni showed signs of repentance. Soon he found work in the nearby town. His very first month-end at work saw my sister-in-law's lad buying clothes of exceptional quality. He found us together with my wife in the home, and I accordingly expressed very sincere appreciation, telling him how immaculately dressed and good looking he was, but on darting a glance at his aunt, I was struck by the stormy, unimpressed countenance of the eminent lady ; a disposition that threw me, who had witnessed ever so often how the aunt had always doted on her nephew, into a state of total bewilderment.

The following month the same young man built himself a beautiful rondavel. Even then, while everyone of us showed appreciation, his aunt remained unmoved. This caused me much embarrassment, for I could detect the young man's eagerness to win his aunt's approval, predictably in the manner of every one of us on completion of a praise-worthy task. Nevertheless, I did my best to encourage the young man, and he quickly took

the bait. Still the next month-end came and he now bought himself a horse-cart, soon completing the purchase with accompanying horses--thoroughbreds of the best mould ever, which quite convinced me that he would finally win his aunt's appraisal. Imagine my surprise when even this effort met with Nojayiti's cold reception.

Then there was this day when, as I was returning from the fields, I was met by quite a stir coming from my sister-in-law's house. Casting my eyes in that direction I noticed that the homestead was teeming with people, most of them red-coats, who sported their brightly-coloured church uniform, an endless stream of them flowing indoors. I then recalled that it was Thursday, afterall--prayer day for church women, but I couldn't figure out how they had chosen my sister-in-law's house for a venue instead of the usual church hall.

I thereupon made for the source of the great noise. I observed from outside that a hot prayer session was on. Amidst the noise of heated choruses Nojayiti stood up and contributed her own favourite hymn:

"Siphe ooSamweli, Siphe ooDebora, Baqhube le nqwelo YeVangeli yakho.	'Give us the likes of Samuel, Give us the likes of Deborah, To steer this bandwagon Of Your Evangelism.
---	--

'De iintlanga zonke Ze-Afrika Zithi, Ma'bongwe uYesu Osenyangweni."	'Till all the races of Africa say, Praise to Jesus In the heavenly sanctuary.'
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Then the good dames take it up standing on their feet before again sitting down. In the midst of it all, Nojayiti remains standing all by herself, her arms spread in a show of profound possession, as she says: "Indeed, ladies of the prayer, you've been called by me. Our prayers are received by the Creator. Indeed, we are given those Samuels and Deborahs. Behold this little one, Mbokreni, who has stopped fooling around--who has put an end to buying horses, useless objects that cannot be enjoyed as a meal, such as are thrown away skin and all. Today we thank the Maker, my sister's lad has bought

a pig, so that one day we will relish its sizzling layers of fat."

"Amen, Amen, Lord," moaned all the great Thursday dames.

8. Fed up with beggars

No one on this earth can rightly condemn Nojayiti as stingy. Instead, it can easily be said of her that she is a merciful person, though she does not like wasting. But the people of our village could exhaust any other person's patience with their incessant begging, and they would still be doing the same thing in the course of the day; this unbroken chain would continue past midday, and in the evening the monstrous song would still be maintained by the children and the adults, women and men, all asking for everything that ever was under the sun.

Every now and again you hear, "Knock, knock! Mother asks if you could spare her some sugar." You give that one, and another comes--"Mother asks if you could spare her some coffee, sugar and some gruel." I used to pity the latter lot, who would ask for several items at the same time, for Nojayiti had become so hard-hearted that she would never as a rule give away more than one item at a time to each beggar.

This begging was exacerbated by the onset of severe drought. Rain became more scanty than ever before. Years rolled by without any ploughing possible while starvation began to haunt the homesteads, and hunger, Khetsekile's own left-handed one, started strangling the people. Hunger, to be sure knows no shame. It became obvious at this stage that if one was espied opening an account in the shop, one would be followed by a long queue of people begging for a dish of mealies, until, after being in possession of a bag of mealies, one is left with hardly a dish. When it came to this, I suggested to my wife that when we buy a bag of mealies, we should not bring it home in broad daylight but rather wait until we can safely fetch it under cover of darkness; a suggestion that laid me open to severe criticism from that self-indulgent eminent dame, who grinned at me with ominous delight, which inspired me with fear, as she said, "What-- whose child is this you suggest should play the robber and

carry food home by night, the food that her own husband and an honest man, has bought her!"

As you may have guessed my disappointment was replaced by the joy of being called an honest man by the eminent dame whom I worship so much.

We were not only plagued by the beggars alone. Borrowers were the worst heartache ever. They used to come and borrow ploughs, oxen, spades, axes--all that lot. It would have been a pleasure, on our part, to lend people our property, but it was not in the minds of many of these borrowers to return the item so borrowed. Someone would borrow a spade away and would never return it until I would naturally forget; and in that way it would be lost to us. They would do this with everything from hoes to axes, everything. What made things worse was my utter forgetfulness which resulted in great losses of property in the homestead. When we finally discovered that all this loss came through me, we resolved to reduce myself to mere puppet in the house, leaving her in charge of everything, including the cattle kraal, a decision which gave me the stigma of being regarded as one whose wife has him by the nose, towing him around like that, which is quite abominable in male circles. Nevertheless, this did not bother me at all, for, anyhow, I lack initiative, and besides I rather prefer being dragged by my nose so as to ward off all responsibility from dear, old indolent me, which also placed every responsibility squarely on both of Nojayiti's shoulders, where it would meet its match; and you would have sat back and amuse yourself over a splendid demonstration, as the lovely Zulu, in high spirits, gave instructions indoors and outdoors in her own home. And then I would recall how this very Nojayiti left all behind, just for me, left her home, sent away all other men in despair, gave herself to a clumsy blunderer like myself, whereupon I would feel incapable of resisting the urge to worship her on my knees.

I noticed upon a certain day that this woman was talented in home management. The local women were at a prayer meeting. They took turns in preaching and had worked up quite an

enthusiasm. The text for that day was not in any way related to the morality of borrowing or of returning the borrowed item. However, Nojayiti arose in their midst proclaiming the wrath approaching those who ever borrowed from others, especially those who did not return other people's possessions. In no time at all she revealed examples of women who were befallen by unspeakable calamities because of the sinful act of retaining possession of borrowed property, explaining further that the sin of keeping other people's possessions surpasses theft by far, because it combines both robbery and telling lies. An observer claims that there was such an exhibition of compunction, and the omen thronged the dais, confessing one sin, that of not returning others' dues. The evening of that day saw the villagers in their hordes like termites, returning everything they had borrowed from us. You will be surprised to learn that some of the things were received back had been borrowed ten years ago!

Our joy was short-lived. Instead of repenting our neighbours were encouraged by their having returned what they had snatched away from us under the guise of borrowing to increase their begging and borrowing endeavour. In my puppet's corner, there was still one thing I was in charge of--that being money-lending; but even this task soon got the better of me, for I would lend money to those people Nojayiti mistrusted, and indeed, they always failed to return the money, which further rendered me open to reproach by my life partner. One other danger was that of women who were mostly the sole borrowers. These beauties would approach sobbing and in great distress, whereupon I would yield almost at once, for nothing touches my heart deeper than the sight of tears from that delicate creature--the woman. In this my companion and I differed like day and night, for, on the contrary, she would even seem delighted by the tears of any dame who could by-pass her to come and borrow money from me; for, though our dear Mngwevukazi hid this like witchcraft, she was possessed quite often by the green-eyed monster.

In order to control any loss of money through my idiocy, Nojayiti devised a plan which to me was quite acceptable.

Presently, what I had always loathed was finally going to happen--that is, to be a worthless dummy, a nonentity who would have no say even in financial matters. The trick was quite easy. Here it is. Whenever someone came to borrow I would sing, "{I m : mIr : d}." If then my wife felt I should lend him something she would sing in a descending scale, "{I f : mIr : d}." But in refusing she would ascend thus, "{I d : rIm : f}"

We had quite a nice time of this, lending out systematically, Nojayiti being the sole lender, though people innocently thought that we were merely singing for the pleasure of it, not knowing that we were engaged in a serious security code for communication designed to protect us from them. But there is no joy without end, for it needed only one day to put an end to this splendid exercise.

There came Mqgamfana, my wife's uncle. He was in great trouble, for his child was ill, or so he said. The urgency of a sick child was the old story of our great kinsman, whereupon he borrowed money from us every month and never returned it. However, kindness can be very deceptive, for, though the uncle was like that, he was his niece's favourite, which thus endeared him to me as well. So he came to borrow the whole of five pounds. At once I struck the familiar tune, "{Im : mIr : d}." Thereupon Tshangisa quickly replied, "{I f : mIr : d}." So I thought, instead, that she was singing "{I d : rIm : f}," and I responded with great satisfaction, as I thought that the long awaited day of cutting this spoilt uncle to size had finally come, and said, "To tell you the truth, uncle, your journey is in vain ..." I did not finish for I was startled by an eruption from my wife, who exclaimed, "Tyhini, what is to become of this man! Don't you think your musical imperfections will lead to much disaster! Are you deaf! Don't you see that I have answered in a descending scale, how dare you refuse?"

"Please, Fazi, please," I cried out pleading to save my skin, "you know better my inability to distinguish the ups from the downs of a person's voice in a song."

"Your imperfections in music must not starve my people, while you lend out to everyone in this village."

I quickly reassured uncle, by way of leading the flood away from the dwelling and said, "Actually, Lume, I made a mistake, money is so much that children play around with it in this house. We'll give you some, and we'll do so with all our heart, all the five pounds you need."

Behold the great bore of an uncle taking his departure with a broad smile, going home in high spirits, heavily laden with my people's five pounds leaving me simmering with fury, covertly cursing him and everyone else who would borrow money from me again.

9. Christening a baby

As for me, I was quite happy with the children already given to us by the ancestors of our Zulu families, four kids, but, on the contrary, Nojayiti kept moaning about the untimely relapse of her fertility. This kept us busy visiting numerous doctors hoping that someone might help her conceive a child. My own hopes had faded long ago, seeing that Balafuthi was already ten years old, an obvious sign that he would not be succeeded by another, but nothing beats a woman's perseverance when she has set her faith on something.

On a certain day, I was alone with MamNgwevu, when the great dame whispered excitedly that she was with child. Our joy at this news can only be imagined. Nojayiti immediately set about diligently and lovingly preparing wrappers and little dresses.

Indeed, it was not many months before Nojayiti went into seclusion and delivered a healthy baby boy. There was cause enough for much celebration. Women came in their numbers to see the new-comer and his proud mother. After ten days I slaughtered a fat wether and invited all the friends to come and rejoice with us at the end of the mother's term of confinement.

After that more happy days passed uneventfully, though something strange actually happened. I could feel that my wife was deliberately thrusting the child upon me to hold while she went about other duties. At first I welcomed this, since I was still relishing the joy of being father to such a lovely baby, our last born, but as she did this regularly, virtually day after day, I called for an end to this, when I made my wife wild with fury, who checked me by saying, "Tyhinile, what is the matter with men? It's nice to have kids, yet you do not want to touch him for one moment!" Thereafter, I was held stiff with embarrassment, and I was now forced to baby-sit and hold the baby while the eminent dame was free to move about, so free that she must have almost forgotten that she had a baby, I stuck to this responsibility but I did not fail to

hear comments made by other men, who derided me for being blinded by the woman with her own baby. All this would have been tolerable had it not been for the fact that one day I was utterly mortified when Nojayiti's sister arrived. They found me alone inside, with the baby screaming his head off and completely beyond my control. I was met by a peal of laughter from the two ladies and the sister-in-law was splitting her sides, saying, "The likes of Bhayeni are the most unaccomplished creatures on earth! Just imagine a man rejecting the company of other men, choosing to stay home with women, and all he does in that time is causing the baby of my mother's child to bawl like this while he can't figure out what to do to soothe it."

Nevertheless, the little one grew up and soon it was time for him to be brought to church for baptism. Arguments on the naming of the child then started in earnest. I had privately entertained hope that as a nanny who took care of the child day and night I would enjoy the privilege of Christening him but it so happened that I had missed the point altogether. My wife's sister, Tawuse, thwarted everyone by declaring that his name should be "Byforce." This name gave me quite an indigestion, whereupon I humbly asked for an explanation of its meaning and linguistic source. "Whatever is the matter with this man!" interjected Nojayiti, "Eversince when have you not known that 'Byforce' means 'Ngamandla'?"

"What force then Fazi?"

"Why don't you ask so?"

"I'm actually asking, mkhwe."

"What I mean, SekaNgqayimbana, is that when the boy came, nobody expected him anymore--ten years late."

"True, Sbali," I replied, "But couldn't we just give the child a Xhosa name, since he is a Xhosa child anyway?"

"What do you mean, isiXhosa, mkhwe?" cried Tawuse, "Would you disgrace my sister's child with a Xhosa name even before he receives the English one?"

"I was just observing the usual tradition followed by all races, Sbali, who name their children according to their languages."

"Off with you, SekaNgqayimbana!" said Nojayiti heatedly, "You are not going to disgrace my child, even your own first name is 'Koranti'--what language do you imagine 'Koranti' is--don't you know it's white language for a newspaper?"

At this we were disturbed by the arrival of Balafuthi, in great haste, saying he has been sent to bring the baby's name by Nojayiti's uncle. He was to be named "Zwelibharile"--there is drought in the land.

Trouble started, Nojayiti stormed up about her uncle who dared to associate her dear child with the current drought and his own starvation. At this I agreed with my wife saying, "True, darling, you are right, it's not a suitable name at all. This child of ours will grow to be a man of all seasons, he just cannot be named after the drought; I suggest that we name him 'Tyhoboziintlanti'--one who crashed into stock enclosures.

"What! What! Have I given birth to a wizard that he should be said to break into cattle kraals!"

"Let it be 'Nqikilitye'--uncover a stone, then dear," I stumbled along in great bewilderment.

"Hey, Tipha! Hey, Tipha, what's got into your ears! Where were the stones you name my child after lifted open?"

"Christen him yourself then, Tshangisa, as for me, I was always dense ever since I was born."

This statement drew an angelic smile from my wife, and she responded by saying, "Alright, Kori, I'll think about it."

Days passed and still the baby was without name, so we used the nick-name his brother, Balafuthi, had given him--that being "Macici"--ear-rings. We used to delight ourselves with this, my wife and I; at such times one of us would say, "Ngamacici kamama!--It is mama's ear-rings!" And the other would reciprocate, "Ngamacici katata!--It is father's ear-rings!" But we never knew the reason why his brother had given him such a name.

Firstly, the day of days came--the day of the Christening of the baby--there was a general din of merriment in the house and preparations of all kinds of dishes were made for the grand celebration. We all left on time for the church, but we

found the church already full, with the parish priest waiting to give us a warm welcome. Up to this moment we were still ignorant of the name for the child, for Nojayiti kept us in suspense with one reply--she would say, "You will find out in good time."

The other members of the congregation were made uneasy by Nojayiti's secrecy about this name, but I, who had cause to trust her, didn't bother, for I was fully confident that with Nojayiti in charge of this matter, it was entirely in good hands, and nothing would go wrong.

The service began on a high note while we all remained highly expectant, waiting for that moment when water would be poured over our fine gentleman with the priest saying, "Name this child."

Indeed he came closer and closer and waited; there rings Nojayiti's voice, clear and vibrant above the silence, saying, "Cannibal, Mfundisi!"

"Who! Who!" the priest asked quite astonished, "Did I hear you say, did I hear you say ... Cannibal? How did you come by such a name, woman, and do you really know what it means?"

"I just like the sound of it, what it means I cannot really tell."

"My dear lady, and you, my good sir, Koranti," said the priest in the interruptive break of the rhythm of the service, "in giving you child a name you must first determine the meaning thereof. This name, 'Cannibal' means a man-eater; and now that you know, would you still like your child to be Christened under this name?"

"No, no, mfundisi!" intervened my Zulu.

"Then give the baby another name."

In the ensuing silence, Nojayiti turned to me, speechless; and it was clear that after getting it wrong the first time she would never recover quickly enough to suggest another one.

I too just couldn't think of any single name, but I heard myself mumbling, "It's Macici, it's Macici, Mfundisi."

On our way home that day I was made most happy by the beaming smile of gratitude on my Sikhomo's face, for I had rescued her at the time of need and named the child.

10. Nojayiti's mirror

The efforts Nojayiti and I embarked upon in our attempt to bring up good children far exceeds any attempt we ever made on earth, but, in spite of all that our efforts did not reward us with the desired achievement, that of moulding a child who far exceeds the others in good behaviour. Nevertheless, we kept forging ahead with our teaching, and where little Balafuthi was concerned in particular we put our foot down.

This was indeed difficult ground, actually it was uphill. This little one was very much alert, extremely clever and fully of childish tricks. Although we were quite consistent in our training, he was always going against our designs, always working to side-step or deceive us, and in most cases he would succeed, especially where I was involved with him.

Amongst his little transgressions, this little spark was fond of stealing sugar. He would not stop it in spite of his mother's frenzied assaults when she happened to discover him. Another form of his misconduct was to loathe school, which made him invent all kinds of funny stories to try and avoid what to him was decidedly a loathsome place.

While we were still watching these habits, Balafuthi added yet another bad habit, that of vagabonding. Our standing rule for all our children is that by sunset all children are home and safe. All those who grew up before Balafuthi honoured this rule; it was just fine. As for Balafuthi, we tried our best to bring this to his understanding, but he would work up a strong opposition against us. He would leave home in the early afternoon, his intention being ostensibly to turn the stock round in the desired direction, but he would not return before sunset, and any stock that chanced to return on its own would have been driven home by me, while those that failed to return would simply go missing. We tried every trick we knew to wean him from this evil habit, but instead, he got worse.

One day Nojayiti, being in a fit of fury, went out at dusk, looking for Balafuthi. She looked high and low for him, but the night crowded in and she still could not find him. At

last, as she was going home, having given up the search, she came up to two figures shambling along in the darkness going home, this being Balafuthi and his great friend Maqandeka.

Nojayiti did not wait to ask questions but applied what she had with her, and the stick bit into both the boys, sending them galloping home. She just brought Balafuthi home and passed on, chasing Maqandeka to his home, driving him right inside his home with a stick. Just at that time Nosamani, Maqandeka's mother, came out, summoned by the bellowing of the boy, and she fell right into Nojayiti who was mad with fury.

"What is it, Nojayiti, friend, what has the boy done to you that you should beat him so?" Thus demanded MaRadebe, seeking an explanation.

"Did you ask! Are you still asking questions!" screamed mNgwevukazi, "Can't you see the wicked practices of this marauder boy of yours, who keeps drawing my baby away from home!"

"Steady now, darling, let us not be heated up about the things our children do; don't let's be drawn into a fight by them."

"This child of yours, MaRadebe, who misleads other people's children like this, has already done it. Balafuthi was a good child until he met with this rascal."

"You are not going to say that to me now, Nojayiti, are you?" replied Ndlebentlezombini rather heated, "You shouldn't talk to me like that. I find Maqandeka roaming by night for the first time since he befriended that mad-cap child of yours."

"Who is a mad-cap, MaRadebe?"

"It's Balafuthi, I'm making no secret of this!"

"You are mad-cap yourself, MaRadebe."

"You too, if you insult me when I tell you about your spoilt child."

The two women exchanged quite a volume of invectives, tarnishing each other, each blaming the other for her own child's misdeeds. For a long time they went on scathing each

other with candid expletives, accusing each other, insulting each other.

Just then, still unaware of the developments outside, I was surprised by Balafuthi bursting in breathlessly and saying, "Hurry, father, come and see! Mother and her kind are misbehaving outside like they were not prayer women!"

"With whom are they misbehaving, boy, and what are they doing?"

"They are insulting each other, father, and they'll soon be at each other."

These words really shocked me. I felt that for Nojayiti to use insults, the trouble must be enormous, for, though she was short-tempered, she did not, as a habit, use insults. She was a Christian woman, and, of all Christians, a woman of the coat. In my surprise I asked, "Who is she exchanging insults with, boy?"

"With Maqandeka's mother, father."

This raised my blood pressure, because this woman was herself a Christian, and she was as reasonable and dignified as Nojayiti.

At once I rose and took to the direction of the crisis. The whole experience was unbearable, and I caught the uncouth language while I was still at a distance, with both of them using every word they knew in black-painting each other, all this being caused by the mischief of love--for each one of them thought her child is good, the bringer of evil should be the other woman's. I went ahead and came abreast just when Nojayiti was saying, "What, who are you, MaRadebe, how dare you talk like that to me, you liar!"

"Please, Nojayiti, dear, you are both of you devotees, stop insulting each other," I said as I went between them restraining them.

"What did you say, SekaNqgayimbana! Is it me you are restraining now! O! O! Once again I'm the guilty party! You want to use me to impress this woman!"

"No, darling, I don't mean you are guilty, but please, let's go home now." What finally yielded to go was nothing but a trembling heap of fury, and as we turned to go, MaRadebe

lashed out a last angry word and said, "Away with you! And take that loose-tongued gossip-monger away with you!"

When we were nearer home, after a long moment of silence, my darling finally said, "Surely, the day I'll ever find that woman in my house things will rise and fall at will. MaRadebe's last words had made me very angry indeed, when she said my dearest wife is a loose-tongued gossip-monger. I heard myself responding to my wife by saying, "Don't bother, dear Jayijayi, as for that woman, I'll cut her throat, truly, I'll slay her while she looks on!"

I could hear the great lady chuckling to herself, saying, "Yo ho! Why did you not say so in the face of that woman, SekaNggayimbana?"

For two or three days after that, Balafuthi returned home on time, which made us very happy. Then one day, being on a Thursday, I went to town, leaving quite early and returning at dusk. From a distance I could see hordes of women of the coat emerging from my house with loud singing and through the din I could hear that faultless voice I love so much which is Nojayiti's as she sang,

Give us Samuel and his lot,
Give us Deborah and her lot
To steer this bandwagon
Of your Evangelism.

The other women then went home. Nojayiti walked back home with a certain lady I couldn't at first make out. I proceeded to the house and came in--what! It was none other than the very MaRadebe of the insults!

I stood at the door, angry, suffocated, unable to speak. There is the creature who painted my wife black with insults, as large as life, now locked in a warm and soothing embrace with my wife.

"Why now, Nojayiti! Why now, Nojayiti!" I exploded furiously, "How could I find you locked in an embrace in this house with our enemy? Why don't things rise and fall at will, today? But me, I know my resolution, which no mouse will dare eat up. Today it is going to be seen to be done. Yes, someone

is going to lose her throat today, sure enough, someone is going to be slayed while she looks on.

"He! He!" so did the wife burst with laughter, "You will do no such thing, you handsome assassin of a man!"

"Are you suggesting, Nojayiti, that you will allow someone who tarnished your image with insults like that to enter your house!"

"That is exactly why, SekaNgqayimbana, I let her into my house. This sister never talked behind my back, she told me exactly what I am, so I could view myself as in a mirror. How then could I send away a God-given mirror? What could ever come to my rescue? Today's Evangelical message was posing that question for the women of prayer.

"Dress him down, Jayijayi, tell him who still works under the wing of pretence to denounce it," said Maqandeka's mother laughing and taking my hand in great complacency.

11. Our son's income

In a family two children usually receive more attention than the others--the eldest and the youngest. Why the eldest is loved so much, I think, is because for the parents it is simply the first time round, an experience they have never had before--to have a baby. This baby then fills them with parental bliss, made even more pronounced by the knowledge that they now have a first born, an heir who will ensure the continued existence of the family name so that it never dies.

