

Negotiating Truth, Freedom and Self:
the Prison Narratives of Some South African Women

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For my mother

Elizabeth

compassionate and courageous

in both living and dying

Abstract

The autobiographical prison writings of four South African women — Ruth First, Caesarina Kona Makhoere, Emma Mashinini and Maggie Resha — form the focus of this study.

South African autobiography is burdened with the task of producing history in the light of the silences enforced by apartheid security legislation and the dominance of representations of white histories. Autobiography with its promise of 'truth' provides the structure within which to establish a credible subject position. In chapter one I discuss the use of authenticating devices, such as documentary-like prose, and the inclusion in numerous texts of the stories of others. Asserting oneself as a (publicly acknowledged) subject in writing is particularly difficult for women who historically have been denied access to authority: while Maggie Resha's explicit task is to highlight the role women have played in the struggle, her narrative must also be broadly representative, her authority communal.

As I discuss in chapter two, prison writing breaks the legal and psychological silences imposed by a hostile penal system. In a context of political repression the notion of the truth becomes complicated, because while it is important to be believed, it is also important, as with Ruth First, not to betray her comrades and values. The writer must therefore negotiate with the (imagined) audience if her signature is to be accepted and her subjectivity affirmed. The struggle to represent oneself in the inimical environment of prison and the redemptive value in doing so are considered in chapter three.

The institution of imprisonment as a means of silencing political dissidence targets the body, according to Michel Foucault's theories of discipline and control explored in chapter four. Using the work of Lois McNay and Elizabeth Grosz I argue in chapter five that it is necessary also to pay attention to the specificities of female bodies which are positioned and controlled in particular ways. I argue, too, using N. Chabani Manganyi, that while anatomical differences provide the rationale for racism and sexism, the body is also an instrument for resisting negative cultural significations. For instance, Caesarina Kona Makhoere represents her body as a weapon in her political battle, inside and outside prison.

The prison cell itself is formative of subjectivity as it returns an image of criminality and powerlessness to the prisoner. Following the work of human geographers in chapter six I argue that space and subjectivity are mutually constitutive, as shown by the way spatial metaphors operate in prison texts. The subject can redesign hostile space in order to represent herself. As these texts show, relations of viewing are crucial to self-identification: surveillance disempowers the prisoner and produces her as a victim, but prisoners have recourse to alternative ways of (visually) interacting in order to position the dominators as objects of their gaze, through speaking and then also through writing.

Elaine Scarry's insights into torture are extended in chapter seven to encompass psychological torture and sexual harassment: inflicting bodily humiliation, as well as pain, on the body, brings it sharply into focus, making speech impossible. By writing testimony and by generating other scenes of

dialogue through which subjectivity can be constructed (through being looked at and looking, through having the message of self affirmed in the other's hearing) it is possible to contain, in some way, the horror of detention and to assert a measure of control in authoring oneself. For Mashinini this healing dialogue must take place within an emotionally and ideologically sympathetic context.

For those historical subjects who have found themselves without a legally valued identity and a platform from which to articulate the challenge of their experience, writing a personal narrative may offer an invaluable chance to assert a truth, to reclaim a self and a credibility and in that way to create a kind of freedom.

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Introduction: Breaking Silences

Prison discourse operates within a certain obscurity which is as keenly guarded as the prisoners themselves. For the prisoner this enforced silence is sinister because it carries a particular threat, both in the silence itself (that is, in the danger that is allowed to continue under cover of the protective silence) and in the breaking of the silence, for the consequences of speaking out are weighty and promise further abuse.

A recent report by Human Rights Watch on prison conditions in South Africa suggests that even in the 'New South Africa' an ominous veil obscures the reality of abuse behind locked doors, and that prisoners have recourse to few and ineffective means of having their experiences heard and adjudicated without fearing vicious reprisals (Brown, et al, 1994). Prisoners are frequently assaulted by warders (sometimes fatally); privileges are removed arbitrarily and punitively in a manner which contravenes not only the 'standard minimum rules for the treatment of prisoners' (adopted by the 'First United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders' held in Geneva in 1955) but the South African prison regulations themselves, as set out in what was originally the 'Prisons Act' of 1959, renamed the Correctional Services Act and amended as recently as 23 June 1993. The violations of prisoners' bodily integrity occur in the shadows and the cost of speaking up — to be heard beyond the heavily guarded walls of the prison — is great.