From being influenced by the initial experience with the first born, the parents now become affected by the knowledge that they are finishing off with the last born, as they know fully well that they will not see another baby again. This last child finds his parents at a relatively mature age with an already balanced outlook. He is normally the child who enjoys a balanced treatment, as his parents are now more stable in everything. In fact, even if the father has been harsh in handling his children, when this one comes along the father has learnt many things, has learnt his lessons and has recanted, which creates the impression that the little one is being spoilt. The little one usually grows into a little rascal who is passionately attached to his parents, though inevitably mischievous, clever and, indeed, he mostly develops into a capable strategist at work, finally ending up as a great figure in his adult life.

As for his brother, the first born, he usually grows into a reckless man, indeed an outdoor man, like Esau, inclined, quite often, to be constantly at logger heads with one of the parents. Ngqayimbana presented such a model for us. Although he and me were not really enemies, so to speak, we were, nevertheless, not in good terms, but he and his mother were inseparables, though a distant observer would miss the strength of this attachment, because of his being constantly receiving severe reprimanding from the well-known spitfire.

As for me, the first time I began to differ with the fellow was when he started working. He stayed away for more

than a year, and finally returned home without a farthing. On arrival at home, he invented lies, saying his money was coming with someone to whom he had entrusted it, whereupon his mother and I waited an eternity, and the money never came. To save the mother from certain disappointment and heartbreak, I finally did something for which I still torture myself to this day; I borrowed money on interest and deceived his mother and the society, saying I had received the money from the person to whom Nggayimbana had himself said he had entrusted it! Dear, dear, what tricks love can play! That is where I began to clash with this boy, and I became possessed by much hatred and a strong determination to keep him in such remorse until he repented.

So the fellow by whose name I am known stayed home for a long time, for he was known to have just brought home so much money, with his mother having become quite a force to contend with in her daily recapitulation of her son's money-saving abilities often throwing hot ashes on my head by saying, "This very same SekaNggayimbana is my witness in this." Thereupon, I would whimper painfully, confirming a lie, all the time watching Nggayimbana, who was always himself, unaffected by any bad conscience about this untruth.

I was, therefore, overjoyed when one day Nggayimbana and his mother told me that Nggayimbana was returning to work. Then the lad was armed with choice provisions by his mother and was accompanied by his sisters to the railway station. While he was away, he remained for a long time without writing, until his mother became anxious. All this time his mother would often think up all kinds of disasters that would impede his writing, like illness, and I, like all men who are always anxious to receive their wives' approval, kept affirming, though I knew fully well that this was a repetition of the old habit of wondering.

While my wife would console herself like this, the news occasionally came spelling out that the fellow was wasting his money like it is a novelty which needs fussing about. A year folded up and still he sent nothing home, nor did he attempt to return, and this time he disappeared and we could determine

his whereabouts. Then, just before the end of the second year, we one day witnessed the arrival of a miserable wretch, who turned out to be Ngqayimbana, coming home in rags and without a penny. Hi! Awu! Now what is this! I have never again to this day witnessed such sorrow as befell his mother, when Ngqayimbana said it with his own mouth that he had spent away all the money in town. On that very day Nojayiti busied herself, cutting my old clothing to size, all for the newly arrived shabbily dressed member of the family, as though he was not coming from work. When it comes to listing things Nojayiti is most skilled at, tailoring comes top of the list. She worked on my old clothes and changed it shape and colour, and it soon looked like Ngqayimbana had just brought them all with him from work. While other people blabbered about his having shunned home, we on our part ignored all that, and we referred to him in return as one who had brought with him much money.

Once again Ngqayimbana stayed home for a long time. Just then time came for boys of his age to go for initiation. Then the little rascal strongly demanded his own initiation rites. I strongly remonstrated with him stating that there has never been precedence anywhere for a boy who wants to be initiated while he has brought no money home with him. Thereupon he brought along his mother and soon they had me cut down to size and in no time I was face to face with a cheerful initiate out in the bush.

On his return from initiation, landing us in unspeakable expenses, he proceeded to work leaving behind sound promises that this time he was going to work seriously for he is now no longer boy, but a man.

Time passed uneventfully. Once again, as before, years passed and Ngqayimbana sent nothing. It was heartrending for me to watch helplessly while this child kept wasting away his precious time like this, and all that time we were witnessing how his equals were energetically buying herds of cattle into the village. They bought those cattle, built their own homesteads, got married and raised children; and all that time he remains at large and we could not trace his whereabouts.

Years filed crowded past without a word from the young man. As for me, I had long given up any hope that he would ever return home, but his mother persisted in prayer, and in those days she would not go to bed without first singing her favourite song:

"Give us Samuel and his lot,
Give us Deborah and her lot,
To man this bandwagon
Of your evangelism."

Then without warning upon a certain day we saw Ngqayimbana at the door-step. Our great mNgwevukazi was mad with joy. She was locked in a long embrace with her son, and they cried over each other's shoulders, until I myself was moved to tears.

I was jerked from weeping by a sharp voice from Nojayiti, saying, "Are you still huddled here, SekaNqayimbana! When will you slaughter the fat bullock?" I left at once to slaughter a sheep and to invite friends and relatives. It was joy and celebration all the way, with the teeth biting wolfishly into the fat wether.

We remained quite happy thereafter, our heir thriving in our midst, and we forgot all possibilities of further troubles.

This longing for perfect happiness was suddenly blown out within a few days of Ngqayimbana's arrival. Just while I was seated with both my younger brothers, Mpondoziyamazama and Jongentabeni at the open-air counselling grounds, there came muscle-flexing giants, both fellows carrying jolly sticks. Mpondoziyamazama moaned. They explained that they had been sent from the amaBhele families, Sitwayi's house in particular, to come and fetch his daughter who is rumoured to be with the Tipha people. This news benumbed my limbs. As we started to mumble denials, the strong man from the MaBhele families explained that the name of that girl was Nontibithethwa, and she was lured by Ngqayimbana and led away from her home among the Xhosa people; marriage rites were performed in town, and now it has been heard that the deserter had at last returned home, and the inquiry was, therefore, a sequel to this.

I went indoors fuming with rage, gathered Ngqayimbana and his mother and asked about this scandal. The young man did not give us any trouble but simply admitted this, adding an explanation that he had left that young woman with Fikizolo, my younger brother, at Nxuba, for fear of arriving home with an obvious cause for controversy, a wife and her baby, after a long spell playing the truant.

"Why have you done such a thing, Ngqayimbana?" I heard myself retorting in great distress. "What are we going to do about this, Nojayiti."

"I don't know either, SekaNgqayimbana, but the standing truth in all this is that all Ngqayimbana's equals now have wives of their own, how can he then continue existence as a solitary bachelor? A further point is that all this has already happened, he has acquired a wife for himself and a baby by her. As for me, alas, I would waste time clinging on mere cattle and allow myself to forfeit a daughter-in-law and a grandchild."

"What do you mean, Nojayiti? How can a truant like Ngqayimbana have his marriage arranged for him? How can I release my own cattle to arrange marriage for a creature who squanders money like Ngqayimbana?"

"You forget, SekaNgqayimbana, don't you, that the very first time this child went to work, he brought home a treasure of money!" Nojayiti retorted angrily.

"Yes, I know that, dear, but then those people waiting out there by the cattle kraal demand cattle now, they won't return driving nothing at all before them."

"Father could just dismiss them with two cows and explain that we are still to work for the others," joined in Ngqayimbana.

"Indeed, SekaNgqayimbana, the child is talking sense. Stop your tricky ways. You yourself never finished to pay the bride price, you still owe my people a cow."

"Well then, well then, I understand, Fazi," I quickly retorted, knowing fully well that no sooner would she touch the matter of her bride price, than real trouble would begin,

"I understand, Sikhomo, and you are right. I shall send the Bhele men back home with two cows."

There I was returning to the cattle kraal with a lump in my throat, leaving the good-for-nothing cattle breeder with his mother in very high spirits.

12. The weeping bride

Now there is this little girl Nojayiti and I love so very much--Nomtyibilizi. As for me, I love her even more for she is so much like the lady I adore so much, her own mother. Indeed, this mTipha girl is a perfect beauty. She is a tall thing--a dark beauty.

She is not only identical to her mother in shape and facial appearance alone--she is just like her in mental tenacity, not to mention cheek, and I can say for her that she was a girl of her word. Quite often she would clash with her mother over that very thing. Then they would climb on each other with no indication that any of them was ready to succumb. As for me, I was in good terms with our eminent Tipha girl, for I had long prepared myself to adopt a more conciliatory position all the way. I would then enjoy quite an agreeable time when both of those dames were around, for all it would take us would be to start any subject or discussion, and they would soon cut me down to size between them and terminate the discussion forthwith.

While we were thus enjoying a happy stay together, something that brought more joy happened--that very nymph who deserves not to die was courted by an elegant young man. She was seen by the young man from the Tshawe people, those of Nzingo's house to be exact. The young man's home was at Mkhuliso, a village not more than twenty miles from ours, which is called Njwaxa. It was quite an estate, rich, beautiful and known for respectability.

The Tshawe people worked fast, and concluded the bride stock target set by the Tipha people, and were soon pressing for banns to be called. My relatives and I initially resisted this, for I was having too many loose ends at that time. But we were forced to yield to this, for Nomtyibilizi, the main actor in the whole thing, hastily intervened and plainly told us that she was not going to be kept waiting. She told us that if we ever began to indulge in lengthy procedures we will return to find her having had a change of heart. She informed

us that she had ten suitors waiting their turn, and she would sure enough elope with one of these if we were intent on delaying her. I tried to wedge in a comment that it is not customary for a Xhosa maid to press forward with arrangements for her own betrothal, but I thus laid myself bare to much ridicule from my daughter and her mother. They told me that I am behind times, I am hideously old-fashioned, that they are no longer those Xhosas of the Noquku era. You will not be surprised then, dear reader, that as soon as things took that turn I made haste to gather all the Tipha people. The result of that meeting was unequivocal--being that we grant the Tshawe people permission for the banns to begin, although I was still at a loss what to do to surmount the impending expenses of that wedding feast.

At that stage I advised that the wedding be carried out at the lowest possible cost, but there again I triggered off more trouble, where my Mngwevukazi asked me whose daughter this was to be snatched away in marriage. To prevent further trouble, I accepted those shenanigans of a mother and her daughter--what with the frocks for the bride and her flower girls, the drinks and horse rides involving tens of horses--and I accepted all this in great agitation. Anyone who learns of such remarks from me would be inclined to suspect that I am a miser, but I am certain that the most cold-hearted cynic in the world would mumble with mercy and sympathy for me if he could see what the mother and her daughter were doing. All too often, I would find myself in town, flanked by those two dames, stopping at every shop window in that King William's Town whose length and breath cannot be covered even by a cat--my mother is my witness, and our sister too!--I would never retreat from a shop without money shooting out even through the nose.

The real difficulty came when it became apparent that I was preparing a wedding for two maids, for the parent fought to look like her daughter. Nevertheless, it must not be assumed that this was unbearable pain, for, as soon as I reached home, still steamed up, my reward would then materialise before my eyes. What a beautiful sight, to behold

those two dames exhibiting like hammerheads, passing the mirror between them, all the time praising the kind and generous Kori. And you could see the beaming smile in my face as I tried to reassure myself if such an angelic creature had not already developed its wings.

So passed the days that brought so much joy to the mother and her daughter, days that I could have enjoyed as well were it not for the fact that they stripped me so. Days passed and soon it was only a week before the bridal party from the Tshawe family arrived. Then crisis befell us. I found the mother advising Nomtyibilizi on the rules of etiquette she must observe on the wedding day. There were other people present, but the discussion was virtually in the hands of the mother, her daughter and Balafuthi, our clever son.

The mother was advising her daughter that one of the good things befitting a bride is to weep when the groom's people take their departure with her. The mother endeavoured to explain to her that this was an old Xhosa custom which was a message to all and sundry that they were not desperate for marriage, showing at the same time that they were not fed up with their families, and knowing fully well that refraining from tears would be interpreted as a most shameful deed among the Xhosa people.

Nomtyibilizi stood her ground telling her mother that she has never ever played the hypocrite in her life, and she was not going to start doing such a thing just for the benefit of that day. She told her that she loved her man on her own, she was delighted to go with him, and, therefore, she could not see any reason for sporting with tears. Balafuthi himself lavished his eloquence upon his sister, but Nomtyibilizi would not hear of all that. I joined in hoping to back them up by saying that indeed what they were saying was true, the Methodists do the same when they approach the preaching dais for a prayer. "Away with you, father," retorted MTiphakazi, "don't you realise right there that there is no meaning in this crying? Would you say it is the Methodists alone who have repented, just because other denominations do not cry during

service. Can't you detect right there that this crying is simply a habit--that it's nothing of substance besides?"

"Indeed you speak the truth there, Tipha ..." But I did not have the guts to conclude this statement due to Nojayiti's icy stare as she heatedly exclaimed, "Off with you, SekaNgqayimbana, you are once more taking the place of this child, so obstinate she would pass for having once died!"

"O course yes, father follows the new ideas, unlike you two." It gave me a feeling of bliss and satisfaction to hear poor old me being praised for keeping abreast with the new surge of thinking, whereupon I kept throwing blissful glances at her mother, who, nevertheless was pretty mad at the time.

At last the groom's party arrived. To this day that day is still clear in my memory. Words of advice tumbled to my daughter, old men spoke and sobbed, women of prayer spoke until the navels curved in, each one ending up by recommending the weeping of the bride--a fitting gesture for the daughter of a man. After these words of advice I took my daughter aside and asked if she had retracted her former resolution not to weep. I was greatly astonished to find that she still upheld her word of the day before, stating that she was definitely not going to sport on tears. I jogged all the way to Nojayiti to comfort her. I used well-chosen words of consolation, pointing out that she should not bother with young rebels--children of today, who will always shout down their parents.

I was greatly astonished to find Nojayiti in great contentment, where she and Balafuthi were full of suspicious giggles and it soon became apparent that there was some conspiracy between the two. I, thereupon relapsed into silence though somehow quite pleased that the great lady was braving such a scandal that was about to befall us in a day's time by effecting unconcerned merry-making--tomorrow being the day when the groom's party would take away the young lady.

Too quickly the hours passed, the last waiting, amidst merry songs and ululations.

"Phantse ndabasa,
Ndithi zintsasa,
Kanti ziingcondo
ZikaNonzondo."

"Just as I settled to make fire,
Thinking these were dry twigs,
Only to discover that these
Were Nonzondo's own scrawny legs.

And also,

"Yiyo le indawo
Yokutshatisela
Onyana nentombi
Zalaph'eAfrika."

"This is the place
For joining in marriage
The sons and daughters
Of our Africa"

The bride was then lifted onto the wagon, the fair daughter of the Tipha people, eyes sparkling like her mother's, which at the time were barren of a single tear drop. When I cast my eyes at her aunts and uncles all I could behold were bent necks--everyone being in grave embarrassment. But even then I was still astonished to see Nojayiti quite happy.

"Whose child could this be, that behaves so disgracefully?" These sad words were formed in the hearts of all those crowded friends. Yet, hold it and you will soon hear! Just as the cart pulled off, a blood-curdling wail came sprang up. The wailing remained sustained in the air as the cart lumbered along and for about half a mile of the cart's departure, it still came with a thrilling sharpness to our delighted hearts.

"Say, Fazi, what happened?" I asked in great delight.

"Tyhini, you lack initiative, SekaNgqayimbana," said Tshangisa with her beautiful smile. "That person you hear crying is Balafuthi. He was smuggled in there under the mattress of that cart in due time so that he would wail and save us from disgrace."

13. Victory

The arrival of Rev. Magilana Mpondozenyathi in the year before last was the cause for much conceit among the villagers of Njwaxa. They even dared to brag that there never was a priest who could be so suited and efficient in his work as this priest. As for Nojayiti, I decline even to comment. Her pride about this priest far exceeded bounds. Whenever he was to visit our home, she would be at a loss what to do with a lout like me. She would then shave me herself and she would stop short of washing my teeth for me, maintaining that I am going to embarrass her before the presence of the gentle-footed friend with my ever so stubble face.

However hard she scoured me my ugliness would remain boldly exposed, whereupon she would appear to be visibly considering hiding me somewhere away from the house altogether. Although I was never entertained by this idea, I used to feel really sorry for her, for the fellow that I am has been endowed with really rough features all round, while the priest was very handsome; indeed this fellow of the Dlamini people was suitable for a prince in appearance. Everytime the priest came Tshangisa would keep me on my toes, shifting me from my position at table, supplanting me with the priest's person. She would do the same in the evening at prayers, where she would give the books to the priest so he would be the one to perform all the rituals of my people.

Pride goes before a fall. After all those proud exhibitions I soon witnessed Nojayiti's ebb, and in no time I often heard her now talking to the other women and saying that it would be good to see that priest transferred to another place, that a new one should now take over. I feel ashamed to say that all those women who were in the house agreed unanimously about this--something that did not give me a mild surprise at all, for I had seen all the pride that accompanied the arrival of this gentle messenger of the Lord. As for me, I was becoming increasingly fond of him. What pleased me most was his strict control, his key observation being that he

realised that there are some women in the congregation who played their husbands' roles, dragging their own husbands by the nose. As soon as he embarked on this aspect of his sermon, I would notice a change on Nojayiti and she would try to give me a hearing, although she had already accustomed herself to giving orders in her house.

Soon thereafter, our church warden received notice from the Bishop, informing him that our priest was being transferred to another parish and we were going to receive a man from the Thunzini people, a man who was still quite young, but who was renowned for his diligence. It was not long before Rev. Zanendaba Ntozininzi arrived. The amount of conceit that followed seemed to exceed that which accompanied the arrival of Mpondozenyathi. The reason was that Mpondozenyathi was already middle-aged, belonging to those of my age group. This one was a young man, which made the youth to idolize him exceedingly. He was resilient and equal to the task of pastorship, a liberal of a fellow, who mixed well with the youth, something that put the whole community at ease and made the young women to busy themselves with added enthusiasm when he happened to visit a house, while the young men on their part would do likewise. Like the busy-body he was, he brought about many novelties in the name of progress, and included in these youth directed activities, games and diverse associations.

Of those associations one that captivated Nojayiti's mind was "Masincedane." As the name also suggests, the aim of this association was to lend support to the village people, with special emphasis on the poor, widows and orphans. Large funds were going to be raised, whereupon all those deserving help would apply to those funds, and they would then be provided with food aid and their children would be taken to school. An action committee and money collectors were then elected, one of those members being Nojayiti, who was in the front rank.

One day a general meeting was arranged. The hall was full to the brim with hundreds of people, all in high spirits. On the platform before us sat the cream of the village. That was where the parish priest was seated with his wife, around them

the dignitaries, the older ladies and the young, all decorated with elegant finery. As for me, I was slumped by the entrance, training my eyes on the enchanting spectacle that I saw of Nojayiti next to the priest, she and his wife flanking him from both sides, and the daughter of the Ngwevu people was on that day dazzling with beauty.

On that day, men spoke until the milk buckets went dry, and the great dames maintained the high spirit. The aim of the meeting was to collect money for the Masincedane fund. Hamlomo of the Qoco people made the opening speech. He kept bringing us to our feet with his speech, and the nectar of his eloquence left us open-mouthed. He went on to suggest that what has developed the other nations are these joint-development schemes. The Xhosa people are the only race whose people laugh at each other and are jealous of each other. He made it clear even to a fool that education has been the source of the civilization of other nations, explaining also that we are now on the road to success through Masincedane.

After hearing this gentleman speaking so eloquently, I found myself in great trouble. For the whole of the month preceding this date Nojayiti had given me no peace of mind, pressing me to do a speech on that day, that, dear reader, to a tongue-tied mute who had never before opened his mouth to say anything in the presence of an audience. I had tried to mitigate my case before Nojayiti but, instead, she came with what looked like a working idea. She wrote all I was supposed to say on paper so I could commit it to memory to use it as my words of address on that day. I then continued to rehearse this speech until I got it right even in my dreams. It was a very clever speech of the kind I had never before experienced in this world. I have often heard pastors preaching, but they did not measure up to this. Truly, truly, Nojayiti is a cow that goes romping out there with the oxen. I became over-inflated with confidence that I would outdo them all that day.

I was, nevertheless, gripped by much apprehension on the day of the meeting, when, right from the beginning of his speech, Hamlomo embarked on the exact words I had stored in my thick head. What was I going to do? I could not just stand up

to reiterate Hamlomo's words. When Ntlekele in his turn rose to contribute his own rhetoric, I became quite dumb--if you have ever seen a fowl with its beak cut off. Gxidolo rose to strip off even the last remaining words from Nojayiti's recital. I started heating up to the sweating point and cooling off to a state of dryness, all in quick succession, not knowing what to say. I just could not back off now, for that would gravely disappoint Nojayiti.

I kept shifting in my seat, indeed scared to the bone. Right then, through the noise of enthusiastic hand-clapping for Gxidolo, Nojayiti directed her brilliant eyes at me, and the insistent message in them was quite unambiguous--saying, "Stand up and speak!" I moaned inwardly in great distress, and pleaded with the heavens to bring forth a revelation. On that very moment, yes upon that very hour--there descended upon me an inspiration whose source I could not explain. I felt myself filled with a strange, unusual power. All became quite blurred and I could not see anything before me. Any feeling of diffidence left me and soon I was making great strides to the stage. I was reassured of one thing--which was that though they might have made quite an impressive rhetoric, not one of them had quoted from that wise man of the Bible, Solomon--the wisest man who has no equal on this globe. I opened my mouth and said, "Friends, Solomon says, 'Go to the ant thou sluggard!' Y'see, a harnessed ox needs no mouth cover! Y'see, beware of the coming fury! A donkey and an ox cannot be harnessed together. You too know about the donkey, my dear fellow! Donkeys once grazed my field to the ground. Nojayiti knows about that ..."

"Oh, go away! Off with you, SekaNggayimbana! I am no donkey specialist. That is not the point in question here anyway. The agenda is money." So did Nojayiti burst out in unspeakable fury. I nearly died of shock, I blacked out while still standing, only to be shaken from that stupor by the suppressed giggling and tittering of that big gathering. I descended from that stage like a zombie, full of disappointment, anger and shame.

Just at that time, the chairman announced tea time, before coming back to make the actual collection.

Nojayiti did not go to drink her tea. She made straight for me, took me aside, and gave me quite a dressing down, not forgetting how she had wasted the whole month, only to watch me doing such a shameful act. "Tyhinile, tyhinile," exclaimed the great dame, "just what manner of thing is a donkey! How dare you talk about donkeys here, while every right-thinking person is talking about progress! Surely, there is only one way to clear us from this shame--and that is for you yourself alone to donate five pounds.

As soon as my wife came out with this idea all became crystal clear once again. Soon the meeting resumed. By now there was no more talking, only contributions. Hamlomo came up and produced ten shillings; Ntlekele came up and hit the table with five shillings and then Gxidolo left a shilling. It then became quite a long queue, men and women rendering contribution. At last I rose quite excited and shouted saying, "Here is my family's spear, here is five pounds! Solomon does say, 'Observe the ant thou who art lazy!' Nojayiti here knows all that. She knows all that."

"Ehe!" laughed mNgwevukazi in great complacency. "Indeed I know that one, SekaNggayimbana. What I did not know at first was that about donkeys."

Those many hundreds thundered applause. The pastor rose, greatly overjoyed, and said, "Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, the one man who has made a remarkable speech is Koranti, for the wisdom is in deeds, it is not the words of mouth."

That night I went to bed feeling like one whose sins had all been forgiven. I dreamt white dreams, being soothed by my own Priest's words, praising me. There is nothing as lovely as being praised by one's own priest! To this day no voice sounds sweeter to my ears than the words of that good woman, Nojayiti, whose kindness exceeds that of all other women on earth, whom, as I drifted off to sleep, I heard saying, "You've beaten them all, my dear Kori, you've beaten them all."

14. A questionable affection

Tawuse again! When will my sister-in-law learn that gossip is not only means telling the untruth, but talking about something quite true but nevertheless none of one's business is also gossip! It was because of such behaviour on her part that she nearly landed me in a disaster.

We had gone to a big service in Fort Beaufort and we were travelling as a church congregation. I had barred Nojayiti from coming along, for I was not happy with her feverish condition. So we travelled uneventfully. The service started on the very evening of the Saturday and developed into quite a warm all-night service. The lay preachers took up the spirited sermon and the female folk gave support. But through all that I did not have any peace of mind. Yes, I was missing that voice of rainwater sweetness, which belongs to Nojayiti, and it seemed to me as though I was a lost soul, as if Nojayiti was no more in this world.

Our combined parishes jostled together until dawn on that leg of the night services. On the following day--the day of the Sabbath--everyone proceeded to the morning service. What I saw there was a beautiful picture. Of all the sights that excelled in beauty on that day, women's and girls' dresses and make-up were leading. Actually, this service was more popular than others, being the biggest of all our yearly services, and it was made even more important by the fact that we were going to set eyes on our new pastor for first time, who was Magqamfana Siwaphi, the great Sukwini, a dignitary who is not fit to die.

Of all those outfits I was most captivated by the dress worn by that pastor's wife. She had on a dress of rare beauty which just managed to cover the knees. There were those who rather criticised this style, saying the pastor's wife would do well not to parade naked before them.

But, when I looked at her and gloated over those lovely legs, shaped like those of Nojayiti, I began to suspect that the women folk who were responsible for such utterances were

ravished, one who could not, in spite of himself, withhold admiration of that unusual sight. That great dame passed on, decorating the very ground on which she was stepping, until she chose a seat in the row directly in front of me on the women's side of the passage.

I would be deceiving you, dear reader, if I said that I paid any further attention to the service. Of all things in life, there is only one thing that I worship--beauty and elegance. I tried hard to resume my concentration on the sermon, but all I could grasp from all the pastor said was a meaningless, "Welewele!" All this time my eyes are glued to the vision before me, refusing to let go. Once I looked around, and found Tawuse staring herself, eying that wonderful woman. Later on I learnt who that woman was. So it was Nozililo, wife from the Mathunzini people, the home of Soganga. She was still living in Tini village, in her house, even though her husband, Thozamile Velebhayi, had long passed away.

Her husband had left her well off, and she then continued to survive free from need, which was why she was famous throughout Fort Beaufort as a woman of taste in fashion and the most beautiful of all.

On the day she sat before me she had on a dress of the sort of glamour I had never seen before, and it spread out all over the seat she had chosen, and the jacket was equally eye-catching, so much that to me it seemed to change colour constantly. The head cloth clung on neatly, and it looked like it was made up on the very day that dainty little roundish head was created.

On that day I was recalled from my reveries by the sudden realization that the final benediction was being made, having heard nothing of what was said during the sermon. Coming out I lingered around my chosen idol, so that I could use the first opportunity to talk to her, to worship her and declare my devotion to her. Actually, I wanted to acquaint myself with her so that I could find the opportunity to introduce her to Nojayiti, so that they would get to know each

simply being jealous of her legs. As for the headman's wife, an energetic young woman, she was simply comparable to a peacock in beauty. To this day I still picture the headman, who was already an old man, his eye lingering persistently on the little wench making it obvious that the altar of his own worship was the seat occupied by his lovely young wife.

That most divine service then began, and the lad of Siwaphi kept it on a high note, so that it began to feel like we were no longer on this earth of dull sods. That was the day I heard that Ginyithole Gwebizizwe was well-endowed with a bass voice. This man sang out, amidst the harmonious support of the boys and girls of the Singgengeni centre, like a calf yearning for its mother, he sang out so much it felt as though our great church hall was going to split its sides. While I was still in the grip of that ecstasy, I heard distinct footsteps of a new arrival. I looked. Behold your miracle! By my mother! I glimpsed an unfamiliar sight. I do not have the words to describe such a vision as I then beheld. I would fit only to be painted by the most refined artist of all in the world.

There entered a tall young woman, whose figure looked as though it had been carved by the best sculptor of all that are made of flesh and blood. Her face was beaming and beautiful, her eyes sparkling, shining just like a baby's, her hair delicately revealed from beneath the head cloth, a shiny black in colour, a little round mouth neatly proportioned to the rest of the body. This particular so-and-so was indeed beautiful, her little mouth sporting a dark colouring of decorative hair in place of a moustache, dimples, like merry guards posted on both sides of lemon-pink cheeks, and what could one say about those little ears!

What sort of people did such an enchanting beauty belong to! I cast a glance at the feet, and found them delicately small, fittingly matching that eye-catching figure. I then looked at her dress. I then became even more stunned. I surpassed Nojayiti's dress so much as a horse outclassing a donkey at a race. And did I get into trouble that day, but already this happened to someone who had, indeed, been greatly

other, and Nojayiti would then learn a number of things from her--well, things like dressing up and beauty care.

From the service we went in for lunch. At table I spoke of nothing else but that woman, her beauty and make-up. It so happened that in this matter I had overstepped the mark, though I was unaware of that. I was brought to my senses by my sister-in-law's angry retort, "Awu, brother, we are bored to tears with your stuff! How long have you been burning our ears hot, drilling us in the peacock-beauty of Nozililo. Was this all you came here for, to ogle the beautiful widows of Fort Beaufort?"

I now became visibly ashamed, as that lot filled the hall with suppressed spasms of laughter. In due time, people began chatting away about the sermon and the preaching we had been to, all that time I am tongue-tied, having nothing to talk about, for I had heard not a single word there. I began to grow uneasy about this matter, wondering what Nojayiti would say, when she finds that the news about the sermon is not forthcoming.

"Yehaye," said Tawuse again, "to think that our brother, Koranti, was desperate to stop my mother's baby from coming to church so that he could ogle widows admiring the splendour of peacock colours."

Time to go home finally came. We left and were soon home. Tawuse came along with me past her home which was along our way, and it turned out she was laden with gossip.

At once she and her sister left enthusiastically in each other's company to fetch firewood, and on her return, Nojayiti kept casting accusing glances at me; this she did for the whole week without thawing down to any utterances however, and still I did not know the reason for this.

Nothing changed until there came news which gave me great joy--that Nontwikunina, our eldest daughter, had been spotted by a wooer. I learnt about this in a letter written to me by the young man's father, where he stated that he himself was paying us a visit and will be accompanied by other gentlemen, to come and lay down the request for our daughter. This surprised me. Judging by the rough featured appearance of our

mTiphakazi, I, on my part, had long given up any hope of her ever being courted by a young man. I was even more surprised when I was shown the photograph of the young man by my daughter, to find a well-bred figure, the headmaster of Ncamakhwe, son of the respected councillor at Ntinde, Zenani Zwelenkomo by name. The letter already indicated that the father of that young man and the other gentlemen would arrive on the very Saturday of that current week.

There was at once a hive of activity in preparation for the groom's party. They had also indicated the time of arrival, on horseback, stating that they would arrive at six o'clock in the evening. There was great rejoicing on that day and the homestead was teeming with people, men and women as well as the youth, everyone in heavy make-up, to meet the in-laws. As soon as it occurred to me, at five o'clock on the dot, I sought Nojayiti out, expecting to see that spectacle I so much delight in, to actually gloat over Nojayiti being in the usual glamour. Imagine my shock when I found Nojayiti in the same tatters she had worn the previous month when she was patching our room with mud, hopelessly shabby clothes which were also covered with mud and stains. What is this! What happened! Is my wife running crazy?

I protested and asked saying, "What are you up to, Nojayiti! Can't you see that there is not one hour left before the groom's party arrives. Why are you not properly dressed up?"

"What should I dress up for? Who cares about my make-up?" said my wife sneering at me.

"Nojayiti! Nojayiti, what are you doing this disgraceful thing for?" I exclaimed in great agitation, anxious not to forfeit the cattle.

"What disgrace! What disgrace! Why don't you go to Fort Beaufort, after all, and invite those widows of the Nozililo calibre to come and grace your affair?"

"Nojayiti! Nojayiti!"

"Yes, where are your peacocks now?"

That was enough to throw the daylight out of me, all purposefulness left me; by this time the horses had appeared at the horizon.

"Jayijayi," I coaxed on, "consider now that what you are doing will put our child in disgrace. Take off these things, Tshangisa, so that you can be acceptable to the groom's people, because in this manner our child could be rejected and we would stand to forfeit stock."

"I'm not taking these tatters off, you hear me? Your peacocks are still available, invite them to come and dress up for your daughter."

"You mean, Jayijayi, you mean those creatures, Nozililo and her lot? You talk to me about those creatures with legs like wood-stakes! Those creatures with wide mouths like lizards! Just what do they look like, Fazi, to warrant your ever comparing yourself with creatures like that!"

"Would you ever do it again, SekaNggayimbana? Would you ever go spreading it all over that Nozililo dresses up better than I do?"

"Never again, Fazi! I swear by my mother, by my sister. My mother's own stumpy-fingered daughter. I'll never again say something like that!"

"Do you really mean it, SekaNggayimbana, that this woman does surpass me in beauty and dress?"

"I swear by Chungwa lying dead in the dark! I swear, Jayijayi, no other woman can ever really be best dressed to me; it often gives me the impression of washing hung on the mimosa bush.

Whereupon my wife dived into her room beaming with a smile. Soon the stallions were just pulling up outside. It did not take too long before I was honoured to see my wife in top quality garments, occasionally conversing and smiling for the groom's party, relatives whose relationship had been negotiated through stock.

15. Pouring oil on troubled waters

We were always in good terms with our neighbours, Nomgokoza and her husband, Madushe Mpayipheli. Now Mpayipheli belonged to the Khwemte families and his wife was a Mzangwe by birth, the daughter of Sihola. Indeed, special dishes exchanged hands, we drew flame from each other's fireplace, but on a certain day, a day that would never receive my blessings, it suddenly occurred to Nojayiti that she could start a domestic paltry industry.

However hard I tried to show that chicken breeding would bring us much trouble, Nojayiti remained adamant, stating that she is tired of being a burden to a scrooge like me. She made it clear that she would like to possess her own funds like other women, wives of teachers, evangelists and pastors, pointing out that only one thing would shape her thus--breeding chickens and selling their eggs. As soon as things took this turn, I started getting busy, making a fowl-run, yes, I made a thorough job of it, making sure that the fowls would not bother any of our neighbours.

MNgwevukazi bought them in large numbers, and in no time we had thirty fowls. She was buying true breed stock, of divers varieties, small ones and big ones, thin ones and fat ones, indeed carrying on with great confidence. Among the fowls she bred was a scrounger of a Xhosa fowl. It was a lean little creature, an eye-sore in all that lovely collection, but Nojayiti liked this scantily feathered bird better than any of the rest of them. We gave it the appropriate name of Nolusapho, in honour of its rapid reproduction. To me it all appeared as though it brought a new generation each month, laying twelve eggs at a time and always emerging with an equal number of chickens. Where it truly amazed us was in protecting all those chickens from the eagle. It was responsible for fits you, dear reader, would never believe. One day she brought down one greedy eagle that had kept a regular reduction of the number of chickens, and she cut it down in the middle of its

usual swooping, whereupon Nojayiti squashed it flat on the ground with her hungry stick.

There is never a rose without its thorns. Even Nolusapho had a weakness of her own, that being an unbridled appetite. Although she was properly fed by Nojayiti she remained perpetually gnawed by a single-minded desire for food. All the fowls were given time to scatter around and stretch their legs, after which they would then be fed and brought back in again, and they were fed to satisfaction. But more often than not we would hear Nolusapho already cackling outside with her teeming chickens, and after all that she would not remain within our yard, but would cross over to Nomqokozo's yard, where she would cause much damage, digging up everything that lady had put into the ground, and thereby causing a great loss.

At first Nomqokozo spoke to us about this, and we also tried what we could to stop this, but Nolusapho behaved as if she was probing the origin of everything Nomqokozo was growing. Enmity then developed, and she started throwing whatever was at hand at every fowl that ventured into her garden. She got one of Nojayiti's favourite fowls first, a very well-fed hen, killed it and threw it over the fence. While we were still in a state of shock she followed up with another big one which she clobbered flat on the ground and threw over the fence. However, we held onto our patience, but when, one unforgettable day, she killed a large cock of a fine breed which Nojayiti had bought for two pounds, things then took a really bad turn, and fierce enmity erupted between these two neighbouring great dames.

Nojayiti swore most solemnly never to forgive Nomqokozo for killing her fowl, a fowl she had made up her mind to found all her wealth on. However hard I tried to show her that the other member was justified in losing patience with us, for, indeed our fowls were causing much damage for her, Nojayiti, instead glared at me, whereupon I fell back to agreeing with her, concurring that no one more wicked than Nomqokozo. We then spent many months indeed in which no word passed between us and Nomqokozo.

Just then, there approached a very important day in Nomqokozi's house, the day of the birth of their only child, Ndongeni. As usual, Nomqokozi prepared a grand dinner and invited all friends and relatives. That day became a day of great rejoicing. As you will have imagined by now, we had not been invited. However, as soon as singing broke out, I found Nojayiti getting quite excited. Shortly, there she was dressing herself up hurriedly saying that she would languish in the service of the devil no more by adhering to hatred of her neighbour, and also stating that though she may have quarrelled with Nomqokozi herself, the infant in whose name the dinner was made had, on his part, no blame in the squabble between two adults. As she spoke she took off, not even asking if I was coming too.

I also went along dragging my feet, for I am not as blessed as Nojayiti is in my sense of justice and vindictiveness. It is not all that easy for me to forgive if I have been moved to anger. I finally arrived at the house, to find Nojayiti dominating everyone there, having already arranged everyone into position, and conducting the singing of young women, girls and men, sweet music, revealing the artistic touch of her genius. Then the great dame started dancing around and before our eyes she got into the grip of elation such as I have never seen in her before, and her whole body went through a fit of spasms, almost like a witchdoctor in a trance. While the singing continued, she could be heard saying, "Halt for a while, women of faith, parental mercy is now cutting across! Let parental mercy apply to us all, wives of men!" Thereupon she dashed out, while we remained amazed, not knowing where she was going.

The song went unabated, and, amidst the chorus, Nojayiti returned carrying a covered basket, and again she called for a pause, and profound silence then fell. "Hold it! Hold it, women of one family, today's event turns the tables! Today the navel gives its cutting pain! It is Nomqokozi's child in whose favour this occasion has been organized, it is the child of my neighbour. The spirit of goodwill gave me no rest, and, therefore, I do give it away, I do give it away, here is the

fowl I like more than anything on earth, I give it to Ndongeni in great jubilation."

Clapping hands thundered, the house looked like it would split open as the two ladies kissed each other, someone who with her neighbour had not been on talking terms, nursing a grudge against each other for all those many months.

On our arrival at home that evening, a jealous streak caused me to ask Nojayiti why she had given away our favourite fowl, and in doing that remove it together with its chickens. So my wife just laughed this off in a rather suspicious sort of way, saying, "Relax now, will you, SekaNgqayimbana, you know nothing yet!"

We went to bed happily that night, the knowledge that we were once again at peace with our neighbours brought me great delight.

However, early the following day, I heard Nojayiti shouting, calling me urgently and waking me up. I quickly rose out of bed, not knowing what might have caused Nojayiti so much fury so early. I went out and found her mad with rage, her whole body trembling violently, and pointing out Nolusapho to me. Behold that greedy creature busily engaged at the bottom of our garden, throwing our onion seedling in all directions. In no time, Nojayiti was eagerly making for Nomqokozo's house. Shortly, she emerged with the aforementioned great dame, leading her by the arm, using all the words in her vocabulary, telling her about her wickedness, to ever send her fowl over to come and destroy her garden. Nomqokozo pleaded in great desperation, making promises and assuring us that she will do all in her power to stop her fowl from worrying us.

"What did you say! What did you say, Nomqokozo, do you so much as know that a fowl can enter someone else's garden unobserved? Is it even you who is so shameless as to beg for pardon when your fowl has damaged someone else's property? Bring! Bring! I demand five pounds for this damage, or else you are going to see the headman today.

I had to put every ounce of pleading power on my words before Nojayiti was to forgive that eminent dame who was now

in dire trouble. I am glad to say that to this day we have enjoyed mutual respect with our neighbour, each of us knowing very well that it is quite difficult to control a fowl with the aim to prevent its destructive tendencies, and of all fowls, definitely not the greedy Nulusapho.

16. Whatever they may say is not their dying wish

Magongoma, the great son of Dibanisile, a member of the Mpinga families, lived in dire want, and poverty made a fool of him. But it was known to everyone that there was a time in the past when he managed well. He had also been to school, where he received a brief preparation, and was, therefore, not so blank as the rest of us were. In addition to that education, he was gifted in eloquence, and all these talents drew me closer to him and so we became friends.

Although Dalasile and I like each other so much, he was never really in Nojayiti's good books, something which much amazed me in Nojayiti, for no one can beat her in sweetness. But she persisted in saying she did not like this man, and always advised me to part company with him. She pinpointed two condemning qualities in him, his excessive appetite, as well as his being a notorious liar. Indeed, I was not on my part, bothered at the time by these shortcomings, not in the least by his telling of lies. It must not be forgotten that I possess that same characteristic most common among the idlers--the love for gossip and being told lies.

Dibanisile then came to our house everyday, and he would babble on, chatting while he drank all we had in the kettle. Like any poor man he also arranged a considerable amount of loans from us, but I would be telling an untruth to say he ever returned a penny of all those moneys. At the time of my acquaintance with this member, we were not exactly what one might call destitute. Due to this, therefore, we easily entertained the idea that we should build a living room with unbaked mud bricks. Just as we began work on the first row, Dibanisile arrived, perched before me, as I chafed and sweated over prepared earth mixture, and he talked on, showing us our stupidity. He pointed out the folly of building a house without foundation, he criticized building with unbaked bricks, stating that he had himself been planning to raise the same sort of structure, but his children forbade him, taking him to task for ever doing something like that, to take a

backward step in all that civilization. He concluded his sermon in the presence of a profound sneer from Nojayiti, but to me these words of wisdom found sympathy, whereupon I abandoned that mud already telling my wife we would no longer adhere to the willful plan of building with mud, but we will wait, instead, for that time when we will have enough money to build a better room than that one.

One day, it just occurred to me that I would now like it to be said about me that I owned a horse, whereupon I went and bought a fawn gelding, a thoroughbred. Nojayiti loved this horse very much. She bought me a saddling kit with great ostentation, saying I look lovely on horseback, and I was also pleased by this account, so that it all became such a favourable state of affairs. But amidst all that, Dibanisile arrived. He arrived just as I was climbing onto the saddle on the gelding in great satisfaction. At once he brought me to my senses, showing me that horse-riding and flamboyant dress are all indulgence for younger men, no old man with thin, bendy legs like mine would ever be a pleasing while straddling a horse. He finally put me clean out of composure when he concluded that our type of horse does not do well on our land because of the prevailing droughts. By the end of that week I had sold the horse, for fear of any possible loss I might incur in case it died.

Because of all these words of advice Dibanisile became more and more loathed by Nojayiti, but I, on my part became even more fond of him, and believed in him to the point of giving away my last calf, for he always spoke of what to seemed sensible enough. He always made his explanation clear, that cattle are outdated, for we no longer had any grazing lands, and now they are liable for one thing, and that is keeping our children away from school. In these circumstances, though Nojayiti continued to reject the things spoken by Dibanisile, I became convinced that she just could not surpass a wise man of Dibanisile's calibre. I then persisted in persuading my wife that we should do a wise thing and follow every bit of advice we were given by such a man. Although my wife was quite reluctant, she agreed that we sold out our

stock, and at my advice that we bury the money in our room, she seemed to relax a bit.

In the meantime, I received a most welcome letter from the local officer, offering me a job I had long been applying for, of being care-taker in the deeping of stock. At once I flew to Dibanisile to tell him the news. I found him seated indoors with his wife, MaGatyeni, and, in a breathless state, I sang out the news. To this day I cannot forget their dejection when I told them about this. Both jumped from their chairs like I had opened fire at them, all this time the woman being on the verge of sympathetic tears for my sake, while the husband blew his top reproaching me for reducing myself to such a low level where I ever wished to be a creature that went arresting people for their own cattle, while being an offspring from a line of court councillors, the cub of Sihobothini, of Qongqolo, of Ndevuzembila, of Bhayeni, of Tipha. By now you will not even be surprised, dear reader, when I say I returned to Nojayiti a changed person altogether, having altered my decision.

On that day Nojayiti and I had a bitter quarrel, and she was accusing me making myself Dibanisile's fool. To stop that fight, I told my wife that I was packing that very day and would go to look for work. Indeed, I crawled along on the way to Sundwana to work at the pineapple farm.

On our parting, Nojayiti gave me a sealed letter, and spoke most lovingly to me saying I must not open it, but that I should wait until I returned home when I would then open it.

At Sundwana I arrived in time for rains and bitter cold. We would wake up at the first light and break for the day at twilight, sleeping in shacks we had built ourselves from sacks, and we called these shacks amatramaru. My own tramaru was exceptionally cold, for I am very clumsy at building. This caused me much ill-health right from my arrival there, and months would pass on with me receiving no wages. Finally, after nine months, I gave up and returned home.

A day after my arrival, Nojayiti took me to Dibanisile's home. The sight that met my eyes there nearly drove me mad enough to need a straight-jacket right then. I went inside and

found a hut full of furniture that has been bought on a credit account. I emerged waddling for shock, and saw a big cattle kraal full of cattle and sheep, and when I looked again I saw a stable for horses. Just then, I spotted a stuffed man with a huge paunch, spelling out wealth, wearing riding breeches and a pair of leather leggings--what! Dibanisile! I exclaimed asking, "What, man, has caused an old man like you to wear leggings and ride horses?"

"Indeed I am forced, Tipha, for this tribe insists that I be a deeping-works caretaker."

"So you say now, but was it not even you who warned that I must not do these things? Today you own furniture that you brought on credit whereas you said I should never waste money in buying mere timber. Today you have built mud huts, you have bought yourself horses and cattle--"

"No, my brother," answered Dibanisile with the politeness of a church voice, "forget that; remember that I was not uttering my dying wish!"

That afternoon, being in great agitation and misery, I went to lock myself in my room. I opened the letter Nojayiti had given me on my departure. I read it:

"You heel of a man,

Within the period of less than one year, Dibanisile will be the one who will be happy, with horses and cattle and many mud huts. By his so-called advice he is merely trying to discourage you, because he does not have the money with which to buy these materials, and he has discovered that you are an extremely stupid fellow.

Your loving wife
NOJAYITI"

17. A legacy and its hazards

I had always heard told of the hazards of legacy, but I had never thought I could experience what I saw happening to the estate of my in-laws. This home of the Ngwevu family, my in-laws, was like other homes by way of life, there being no unbearable hostility, but in no time the question of legacy brought it almost to a state where even murder could be expected.

Siqithi, father to Nojayiti and her cast, left an unambiguous dying wish on his demise. As custom dictates, he left his estate to the eldest, Macholi, and, in addition, he bequeathed his large stock to him. He then divided the remainder of his legacy to the other children, with the exception of Nojayiti, who was left with very little of significance. When I pried Nojayiti about the reason for this snubbing, she told me that she herself stopped her father from leaving anything to her, which was in recognition of a former generosity of his in giving her ten goats, just after her marriage to my people. Indeed those goats had been sent to my family, and multiplied rapidly; we milked, slaughtered, sold, and they kept increasing until they reached eighty. But they were later visited by a plague, and they grew scrawny, dying in their twos, threes and fives on each single day, until finally only one goat was left--a speckled she-goat.