Cynthia Brown, Bronwen Manby and Joanna Weschler of Human Rights Watch write that most prisoners whom they interviewed were reluctant to give their testimonies for fear of being victimised as a result (Brown, et al, 1994, 39).

Those that did participate said that they had previously been penalised for lodging complaints:

In Barberton, a prisoner complained that he had been transferred to the maximum prison from the medium after going on a hunger strike to protest the failure to respond to his requests for a transfer. His books and writing materials were confiscated, and he spent some time in the isolation cells. On January 22, 1993 he was assaulted by a warder, in front of a superior officer, while asking about his security classification. The prisoner made a complaint about this treatment, and was told that it was up to the commanding officer of the prison to decide whether to bring in the police to lay a charge against the warder concerned. At the date of our visit, one month later, no action had been taken other than to take a statement from the prisoner for the purposes of the disciplinary committee. (Brown, et al, 1994, 38)

The prisoner's initial attempts to be heard, from within the penal system, were not simply unheeded but punished. Similarly harsh treatment was meted out to prisoners claiming political status who went on a hunger strike to demand their release along with those identified for amnesty in 1991. In an attempt to pressurise the prisoners to end their hunger strike, prisoners were forced to go naked for an entire (autumn) night, after which they were locked in the mortuary of the prison hospital. The two prisoners who spoke to the researchers were released only after 18 and 27 days of hunger strike respectively. Even on release, accusations of maltreatment brought by the prisoners were absorbed by the bureaucratic labyrinth:

As a result of this treatment of hunger-striking prisoners, the doctor who had been responsible for their treatment was investigated for malpractice by the South African Medical Council. In March 1993, the council found that there was insufficient evidence to justify a finding of malpractice. (Brown, et al, 1994, 41)

By hearing, then dismissing, the prisoners' claims in the inquest, the official investigation gags the prisoners more thoroughly than had there been no hearing, for it invalidates their charges and suppresses the power of their critique.

The most powerful way to condemn a prisoner to silence, of course, is through death in detention. While the numerous deaths in detention during the years of apartheid rule are legend (the death of Black Consciousness activist Steve Biko being perhaps the most widely known) recent incidents are as buried in obfuscating officialese and public complacency as the earlier ones. Evidence from Prison Conditions in South Africa (Brown, et al, 1994) suggests that the official procedures for dealing with an unnatural death in detention (as provided for in the Inquest Act) are seldom carried out in full and even when they are, the procedures do not ensure impartiality and state accountability. While the law demands that an autopsy be carried out, the forensic pathologists are always state employees and the requisite inquest is conducted informally, in camera (Brown, et al, 1994, 51). The family may appoint an independent doctor, but the autopsy may proceed before such a doctor is appointed, which is the case in 90 percent of inquests (1994, 52).

Brown, Manby and Weschler argue that inquests are unlikely to expose abuse of prisoners and point to the inquest following the death in detention of Carol Anne Meyers as a case in point. (Further details of Meyers's detention are not provided.) According to Brown, et al, the judge ruled that her death 'was caused by "irresponsible and inhuman" conduct of prison officers applying restraint under Section 80' (which entitles prison officials to confine unruly

prisoners but not for the purposes of punishment). Brown, et al, report the outcome of the case in this way:

Meyers died as a result of injuries incurred from being kept in a straitjacket for twenty-three hours by warders in Pollsmoor prison. She had been placed in a straitjacket after she had threatened to commit suicide. The court found that prison regulations had been disregarded in applying the restraint, and also that warders had regarded the restraint as a punishment [which is illegal]. Both officers involved were promoted after the death occurred. (1994, 36)

The struggle to be heard which prison narratives represent goes beyond the attempt to secure a fixed presence which theorists of autobiography have critiqued.¹ For the prisoner whose personal and political self has been violated through the horror of detention, the process of articulating (and publishing) her story may promise a means of validating her story and thus the integrity of her subjectivity. To the extent that the horror results from its concealment and the sheer powerlessness of the prisoner to speak out, autobiography may offer a way of reversing that violation and of objectifying the horror by exposing it to public viewing.