While we were still thus occupied, there came my brother-in-law, Macholi, saying he has come to fetch his family's goats. Although Nojayiti tried painfully to explain to him that the goats were a gift to her, Macholi would not hear of it. We were still at variance with each other when he left, and it turned out he only wanted to make more trouble for us by letting his brothers and his sisters into the dispute. Instead of helping him out, the brothers and sisters laid down their own claims, each declaring that he or she is entitled to the last remaining goat. To me the stunning part of this dispute was the wretched condition of this highly disputed goat, which was so lean and so obviously dying of diseases. I

was actually prevented from killing it by the fervour with which the members of the mNgwevu family issued summons to one another.

On that first day of the trial there were four claimants--these being Macholi, the heir, Velaphi, his younger brother, Ntsakantsaka and Nojayiti. Each one of them had his or her own lawyer who had been paid ten pounds to take up the case, and, in addition, all of them except Nojayiti, had consulted medicine men to doctor the proceedings.

Macholi's departure from home to the court was marked by fumes of medicinal smoke. Ngubozengwe the greatly feared medicine man, killed a dog and cooked it for them to eat, claiming that this will lend them the force with which to bark at the case very much in the manner of a dog. The results of this preparation became more serious than expected, because Qondovu, Macholi's leading witness, behaved strangely in court. He was caught by the police before the day's proceedings, romping around hopping and bending down to touch the ground barking at the court. At once he was arrested and fined five pounds for creating a commotion in the court, and unhappily Macholi had to pay for him.

On that very morning, while we were still in court waiting, there came someone who informed us that Nongaliphi, the family's aunt, who was also one of the leading witnesses in this case, had broken a leg and had returned home. That incident started quite a serious responsibility for Velaphi, who had to foot the bill for the medical expenses of one who encountered an accident while she was on her way to give evidence in support of his plea.

The case was finally put to trial on this first day. Macholi insisted on one point, that his father had not told him that he had bequeathed these ten goats to Nojayiti, and, therefore, they and their offspring should be in his possession as he is heir. He spoke his guts out and his witness, Qondovu, also spoke well.

Velaphi on his part argued that these goats came through his personal savings while his brother remained out of contact somewhere in the urban area, having denounced his family. His

argument was firmly supported by Nongetheni, one of the family's aunts who had apparently been saved a broken leg. All the aunts preferred Velaphi to his elder brother, the heir, because he was friendlier than the latter, and anyway, they were more familiar with him than the heir who had squandered the greater part of his life in town having denounced his home and helping no one.

Ntsakantsaka, on his part, presented the argument that once when his father was very ill, he took two pounds from him, promising to give him a dark-brown she-goat in return, which is actually the goat that gave birth to all those goats which were shifted to Nojayiti, where they all died leaving behind the very goat that is now the bone of contention. He had Ngabom, his uncle and Tyuka, his uncle from the mother's side, as witnesses.

Nojayiti, on her part, spoke the truth as I myself knew it--that she had had no share in her father's estate simply because she had refused to let her father bequeath anything to her as she was quite happy with the goats she had been given. Her sisters gave devout evidence of this--those being Tawuse and Nohombile.

This turned out to be a sensational case. For days thereafter we spent our time in and out of the court room, and the trial went on interminably, with intermittent delays caused by postponements, and in the meantime the lawyers and the medicine people kept hiking their costs. It was as though, however, the family was not conscious of these expenses. I did my best to advise Nojayiti against the folly of spending so much money for the mere possession of one goat, which happens to be the most ailing of all the goats in the world, but she flatly refused to listen.

I still have a picture in my mind of the final day of the trial when we made our last trip to the court room. The court was full to the brim with spectators who came from all the corners of the Gqunukhwebe territory. Qondovu, Macholi's chief witness, was now giving evidence. I still cannot imagine what preposterous comment he made, but in that general silence we were jolted to sudden attention by Ntsakantsaka's outburst as

he stormed about misusing Qondovu's name and calling him names. At once Ntsakantsaka was arrested and charged for contempt of court. He was convicted on that very day and fined the whole of ten pounds or two months in jail, but was saved from spending a night in that big hut with no central pillar by his lawyer who paid the money on his behalf.

It was then that feelings became bitter. I began to notice that Nojayiti was now regretting that a sickly goat should cost us so much. Some coveted discussions occurred frequently between Nojayiti and her favourite Balafuthi for quite some days. At once I knew that we were in for a surprise from those two. I was now quite acquainted with such curtailed conspiracies between mother and son and their dramatic outcome.

Just then I watched surprised as Nojayiti gave Balafuthi a pile of letters addressed to her brothers whom she invited together with their witnesses and friends to our home.

* * * *

The appointed day came. All the Ngwevu families, witnesses to the case and relatives were now seated in front of the house. They were all warmly welcomed by Nojayiti. They were now quietly seated and waiting, wondering what it was they had been called for whose importance seemed to exceed the ensuing dispute. Thereupon, Nojayiti rose and spoke out, saying, Ngwevu families, pay attention for I am now addressing you. Today marks the third month of our pre-occupation with courtroom processes as we follow one dispute. We employed the services of lawyers at expenses far exceeding the value of the goat that is at the centre of our dispute. Some of us have even tasted an arrest or two, some of our aunts are paraplegics today, and all that is a result of this one dispute. As for the goat itself, it is true my father bequeathed it to me, as you yourselves are witnesses to the fact that I did not receive any share of the legacy, but I shall no longer harp on that now. There is only one thing that bothers me, and that is, should a goat full of scabies now

cause a general disenchantment among us? At that point, my mother's babies, I took the law upon my hands, in my attempt to stop us going to the court."

At that she called Balafuthi. There entered a busy body struggling under a heavy load carried in a sack. Thereupon, Nojayiti continued, "Balafuthi, take out one hind leg and one foreleg and present them to my eldest brother. Take out another hind leg and foreleg and present them to my brother, Velaphi. Present the one half to my brother Ntsakantsaka and set aside my own half, and don't forget to cook the head and innards for the relatives, whereupon the skin goes to your father who has been looking after the goat we are now dividing amongst ourselves."

By the time Nojayiti uttered these last words her voice was already drowned by the shouting of these great praise singers, her brothers, hailing her and talking amongst themselves, with Macholi proclaiming,

"You judged well,
 You judged well,
 Cow that grazes with oxen,
 Heroine on whose person hangs the keys,
 The keys hang from your neck.
 And with these she locks in her family's belongings.
 Ncincilili."

18. The blot and the beam

What a bother Tawuse's habits can be, that being my wife's sister. She could never be said to be evil at all. By this I do not include her little personality defect, that being her obsession with gossip and such imperfections as that. But she used to stun both her sister and myself to no end in one thing--her most incredible sense of self-justification, which made her inevitably to put the blame for anything on someone else.

She had her favourite brat called Magebengwana. This child was suckled until he was quite a huge volume, while all this time the mother refused to wean him. She had now developed a hunch-back from carrying an old man in the manner of a baby on her back. Even when Magebengwana reached the school-going age, his mother refused to take him to school. So the so-called Qebi remained a free marauder and a trouble-maker. Turn this corner or that and you would encounter cries of pain where Qebi would be busy molesting other children. If his mother or father happened to send him you would hear the most unbelievable mumbling from him. But as soon as foodstuffs were about his eagerness would be felt, and he would smile like a layer of fat.

Tawuse's store of sugar would diminish rapidly and she would be forced to buy more and more sugar, while this brat kept eating away at it, and if he happened to be asked, he would deny the accusation point blank. Tawuse would then be the first to believe these sworn denials, whereupon she would single out her own culprit, who would always be someone else's child, not hers.

In addition to this Qebi started something new, the use of incredibly rude language. Cursing is one thing Tawuse feared more than anything in the world. Now she was at a loss what to do to overcome this one. She approached her sister, Nojayiti, asking for advice. Nojayiti's response was singular--in fact what she had been saying before, that she should take him to school. There was quite a struggle to subdue and bathe

him. Nojayiti had to lend a hand amidst the cursing and scratching from the great fellow. However, they endeavoured in their business of scrubbing the body of this family member whose dirt had rendered it darker, rubbing away the scales that resembled those of a leguan. In the long run they brought him to school panting, kicking and screaming.

He was warmly welcomed by the teachers and eventually he began to settle down like the rest of the children. What, him? Familiarity breeds content. Soon the fellow's old habits were back and he relapsed into his former behaviour, beating the other children with teachers' moneys getting lost, until it was quite clear that the whole school had been affected. The class teacher tried to understand, but one day he too had to give up, the very day of the inspectors' visit to the school, when the boy hurled a stunning insult.

He went to inform the boy's mother about this. There he lent himself to a situation of a serious moral lesson. He was told that teachers did not exist anymore these days. As kids themselves in their days they would not even dream of uttering an insult before a teacher. He was told in no uncertain terms that blame for the unbecoming behaviour of today's children lies squarely on their teachers' shoulders. They fail to discipline, they do not counsel, they do not use the switch, often claiming that they are forbidden by law. The great lady concluded by advice to the teacher that he should discipline, counsel and use the switch.

Then one hot summer day, while the teacher was inspecting the children to determine if they washed their bodies well, he came upon Qebi. What a pig! He just could not stand the boy and sent him out at once to go and wash his body in the river. The great fellow came face-to-face with his mother just as he was about to wade into the river. Do you still ask what happened! Tawuse was mad to learn that he had been sent out there by the teacher to come and wash his body. She led him away by the arm, before a single drop could touch him, cursing all the way the teacher who thought better of himself, ridiculing other people's children. What, who does he think he is ever to imagine he could be neater than Qebi--the very Qebi

who likes water so much! From that day on Qebi never set his foot at school again. Whenever other people asked why Qebi was not attending school, she would retort, "There's no reason other than the general delinquency of the teachers of today!" Nojayiti tried her best to advise her sister and when she said, "First remove the beam from your own eye before you clear the blot in someone else's eye, Tawuse," the warning drew no response.

Gxelesha, Tawuse's husband, was a perpetual drunk, and a wild fellow who beat up people in drinking places. By this time he was as lonely as a hermit as other people avoided any contact with him because of his questionable conduct. Tawuse became badly affected by her husband's being shunned by everyone, saying that the cause is their hatred of him. Then there came Mqhaphu, the district's young fellow who had come there to guide in agriculture. Since Gxelesha was in any case quite friendly by nature, and since the young man had as yet not discovered his undesirable conduct, they became bosom friends, and, indeed, Tawuse was full of gratitude, that her husband should, after having been so ostracized by the people, suddenly become friends with such an important figure as an agricultural officer. The social visits frequently paid by these two fellows to each other brought everyone joy and excitement, and the two continued to keep each other's company.

On a certain day, when Mqhaphu was quite tired, he was invited by Gxelesha to a drinking spree at Ngxingongo's home. When they got there they enjoyed themselves, and the agricultural officer was greatly admired, for he had never been seen drinking before. Pails came out one after another, and Gxelesha drowned it all, while he waxed eloquent. All this surprised Mqhaphu, who was by nature quite withdrawn. In no time Gxelesha was as drunk as a lord. At such times no one could dare advise him to go home, so Mqhaphu his favourite, was under obligation to escort him home, something which he did in profound annoyance and in deep shame at being seen escorting such a drunkard. At the door they came face to face with Tawuse who hipped mountains of curses all directed at the

one who had come all the way from far beyond to teach her husband such drinking habits.

Tawuse used to neglect the buildings and leave them unplastered although he had many daughters. Whenever people asked her about this, she desired to know what she was expected to do with the generation that has been spoilt by electricity. When she got to recalling her prime time she could talk until sunset. In their times they obeyed their parents, unlike today, present times that are said to characterize progress, while in actual fact they do not--instead they are for regression. The contemporary generations is not progressing, it is regressing.

That agricultural officer introduced new methods of agriculture on arrival in that district, but Tawuse had nothing to do with him--the creature had taught her husband drinking habits. All the people of the district worked their lands according to the newly introduced methods but she and her husband continued to sow their seed on barren ground, never appearing at the lands during cultivating time. Their neighbours had plenty to harvest while they themselves got nothing. Now Tawuse started a new cry, complaining that her field had been blighted by witchcraft. She staged quite a lamentation about this, and the other women got fed up, for, in carrying out her usual exhibition of using other people's names when preaching in church, she made this her daily subject, where she would fall short of naming names obviously mistrusting the effect of indirect reference.

Her sister, however, persisted in showing her how her misfortunes were her own invention, and the teacher, modern times and witchcraft had nothing to do with it. In the long run we observed Tawuse and her husband gradually returning to their land. It was a good year with plenty of rain, and the people planted enthusiastically. Among the leading farmers were Tawuse and her husband. They farmed their beautiful expanse of land in a manner they had never before shown. They applied first-grade fertilizers and cultivated the land several times. As one looked one could see three cobs on each mealie stock. Indeed, she was now beginning to see that

witchcraft was not the problem. They were already counting the numbers of the bags they would produce, these being maize, pumpkins and beans. All the other fields were equally laden with produce.

Just then, on an afternoon that will never be forgotten a small patch of cloud materialized from the west. This cloud gradually filled up the sky and a thick darkness encroached upon the land. We watched it advance upon us with great noise and forcefulness. The sky became dark from east to west, and a gale never before experienced in that land started blowing, then heavy torrents of rain with hail stones the size of a hen's egg fell, while the flooding waters took everything with them, as the wind uprooted trees, crops and houses. The water laid every upcoming shoot flat upon the ground. We had been hit by a tornado. It took less than an hour, but the devastation it caused was incredible. When one looked in the direction of the lands one saw a uniformly bare and barren stretch of land that looked as though it had always been hostile to farming ever since the creation of this earth.

That was how everyone was turned away from earning their bread and butter. On Sunday, heads bowed in disappointment and misery, they all went to church. The pastor invited everyone to come and confess their sins, asking each one of them to pray. That was the day when men prayed fervently, confessed and pleaded with the heavens to recant recall their fury; that was the day when the old girls fretted asking for forgiveness, begging and pleading. At that Tawuse rose to her feet, and could be heard saying, "Tarhu (please), Lord, God's servant wastes her effort unnecessarily! Your people, oh Lord, are just bothering you, when they say you punish them for their sins! Forbid it, my people, there is neither sin nor punishment here! It is the Government! It is the whites! It is the whites who are responsible for this evil.

19. A crane forages for no other but its own little ones

Our local school was still quite elementary, with the highest class being Standard 2. However, I can never really account for its remaining at such an elementary stage. It was incepted during my father's time, when Kama the senior was still alive, but you would never guess. Still the ranks of illiterate people far outnumbered the school people, and these illiterate people clearly stated that they were not prepared to shift from their way of life, because they saw no improvement in the ways of school people like us. The most outspoken was our Headman, an old man from the Mpinge people; indeed this prominent member of the Senzwa families stated unequivocally that he would never take his children to school, for school education made vagabonds of the boys and the girls never got married, something that renders all converts poor, without any stock to show.

You may as well guess, good friend, how hard it must have been--when education was opposed by the leading gentleman in our village. As soon as we became aware of the school's precarious condition, we hurried to put men together in a Committee that would assist the pastor and the teacher, but that proved quite an uphill battle. We tried approaching one man after another but all those who would have suited the work of the Committee well refused. All we could manage to do was inspan the sickly ones.

I still remember the first Committee members to this day. We had Dlomdayo, the hero who persisted in bringing up one topic for discussion, that the teacher was rumoured to be drinking. H would harp on this until we would be fed up, and every day we tried to reason with him about the folly of acting on suspicion alone, when catching him red-handed and seeing for ourselves would have been ideal. As for Zanezingqi, he was prejudiced against the teacher for his stinginess, and he complained bitterly about his constant declaration that he is empty-handed whenever he asked him for a pinch of tobacco. At meetings he argued about this until sweat came down his

face, taking elaborate pains to show us that the cause of the school's deterioration was the resolve of the teacher to be stingy. He would then conclude by a declaration that he was pulling out his children from school rather than stand the scorn of someone who could not afford him a small packet of tobacco a day after he had so entrusted him with his own children. Madolwana, on his part criticized the teacher for not visiting him in his house, stating that he frequents the homes of important people only. Gudlindlu on his part admitted that no reasonable complaint could be directed at the teacher in person, except for the sole irregularity--he belonged to the Mfengu sub-culture, and, of all Mfengu sub-cultures, he had to come from the Mfengu people of Ngqushwa! This honorable member of society could see no transgression of worse gravity than to have his own child being taught by imfengu. However, among us we also had a gentleman from the Dlamini people*, and I expected him to defend someone from his own sub-culture, but he was mute. Actually, the teacher was of the Radebe lineage, also known as the line of Ndlebentle-zombini, so Dlamini based his defence on that, revealing to us that all the Radebe people were not quite reliable.

Such were the members who manned the Committee, which made it a difficult task to come to a useful conclusion during the discussions that were themselves dominated by such petty prejudices. While we wasted much time in meaningless debates the round mud huts were disintegrating; the thatch was being blown away by the wind, the wall having long tumbled down. Each year when the inspector paid a visit to the school, he would find himself surrounded by such decayed structures, whereupon the poor man coming from his white surroundings, would be forced, as a measure to protect the dear lives of the children, to close down those huts that proved to have leakages or to be letting in draught, something that made the levels to come down to the second level. Consequently, all the teachers were removed leaving behind the principal whose story is already well-known to you, the very man who was so resented by the Committee. Even this brought him severe accusation, for it was claimed that he had himself expelled the other

teachers. This accusation nearly made things unbearable for the teacher, for those teachers who had been removed were born and bred in the area, and of all people they happened to be members of the Gqunukhwebe of Tola. How dare this insignificant, little Mfengu man from Ngqushwa come and straddle his legs here!

Now it was worse than before, all this piling up on the already simmering hatred in which they had always held Tolinamba, the son of Zabkhokhwe, whereupon the intense hatred finally raptured. At this stage we heard limited criticism. He became isolated, keeping his own company, anyone who was seen talking to him being held in disdain and severely castigated. That is when I resolved that Nojayiti was indeed a natural hero. Just then she showed much interest and shared much friendship with this young man, almost taking the part of his own mother. I once attempted to caution Nojayiti, seeing the discontent of the people as a whole, but she was adamant and flatly refused to distance herself from him. Quite soon though it became a joy to me, to see the poor child having that dear, little solitary niche in which to find solace.

As will be understood, the school, which had been continuing to disintegrate any way, now accelerated its process towards total devastation. We, the Committee members were greatly concerned about this, as we agitated over how our children would get their education now. We thought, and thought, and finally came out with the one person in the whole village who could help us--his name being Nkwilinkwili, a member of the Qadi families, the headman's chief councillor and man who commanded attention with his voice at the people's court. Throughout my life I had never seen anyone contradicting that man's say, and he was greatly loved by many in the village. He deserved his popularity, for he was extremely friendly, with endless entertaining talk, often made possible by his ability to weave a yarn, but he was unmatched in his resourcefulness. You would be sure to meet an energetic speaker, and when formulating a trick he would look at you straight in the eyes, reading how gullible you are. Watch out!--anyone who is not used to his ways would find almost too

late that he has been tricked. As for me I resorted to avoiding his stare as he spoke, fearing to be duped by him and rendered into a wretched heap of shame.

That was the man whose help we finally sought out. We lobbied with him beseeching him time after time to come and join our Committee, but he never yielded an inch. Awu! If only he could work with us, and convince the Headman who commanded such a following in his village, redemption would be certain! No doubt, those classrooms would be erected immediately, the kids would yearn for school, those teachers who were our own children would return to teach there again. We did our best to persuade Nkwilinkwili to come and work with us, but he gave one excuse after another, and we failed to nail him down.

Just about that time I became conscious of something suspicious to do with Nojayiti and the teacher; intimacy grew between them and I increasingly spied them consulting each other, whereupon they would become secretive as soon as I approached them, and sometimes it would become clear to me that they have changed the topic. While I was still watching this, I began to notice that Nojayiti is now hooked on Nkwilinkwili, which left me quite stunned, because it had been Nojayiti's vow and chant, saying that she would never let herself to like Nkwilinkwili because of his lies and cheating. While I could not help being surprised, I could not help but admire Nojayiti for overcoming her hatred of him and her criticism of him as a bad man. With things the way they were Nkwilinkwili now frequented our house, oh yes, and I admired his increasingly becoming great friends with the beauty queen.

One day, Nkwilinkwili being himself in the house, Nojayiti revealed to me something that left me in a chilling state of shock. She announced to us that the teacher had imparted to her a dreadful secret--that he had murdered his mother--the police were investigating, looking for the culprit, and there was no way they would find him. He had then told her that he had a bad conscience about this and that he no longer wished to continue living, his resolve being to give himself up to the police so that he could be arrested, convicted and hanged. She informed us that the teacher was

planning to surrender himself to the police immediately, but Nojayiti herself had advised him to delay for six months, so that his termination of work would coincide with the beginning of the December holidays, the time when he can give himself up safely.

This revelation gave us quite a shock, and we asked in great consternation why she stopped him from giving himself up to the law. Her reply really sobered us up. She told us that she was helping to acquire Bhitywana, Nkwilinkwili's son, a vacancy. As a matter of fact Bhitywana would complete his teacher training in December; that would be the only opportunity for him to replace the murderer. All this was good enough, but there was still one problem, that being the fact that the teachers who had been retrenched were still out of work, and were also local children like the said Bhitywana.

"What's the matter with these men?" asked Nojayiti laughing. "Can't you see that all the fathers of those work-seeking children are not on the Committee. There is but one solution, ask Mr Nkwilinkwili to come onto the Committee now, before this becomes public; you must all present yourselves before him and promise him that you will avail the first vacancy in this school to his son Bhitywana."

In a matter of days Nkwilinkwili was on the Committee. Something of great wonder took place in that very hour. Nkwilinkwili spoke to the Headman, and soon the big man himself was all enthusiasm about education. One meeting was organized after another; classrooms and teachers' cottages were erected; the Committee itself now became popular and it too held the teacher as its favourite, because Nkwilinkwili had declared that eversince the universe was created there had never been such a teacher as he was.

Throughout all this rush all kept wondering what had caused Nkwilinkwili to devote himself so much this time to an undertaking that was not affording him any payment; only we knew the reason. The entire Committee and the village were grateful to that one man who had resurrected the institution from sheer ruins. Imagine, oh just imagine the beauty of a school milling with kids all over.

* * * *

The last day of the term in December came. There is a big concert, all the parents are here, having come to hear reports regarding the work of their children, everyone is in high spirits. On that very hour we were seated on the front stage with Nkwilinkwili, who effected much air of dignity being the Chairperson of the concert, with me as his vice; oh yes, there he sat, right there--a complete specimen of a ceremonial figure, because the moment for the teacher's turn was nearing, where he would then, as Nojayiti had forewarned us some days earlier, tell the members of the community gathered there that he was terminating his services as their teacher. But just at that moment in came Nojayiti together with a beautiful woman who was unknown to us, and she joyously proclaimed: "Mr Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to introduce to you the mother of our beloved teacher, having come to thank you all Gqunukhwebe people, for taking care of her son."

Looking around amidst that rapturous ovation, I just managed to see the Chairperson of the Committee sneaking out his face the devil's own mask of shock and disappointment.

"Nojayiti! Nojayiti!" I challenged in great distress, "How, Sweetness, could you tell us such a lie?"

"I knew it all along, Darling, if a crane ever forages for another, that could only be its little one, especially one of Nkwilinkwili's cunning.

Thereupon her beautiful dimples sank in a smile of victory.

20. The bottomless pit

It was the year of great harvest, the rains had dully come, and the crops had grown in more abundance than had been the case in many years; everyone had harvested something of his own, indeed everyone was rich and happy. My wife, Nojayiti, who was always generous anyway, excelled in that year in charity and hospitality.

Everyday our house was full to capacity, and a ramification of footpaths developed on all directions in the village. Some of these people would wake us up in the morning, and many of them sought nothing more than to drink the delicious coffee only Nojayiti could brew of all the women of the world. While Nojayiti was still overcome by her love and affection, I had my moments of extreme worry when I saw us finishing more than two shillings worth of sugar a day, whereupon I frequently engaged a silent prayer in my heart of hearts, pleading with the Heavens to have mercy on us and save us from so much love of our neighbours.