From her position as writer, Caesarina Kona Makhoere urges that it is 'important to hear a person's plight' (1989, 73). That is, it is important to be heard; the convention of the prison narrative might offer the form when other (official) channels have proved biased and hostile. For in telling her story the prisoner's control of reality — that is, the representation of reality — is in some way reasserted, therapeutically. Her violated and starved body is no longer

¹ See for example Elizabeth Bruss (1976), Jacques Derrida (1974), Leigh Gilmore (1994) and Sidonie Smith (1987). The following chapter considers some of the debates in autobiographical theory.

condemned to being hidden. When the wounds are exposed (along with the wrongfulness with which they were inflicted) healing begins.

Theorists of autobiography have argued that it is impossible to recapture the past simply and accurately. This does not detract from the power of this healing mechanism. For while the ability to claim the status of the truth provides the authenticity without which the narrative cannot do its restorative work, what is at issue ultimately is representational control of reality, not reality itself.

Language does not have the power radically to undo abuse, for it cannot deny the fact of it. What it does offer is a restoration of sorts, although this promise of restoring sanity, truth and wholeness will be broken (Laub 1992), because the world which is represented through language (and thereby affirmed) is a world which has been violated. The truth, as a phenomenon encompassing notions of justice and righteousness (as opposed simply to verifiable fact), cannot be restored simply through a commitment to attempting an accurate representation of events. Nevertheless, Laub argues, there is healing potential in the attempt to represent traumatic events 'truthfully':

Yet it is this very commitment to truth, in a dialogic context and with an authentic listener, which allows for a reconciliation with the broken promise, and which makes the resumption of life, in spite of the failed promise, at all possible. (Laub 1992, 91)

What is repossessed through the act of writing is a semblance of authority in the construction of self and world. However, the contexts within which prison narratives are written differ; the freedom to break the silence is not safeguarded, nor is control in representing the world necessarily within reach. When Ruth First published her account of being detained in South African prisons, it was not

long after she had left the country without a passport, never to return. Even while writing she did not believe herself to be free from the pervasive power of the South African intelligence network and certainly many fellow activists whom her narrative might have incriminated were not. It was her conviction that 'it was not the end, that they would come again' (1965, 144). Emma Mashinini, too, is unable to shake off a debilitating fear that she is being followed, that anything she says would be heard and reported. Her autobiography, Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life: A South African Autobiography (1989), was written in a similar context in which political opposition was repressed. The Nationalist Government's change of approach which resulted in the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of resistance organisations in South Africa was to occur in early 1990.

After discussing the bombing in May 1987 of Khotso House (the offices of various anti-apartheid organisations) Mashinini reflects on the violent nature of apartheid repression:

This is the kind of violence which surrounds the apartheid regime. This is the kind of society we live in — a society where children disappear, where mothers go from prison to prison to try and find their children, where some of those picked up by the troops or the police are as young as eleven years old.... The horror of South Africa is that the life of a black person is very cheap. (123)

The struggle against political obscurity is a markedly physical struggle. The debilitating fear which is instilled in dissidents such as Mashinini is a fear of physical reprisal. The regime's response to political opposition is to whip, detain or even to kill off activists or suspected activists. (The word 'activist' itself attests to the centrality of physical expressions in political opposition.)

Word and body are profoundly interrelated: it is considered appropriate for the state to respond to political opposition with physical confinement. Equally, the struggle for political recognition is a bodily struggle. The converse is also true: oppositional writing offers itself as a powerful response to the physical subjection of detention. The fight for control over representations of history is waged on the level of the body. Slick criminological discourses cannot hide this. The war against opposition in apartheid South Africa certainly was a war about bodies — where they lived, where they ate, who they slept with, how they behaved. Detention without trial was one of the key instruments of repression in South Africa, for it attempted to smother spoken resistance (even that which might have surfaced in the controlled environment of a legal trial).