This love fever did not affect the people of our village alone, there would be visitors from the four corners of the globe, races and personalities of all kinds humanly possible; pastors, teachers, learned fold, leaders, chiefs--but really how far can I count? The latter types really skinned us alive with expenses, until my very soul was cast in great distress, but Nojayiti on her part moved from strength to strength in receiving these guests. However, all this distress was greatly reduced by the sight before my eyes, as I watched Nojayiti in great joy and perfect happiness surrounded by the personalities of world-renown who held her in their conversation showing their great admiration for her. I also consoled myself with the belief that Nojayiti herself, after a while and when leaner years came by, would finally see the folly of such a waste as this, and then consult her mind about it, but there I had missed the point.

A bad year did indeed come about, and starvation sent everyone scrounging about, with score of refugees treading

along in search for good. People now crowded to my house like an assembly of winged termites, and, as I watched Nojayiti emptying everything in our house and sacrificing all for them I got gripped by a new wave of wretchedness. I was thinking of my children--my babies--and I could see quite clearly the danger of slow death in the form of starvation encroaching upon them, because, though this lady from the Ngwevu people had apparently forgotten, it was a fact that we were not rich and were in fact far from that. I started complaining strongly to my wife about this. She said nothing, so I thought she was duly chastised, but I would like you to imagine the state of shock in which I found myself on waking up the following morning. I took a walk to the gate and I observed written on the gate in large letters the name Nojayiti had given to our house, letters that drew the attention of even joggers, written thus, "Your home."

I am unable to express the state of shock in which I found myself because of such a reckless invitation. People had been coming to our house in their tens all along, but now they came in their hundreds and through all this I found my hands helplessly tied up awaiting with great foreboding our impending doom.

While I was still in the grip of my worries with Nojayiti at the height of her happiness, there came Nozamile on one of the days laden with news, some of which gushed through the nostrils. She told us point blank that many villagers are not pleased by our new habit of entertaining guests in our house. She informed us that Nohajisi maintains that Nojayiti's open-handed invitations do not really come from a friendly heart; all she is doing is to seek popularity and to extract some gifts from her guests. She also informed us that Nonzingo, on her part, declares that why Nojayiti has opened a "coffee shop" is because she is a gossip, she is trying to channel gossip in her direction through those people she feeds and entertains with cups of tea. She also told us what Nkibitsholo says--that Nojayiti is a wicked woman who enjoys her domination over a dunderhead for a husband, whom she is landing into incredible debts by her exorbitant spending of

his money. Nontlola on her part, was incredulous of a hag who had bewitched her husband in broad daylight, so that he became the very fool who feeds on cow dung, yes, even stating that even this popularity that draws people to her house is caused by neither beauty nor kindness, instead it is witchcraft inherited from her mother, grandmother and great grandmother; whereupon she felt sorry for those who frequented her house because they were ready victims of her lightening-birds and her tikoloshe population.

Nozizwe had made her contribution by traversing the whole village chirping endlessly about Nojayiti's vanity because her house was visited by important personalities, threatening to reveal her true identity as the offspring of a nonentity, child of lowly people. Nozamide told us all that the village was saying about us, and concluded by informing us that our wretched little house had been given a bad name indeed, that of "The Bottomless Pit," because, it was alleged, all those who came to us never came back to other people's homes, instead they were swallowed up by our house, where I, Koranti, acquaint them with drinking and other obscenities, and this, of course, was referred to veteran pastors who were also better educated than I was, and also referring to those dignitaries who visited us--those leaders and those royalties.

It was clear to anyone that the information brought to us by Nozamide came from sources suffering from one common disease, envy. Although we could not be angels by any measure, we could hardly be the dirtiest of all those neighbours, and the most interesting thing was that the very people who said those things about us were well-known in that village for the self-same transgressions. I knew Nojayiti the best of all of them and I had not noticed one single justification for the criticism directed at her.

She was some good people's baby, born of noble folk, having a true Christian heart, and she could not pretend about her love for mankind--the lowly and the highly placed, the young and the old, the ugly and the beautiful, the disabled and the able bodied--binding the lot with one cord. However, I listened to all this with great interest entertaining a fond

hope that this would startle Nojayiti a bit, work her into a state of agitation about such lack of gratitude, whereupon she would then restrain herself from this senseless devotion to people like that at the risk of rendering our own house poor.

Immediately after departure I engaged myself in a sympathetic process of counselling the eminent lady, consoling her after all the criticism on the name lent to our house--that abominable name of "The Bottomless Pit." Soon I found myself really worked up at the thought that our attempt at hospitality should be met with such disdain; I found myself telling my wife that this libelling causes me much shame, explaining that I did not know what to do to wipe it off from the people's memory, whereupon I took the opportunity to advise her that one of the ways to remove such a libel from people's minds would be to recant and to refrain from worshipping people.

My wife listened obediently, and I became quite convinced that at last she sees the malevolence of her present disposition and her attempt to be of service to her people, but I went to bed sensing something ominous with my wife. Although she was quiet, her reticence did not appear to be caused by any repentance on her part, nor did it seem to be fury nor change of heart. I waited for a long time in my bedroom that night, but my wife would not call for her rest. I noticed, however, that there was urgent business between herself and Balafuthi, her favourite son; there was much activity, sawing, and plaining, but I never really found out what was up. At long last I went to sleep, and had the most alarming nightmares, all sustained by the sound of that despicable term--The Bottomless Pit.

Very early the following morning Maqhashu, my eight-year old grandson and favourite, burst into the bedroom in a breathless haste and exclaimed, "Father, come and have a look at the gate! Our house has been given yet another name!"

I hastened on with the little fellow dragging me by the arm. I opened the gate--can you believe it! I nearly fainted from shock and the horror. There stood the writing in big bold

letters squarely in the place of the original name, saying, "The Bottomless Pit."

In great excitement and horror I ran back to my wife to break the news of the horrendous ploy our neighbors had perpetrated that night. Wonder of wonders! Instead of my wife becoming shocked by this news she just laughed and said, "Why now, SekaNggayimbana, did you not know my handwriting all this time?"

"You mean to say, Nojayiti, you mean to say that you yourself have put up that abomination on our home?" I complained and pined in great surprise.

"No, Darling," responded the great lady in a church tone of voice, "I see no abomination in this term, I see great fame to think that all those who enter the doors of the Tipha family enjoy themselves so much that they are swallowed up and never think of any other home. I so loved this name that I decided to put it up at our gate as a perpetual monument of your hospitality, my beloved husband, a reminder of our love for each other and our devotion to other people.

Despite the eloquence I still remained in horror of the idea that this term be spread out like this, so I replied, "Yes, dear, that may be the case, but we can only be the source of scorn and ridicule from people with so much envy and foolishness.

We continued life under that banner of proudly being such a bottomless pit, and thus do we still remain to this day.

21. The beauty queen is overshadowed

The children of Tawuse, Nojayiti's sister, were lovely creatures, especially the girls, but Noziganeko was queen of them all. This child had the purity of beauty one can only find in the waters of a mountain stream. Young men in the district were crazy about her, all of them fighting to attract her attention. They all tried their very best, but all was in vain. Noziganeko's equals all soon got married, leaving her still a maiden, all because of her highly critical eye.

I was myself not unconcerned about this, fearing that sooner or later young men might give up their chase and resort to alternatives of whom many were desperate to get married. But I must confess: it so happened that just at that time our span of oxen suffered shortages, two of my oxen having been killed by the quarter-evil (disease that attacks the forelegs of cattle), so that it became a problem how to start ploughing; whereas had the bride's stock been delivered in respect of the maiden, the span would have a full complement, for we shared ploughing activities with her father. Nojayiti repeatedly engaged her in discussion about this, pointing out to her all the joys of marriage together with the dangers of remaining single for too long.

I was often amused by attempts made by Nojayiti together with her sister, Tawuse to convince that stalwart hoping to finally bend her. One day Nojayiti left home at Njwaxa and undertook a train journey over a spurn of days to Idutywa. We were soon surprised by her return with a tall, well-built young man, a Mr Nqabashe of the Dosini people, a handsome fellow indeed, a very neat man whose presence made all the girls in the village frequent my house fabricating all sorts of reasons for these visits. Suddenly all the mortars for stamping mealies in the whole village were not suitable for the girls, and they claimed that the best one was at Aunt Nojayiti's house. Nojayiti's reserve of wood grew enormously in size as all the girls in the district began to fetch wood for her, let alone fetching water for her; but Nojayiti was

not pleased by all this abundance, because the very person she had brought Dosini to see now adopted a new habit. Noziganeko just made herself as rare as auntie's marriage, always giving a good reason for refusing everyone of her invitations.

Just then things took a turn for worse, for amidst the girls who were in competition there was a great beauty, Nongemkile, the starling-dark beauty from the Thunzini people, tall and shapely with a catching sparkle in the eye that defied distances, and brows that were black like ebony. Nojayiti was pleased with all the other girls who paid their regular visits, because they never really seemed to interest Dosini. But one day my wife nearly became quite bewildered with shock, when she discovered Dosini fumbling for a cigarette, something he had never tried before, and wiping his forehead with a large white silken handkerchief, and on looking at one of the corners she found written, "Nongemkile Chophetyeni."

Wasting no more time, my wife took poor Dosini by the arm and led him stumbling to Noziganeko's home. They found the beauty there in person, but she soon remembered that she must go to Ngwenya's shop, that being a whole distance of four miles from where they were, which further necessitated that she set off at once if she was to get there before they closed. On that day Nojayiti went home in great agitation and inwardly cursing such a foolish child. She fell into deep thought and came up with a plan. She organized a big dinner party and invited all the relatives. She gave special tasks to all the girls in the village and when it came to Nongemkile she was even more particular. She assigned her to the pots, and the two of them wore German print and set out to belabour the steaming and smoking operations, by which she was making sure that Dosini did not have a glimpse of that beauty. Noziganeko was then draped in by her mother and her aunt, decorations upon decorations, so that she would outshine all the girls of the village.

The dinner party itself was a grand success, and I kept amusing my wife who was in a joyous mood, as their lady kept Dosini in constant conversation, but alas, we still had to see

Noziganeko approaching Nongemkile, and the next thing we saw was the two of them whisking each other away, and again the next thing we saw was Nongemkile returning a spritely lady. In great surprise, mNgwevukazi asked for Noziganeko's whereabouts, and was shocked to learn that she was sent away by a killer stomachache, leaving behind an arrangement whereby Nongemkile was the one to keep the company of the guests. The single result of all that was that by the end of that year the said Nongemkile was a bride among the Dosini people, and the great beauty, Noziganeko, remained with her highly cherrished freedom, while we, on our part, fumbled wretchedly with our ploughing.

Here at Njwaxa there was a young man called Ketile, one of the Mphothulos. If there exists anyone who dared to suggest that this man was not ugly he would be the worst of all evaders of truth that ever were. He was a dwarfish fellow with bendy legs, a squint, with rubber-thick lips and a wide mouth that stretched from one ear to the other. Stocky as this fellow was, his feet were so long that he wore size nine, which made him to waddle along like a duck. Did someone mention voice! There has never been such a big one before; when he spoke it sounded like thunder and forests threatened to split open. What of his base during the service! Even passers-by stopped to ask where such a sweet-sounding organ in the house of the Lord came from. The fellow was also gifted in the art of jesting. He would be hunted by men and women, young men and maidens, old men and old women, because of his entertaining stories--stories which, in spite of the yarns built into them--something he very much liked to do--were quite pleasant, most of them being also remarkably didactic. In addition to all this he had a big handicap, that being an abnormally gross appetite. At wedding feasts men feared to eat meat with him at the courtyard, because while some of the men would still be going through their first cuts the great fellow would be swallowing the nineth. When it came to the beer he would drain a big beaker like it was a mere shell. The greatest wonder of all was that in spite of all that volume he was never seen in a drunken mood. He had an amazing habit of

getting drunk while watching the container bubbling with foam, and then gradually sober up as he drenched the beakers so that by the fifth or sixth he would be as sober and dignified as a bishop on his throne.

He may be said to have relished all these, but he enjoyed nothing better than pork. He smelt pork about seven days before the pig was slaughtered in any house; he dreamt about its colour, its age, the thickness of its lard, and woke up to declare his dreams about it. His awfully ugly face would transform itself into a mask of angelic gentleness at the sound of a pig's screeching cry as it is being slaughtered; by the time the first selections of meat are cooked the great fellow from the Jwarha families would already be busying himself, and that pork would be eaten in a manner no pork was eaten before, and the great fellow would retire to his home that evening with a stiff balloon for a belly and its weight would make it difficult for him to sleep.

While life went on like that, we were surprised one day, by the arrival of a beautiful selection of cattle at the home of Gxelesha, my brother-in-law. It was the Jwarha people having come to negotiate marriage on behalf of Ketile, having come to ask for Noziganeko. We were spell-bound and did not know what to do. How could such a man think in such terms! How could he be so daring as to ask for Noziganeko who had rejected scores of handsome men, many a rich young man, teachers and ministers of religion, sons of chiefs and councillors; and, to crown it all, he comes here driving a whole herd of ten cattle much like someone who is doubly sure of success.

As I cast my eyes on those oxen my heart missed a beat and I began to accuse God the King for Ketile's irredeemably ugly face, because he was, no doubt, going to be rejected by the belle, giving me ye another wretched year of struggle with ploughing. As I looked at Ketile on that day it began to dawn upon me that indeed I had never in this world before seen anyone that ugly. I saw with my eyes the very essence of ugliness in him as he sat there on dried branches at the cattle bier, pitched up as he was with great composure and a

smile. I could also see that he was not a bit anxious about the rejection he was sure to get.

The men could not come to an agreement on whether to call the girl and ask if she loved this young man, but I insisted that there was no need at all to bother the lady about such a clod. In the end Noziganeko was called. I had never at any other time seen that girl as terrific as she was on that day. Someone asked if she knew this young man, and the beauty queen mumbled a low, "Yes." Again the man asked saying, "Do you love him?"

"Yes."

We all sprang to our feet, our foreheads knocking against each other, but Ketile alone remained calm and unaffected; he looked at each of us in turn, his lips having split open from ear to ear in a smile of triumph. In the grips of such a shock, I shouted besides myself and asked, "You say you love him! You love him? Don't make fools of us, child, what is there for you to love in that clod?"

"He is not a clod, uncle," Noziganeko pleaded in response, "he is human like all the others."

Ketile's smile stretched and became wider, and I eagerly retorted, "I say what is there for you to love, girl, in this young man? Be careful that you do not bluff us."

"I love him, uncle," said Noziganeko more insistently, "I love his base in church."

At this the prospective husband was in danger of having his mouth snapping at the seems, I could also hear my heart pounding like a drum inside of me, because I was going to plough so hard a fairy would die.

* * * *

A celebration, the ululations, the wedding day is at last upon us! There is singing, the clapping of hands, with,

"Vela, langa! ("Sun, do arise!
Kutshat'uMangezula!" It is Mangezula's wedding day!")

And also,

"Ndonga ziwelene, ("The walls fell across each other,
 Ndonga ziwelene, The walls fell across each other,
 NgamaJwarha namaVundle." The Jwarhas now meet the
 Vundles.")

People flocked to church, in their numbers, and on this day the daughter of the Jwarha people had outdone herself in beauty. We watched her stepping gently inside with her bridesmaids. There was a lull in the noise as people awaited the entrance of the bridegroom with his train; they waited and waited but he never showed up. People started fidgetting, looking around, and mumbling to each other in consternation. Someone went to ask, and he found that there was just as much consternation there, the bridegroom is nowhere to be found. Where on earth could he be? People now began to give all sorts of interpretations, some saying he had slipped and fallen, for he had been seen going in the direction of the river, some saying that magic had blown him away, still some were saying he had been carried away by the sorcerers' flying craft, and things deteriorated into such a confusion, until in the end there was virtually no wedding because of the strange disappearance of the bridegroom.

Search parties spread themselves about, and they combed the area searching, one of the search parties setting out to as far as Sheshegu by sunset. On entering the village they were attracted by smoke from a huge fire with pots, and a big number of people not far from it. As they made for it they were shocked to see Ketile himself seated around the fire, sweating heavily, his face shining with sweat and oil, biting with great relish at a fat piece of pork.

"What is this! What is this my father's child," exclaimed his younger brother fretfully, "what shame is this, for you to undertake a whole day's journey running after pork? What about the wedding?"

"The box-chest scratched its head, showing what could have been surprise had he not been in the presence of pork, and it answered in its big voice saying, "O, I forgot all about a wedding! This meat just tasted so nice."

22. Nojayiti's sister-in-law

I do not think that, excluding Nojayiti and my own mother, there is in this world anyone I love more than Nomaghashu, my father's starling-dark beauty daughter. Nomaghashu was the eldest at home, and mother used her name in addressing my father just as everyone else in the whole village of Njwaxa did; throughout the district of Xesi and among all the Ggunukhwebe people. All of us at home including our uncles swore by this lady.

Yes, indeed, my mother's baby was a perfect lady. She was tall, proportioned like the portrait designed by a master painter. She was starling-dark with eastern eyes, her shiny cheeks held together by two most fitting dimples, and the hair was ebony. Her delicate little nose was like that of a buck, with a thin suggestion of darkish hair on her upper lip. The teeth were white and bright, forming a carefully arranged row like a line of pearls, with a gentle gap giving an amazing relief right in the middle.

While she appeared beautiful in the face and form her walks were most suitable and she could laugh quite charmingly. Indeed, you would never imagine a rough featured creature like myself had the slightest relationship with a beauty like that. Yet she was my blood relation, bone for bone, flesh for flesh, with one mother and father. She was older than me, for I grew up being carried by her on her back, which in turn made two things possible, one being that I loved and respected her like my mother, while she looked down upon me like her own child.

There is always a bad side to everything good. In addition to all the talents Qashu had--for that is how we lovingly called her--she possessed a few shortcomings--the first and most glaring being her extreme sense of pride, which I think was influenced by her extreme beauty, which made her quite spoilt by much adoration praise and idolizing. Her second short-coming was her loathing of work. You could have your pleasure watching my father's beauty, her long slim fingers handling work like they belonged to a somnambulist.

Once mTiphakazi actually got married, and the marriage took her to the big homestead of a Tshawe family, at the house of Ndizazombona, but she did not stay there long, she came back though her husband was still alive and living with her. Those who know were saying she was brought back from her in-laws by her laziness, but her own report was about the wickedness of her mother-in-law. As Qashu's marriage had not worked, she stayed with me as the eldest of her brothers, but that stay was just a formality, for in reality she covered us all, staying with me for about two years, before she left for one of my younger brothers, until she got tired of that one, left him, often after a great exhibition, and went to another.

But despite the mongrel-like vagabonding of mTiphakazi, her best place to stick to was with me--the cause for this being two things--one being that as heir I lived in my father's old property, something to which she laid a claim, and never ceased to inform us she did not beg for anything from us, for she stayed in her own father's house, altogether forgetting that our parents had long departed from this earth, and we now survived by taking care of ourselves. The second cause was that she was very much like my wife in behaviour, because, although both of them were spitfires, they were also straight talkers. Moreover, her being a burden to me was outbalanced by my inability to even sulk at her, because of the way I loved her.

Nojayiti also loved her sister-in-law very much; one of the reasons for such love being her recognition of my own devotion to the same, which made her even more determined to please the husband she loved more than anything in the world, that then being myself. Also there was the idea of wanting to outshine the younger wives of brother-in-laws, hoping to make herself my people's favourite, especially to the imposing eminence of the family heiress.

We continued life in that fashion living with Qashu--no, I should actually say under Qashu's control. For days my sister would wake up at dawn to make her tea, prepare her breakfast, lunch and supper, and she would never for a single moment arise from the mat on which she was wallowing on her

belly. She remained in that lifeless pose for the whole day, poking the air with her immensely long pipe and puffing away casually, not in the least caring to think that there were those who were sweating to maintain her well-being.

Things used to become quite tough, especially on Sundays, when we had to go to church. The first thing to do was prepare for her, then we could be free to go to church. She would remain at home, fully stretched, and she would draw her thick eyebrows at us every time we asked her to come with us. The funny thing about it was that my sister and I were converted on the same day, and for a while she cherrished evangelism, but soon she left off everything. Nojayiti and I were shocked to death when she told us about the cause for her short-lived relationship with the church, saying before she was converted she never ran out of tobacco, because her lovers often bought her some, but on her conversion, when she had to abandon all that her mouth turned sour for want of smoke! She added that if the Lord gave her no tobacco she would simply return to those friends who bought her some!

On several occasions Nojayiti tried to reason with mTiphakazi concerning her laziness to work and her leaving all the work to her, but she became a veritable rhino, telling her in no uncertain terms that if she kept nagging her, she would simply leave her, for she had no shortage of sisters-in-law. Even today I seem to see the eminent lady, her mouth screwed up, her legs stretched, smoking, holding the very Nojayiti I obey so much in her grip. Indeed love, where a woman loves her husband, must be something great, for it to be Nojayiti herself who submitted to all that.

Under such circumstances she would then employ all means to restore the good relationship between herself and that uncompromising commander. She used to soften her by giving away part of her wardrobe to her, something she enjoyed very much, she sewed her own dresses, a task she loathed most awfully, but her strongest control was tobacco, for she was addicted to it. I too had found useful leverage to relieve my wife of her. She had a favourite habit of prodding and poking other people's pipes in search of tobacco juice and residue.

Whenever she called for my pipe I would fake equal addiction to tobacco juice and residue, whereupon I would suggest that only one thing could separate me from my pipe juice, that being the condition I set that whoever wanted tobacco juice and residue had to fetch me water from the river first, or she should fetch firewood for me, or then perform any other task that may be beneficiary to the house. That provided one of the rarest occasions where my father's dearest would render us some service.

Nomaqhashu had one really great desire in life. Upon a certain day she had observed a chief's wife, a lady of the same calibre as herself smoking with a pipe whose length equalled a man's arm. From that day on she never enjoyed her meals anymore, dreaming about the ownership of such a pipe. It made her so sad to learn that the person who made such pipes stays far away, and it would be too costly to get to where he was, and that make of pipe was a bit expensive, for they were one pound each. So did mTiphakazi continue to pine on day after day, presenting her case, and complaining that had she still a father or brother she would have long possessed such a pipe. My wife and I remained adamantly unaffected by this request, because all we knew was that smoke will always come forth, there being no impediment to smoking even if one used a fairy's pipe, and we resolved never to indulge in such expensive mischief, and buy a pipe at such a price.

As it turned out, however, we had grossly miscalculated. Indeed this life has its ups and downs, for, soon I was confronted by Nojayiti asking for a pound from me; she was in great excitement stating that she would never refuse her sister-in-law her wish, and she was now determined to buy her that pipe of her dreams. Do ask and we shall tell you the reason.

We have so far emphasized the laziness of my father's baby so much that indeed any reader would conclude that there was nothing on earth that she could do by herself. Yes indeed, she was grossly indolent, and found it hard even to wash dishes, and even when she did wash them after her meals, they still had to be redone because of their begrimed condition.

Her sweeping of the house was the same, where one just wondered, not knowing which section had already been swept and which still remained. There are the two tasks she performed with excellence. The first one was baby-sitting expertise, which was where she became handy in rescuing my wife from our spoilt grandchild. The second one was her unequalled skill in brewing Xhosa beer. Believe me, she had a natural instinct for this one. She was popular for her brewing throughout the whole area that stretches as far as Nkelengeshe.