Detention without trial has a long history in South Africa and in fact has not yet been outlawed (although this is likely to change once it has been dealt with by the recently established Constitutional Court). It was supported by a series of statutes which formed part of the state security legislation. The so-called 90-day detention clause (section 17 of General Law Amendment Act 37 of 1963) provided for the detention without trial of people thought to have committed or be about to commit a political offence, or anyone who was thought to have any information regarding an offence. The statute was alarmingly vague in its definition of such an offence (based on the Suppression of Communism Act 44 of 1950) and granted vast discretionary powers to the police with respect to the conditions under which detainees could be held. From 1965 onwards detainees could be held for 180 days in solitary confinement (under section 215 of the Criminal Procedure Act 56 of 1965). No courts had jurisdiction over detainees

held under this provision. Thereafter, the Terrorism Act (83 of 1967) placed no time limit on detention without trial. 'Section 6' detainees could be held indefinitely until they had answered questions to the satisfaction of the security police who had full discretion. In 1982 all security legislation was brought under the Internal Security Act (74). Don Foster and Diane Sandler, writing in 1985, argue that the detention of political dissidents forms a part of the 'highly repressive state measures'.

Oppositional writing may go some way towards withstanding such measures, by breaking the silence enforced on dissidents in detention where abuses go unchecked and where s/he who has been violated is unable to resist. But the horror of detention could almost be said to speak for itself; the force of written testimony lies simply in exposing the fact of (bodily and political) abuse to the harsh light of day:

The woman lies on the wet cement floor
 under the unending light,
 needle marks on her arms put there
 to kill the brain
 and wonders why she is dying.

She is dying because she said.
 She is dying for the sake of the word.
 It is her body, silent
 and fingerless, writing this poem.²

² An excerpt from 'Notes Towards a Poem That Can Never Be Written' by Margaret Atwood (1987, 92).

1. Subject-Positions in South African Autobiographies and Prison Narratives.

South African autobiography is burdened with the task of producing history in the light of the silences imposed on lived history and oppositional ideology by Verwoerdian apartheid. In addition, I have said that prison writing counteracts other, more threatening, silences (such as the ban on public disclosure of prison conditions enforced by the Prisons Act of 1959).³

The autobiographical model commonly ascribed to in western literary traditions, therefore, does not adequately accommodate trends in autobiographical texts produced in South Africa. It must be said, however, that descriptions of common characteristics are best proposed with great circumspection. Judith Coullie draws attention to Paul de Man's 'denunciation of the continued use of generic categories in analysis' (Coullie 1991, 3). I, too, am reluctant to indulge in too many generalising pronouncements on the nature of autobiography in South Africa, both because of the specific scope of this thesis and because I believe that the urge to sort literary texts into categories based on similarities results all too frequently in overlooking significant differences. In addition, categories tend to recreate themselves by imposing significations on texts, in what becomes directed reading. Coullie is circumspect when she suggests common features in South African autobiographical texts:

While generalisations carry their own dangers, it can be observed that introspective, highly personal autobiographical writing in contemporary South Africa is so uncommon (there are some notable exceptions) as to

³ See Don Foster with Diane Sandler and Dennis Davis (1987, 172).

be almost definitive of the genre in its absence. It seems to me that this is indicative of the fact that a great many South African autobiographical works have a political agenda. (1991, 15)

The proliferation of texts and documentaries attests both to a desire to contribute one's story (and that of the group with whom one identifies) to the annals of history and, as Coullie comments, to the current desire on the part of the reading public for access to accounts of experiences previously obscured (through white domination of the media and educational institutions within South Africa and through the cultural boycott of South Africa internationally):

Autobiographical texts by South Africans are being published in ever greater numbers in South Africa and abroad in response to perceptions of greater interest amongst a wide range of readers. Experiences of South Africans have acquired particular topicality of late. (1991, 2)