Here is what changed Nojayiti's mind and made her desire to buy that costly pipe. A great Gqunukhwebe chief was coming to Njwaxa to discuss matter of national importance. As usual our house was appointed the place of residence for His Royal Eminence. The whole village was to make preparations for his stay, but Nojayiti selected on her own, since she was to be the actual host, to brew him the best beer in the world. She, herself, was not so talented in such matters, and thus trusted her sister-in-law to do it. That is how my sister was then asked to brew that mqombothi, from which she would further take over the baby-sitting responsibility. Nojayiti planned to be the lady of the day, and not to be restricted by things like troublesome children. Let it be known that nothing was worshipped by Nojayiti more than chiefs, and now she was to be visited by the Supreme Chief of the Gqunukhwebe himself, him in person. That is when promises were made between sisters-in-law regarding the thorny issue of the pipe.

The day came for the brewing to be resumed--Nomaghashu was nowhere to be found! It reached the stage to be boiled, still no sign of Nomaghashu! We now became quite alarmed, and speculated wildly being at a loss how to explain the transgression that could cause Nomaghashu to bring about such embarrassment. It so happened that while we were still gripped by anxiety, there came a certain so-and-so and told us that she met Nomaghashu on the way to Mdizeni, stating that she was visiting her nephew, Khohlile at Nxarhuni. This decision to undertake a journey that would take days rather shocked us, as she left behind a task she had been so painfully asked to do and turning her back on all those delicious dishes of the day

of Mhlekazi's visit. This surprised us to no end. Just imagine my wife's mortification at having to attend to the guest of honour by herself alone.

A fortnight after the departure of the royalty we were glad to receive Nomaqhashu back home in one piece. Nojayiti blurted out her question in great expectation, "Oh, why, Sisi, did you cause us so much anxiety by not letting us know where you were? Why, Bhayeni, did you dishonour the people's leaders by depriving them of the rare opportunity to taste your skill in brewing?"

Wearing her characteristic lovely smile, my starling-dark sister responded without even pausing to think, "Not me, Sisi, cannot be bothered by your chiefs. I had an urge and had to go to Nxarhuni to prod my kind nephew, Khohlile's pipe; he does not make me pay like your husbands, when I need tobacco juice and residue.

Here I'll take a break and smoke.

23. A gift from Madondile

"It is far better to do something haphazardly than never at all." These are the words my wife, Nojayiti used to caution me with; and though I could not follow them in the beginning, I finally caught up with their meaning--in the ultimate end. I recall them now just as I remember what happened to me and led to this story.

In our village there was a fellow whose name was Madondile. He was very rich, being also a good man who was generally liked by everyone, except for one thing, he was extremely stingy. There wasn't a single person in that big village of Njwaxa who could claim to have been presented with a gift from the same Mpemvu. How could there be anyone at all? For this fellow's stinginess prevailed in his own home. Although he had those many cattle, sheep and goats, they lived only on boiled mealies in his house. He used to grow plenty of beans, but his family stayed in perpetual hope for beans, because they were never eaten there at all, as all those bags were filled up and sewn up before they were than taken to the store to be sold and the money would be buried underground, leaving the family with nothing to eat except boiled mealies.

Meat was never even seen in the house, except meat from dead carcasses, and even that was very rare indeed, for this fellow was good at caring for his stock, and knew very well how to cure an ailing animal, let alone bandaging broken animals; he would dose an animal until it was dead and cold, sometimes giving it medicinal charms.

Just at that time our church, the Anglican Church was making its ground preparations for the great occasion of the Passover. Visitors from all places near and far, were expected. Funds were raised and all sorts of food were bought, in readiness to receive those people. There now remained one thing that we had not got sufficiently enough, that being something to slaughter. We required six animals for mutton, but we still had five sheep and goats, all of which had been contributed by local people, like Mr Nkumbi, Mr Xelenxwa, Mr

Ngonani, and Mr Ngqinishe and their families, the fifth one having been donated by me, to my great discomfort, because it was almost the last little lamb I owned, the rest having been finished by Nojayiti's excessive generosity who always insisted upon my throwing in my spear on every church undertaking and every endeavour at progress.

One day at a service the congregation was taken by surprise by Nojayiti's announcement that donation of this sixth goat should be sought for from Madondile. The Lord's people all disagreed, asking themselves one question, that being whether it was possible for blood to come out of a stone or for a cow to give birth to a human being. All these words were referring to Madondile's stinginess, but Nojayiti remained adamant until hers was the last word.

While we were thus engaged in studying the proceedings we were astonished by something strange. We saw Mpemvu suddenly abandoning his stock, and, instead, crisscrossing the village day after day looking for one thing, a goat. In those days a full-sized goat of the best breed was ten shillings, and the female ones were a little less. This was rather surprising, because he was the man with the most goats, with the whole village buying from him. What was most astonishing was that in every home he visited there was a goat to sell, but all of them ranged from five shilling upwards. Wearing the most wretched face ever because he could not find a goat at a lesser price than that, he traversed the village. But after many days he again returned to his flocks, his face beaming with joy, and it was quite clear that at last he had found a solution to his problem.

Rumours which greatly unsettled me started filtering through, rumours that Madondile had found a goat which he had managed to buy for half a crown, and he planned to donate it to the church. But I was puzzled because Nojayiti had no apprehensions about this, although the shocking news had reached us both. This particularly intrigued me, for Nojayiti likes nothing better than the church, but how could it be herself in person who did not seem to care as the congregation was made to suckle from a lifeless udder.

Again the congregation organized another meeting in preparation for the great day. All the preachers and prayer ladies were there, as well as the district youth. Under discussion was what to slaughter. There arose the beautiful mNgwevukazi, Nojayiti, already in full praise of both the men and women, and asking the gathering to go as it is, the whole lot of them, and they should sing with gusto as they go, with preaching and prayer, to ask for a contribution of meat from the rich man of the district. This suggestion looked good enough, and so the congregation rose and made for the home of Madondile.

To this day I can still picture that honourable master seated with great composure opposite the door of his very large hut, encouraging us every now and then with his lovely smile. On that day we sang with more fervour than we had ever done before. Just then our leading preacher, Mpimpiliza, rose to his feet, and uttered great words explaining that to give is more blessed than to receive; suggesting that the heavens deserve the most valued gifts from what we own; telling stories about the wise men of old who gave the best of what they possessed making a gift of the most precious of all their stones, myrrh, and also frankincense. The sisters of the Union prayed until the milk pails went dry, praying that the impurities in the heart of our host to be cleared out.

Just then the great Thembulander waved his hand bringing that crowd to order and asked everyone to wait while he went to the kraal to be back soon, and so he went out amid that noise of singing which came as though from the skies after those good words by Mpemvu.

Soon the great favourite was back, and asked the congregation to come out to see for itself. And indeed what did they see? A veritably dreadful sight. There stood a very thin creature which appeared to have been a male goat before. There stood the creature whose hair was peeling off the skin, whose ribs could be counted by someone jogging past; there stood the scrap of creature which was just the same as a bag of bones, too exhausted even to remain on its legs; there

stood the creature as Madondile pointed at it and stating that it was his contribution to the work of the Lord.

The people were dumb with shock and disappointment and the noise of singing died down all of a sudden, and everyone was trembling with fear of there being anyone who could be so shameless as to give such a donation to the church.

The one person in that multitude who nearly died from shame and disappointment was Madondile's younger brother, Ndenzeni. He just hovered there in bewilderment, his lips parted in shame that stinginess could drive his brother to do such a thing.

That silence was broken all of a sudden by Nojayiti's high voice, as she sang her favourite song, weaving it thus,

"Sinelizwi likaThixo, Sinobomi ngalo; Siyazaz'izono zethu, Nomsindisi ngalo."	We have the Word of God, It gives us life; We came to know our sins, And the saviour through it.
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At once the whole crowd broke into life, singing,

Lihambile elo Lizwi, Lisahamba lona; Ezo zizwe ezikude Zilindele lona. Ziyoyisw'iintshaba zakho Ngezwi lakho, Nkosi; Wozalisw'umhlaba wonke Lizwi lakho, Nkosi.	That Word has spread, It still spreads today; Those far-away nations Still await it. Your enemies are overcome By you Word, O Lord; The whole world will be filled up By your Word, O Lord.
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At this point Nojayiti called for silence, and spoke, saying, "Indeed, my friends, here we are. Here we are at the home of this member of the Gqunukhwebe people. Why should you be amazed? Why should you be so ungrateful?"

"Imilambo yeli lizwe; Yovuyiswa lilo; Abantwana bezi zizwe Bolulekwa lilo."	"The rivers of this country; Will rejoice in it; The children of these nations Will be brought up under it."
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As this song rang out it felt as though the earth would tear open and the mountains crumble. Again mNgwевukazi spoke, "Don't you know, friends, that an English idiom says that beggars shall not be choosers? Don't you know that another one

says never look a gift horse in the mouth? Rise to your feet, men, rise to your feet, sisters of the Prayer, and thank the man from the Mpemvu people for his kind gift towards the preparations of the congregation.

Being in great exhilaration, sensing that he had been redeemed from shame, until his family asked him to hold himself together, Ndenzeni jumped up and bellowed out saying, "Stop, stop, House of Phalo, to add to this gift of my brother I donate, I donate my ox, the one with downward pointing horns, and in addition, I surrender myself and my family wholeheartedly to the church."

As he withdrew tears came down, whereupon the congregation gladly concluded the song,

"Zopheliswa'imfazwe zonke	"Every war will be terminated
Ngezwi lakho, Thixo;	Through your Word, God;
Kwakulawul'uxolo lodwa	Only peace alone will reign
Ngezwi lakho, Thixo. Amen."	Through your Word, God. Amen."

The good old Anglicans went home in great joy, driving before them that fat ox and the he-goat. On that same day, in the evening, her adorable face radiating with joy, I heard my wife laughing with her sweet little voice and asking, "Well, Bhayeni, have my words not sunk yet? Remember the day I said it is far better to do something haphazardly than never at all?"

Sensing the meaning of her words I pretended to ask, "Why is that, my Adoration?"

"I mean, love, that though Madondile may have made a meagre donation, that donation of his has brought the congregation an ox and the entire family of his younger brother who was by far a greater miser than him."

"You have really astounded me, Tshangisa," I said, my heart singing with joy, "because it was your wonderful sermon that brought about all this repentance."

"Yes, indeed, Tipha, that is how God's power works, it works even through clay pots like us. What shall we do to thank God by? Nothing more than to release that fat hamel in exchange for Madondile's bony animal, so that we can fatten it for ourselves. I am sure if we do that, God will bless us."

Though this was my last breed of a good sheep I concurred eagerly, and was rewarded by much kissing from the beauty I love so much.

24. Deep secret

There are few people, if any, whom we liked as we did Qolwana, a man from the Mfene families. He was a great talker, a brilliant entertainer, someone whom you rarely found in a sad mood. That in itself was a miracle, because if there existed anyone who would be justified for indulging in self-pity and doubt, it would be the same Hlathi.

He was extremely poor, as poor as a church mouse, having been deserted by all his children, and none of them worked to support him. His heir, Mangweni, was a chief clerk at the mines in Johannesburg, and it was rumoured that he had everything, but he ate all and wiped his hands on his head, and it was clear that he no more regarded himself as having a home. Also his eldest daughter, Nomathemba, had gone and lost herself in town, and it was rumoured that she too was making much money selling liquor, but she too, like her brother, did not even dream of having a father.

Had Nojayiti not existed in our district this old man would certainly have long died of hunger. He lived by himself alone in his house, and did not cook, for there was nothing to cook anyway. He would rise early in the morning and knock on all the doors of that big village of Njwaxa, asking for coffee as he did so. If he happened to get a cup to drink he would then proceed to another house to languish there waiting for lunch. After having his lunch he would again proceed to yet another house to await supper.

The hardships of such an existence are immeasurable. The people of that village are not wealthy; many have a hard time to make ends meet, which made Hlathi's task even more difficult; for him to come in and go out of a house empty-handed was quite common, and the people did not refuse him just to spite him, but they were themselves struggling hard.

That was the very experience that brought Mfene, the vagabond, our way. In our house we were ourselves having the worst time ever in life, the house full of our own and our prodigal children's children, but I doubt if it ever occurred

to Nojayiti that we were in such hardships simply because of her excessive generosity. MNgwevukazi gave away too much, quite often preferring to see us go without our morning tea rather than deny someone who had come to ask for a spoonful of sugar or coffee. My dear friend, it was often someone who did not have the least mercy like her, but because of the deep love I have for Tshangisa I would often succumb.

Because of my wife's well-known civility Qolwana never once left the house without having been rewarded. Soon he appeared no longer keen on his rounds through the village, staying the whole day in our house. It would be great fun for me to settle down to conversation with the famed fellow, eating, drinking that coffee that could only be brewed by Nojayiti alone in the whole world to that special taste.

Thereupon, the renowned talker and jester would tell us many tales, and the tales would grow in strength with the boiling of pots and kettles. Let alone if there was also the smell of meat in the air or fat cakes which Nojayiti liked to make. He would then begin to tell us about his best dreams, and he would impart to us in confidence the visions he had had. That was just where he won Nojayiti's heart, because all those visions had something to do with me, sometimes dreaming of me in heaven for possessing such a good cook for a wife, sometimes he would prophesy that I was still going to be a very rich man for looking after the destitute. As there is no woman who loves her husband like Jayi, these prophecies and praises strengthened her own view of Qolwana's worth.

One day while this fellow beset me with praises with the usual fervour, Nojayiti attracted my attention as she went out to fetch my old Sunday suit from the chest and handing it over to the praise singer, and he went home wearing a broad smile, while we remained in the certainty that the whole village would be covered by the news of our good deed as the praise singer would crisscross it announcing our generous maintenance of him.

The praise singer was back the following day, and performed even greater praises, stating that already he saw the wings budding out on my body so that I could become an

angel, a fitting reward for my kindness. Just when it came to these words my attention was attracted to Nojayiti unearthing my favourite shoes and presenting them to the only one person who could speak so well. Though I was still moaning from my great loss I consoled myself by saying that Qolwana deserved such a reward for his sensibility to show gratitude, for the majority of people on earth lack that talent pitifully.

But tenderness towards Qolwana was shaken soon after that, for, while we waited there came some villagers. They came in breathless haste, expressing their admiration of our friend's smart appearance, saying they saw him at a wedding feast where he was immaculately dressed like a dandy. We eagerly enquired where he got his clothing. We nearly died of shock from the reply we received. Nonzwakazi repeated for us all the praises said by Qolwana praising his son, Mangweni, saying it was he who had sent him that suit; praising his daughter, Nomathemba, for it was she who had sent him those shoes.

This fairy tale nearly made us go crazy, for we had never before experienced such treachery, to dress someone up like that only for him to lend the glory of such a deed to his own worthless children. But when we recalled his friendly nature, reminding ourselves of the follies of a kind person, we recanted and bore the brunt.

While we were still reeling from the blow, there came the news that really made me mad. There came Nomagqwa who found me with my wife in the house, and told us all about our friend. She told us that the village had even invented a new idiom, which stated, "The sweet water they make in Nojayiti's house!" It so happened that this idiom was derived from Qolwana's language. We learnt that after having coffee with us he would crisscross the village in search for more to drink again and since people knew that he came from our house they would first ask if he did not drink anything, and his answer was always one, "Yo! Drink what, my father's baby? Drink the sweet water they make in Nojayiti's house."

This became a painful sore to me, after having helped someone so much to fill his own belly, only to be rewarded by

his declaration that my wife could not make coffee, the very one who cannot be surpassed by any other in the whole world when it comes to cooking, and all that, all that derogation just to help him feel up his baggy paunch. I became possessed by a dreadful ire, and I swore to do him all sorts of evil I could think of doing to such a wicked one. But though I raged on my fury was nothing compared to that of Nojayiti. She said it out loud and clear that a creature of such dishonourable habits, such a gossip as that and ungrateful wretch will never again set his foot inside her gates. Over and above all that anger remained the debilitating humiliation in the allegation that she was poor in cooking something in which she prided herself.

I was extremely happy when Qolwana gave us a wide berth during the days of this revelation, and it seemed that he had become nervous.

One day I undertook a journey to Alice braving a hot weather. On my way back I could not wait to get to my house as I was badly missing my wife, and I was already uttering all the endearments as I travelled, in anticipation of her delicious lunch, the nice coffee that I enjoy so much which had been discredited by that creature whom I now hate so much. Just as I was approaching the house I was welcomed by my wife's generous laughter, which was accompanied by a male voice I could not recognize at first. I got there and was shocked to find at a table elegantly covered with white cloth there perched Qolwana his wretchedly false mouth stuffed so full of food he could hardly speak.

For quite a while I was suffocated by anger and could not speak. How could this woman lock herself in with a puff adder! How could she feed a creature who had denigrated her so much with falsehood before all the Gqunukhwebe people! "Nojayiti! Nojayiti!" I burst out asking in a flurry of words, "How could you, dear wife, feed a puff adder?"

Both Nojayiti and the said puff adder glanced at each other and at me alternately, and it was clear that they were more astonished than I was astounded. I added a cautioning and

said, "Nojayiti, don't you know, have you forgotten that this one now spreads falsehood throughout the village about us?"

"Tyhini, people!" exclaimed Nojayiti, at last appearing to sense what it was all about, "Tyhini, what is wrong with people like Koranti? What does conversion mean to some people? Don't you know, love, that the secret of conversion is not only to love those who have not angered you but also love you, because the tax collectors do love those that love them. How different is your love, Tipha, from that of the scribes and the pharisees when you are so partial in matters of faith?"

"Tell him, sister, tell him, Nojayiti, we are the true converts," said Qolwana, giggling delightedly, "Tell him of the limited faith, that the Scriptures say, 'Thou shalt not forgive him who wrongs you seven times only, but you shall forgive him seventy times multiplied by seven!'"

"Well spoken, Hlathi: Well spoken!" said Nojayiti, whereupon she poured him a cup of the creamiest coffee of all she had ever brewed.

25. The headman's obsession

An idiom of the white people says a nation is given leaders who are identified with its aspirations, this meaning that if the nation is cruel its leaders are likewise cruel, an idiom that suggests that it is no use blaming those who are cruel, the people should themselves do some self-searching and introspection and improve themselves. One speaker once illustrated this by pointing out how animals adopt identical features with their places of habitat, indicating that a snake that has green grass as its habitat is also green, the lizard that spends its life among dark rocks also becomes dark in colour; it was also showing the same truth that leaders take after their people, it is no use blaming them in isolation. If a leader, be he teacher or pastor be he in any profession at all--if he commits transgressions, in doing such things he is not alone but he does them together with the people of that nation. It is their permissiveness that allows him, whether for love of each other they keep a blind eye to these transgressions in their own offspring.

It is thus not certain whether our village was influenced by such conditions to elect Gxelesha, as its headman. My wife's sister's husband, Gxelesha, was a heavy drinker and a violent man, and none ever thought this man could be elected, headman of that graceful village of Njwaxa, but then he was elected, an event which astonished the very village that elected him.

This village, however, had been overcome by something that confuses everyone, for there occurred, a whole year before the election of a new headman, a strange happening. All of a sudden this man from the Kwayi families was converted, and we witnessed his regular attendance of the services and progressive associations, he completely gave up drinking and fighting, refraining from all beer-drinking parties. The one other person, besides his wife Tawuse, who was extremely pleased by this conversion was Nojayiti, for she singularly

loved her misbehaving brother-in-law, which further endeared him to me.

It is around that time that he became obsessed by the idea of a headmanship, and he often pleaded with Nojayiti to use her influence and spread the news of his suitability for headmanship within and without the congregation. With that Ngconde (mKwayi) had backed the winner, because Nojayiti had the strongest influence throughout that whole village. He would first draw in the women with her kindness and her ever-present coffee which was destined to ruin me in my poverty. To win the women in any race means that you have equally nailed all their husbands down.

Though I liked my mfumbesi (wife's sister's husband) so much I had not been blinded by his former misdemeanours and I still held him in covert suspicion, which in turn gave me a bit of embarrassment, but a lingering suspicion made me feel that this was not a sincere conversion, but had been caused by the knowledge he possessed that the old headman was leaving his position in a year's time, and Ngconde wanted to be without blemish when elections came.

I can still recall the day on which I got a severe chastisement, when I voiced this opinion to Nojayiti, and she belched out all she could remember, comparing me to all sorts of creatures for entertaining such wicked designs. She gave me a sobering sermon about the evils of suspicion, and even told me that self-centeredness was one of my shortcomings, imagining myself better than others and believing I am the absolute and most upright soul on earth. I quickly repented and pleaded forgiveness stating that these were not in fact my feelings, but I was just giving her an indication of the things cruel people said, whereupon the idol consoled me with her dimples and smilingly said, "I knew all along that it could not be my own Korrie who was saying these things--it was Satan!"

"It's him, it's him, dear wife." I floundered in an affirmation, "Indeed that was him, this is Satan's old trick, to see himself better than others." Though I said this I still remained unconvinced, pitying the Devil at the same time,

having made him by my own utterances to carry the blame on this one occasion.

Instead of discouraging my wife, these disparaging remarks propelled her. From that day on there were rivers of coffee in my house and bread became the thing with which to stone each other, with Nojayiti harping on one line, that there never was, never is, and never will be anyone else who will be as suitable for the village's headmanship as her brother-in-law, Gxelesha. With upper lips sweating women infiltrated groups competing among themselves for the best way to express their support of Nojayiti and what she was saying that the village would have found itself an angel on earth if ever it elected Gxelesha as its headman, something that soon made it to seek the one person only, Gxelesha.

Time passed in that manner until the old headman left his position for retirement granted by the Government, and the important day of the election of the headman finally came. As will be expected he outvoted by a large margin, as a horse outpaces a donkey, all those who had been nominated by the few who still held onto their disparaging remarks, and so the eminent mKwayi ascended onto the position of headmanship.

There were great celebrations, popular dancing, men's dancing, the people were made mad by such success. While they thus rejoiced with me also trying to display some mirth, I soon became quite distressed by, and actually groaned inwardly when I say the expenses such success caused us. When I made a mental calculation of the expenditure on coffee, sugar, and bread, I realized that the costs far exceeded my monthly income.

All those people who now filled our house had been invited by Nojayiti to come and share views with us about this grand success, and Nojayiti was herself filled with joy for she knew that all that success had been made possible by her influence in the village.

Speakers spoke until their navels caved in on that day, all of them congratulating the new Headman, giving free advice, and also explaining what headmanship means. Maxandeka rose, a well-known orator, defining headmanship and what its

work entails and explaining that a headman is the father of his village, he represents the people in Government circles, and he speaks on their behalf, seeking out and harnessing opportunities for them. He then suggested that a headman is a servant of his people who should make all forms of sacrifice for them, who should accept to starve while there is even one of his people who is in distress.

Vusumzi jumped up to add to this, stating that the headman is the one person who should prevent people from gambling with lawsuits, showing at the same time that the success of a competent headman is measured by the scarcity of lawsuits, the absence of drinking parties and excessive drinking, as well as in his own endeavour to encourage the general public to live respectable lives. Men and women crowded each other like that all of them agreeing that success of a headman and his village is to live Christian lives and in a respectable existence.

As I directed my eyes at the majestic fellow, mfumbesi, I felt the tears crossing the bridge of my nose. I noticed that he was quite like a bride, without a word, and it appeared that all the wise remarks were being absorbed through both ears.

After all the speakers had had their say people got up and left, leaving myself, Nojayiti and Tawuse still fighting our tears. I was jolted from that calm by a rapturous jolly voice, as mfumbesi rose to his feet, addressing his wife thus, "I swear by my mother, by my sister! You are going to be fat as a sheltered ground. Tshangisa, you are going to have your fill of all the meat of the court until you break a tooth!"

As he concluded he turned to address me producing a nip of brandy which he had kept hidden in his pocket and taking a quick sip, saying, "I swear by my mother, my sister! By Chungwa lying dead at Mnyameni. Kama with half his second finger cut off! I shall enjoy liquor and the women, and the meat now that I have finally got the headmanship of this village."