Many of the autobiographies published recently in South Africa imply (or declare) that they are representative of a history larger than that of the individual author. A glance at the titles and subtitles of the four narratives which form the focus of this study bears this out. The 'me' and 'my' of Emma Mashinini's title (Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life) quickly gives way to the indefinite article in her subtitle (A South African Autobiography) so that her account is offered as typical or at least indicative of South African experience more broadly (1989). Caesarina Kona Makhoere's title elides her presence entirely in favour of her context: No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid (1988). Ruth First's title is intriguingly specific, even clipped, and the Bloomsbury edition represents the vertical figures of the title dramatically within prison bars. The stark 117 Days indicates both the focus of her narrative and, by implication, the particular horror of that time,

whereas the subtitle (which does not appear on the cover) is suggestive of a documentary-like representation, with its reference to legislation: An Account of Confinement and Interrogation under the South African Ninety-Day Detention Law (1965). First too, then, draws on what Coullie describes as 'features of journalistic practice' commonly employed in South African autobiography in establishing the trustworthiness of her tale (1991, 15). First is not consistent in this, however, for in the narrative itself she weaves in representations of complicated self-scrutiny along with reports of the experiences of others, italicised to distinguish them from her own.

Maggie Resha asserts, first, her African identity in her title: 'Mangoana O Tsoara Thipa Ka Bohaleng: My Life in the Struggle (1991). Resha translates and explains the Sotho proverb — well into the narrative — which gives her book its title. 'The mother grabs the sharp edge of the knife to protect her child' is 'the story of the bravery of a woman' (123). Her identity as an African mother and woman is thus privileged, and Resha's point in the text is that the mothers are not simply to be subsumed by the broader concerns of history (or passed over).⁴ She is writing a history of the women, the brave women (such as herself):

The story I want to tell here is the one about the contribution of the women to the anti-pass law campaigns of my time, since their story is very special, and because no story of the liberation struggle can be complete without highlighting their particular participation. (110)

Resha thus points to an anxiety which is returned to throughout this thesis and which provides the rationale for its focus on women, particularly. For where

⁴ See Dorothy Driver (1990) and Desirée Lewis (1992) for a fuller discussion of self-construction as 'mother' in autobiographical texts by black women.

women have not had access to authority and where their experience of detention has been harrowing in ways not experienced by men, it seems that their turning to writing is that much more remarkable — and fraught with difficulties and anxieties — than a subject who is assured of his/her right to speak.

But Resha's bold focus on women is difficult to maintain when the task of representing a broader history demands to be addressed (although this task of 'documenting' history may also appear to provide a certain legitimacy to a narrative which also includes, less obviously, the stories of women). For the 'documentary' task all too quickly eclipses the focus on women. For instance, in her brief subtitle Resha appears to be foregrounded, herself, but in fact she has circumscribed her life's story within that of 'the struggle'. The reader might expect that she will primarily be concerned with representing (anti-apartheid) history. Her text bears this out, for on a number of occasions she explicitly draws the reader's attention to the history-producing function of her book which gives only brief account of her childhood in the Eastern Cape and her nursing career before concentrating energetically on her involvement in the ANC alongside her husband Robert. His story becomes a central part of the book, with its inclusion of his writing (about the Rivonia Trial particularly) and the letters and speeches of others about him.

The role of writing is not simply to highlight her part in the liberation struggle, but to record the events, and the many sacrifices made, for future generations:

For us, who are former residents of Sophiatown, it is important that we write the story of the township, so that coming generations should not be given distorted history about the resistance of their people. The whole history of South Africa has been so distorted that one cannot be surprised when, in a few years time, the white regime, which is well-known for its deception, will be writing books that Sophiatown was moved because the Africans wanted to move, like they have said that African men like to live in compounds without their families, and that they want to carry passes.

We want the younger generations to know of the sacrifices and sufferings of men, women, and children who woke up one morning to find the township looking like a place under siege. (Resha 65)

In his article, 'The Ontological Status of Self in Auto-biography: The Case of Bloke Modisane's Blame Me On History', Thengani H. Ngwenya writes that 'self-analysis in black South African autobiographies is intricately linked with historical documentation' (1989). One reviewer of Resha's autobiography suggests that her book is specifically read as 'history'. In his article, 'Living History', printed in the monthly magazine, Learn and Teach, Saul Molobi says this of Resha: 'It is said that some people make history, and others write it. Maggie Resha does both' (1992, 3). The distinction is not one many theorists of autobiography would support, but it indicates an acceptance of personal narratives as 'history'.

Molobi stresses another point in praise of Resha: her book is 'also important because it is not a selfish account of one person. It is also the story of dedicated people such as "Uncle JB" and Lillian [sic] Ngoyi, who did not have the chance to write about their life in the struggle' (1992, 3). Molobi's disapproval of individualised testimony is striking and confirms what J.U. Jacobs argues with regard to prison memoirs, many of which include the 'stories' of other prisoners: 'the authors' singularity has been subsumed into the depersonalised plurality of political prisoners and ... their authority is communal' (1991a, 195). Resha's authority is based on her representativeness, but she uses her position as spokesperson to highlight the role of the women particularly whom she fears will be forgotten.

Margaret Daymond quotes the African saying, 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am', which, she argues, 'offers a very different basis for

selfhood from the singularity, the uniqueness, that is emphasised in western cultural traditions' (1993, 25). When writing — as a woman — into what could be a fearful void of scepticism and indifference, and thus claiming an uncertain subject position, the task of representing history itself may appear to carry greater weight and legitimacy than an individual's story which may seem more likely to be dismissed. Resha highlights the gravity of her task in this way: it is 'important that we write the story of the township' so that younger generations will know of the sacrifices made. In her own bid to be heard, Resha constructs herself and those who are part of the group of men and women of whom she writes as forebears and in so doing represents succeeding generations as unaware and in need of teaching.⁵ Resha's emphasis of this role bespeaks an uncertain relation to authority which necessitates that her self-construction takes place, first, in the context of a larger story and, second, within a community. Sindiwe Magona conceives of her task similarly, announcing it boldly in her title, To My Children's Children (1990). For in the perception of having greater legitimacy, a greater assertiveness is also made available.

For Audre Lorde, an African American poet and writer, writing or speaking(out) is represented as a moral obligation:

I have a duty to speak the truth as I see it and to share not just my triumphs, not just the things that felt good, but the pain, the intense, often unmitigating pain.... If what I have to say is wrong, then there will be some woman who will stand up and say Audre Lorde was in error. But my words will be there⁶ (emphasis added)

⁵ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) for an incisive critique of the unacknowledged interests which accompany literary representations of others, even in what appear to be oppositional texts.

⁶ Audre Lorde is quoted by Mari Evans (1984, 261).

A second feature of the act of writing emerges in her statement, for it implies that writing promises a stable presence. There is a strong sense of personal investment in her 'words', which act as a form of proxy: if 'what I have to say is wrong' then people will say 'Audre Lorde was in error'. But she is not disturbed by this possibility. It makes her more defiant. She cannot be dismissed nor can her (previous) presence be glossed over, for her words will 'be there' to testify to her existence.

The corollary to the thought that 'words' can stand for presence is that at a time prior to speaking, a presence existed to give a context to what was said. Autobiographical writing ascribes to itself this presence most assertively, promising in its very name the immediacy of firsthand disclosure of life experience. There is a certain investment of 'truth' in the notion of firsthand experience, if only in the claim to have 'been there'.

However, the suggestion (implicit in the convention of autobiography) that a writer has access to her/his life in order to represent it in language has been refuted by critics of autobiography.⁷ Poststructuralist notions of selfhood and representation have called into question readers' expectations that a firsthand account of a life could reproduce that life, making accessible an unfiltered and immediate presence. The complications of representation mediate to produce a new text which is inevitably removed, to some degree, from the life that was. Nancy K. Miller (1988), however, has argued that to insist on the unreliability of autobiography is to re-enact yet another silencing for women autobiographers who have historically been denied access to authority.