26. Cross-purposes

Magebengwana, that being the son of my great friend Gxelesha, was a very clever boy. Outside school he showed a marked intelligence, but as soon as he got to school he became something else. One of the reasons for this was his poor attendance at school; even when he started it was a great struggle. All that was as a result of the manner in which his mother pampered him, as well as my in-law, Tawuse.

As he was so spoilt at his home, Qebi did not last long at school, where he remained outside the school, wallowing in idleness outside the school-room. As will be understood, he left school at very low levels.

It was not long after he left school, that he and his equals joined the contract workers and went to work at the mines in Johannesburg. As a spoilt child he soon found the mine being the worst place ever for him. On his arrival he had been sent down the shaft, where he had to dig with a pick-axe, hitting jam-picks and digging out rocks with iron for the whole of the summer's day.

This was quite a difficult matter to Qebi, the great loafer, and the six months of the contract felt like several years to him.

It now became a painful fact to him, when he saw his equals working comfortably, being clerks, touching nothing with their own hands, but earning far bigger monies than he did. At the end of his contract he did not hesitate to take the train determined to go back to school under any circumstances.

But this never happened, because on his arrival back home he found many forms of entertainment. He became a drifter who covered the whole of his home district, being deceived by being recognized as the brave one in the fights. One of the things which occupied him was liquor. At that time all the boys were into the mischief of drinking, not drinking African beer only, but also having perfected the drinking of the white

man's brew. Qebi indulged heavily in this, until it became quite clear that he would soon be an alcoholic.

Just then he got himself an excellent job in King William's Town, near his home. He took up that job with much bragging, and his employers liked him, but even here he did not last for long, because conditions came up which required a little education, and so he had to leave. He came back home in great spiritual pain, regretting the time he wasted until education bypassed him.

He remained at home for quite a while, being a jobless lay-about, and being reluctant even to look for work, for he knew very well that he would never find an easy job. This made her parents extremely unhappy and Nojayiti was herself equally affected as she liked him so much.

Just about those days, as he finished his eighteenth year of age I caught sight of Nojayiti bringing him home with her. On a closer look at him I noticed that the fellow was neatly dressed, carrying by the hand a slate and pencil. I asked Nojayiti what all this meant, and she replied eagerly and said that big boy had seen the folly of his ways and was now returning to school and had made up his mind to study until he was a teacher.

At this I tried to express my own views, to show that for such a sluggard to think he could still study was a fairy-tale, but it soon became clear that I was creating enmity for myself. Thus went the school child and her aunt to school.

At that time our school teacher was a very well-informed man about his work. He gladly took up the boy and registered him in Standard 3. That turned out to be a wise decision by the teacher, because Qebi did wonders, revealed something all of us never knew he had before. He showed much diligence; he persevered despite the giggling of other children for his age which was too incongruous for that level.

Though he had to skip a couple of levels to be in Standard 3 because of his age, that problem soon sorted itself out and he picked up his subject at an exceptional pace, and by the end of that year he knew everything there was to know in Standard 3. He passed and proceeded to Standard 4. I could

well describe the joy of us all when he passed Standard 3. I can still remember to this day how Nojayiti rose at the congratulatory dinner to prophesy that soon the boy would be the principal teacher of the local school.

The fellow came to Standard 4 exhibiting much purity, one who had long forsaken evil practices, one who made even a skeptic agree that Nojayiti did need to swallow her words, for the fellow stuck to his books with fierce concentration. This inspired the whole village with one desire, that being to see a child from it at last becoming a teacher. Actually though the school was very old in the village there had never come out of it a child who grew up to be a teacher.

Prayers were made at congregations and associations, appealing to the heavens to abide by this child, who after growing up, has repented and shown such admirable behaviour. Every Thursday Nojayiti would rise at the sisters' gathering, and start her favourite hymn,

"Yesu sivelele
Khaka Nqaba yethu,
Siza, Nkosi, kuwe
Neziphoso zethu.

* * *

Siphe ooSamuweli,
Siphe ooDibhora;
Baqhube le nqwelo
YeVangeli yakho.

* * *

De iintlanga zonke
Ze-Afrika zithi:-
Ma'mongwe uYesu
Osenyangweni. Amen."

"Jesus bear with us,
You who is our Shield, our
Fortress,
We come to you, O Lord,
With all our guilt.

* * *

Give us the likes of Samuel,
Give us the likes of Deborah;
To steer ahead this wagon
Of you Evangelism.

* * *

Until all nations
In Africa say:-
Let Jesus be praised
In his sanctuary. Amen."

Time passed on well enough until the examinations day came, when Qebi would undergo his Standard 4 examinations. He trotted across those examinations and passed in flying colours.

As usual a big number of relatives gathered at Qebi's home on that special evening, to congratulate him for such remarkable success. In that hubbub of singing Nojayiti rose in

great excitement and pride--being the aunt of the day, and said, "Say now! Say now, Qebi, just say it out yourself and tell us your aim, tell us what you are studying to be."

"I have finished, auntie," said the grand fellow smiling broadly, "Today I have passed the key examinations--Standard 4."

"Why do you say so, my lad?" asked his father surprised, "Why do you say Standard 4 is the key examination?"

Exhausted by his own joy and laughter Qebi replied saying, "Well, now, father, I can enter a bottle store as you often do with your Standard 4 certificate."

27. Secret ingredient for peace

Someone once said that money changes friends into enemies. Indeed he was right. Many of our enemies in the little home that Nojayiti and I had were caused by money. We were not rich at all but people just beset us with borrowing as though we were as rich as kings. All this was caused by Nojayiti's weakness when it came to lending people money and her unrivalled generosity in rewarding other people.

It was even more amazing when she persisted in her attitude and never relented even when the borrowers seemed determined to put us to sorrow. Never, mNgwevukazi was not to be broken down. Most of those people made sure we never saw them again after the day they came to borrow. Those we could still see tended to do worse than the former one, because for months and months they would still not pay us back, and then they would themselves turn sour and would not even want to greet us.

The very thing happened the day we helped to save Nogrulukile from trouble. She came to us in tears because her husband and child were ill and she needed an amount of about one pound. She told us how callous the people of the village were, stating that she saw everyone of them in a bid to get this money, but none of them showed any mercy.

I winked at Nojayiti, I even whispered it into her ears, that there must be a reason why the whole village showed her no mercy, but my poor advice passed unheeded. Our eminent member left in high spirits, and then a very long time passed and many events came about before we could again behold our good friend.

After not seeing her for quite a long time, long after her husband and child recovered, Nojayiti went to demand our money. She was led to believe this and that which she could not really follow and finally left that house empty-handed. After that this lady continued to arrange one date after another, but always on the appointed date she would switch to another date for one reason or the other.

Our feet became sore as we walked to and fro trying to get our money back, which we never received, but instead what happened was that our friend soon lost her charm and sympathy for us; until on Nojayiti's last day to see her there developed a loud exchange of rough language, with the eminent member storming with fury, castigating Nojayiti for her lack of good manners, and saying that she has such dirty manners for pressurizing another person about such a small amount of money.

Well, such insolence was still a lesser evil compared to what Songololo Mbekembeke did to us. We lent him a milk-cow, which soon calved and in due time it had produced a herd, so that Mbekembeke could continue to milk and to plough, and there was life in the family. It was such a bad day indeed when I came to fetch that stock, offering as I did to give him a sprightly heifer from the four cattle, the fifth being the mother cow. Mbekembeke just stormed about cursing, stating that he had actually bought the cow from me.

I gave up that cow and its offspring and left and then he added insult to injury by brewing intense hatred against me, refusing even to look at me.

That was exactly what Dubulekhwele Mpendulo did. He came to my house, found I was away, and borrowed my Sunday pair of trousers from my wife. We went to and fro in an effort to get that pair of trousers, but this fellow just would not return it, and finally he announced that I would never get it back because my grandmother's grandfather died before he could pay his mother-in-law's grandmother's father's uncle, a recollection that indeed got me quite confused, not being able to recall why and wherefore, whereupon I gave up the trousers in the end. Without knowing it I had invited much trouble by this decision because the anger Dubulekhwele brewed up after this ultimately caused him to summon me to the court at the great place and before the church councils, accusing me of diverse transgressions known and unknown, something that greatly handicapped me, because naturally I am too dumb in matters of the law and I am ignorant about court procedures.

My wife excelled herself in rescuing me from that quagmire with her excellent advice and prayer.

As for me, I learnt a lesson on that day regarding taking anyone to task about my belongings, and I thought that Nojayiti had been thoroughly grilled only to find I was wrong. One day Nojayiti lost her favourite hen, which her mother-in-law had given her while she was still alive. It was a really old hen, it could no longer predict the approach of the early light, but she loved it as though it held her with a magic charm.

When this hen got lost my wife was just mad, and in frantic haste she set off on her search, and all that time I kept following her at a safe distance in great anxiety. Something quite amazing took place, because she soon caught up with a trail like a dog, and I watched her making for Nohalala's house, a certain mSukwinikazi who is also our neighbour, and once there she made for a pile of wood, ramaged and came out with the feet and head of her hen, her very hen, not any other. Nohalala became spell-bound and could not speak. I tried the best I could to plead with my wife but she leapt like a shadow onto the road to the headman's to lay a charge.

There wasn't much to say and Nohalala was found guilty and was fined two goats, one for the court, the other one for us. Indeed I would be lacking in truthfulness if I suggest that we ever had any peace anymore. From that day on Nohalala went talking about us, announcing our cruelty, stating our poverty, saying we are stingy misers who lived by accusing other people of stealing our hens. Things became really bad when half the village sided with Nohalala, our cruelty was unforgettable, we were the things that had neither friends nor neighbours, we were things that took people to court for a mere chicken, all of them stressing that we were unjustly accusing that lady, because we wanted to earn a living by trickery.

Where the shock really got me was that all this was said even by those who had been at court, who had witnessed how Nohalala had nothing to say for herself and how she had

pleaded guilty. When I defended myself by asking why the people as a whole sympathized with a thief, punishing those who had something stolen from them, there was one answer, "We of the Gqunukhwebe region do not pass confidential information, we withhold it.

We continued to suffer a wretched existence amidst our neighbours, and Nojayiti now understood what she had failed to grasp before, that in this village the one who received any sympathy was the thief and not the one who suffered losses. All became painfully sore to me as I watched my wife languishing in isolation in her house, all our friends gone, honestly, with everyone using a thumb to point at us, the informers, creatures that never knew and would never know the Gqunukhwebe ethics. Half-way through those days I noticed that my wife was worried; she remained in deep thought, but I could not even suspect the possibility of what she finally resolved to do.

On a certain day I went to look for a lost calf, and I left in the early light to return at sunset. Just as I was approaching home, I heard much noise and singing coming from my house, and I wondered who was responsible for this jubilation. Approaching I could see Nojayiti standing before that jubilant crowd, addressing them enthusiastically. I got in just as she was saying, "Yes, fellow villagers, you have been invited to come and accept apology from the Tipha family. I have been honoured by your presence, descendant of Mpendulo and you Nohalala, and you, child of my family, Songololo, and also you Nogrulukile. I also refer to all those we've ever sighted. We beg your forgiveness Nogrulukile for putting you under pressure when you owed us some money, and from you, child of my family, Songololo, for bothering you by attempting to lay a claim on the loaned cow. We beg forgiveness from you, our sister, Nohalala for ever dragging you through a court case after stealing a chicken. Anyway, what worth is a beruffled old hen, that we can have you arrested for stealing it being yourself our neighbour? Yes, my friends, I agree that the fault is with me in this matter, I alone am responsible, I have done wrong even to mislead my husband here and to have

him by the nose so that now he is at war with you. We, therefore, beg you at this hour, for all the trouble we've ever caused you."

The jubilant song rose even higher, with all the house shouting, "We forgive you both! We forgive you both, Jayijayi!" While they thus chorused themselves I disappeared into my room, my heart still bleeding with the grief caused by what my wife had spoken. How could such a good wife, how could an angel begrime herself thus, to say she is at fault for all those evil things these people had done to us? Also to claim before so many people that my wife had me by the nose tortured me severely.

My wife found me thus engaged in my thoughts in our own room. At once I cried, "How could you, Nojayiti, what sorts of things were those you were saying to the people who have just been here?"

She smiled and her dimples, which I worship so much, formed up as she said, "Tyhini, SekaNggayimbana, do you mean that all along you did not know the secret recipe for living in peace with other people?"

"I know, I know, NakanNggayimbana, it specifies that the transgressor is the one who begs forgiveness, not for an angel herself to begrime herself with mud thus attempting to please the wicked people."

My wife laughed a little and said, "No, dear Tipha, that is exactly where you make a mistake. An earthling never finds himself at fault, which then necessitates that you should then condemn yourself first; only then will the son of Adam and the daughter of Eve not forget you for your reason and kindness and meanwhile you already know that you are a saint who has never sinned.

As my wife called me sweet names and kissed me repeatedly I succumbed and yielded to her language though my heart was not yet fully reconciled to this horror. But within a matter of days all my discontent had melted down, because, as of yore, people filled our home like a swarm of bees; they loved us, admired us, were amazed at our reason, until my heart sang for joy, except for the expenses incurred to supply the

streams of coffee which Nojayiti had gone back to serving, something that I have long given up seeing her recovering from because of her overwhelming generosity.

28. Pandemonium

Nothing on earth is more cherrished by Nojayiti than education. She persisted and worshipped and devoted herself to it. Her daily lamentation was her not having gone to school. I tried my best to console her by pointing out that this did not show at all--but all that was in vain. Everyday I would tell her that she excels all the women of this world, she is more enlightened than all the lady teachers, she cooks better than them, she speaks better English than them, her conversation is more constructive than theirs--but all this was to no avail.

After all her lamentation she resolved to do one thing, that being to apply all her powers to the education of her children, since she had herself missed the opportunity to learn. Even there she encountered much pain, because the children acquiesced to her sentiments. Our eldest child Nggayimbana soon showed us, and while we sent him to school determined to give him good education, he bolted, my friend, and off he went to the mines, and once there he specialized in squandering money.

Even there, Nojayiti never gave up preaching school education. She preached education within and without the church. I do not remember a single day when she forgot to mention in her prayers the children of this race, that they be blessed with education. There was not a single day when the family prayer was concluded without her favourite words:

"Nkosi, khawusikelele
Iimfundiso zezwe lethu;
Uze usivuselele,
Siphuthume ukulunga."

"Lord, bless
The education of our country;
And encourage us,
To return to goodness.

MNgwevukazi talked the language of education: she talked everyone to silence, and it seemed that she held her subject clear to her.

I still remember to this day the words she used to say, some of them indicating that school children are most fortunate, they are like cattle grazing delicious grass in the meadow. She used to say that anyone who rejected education is

no different from a thirsty horse which, on being taken to the river, refuses to drink. She would argue and show that all the nations that are famous today were lent that fame by education and she would then show that all those that desisted perished like obsolete ideas.

While my wife preached that good evangelism, Nziphonde, a fellow from the Qadi families, emerged, being a fellow whose words were always taken heed of in the village. This fellow, Nziphonde, loathed education more than anything on earth. Those who know used to say that this loathing was a new development, that it was first noticed the day his only boy played truant and that even before reaching the first level. Those who cared less for him suggested that his loathing was simply caused by envy and he was envious of those children who still went to school

A vindication of this did come about, for this fellow could not even look at a school child, and he would criticise him even for his neat clothes saying that he was arrogant and was trying to turn himself into a white man whom he would never be. There was one thing that Nziphonde liked very much--ploughing--but even there he had found something by which to formulate his insults, whereby he would declare that all children were clumsy and knew nothing about ploughing, things that perpetually stared at a book as though they would have to eat it to survive.

Qadi greatly influence the village with this teaching, and, because he was an eloquent speaker, there were soon several followers. It was a sad thing for Nojayiti as she watched the number in her people's school gradually diminishing because of Nziphonde's teachings, saying school people are clumsy and idle, they are alcoholics, they lack respect, and they all end up running away from home to become worthless layabouts. What made things even worse for Nojayiti was that he quoted well-known names of children who had been educated in that village only to suffer that fate. However she would sometimes make an occasional attempt to show that the illiterate ones are also like that, showing that Nziphonde's son is himself lost and no one even knew if he was still

alive. But her words as much as the words of those few who still thought like her fell on deaf ears.

In addition to her frustration a great disaster came about in the village which nearly rendered my wife stark mad. The school which was already one-legged for shrinkage of the numbers of school kids was now demoted by the Government from Standard 4 to Sub-B.

For days my wife wept; in no time she became as thin as a rake, her complexion also changed. My own wretchedness at this change is unimaginable, as I watched my idol losing her beauty to become something I could not tell. My heart was darkened by revenge, directed at Nziphonde, and I hated him most intensely because I knew that the reason for all this tragedy, its beginning and its end, was him, but I remained helplessly wrapped in my own sorrow. Instead of this bringing about regret to Nziphonde he became all the more malicious; he toured the village, a grin of triumph in his face and wherever he went he announced that now was the time for us to secure our children for ploughing.

Nojayiti continued her life of extreme sadness, and all became so lonely in the house, for she spoke to no one and remained locked up in her room, where she would maintain a brooding silence sometimes, and at other times she would break into song and sorrowfully sing,

"Bona izwe lakowethu, Uxolel'zono zalo Ungathob'ingqumbo yakho, Luze luf'usapho lwalo."	See the land that is ours, And forgive it its sins Do not unleash your anger, And destroy its offspring."
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MNgwevuakazi would then continue thus,

"Yala singatshabalali, Usiphile ukhanyiso; Bawo ungasibulali Ngokudela inyaniso."	Forbid our destruction, So have given us the light; Father do not put us to death For denying the truth."
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Whenever I heard that good man's child saying that tears flowed down my face. My hatred for Nziphonde and his lot would then grow from strength to strength.

It was under such circumstances that the school's big day, the closing day finally came. All the villagers, men and

women, were brought to the school hall to receive a report about its progress, and they had come in their numbers to hear for themselves exactly what had caused the Government which had been so patient all along to suddenly decide to demote the school. The hall was full to the brim with the headman himself being there, and that is the beast I kept scathing with a vengeful eye, because he had proved himself the expert and champion at destroying that school with his lack of responsibility, where he focused on only one thing, drinking beer and eating meat.

Speakers took the floor, women and men, after the headman's oration, where he and his people expressed sadness at being deprived of education. It was then that Nojayiti took the floor, and she was burning with emotion, whereupon the eminent mNgwevukazi said, "Hold it, people of the Gqunukhwebe regions, all that has happened has no sign of evil at all to my view, it only demonstrates the evil and sorrow to which we have descended."

At once the hall roared, and Tshangisa continued, saying, "But to me this seems to be fortune in disguise. We have all along been wasting our children's time at school, where the child would waste valuable time for years--trying to reach Standard 4. All that is now over. Our children will only learn to write, and after passing Sub-B they can leave school to help with domestic chores. Only now are we going to enjoy the great privilege Qadi Nziphonde himself has been longing for for so long, which the Headman and the village as a whole have been longing for. Yes indeed, our children are going to plough the land for us."

When I heard all this I popped out my eyes so intensely they could have exploded, and at once gripped by a chilling pang of fear thinking that too much anxiety had finally rendered my wife mad. How could it be her, herself in person, to speak such callous talk? In my bewilderment my eyes searched for those of Nziphonde, almost certainly expecting to see that broad idiotic grin, for in the end he had converted, indeed converted Nojayiti, the stalwart, but what I saw fascinated me even more. I saw the thing panting with fury,

the thing was staring at Nojayiti with such deliberate scorn that it looked as though he would swallow her alive, something which to me was so enigmatic I almost thought I was having a nightmare.

So proceeded Nojayiti and said, "Can't you see for yourselves, people of the Gqunukhwebe regions, that this process of educating children is a waste of time? Where is our family heir, Ngqayimbana? Was he not carried by the very education which lost him in Johannesburg? Where are all your children whom you educated at great expense? What have they ever done for you? Who can still deny that education breeds rascals, alcoholics and prodigal children?"

By the time my wife sat down I already had an attack of short breath, her speech having thus shaken me, and I could not even rise to explain to the crowd that they should not keep anything she said, because they had my assurance that she was not well, and all that comes from a severely troubled and depressed mind.

Just then the meeting came to an end, and there was a general babble, but I could not even catch what that crowd was talking about. I managed to shuffle forward, taking my wife along by the arm, my guts grumbling horribly because of the disaster that had befallen me to have my beloved wife breaking down like this. We got home without a word, and my wife went to sleep being the worst of all idiots there ever were, while I made up my mind to get up at dawn the following day, get a span of oxen and get her to the doctor.

To this day I shall never forget what I heard and what I saw early the following day. I was woken up by familiar loud laughing with Nojayiti's usual healthy, rain-water fresh voice calling my name and my wife was saying, "SekaNgqayimbana! SekaNgqayimbana, come out and see the Creator's miracles!"

Imagine what my eyes met! There was a procession stretching from the beginning of the village to the school, all the village children led by Nziphonde with the Headman blanking him with all the opposers of education in the village, all of them shouting one slogan, "We are going to educate our own children even if Koranti and his lot together

with their wives may attempt to mislead us in any way possible!"

Beaming with joy and gratitude I spoke to Nojayiti asking from her in great surprise what had caused her to speak as she had done at the meeting. She laughed in her usual matter-of-fact manner and said, "Don't you know, SekaNggayimbana, that people as a rule never follow a good lesson? You just stress the uncomplimentary points, and then they will begin to demand the good thing. Moreover, as soon as you criticize anything they become suspicious that you want to make a profit alone and then they go for it."

And indeed Nziphonde did just that. Soon after the meeting he toured the village stating that Nojayiti was attempting to double-cross them, she wants to be the only one educating her children in that village, and that was how Nziphonde's pandemonium came about and in that way salvation too came by in the village and the children went to school.

29. Promotion that caused much crying

I like the people of my village more than any other people. The way I see it no other community anywhere in the world can ever be as kind as these people. Men and women, young men and girls are all nice and kind. These people have a gift of love, are eager talkers and are ever happy. Women are even more open-hearted. All of them are pretty, kind-hearted and exceedingly clever ladies.

Life went on in that harmony in the village, with the young people having their own games and the women their own. Of all the games and funfares that used to be performed there was one that I personally preferred. It was called the fine. This took the place of what the white people like doing. Well, whites socialize by inviting each other to tea parties, with one family inviting a number of others to come and have tea or meals with them on some appointed day. There is, in fact nothing like that in our village just as it is not a familiar occurrence anywhere among the Xhosa people. The place of that, as we have already indicated, was taken by these organized fines.

Whenever a junior woman was at fault with a senior woman the latter would then say, "You have done me wrong by this and that, So-and-so, so I impose a fine upon you." The transgressor would normally begin by pleading with her judge, but the other would not hear of it and uphold the fine. Thereupon, the transgressor would be forced to spend money in the vicinity of one pound, a little more or a little less depending on affordability, and she would then buy coffee, sugar, milk, flour and such like. Then the women of the village would invite each other, and there would be a big celebration on those items and there would be singing and jubilation.

This was greatly admired, because it made us all happy, and the grudges caused by gossipers would vanish for a while, as all the women came together and conversed, sang cracked jokes at each other's expense, advised each other, talked

about domestic affairs, just as the white people used to do in their own gatherings.