⁷ See, for example, Sidonie Smith (1987) and Leigh Gilmore (1994).

It seems crucial to recognise that all experience is necessarily articulated in a posterior interpretative moment: Sidonie Smith describes autobiography as 'an interpretation of an earlier experience that can never be divorced from the filterings of subsequent experience or storytelling' (1987, 45). In describing autobiography as an 'act' as opposed to a form, Elizabeth Bruss stresses the moment of writing rather than the earlier moment which is the subject of the text. For writing produces the life (in print); it does not merely arrange events in sequence. Autobiography can never be a simple linguistic ordering of the substantive or 'factual' content of a life story. Rather, it is an act of ascribing meaning ('now', at the moment of writing) to an earlier moment or to a younger self. Smith describes autobiography in this way:

[It is] an interpretation of life that invests the past and the 'self' with coherence and meaning that may not have been evident before the act of writing itself. (Smith 1987, 45)

Gayatri Spivak expresses a similar thought: 'No one can quite articulate the space she herself inhabits. My attempt has been to describe this relatively ungraspable space in terms of what might be its history' (1990, 68). Taking a lead from Spivak, the aim of this thesis will be to consider the historical and political significance of the act of writing a 'personal history' of imprisonment and of constituting oneself as a linguistic subject after the brutal silencing of detention. Ultimately the text must stand as a document separate from its author, 'susceptible to a history larger than that of the writer, reader, teacher. In that scene of writing, the authority of the author, however down-to-earth, must be content to stand in the wings' (Spivak 1987, 268).

It is for this reason that I choose not to dwell on the banal debate over whether or not autobiographers are able to represent the past accurately. It is assumed that an author is unable fundamentally to know and 're-present' herself (or make herself present again). Francis R. Hart has argued that the 'unreliability' of autobiography is 'an inescapable condition' (1970, 492) in reading autobiography. This is not to refute the role of truth in autobiography, for it distinguishes the autobiographical narrative from other stories which can easily be dismissed as 'a fiction'. For the subject whose access to (political) authority and credibility is not assured, the truth acts as a guarantee of sorts. But the truth asserted in personal narratives is a negotiated truth, as dependent on the expectations of the reader as on the integrity of the author.

What interests me is the particular significances and difficulties surrounding the act of representing oneself in language and of constituting oneself as a political subject. In relation to African American women writers Houston Baker draws attention to the political significance (and difficulties) of constituting oneself as subject:

The quest for subjecthood in what seemed to turn-of-the-century black women writers a new era of freedom was not a simple matter, and the search for an effective historical embodiment of the black-woman-as-subject was equally problematic. Standing under the whiteman's historic burden of concubinage and the silence enforced where such matters were concerned, black women creators were hard-pressed for a credible subject position. (Baker 1991, 32; emphasis in original)

Two issues arising from his statement require further discussion for the purposes of my project. First, the category of 'black-woman-as-subject' must be seen to be fixed only in the sense that it represents a designated political category of which

individual subjects are free to invoke membership. One can never apply enough caution when dealing with the possible essentialism of category-assignment.

When the constructedness of subject categories is acknowledged those terms are immediately freed for deeper, more fruitful analysis which is less dogmatic and repressive of identity and meaning. As chapter five will argue at great length, bodies, or at least the ways in which they are read and positioned in culture, provide the rationale for politically distinct categories of identity.

Although arbitrarily invoked and linguistically constructed, bodily differences are accorded great significance as indicators of psychical and political identity.

It seems more useful to read gender in terms of the positions taken up by or allowed to the subject as opposed to anything more positivistically verifiable. Specifically concerned with the question of 'self' in relation to feminism, Sandra Kemp puts forward 'a view of gender not as anatomy, but as a position from which one might speak. (So, "hegemonic"/"marginal" may be more useful terms than "male"/"female")' (Kemp 1990, 100). Monique Wittig's controversial definition is similarly relational. For her the distinguishing feature of women's identity and experience is a relationship of disempowerment and obligation which can be verified through reference not to biology but material conditions of oppression, that is, not genital differences between women and men, but the way women's bodies are positioned in service of men's desire:

For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation ('forced residence,' domestic corvée, conjugal duties, unlimited production of children, etc.), a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual. (Wittig 1981, 53)

Although not concerned in the same way with relations of power and material conditions, Jacques Lacan speaks of gender as determined by one's position as subject or object of desire, that 'as is true for all women ... the problem of [Dora's] condition is fundamentally that of accepting herself as an object of desire for the man' (1982, 68).