In all this Xhosa affair, age is the guiding factor. It was such a joy to observe the women organizing themselves according to their allocated positions. Elderly women would lean on their walking sticks and go to sit on the mats laid down for them. There the eminent ladies seat themselves presiding over the occasion with great dignity. Playing their part they give commands to those immediately below them, who in turn pass these to those who are further down, until they reach the junior women who do the cooking and prepare the beverages. These provisions would be sufficient to cover everyone, because the junior woman who had been fined would not make a solitary sacrifice. Over and above her fee all her colleagues would contribute their own substantial amounts. When one of them has been fined the rest of them are equally affected, all of them are subjected to correction. The fun of all this is that it is all a game, and the one who has been fined pays only because she wishes to entertain the others. That was also where Nojayiti and I always just averted conflict, because for love of entertaining other people she was simply never exhausted by making that rain of coffee for the people who always came to our house. Quite often when an old woman visited us, Nojayiti would playfully tease her, and the old cow would immediately resort to that fine, and that meant that I would be the one to deep his hand in the pocket, to pay the fine. Nevertheless all the revolt within me would soon quiet down as I watched the eminent lady enjoying herself at the centre of all those women who would be competing in praising her for her kindness and her dancing, something I have never seen another woman do with such grace, and, of course, the musical voice of mNgwevukazi. We men also used to come and watch on, where we would then be treated with great hospitality and given the beverages to drink to our fill.

At such jubilations a review of seniority groups would sometimes be made, that is, promotions to senior levels of certain groups would be made. This promotion is a very important issue, my friend, because it required intense

preparations in this vicinity. It is a privilege that is desired by all the women of the village. Nothing goes without confrontations and arguments in life. In this too conflicts soon came about. Just as people cannot all be loved on one level, that the elders were prejudiced in their promotions soon became quite an issue. But, indeed, to speak the truth the elders were not unjustly accused, because No-emele for one remained at the level of junior women until she came to the end of the child-bearing age; meanwhile senior women would not bother themselves even when they were asked about her case, and often one of them would cry, "Ii! Stop telling us about a nobody!"

As for Nojayiti, she went through all these stages like a race horse and often the senior women would be extremely touchy, threatening to break up the gathering, whenever anyone asked them why Nojayiti was promoted alone. Many times I secretly hoped the senior women would be thwarted in these promotions, because I knew that after the process not a single senior woman would leave without a heavy load of my coffee and sugar at the end of a quick visit to our house the following day.

Any matter that involves corruption usually causes much disagreement in the end. I say this in one of these gatherings, where the senior women finally gave in. On that day No-emele stood her ground, stating that it would never happen again that her juniors would be promoted; she declared on that day that she would never again honour the grades, she would gate-crash and eat even from the highly honoured tray of the senior women. She heatedly demanded to know which chief's year of circumcision coincides with Koranti's graduation into manhood, to warrant Nojayiti's seniority which is second only to that of the senior women, and she immediately pointed out that her husband was equal to Chief Tshingilani whereas Koranti went to circumcision with Chief Tamsanqa, which is clear evidence that he is junior to her husband, and further exposes the fallacy that Nojayiti could never be senior to her.

A crisis situation now developed, with every two women arguing between themselves, one saying, "My own husband equals Chief Moltini," and the other one responding, "Mine is Njengele's" and that was it, soon it seemed they would be at each other's throats. But this crisis was soon diffused by Nojayiti who said, "Please, good women, I do not even know these chiefs, because I am a woman, and I never went to circumcision. Leave all this to the mothers, they know better than us." The senior women were at once filled with admiration and praised Nojayiti, the clever child, whereupon the other women succumbed, because all the people of this world need a little appreciation from the elders.

After that day I noticed that Nojayiti was preoccupied with something, and quite often I caught her in a brown study, never paying attention to what I said. Eventually I confronted her about this and then she told me what was troubling her soul. She explained to me that the last gathering had clearly shown the evil that destroyed the black community, the very evil that retards our progress, that being the evil of worshipping high positions. She showed me all the danger of this, stating that it is the cause of all these splinter groups in church and in civil association, because everyone desires to be in charge, to be in control. My beautiful girl imparted to me that from now on her priority would be to fight that disease out of the village. I too encouraged her in her undertaking, though I could not dream of any possible strategy of launching such a task.

Just then, the day that was destined to become a red letter day for me was announced. In their own council, a rather dictatorial council at that the elderly women had decided that Nojayiti should now be promoted to that final and most privileged grade of all, that being their own grade. This gave me a grave shock, because all those ladies were very old women indeed, all of them had wrinkles, their heads were grey. All of them were bent double, indeed enjoying a venerable old age, all of them using walking sticks for support. I puzzled over the credibility of all this, because, as for Nojayiti herself, though her years were not just few any more, was

plump in her appearance because of her extremely attractive features, she walked briskly, and her hair was as black as ebony.

Though I was surprised by all this my heart jumped for joy, when I witnessed how my wife was flattered by this news, and when I saw the joy of everyone in the village, I felt reassured that this had obviously provoked no envy, for everyone felt that a deserving person had been dully rewarded.

All the village women turned up on that great day, and there was coffee and tea all round. Like termites people converged to Novili's rondavel, where my beauty who does not deserve to die was to be crowned. On that day the eminent lady tried one dress after another, and to crown it all she donned a headgear that was nothing like all the other women. To this day I can still remember the day, when she kissed me most lovingly and effecting a perfect walk, left me still waiting for other men who would pass by so that we would all go to the drinking party together.

Cups passed on unendingly, and there was happy singing, while we, the men, looked on and enjoyed ourselves. At last it was announced that Nojayiti should rise and take her place among those dignified women. I opened my eyes wide as my wife sat in her place, getting them ready to take in all that perfect beauty of Tshangisa. What! The shock I got! The noise caused by the singing and the general excitement--all these came to an awfully abrupt end. All the eyes were directed at Nojayiti; there she sat at her place of promotion, the very sight of misery itself, with tears of utter bitterness flowing down her cheeks.

"What's the matter, Nojayiti? What's the matter, Nojayiti?" cried everyone.

After a long painful time of her silence she answered in a trembling voice and said, "Woe is me, women of prayer, in fact, as you see me seated among these wrinkled wretches, I have myself finally reached advanced old age, and my arrival here means that the journey from the start has been far too long already, and the destination is near at hand; I was not

in such a hurry to receive this grade because of one thing, that soon I shall die. Let us kneel down and pray, women!"

All that multitude bent down in tears, weeping and everyone was praying for humility so that they could be given the power to prepare for the future life.

30. They warn you not

Typical for things on this earth to turn sour. Things looked good for me until I got converted. I say so because I used to vagabond freely doing whatever pleased me to do. I used to eat meat from my family's dead beasts until my stomach ballooned, and no one asked me anything. I used to visit all drinking parties, touring the whole of the Ggunukhwebe region at will, and it was all so good. But on a day I shall never forget I went to a Christian encounter, where all of a sudden I lost my bearing altogether; there I was, carried away by emotion to kneel before the pulpit, and that became the end of it all. After that I became such a devoted and most enthusiastic convert.

By then, I was not yet aware that I would be prevented from doing all sorts of things, yes, blocked from all the pleasures. I was, however, startled from the beginning when it was ordered that a person should not eat meat from his own cattle, or a goat's meat--in fact any kind of stock--if it had died on its own. With reference to liquor it was worse, our evangelist, a man called Chophile, did not want to hear of someone who drinks, and he openly declared that such a person deserved the eternal furnace of hell. He preached this within and without the church, with Qabelisile, his right-hand follower constantly fuelling this sermon. As for Qabelisile, he did not even want to look into a drinker's face. I dared to ask him one day rather carelessly where the fault lied when a man had grown his own sorghum, had it prepared himself, only to be told he had sinned so awfully. He just went to town on me, cursing all those who were wayward like me, a creature who, after having left Egypt still missed its pots of oil.

What a miscalculation ever to assume that this could be just a small matter. One gathering after the other was organized where I was interrogated and asked to reveal the source of this information; how could I have such odd little questions so soon after joining the congregation. What made things worse was that even Nojayiti, whom I had trusted would

be on my side, kept sneering at me, for having no shame to ask such questions from the people of the Lord. People like Maweni, Machibini, Gxamthwana and their wives, Noziyengana, Nontwikunina, all co-starred in the discussions, all of them maintaining that a thing of my nature should be excommunicated from the church of the Lord before I taught other people such wayward habits. That was the day I really got my lesson, and I never again asked such a question in church.

Just a Sunday after those gatherings the steward preached a loaded sermon to the congregation, in which he referred to those who embrace all, things which remain in church with one foot while the other foot is in the jungle; they still want to mix with the non-believers in their heathen ways, whereupon he hammered home the fact that the worst thing is for a convert to continue cherrishing things that can only be compared to sacrifices. He traced the roots of this sin until it dawned upon me, and I became quite convinced that in my present mood I would never again cherrish heathen sacrifices. My father's sons persisted to call at us, asking me to go and preside over the family rituals in their homes, reminding me that I was the eldest, nothing could be fulfilled if I did not participate in it, but I refused to yield to them. My reply was only one, that being the matter of sacrificial offerings was corrected by the Lord, and became the ultimate sacrifice on the cross; what were the sacrifices they demanded in aid of.

While I was still such a perfect convert a crisis befell us in the house. The first boy of our first son fell ill most severely. Soon his side, mouth, eyes, the lot, got twisted to one side, and he was moaning with severe pains. While I was still cornered like that, there came my own father's lads, and they were not referring to yesterday's talk anymore, but were now saying that if you and your conversion are planning to destroy the entire Tipha family, we are going to cure him ourselves, and you can continue to nurse your own death yourself together with that wife of yours who has you by the nose. Having said that they took their sticks and went to the deviners. I tried to say something but they were not now going to listen to whatever I had to say. The great Bhayeni

offspring left in great haste and were soon back, and upon their return they stated that the child is devined to have seen something that possessed magic powers; he must, therefore, be brought to the river where a sacrifice must be made to the creature of the river. Their explanation brought light to my mind, and at once I knew that the diviner had correctly identified the true cause, he had actually seen where to send the spear, for it had been a very odd thing for a child who had been in good health all day to return from the river with his side twisted and not even being able to speak.

Just as I was beginning to say, "Well then, good Tiphaz, I hear you--" Nojayiti burst out saying that no such customs would be performed in her Christian home, and, already, she was pointing a finger at me, threatening to inform the congregation about me. As I began to explain to her that my family did not belong to any woman, and that men from this family had gone to a deviner and were now back with the news of such importance, Chophile appeared accompanied by his chief elder, Qabelisile.

I hurriedly begged my younger brothers to depart and give me a chance to listen to what these church people had to say. I had not finished my explanation of what my younger brothers were about, when both the Lord's people hollered and accused me of allowing such heathen practices to take place in my house. I tried to explain that these were blood brothers of mine afterall, and I could lend them a hearing even if I was not going to agree to it, but Qabelisile would not hear, telling me point blank that I was leaving the church that very day, and moreover, I would never be considered for a sermon again. At this I gave explaining and pleaded forgiveness; well, you should know what it feels to a black man when he is faced with the danger of forfeiting the opportunity to shout and preach over people. I would not care to conceal, however, that by nightfall that day my soul was quite wounded deep down, because I had seen my child facing death with my own eyes, and what the deviner had said was as clear to me as the sun at midday. But the designs of the Creator can never be

counted, because the very child who was dying when we went to sleep was quite promising the following morning.

The recovery of this child was a good thing to me, it brought me much sermonizing from Nojayiti, who endeavoured to show me my own obstinacy which was refusing to quit as well as failure to trust in God, though He had shown me that very day, and cured the child even before we could resort to heathen practices of diviners. I too became a good convert, and I resolved never to fall back to barbaric practices again, even if peals of thunder tore the heavens apart.

That is why when our headman, offspring of Matyholo and Nqweniso by name, invited the village to a sacrificial ceremony, I did not even bother myself about that. The headman came to tell me, but I told him in the face that I was not party to any such heathen practices. He left a very disappointed man, because him and I were great friends, but I had already made up my mind never to beg any earthling's favour about my present stand. The Headman was a very rich man in the village, and any occasion he hosted used to be well attended. They did the same on this particular day, streaming in their numbers to his home, where a fat ox had been slaughtered.

Our own friends and relatives dropped in to tell us how fat the ox was, some of them advising us to wait until dark when we could then sneak to the feast by night, when people could not see us. Horrified at hearing these people give such treacherous advice I blew my top and sent them out of the house, expressing extreme disgust at the words they had spoken, that I was a fool not to do that, for other converts do it.

While in bed that night, someone brought the news that made it necessary for me to leave for Port Elizabeth early in the morning. When this befell me I had not a penny in my possession. Then my wife advised that I go and wake up the Headman and summon his help; and I well agreed knowing that I would certainly get it. I stumbled on through the darkness of the night on my way to the Headman's home. While I was still at a distance I noticed that they had not yet gone to sleep. I

got there, knocked at the door and a child quickly opened it. What! The room is full of people and at the head of the row of men Chophile, our honourable evangelist was gracefully seated, eating with relish the fat sacrificial ox, with his chief elder, Qabelisile, at his side, knocking out marrow on a piece of stone, and Maweni, Machibini and Gxamthwana were surrounded by their wives, Noziyengana, Nontwikunina and many others of the red ochre category, all of them enjoying the nice-smelling meat of the sacrificial ceremony.

Truly, truly, they warn you not.

31. Tawuse's great loss

Tawuse, my wife's sister is quite an enigma. At times I often come to the conclusion that she is a very nice person, but at other times her numerous imperfections really shock me. Amongst her shortcomings the most glaring is her inability ever to see a fault with herself, something that always makes her think that whenever there is a misunderstanding she is the one who is misunderstood.

While Tawuse was still a member of the congregation and while she still attended the women's prayers well, we soon noticed her gradual withdrawal from both of these. Nojayiti repeatedly asked her about her slacking, but, as usual, she blamed someone else. She put the blame squarely on Nosenti's shoulders. Nosenti was a highly respectable woman and was chairwoman of the women's association. Besides my sister-in-law's complaint I had never before heard anyone else blaming this lady. And, moreover, I had never before heard anything said regarding the shortcomings pointed out by Tawuse.

Her criticism of her was flimsy; she maintained she thought better of herself, she used her position to castigate others for minor mistakes, saying some people were news-mongers and liars and more such shenanigans. But she was not wrong about Nosenti's loathing of the sin of news-mongering and the telling of lies, which were my sister-in-law's major forms of occupation. Tawuse thus remained at home, refraining from services and other associations because she was at odds with the Chairwoman.

Tawuse's hatred was not a pleasant matter to Nojayiti and myself, because Nosenti was a truly nice person. She was popular before all by her disciplined behaviour, and she cherished everything good in our village, being well-known throughout the Gqunukhwebe region. Nojayiti tried her but to show her sister all these positive points but the latter refused to be calmed down. She held tenaciously onto one view, that she could not stand anyone who faked holiness, things which never knew that one day they will fall.

While we thus continued to live our leaderess came up against many problems. While we continued to live in peace there came the bad news of the death of Bonisile, her eldest son, the mine having collapsed upon him in Johannesburg; then a couple of months after that her second eldest son was run over by a car and died immediately. Another couple of months and Nomathamsanga, her last-born was laid down with fever. Her illness got so severe it was feared she would die within a matter of days. Nosenti now became quite frantic and did not know where she was.

The little girl was seen by many white doctors, but instead of an improvement her condition deteriorated. The child became thin like someone with tuberculosis, but all the doctors denied that she had any such disease. The white doctors diagnosed several disorders but none of them could help. The child's parents got into heavy expenses, but instead of an improvement, the child got worse.

Relatives now came with their advice until a certain relative put the blame on the parents themselves. He addressed the parents stating that they had finished the list of white doctors and those black doctors who had received medical school training but none of them brought relief. He then advised that they now go to a Xhosa deviner to hear what she has to say about this. Initially the parents tried to wave aside this advice, but the child continued to get worse. In their great distress the parents finally fell and a devining ceremony was then attended.

At that devining ceremony Magqabakadliwa did not make any lengthy job of it. At once he pointed out that the cause was in the river, therefore, the water people should be atoned in order for the child to live. The deviner carelessly reflected that the child would never survive without a sacrifice being made to the water people at the river.

Since they were now in the hands of the deviner both the child's parents agreed, and Nosenti knelt at the mortar to grind grain for beer, the deviner was called and they went to perform the sacrificial ceremony at the river. Many members of Nosenti's congregation saw this and heard about it and it made

them very angry. How could their respectable leaderess recede into such heathen practices. How could Nosenti, despite all the light there was, return to this nonsense of preparing beer for all those crabs in the river! There and then this sorrowful woman was summoned to a disciplinary hearing by the prayer women, many of whom had sworn never again to be led by someone who still upheld such beliefs.

This was extremely sad news to Nojayiti who strongly sympathised with Nosenti, her colleague. Though I was myself feeling so bad I was consoled by what I saw happening, Tawuse now began to go to the service and now also frequented the women's prayers. By this time there were quite many meetings organized by the women of prayer where they discussed what to do with Nosenti, their talks being quite heated and the arguments being weighty on both sides, there being those who maintained that Nosenti had committed sacrilege and an obscenity in the eyes of the church, and was therefore no longer fit to be in the company of true Christians. The second group did their best to show that the temptation was too much, and the leaderess's weakness was understandable. This group was putting forward an appeal for mercy and forgiveness, leading in this being she who belongs to me, Nojayiti, and all this time Tawuse was with her so much that I began to think that her views were in perfect agreement with those of her sister.

The hot meetings of the prayer women went on for a long time, until at long last the day for a final decision to be made was elected, when all the women would vote on whether the leaderess should be excommunicated or forgiven. That big meeting was to be at Fort Beaufort quite a distance from our own area of Njwaxa.

Immediately the eminent women of Njwaxa woke up on the appointed day, they busied themselves preparing for the journey to Fort Beaufort, but just then something happened-- just when I watched Nojayiti and the others finally taking their ebony sticks to go, a very big storm started, a storm of the type that was never before experienced in that region, a hurricane that flattened everything in no time. When we

finally looked outside we found Tawuse's fowl-run, with a hundred prime stock chickens in it, having collapsed.

This got us worried as we thought of the great loss suffered by my sister-in-law, with the damage certainly reaching up to a hundred rand. As soon as the storm subsided we hurried to Tawuse's house having totally forgotten all about the meeting at Fort Beaufort and being pre-occupied with one thing only, that being to console my sister-in-law for her great loss.

We soon got there, but we could not find Tawuse anywhere. We search inside and out but there was not a trace of her. We now became quite alarmed and we lingered there helplessly fearing that, made light-minded by shock, she might have been blown away to disappear where we could not imagine, but just then we heard Tawuse's sorrowful voice coming from the nearby grove of mimosa trees. We ran to meet her, and Nojayiti was first to reach her crying, "Awu, Tawuse, my mother's child, we deeply sympathise with you for your great loss!"

"No, dear sister," bellowed her sister, "I am not lamenting the loss of these chickens!"

"Why are you crying then, child?" asked her sister surprised.

"I am crying, my mother's child, because of the great loss caused us by this hurricane, because we missed an opportunity to go to Fort Beaufort to hear with our own ears and to witness with our own eyes the fall and lamentations of that wretch of a woman, Nosenti, who used to make herself purer than the rest of us.

32. Nojayiti's surrender

Nongemkile was an old woman who lived only with her grandchild in her house. This lady was quite advanced in age. She was small and very dark in colour, with snow white teeth, and the eyes were black little pools sparkling deep down the sockets. She was quite affable and charming. Her grandchild had a nice name indeed, they called him Mbokothwebomvu, but he in person showed nothing in common with redness or any light complexion because he was as black as coal much like his grandmother was.

None knew this woman and her grandchild quite well in that village, because all the villagers were far too young in comparison to this old woman. We, in our house did not even know where she originally came from because by the time we started being aware of our environment she was already living here, she was already by herself with neither husband nor child. While she had been staying alone all along, one day she suddenly surfaced from where we could not tell with Mbokothwebomvu who she introduced as the child of a daughter who died. At the time of this incident Mbokotho was a young boy of about seven years, a brave-looking little lad who was always at his grandmother's heels, and enjoyed anything that goes below the nose.

Although Nongemkile lived by herself as she did, she was never destitute, but no one knew where she got her life support from both for herself and her grandson. Some were saying that she had the backing of the whites she once worked for some time ago; they were the ones who kept sending her money. Others suggested that she had buried some money, and was now taking something to feed herself, but no one knew anymore than this, because even if one tried to ask her directly she would be cleverly mystified and manipulated by this lady's wise talk.

One day she came to our home, and in their conversation with Nojayiti Nongemkile hinted that her grandmother's grandmother was mNgwevukazi herself, and in that way the

relationship between the old girl and Nojayiti was firmly founded, and soon I found that they had already established that while they did not know it this old woman had been their cousin all the time. I got suspicious the very day she explained to me, with restless eyes, about this relationship, and I already foresaw the trouble such a common ancestry would bring about, but when I saw how much this pleased Nojayiti I was consoled at least for a short while.

It turned out I had miscalculated, we had opened a can of worms, because from that day on we knew no peace from our cousin, by our new sister. Each new day met Mbokotho knocking at the door to convey his grandmother's request to be given this or that. The eminent Mrs Charity, the ever-generous Nojayiti, was initially escaped by the true meaning of this, because she was still overwhelmed by the new strength of having a new relative added to her line of relatives, and continued to give her cousin generously.

While that was still going on the drought came; one year after another it prevailed upon us; the food got finished; there was severe starvation. The people starved pitifully, buying grains of mealies by night, to avoid being crowded by the neighbours. We were also severely deprived by this drought, because we are not employed, who should have been supporting us together with his own family never really showed any competence in domestic management.

However, we still got up to have some breakfast at eight o'clock, a rare meal to us and our school-going grandchildren. While we thus struggled, our cousin invented a new confusion, she made it a point to get to our house at exactly eight o'clock, with the excuse that she had come to stamp mealies or sorghum at our mortar, sometimes coming even with just a fist full of grains. This burdened us heavily, because it was necessary for us to eat our morsel of bread with our cousin and her grandchild, Mbokotho who never parted with her just as a tail never part from an animal.

When we saw our poor family being tormented by the shortage we started looking for ways to protect ourselves from our cousin. We ceased preparing food for eight o'clock, we now

eat at seven o'clock. For two days we got some relief, we ate our feel, but on the third day we heard the approaching footsteps of the old cow, and we started starving as of yore. After that we altered our time repeatedly, which would give us a few days' relief, but soon the surge of a parasitic cousin would be upon us like a hail storm. At long last we found out the cousin's secret for timing our meal times so well. Her little one, Mbokotho, was engaged in a little chat with Sikhephe, our own grandchild of the same age, here at home, when he screamed, "Yes, Sikhephe, we have a clock at home now, grandmother says she has bought it so that she can accurately time your meal hour and then come over to do some stamping!"

Nojayiti was as angry as a male ostrich, she lifted our excellent mortar, carried it on her head and donated it to someone who lived very far away from our house, that being Nongenile, in this way trying to stop Nongemkile from ever inventing any excuse to come and eat our food for us.

It was for some days after that we celebrated our peace of mind, watching Nongemkile touring the village in the process of looking for where she could use a mortar. The family began to pick up a little fat and our souls were at peace, until we seemed to forget ever having a pest like Nongemkile.

While we continued to enjoy our happiness another form of fresh happiness came our way; our daughter-in-law gave birth, a lovely boy. We now began to realize that all our troubles are over, we would spend our future in peace and happiness, but there we had missed the point. The day I shall never forget did come. We were relaxing in casual conversation with my wife on the eleventh day after our daughter-in-law had given birth, with Nojayiti playing with the new grandchild; Nongemkile burst in with a broad smile, showing such friendliness as we have never before seen her display. She made for the baby, put it on her lap, and kissed it saying, "Nojayiti, sweet Tshangisa, the birth of this bright boy has given me tremendous joy! From today on, I shall never leave this house, I shall stay here and feed my eyes on this handsome fellow."

When we were alone again I asked my wife being in great distress, and said, "Whatever are we going to do now, dear wife? As for me all tricks to expel Nongemkile are gone. Could you produce a trick of your own."

"Where would I find it, sweet Tipha," said my wife lamely, "I know when I am beaten; even if I have never been beaten before today I now surrender."