These formulations seem helpful in that they free identity from rigid configurations based on a system of exclusions and inclusions determined with reference to anatomy. They draw attention to the fact that it is not sexual difference as such, but the meanings attributed to sexual difference that bear the rationale for the marginalisation of women.

Even here I think one should be cautious about assuming a universally experienced disempowerment among women. One cannot be too vigilant in qualifying categories and in insisting, as Gayatri Spivak does, that 'the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous' (1988, 284). While categories may be usefully invoked, they obscure a multitude of differences. For example, Ellen Kuzwayo's glib, surprisingly dismissive reference to 'the home-help' (1985, 135) and 'the peasant community' (148) cannot sustain her assertive use of the category of 'black women' who, as an apparently unified class, have resisted apartheid with strength (241).

Judith Butler discusses critically the 'identity politics' which creates a subject in order to arrive at emancipation:

The question of 'the subject' is crucial for politics, and for feminist politics in particular, because juridical subjects are invariably produced through certain exclusionary practices that do not 'show' once the juridical structure of politics has been established. (1990, 2)

It is necessary always to ask of political categories, what difference is being overlooked, who is being excluded? A deep suspicion or at very least a circumspection in considering any social category is essential.

There is a fundamental distinction between the conservative gestures through which categories are socially entrenched and the process of ascribing to oneself an empowering position as subject. The desire to achieve self-definition and political recognition on the part of a marginalised subject cannot be equated with an oppressive denial of autonomy justified in terms of difference. What is called for, then, is a commitment to interrogating categories and relations. As Jane Gallop has proposed, identity 'must be continually assumed and immediately called into question' (1982, xii). Discursive categories are not rendered meaningless when their inner workings have been demystified.

To interrogate categories need not be to shatter a potentially empowering oppositional stance. Butler goes on to say of the category of 'women' that the 'assumption of its essential incompleteness permits that category to serve as a permanently available site of contested meanings' (1990, 14) making space for a radical questioning of social dominance which depends upon totalising linguistic gestures. But for the embattled subject who feels the insecurity of her access to an authoritative subject position, the luxury of self-scrutiny and of interrogating identities may be unavailable, or too dangerous an indulgence.

Caesarina Kona Makhoere, author of No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid, relies to some degree on an unquestioned unity between herself and her comrades in her prison narrative (1988). It is significant, for example, that the plural pronoun 'we' is commonly used in preference to the singular 'I'. Their

shared identity as black women prisoners (more so than as fellow activists) marks the strength of their resistance. Disunity or even difference from her self-identified group threatens to undermine the authority of her own position as subject.

Nancy K. Miller has called for caution in applying postmodernist reading strategies to texts by women because 'women have not had the same historical relation of identity to origin, institution, production that men have had':

The postmodernist decision that the Author is Dead and the subject along with him does not, I will argue, necessarily hold for women, and prematurely forecloses the question of agency for them. (1988, 106)

Miller's caution is worth hearing for it draws attention to the contexts of power relations within which writing takes place. But there is a danger in establishing a different set of reading methodologies which proscribe careful analysis of linguistic constructions for fear of re-enacting the disempowerment of a marginalised subject. First, I do not believe that criticism empowers or disempowers. Second, the historical tensions within which a writer such as Makhoere encodes her challenge to hegemony are of great relevance for oppositional politics which are not crippled by critical rigour. A sympathetic reading will recognise the particular constraints and struggles which produce a text of this nature.

Baker understands the 'quest for subjecthood' for the 'black-woman-as-subject' as a 'quest' for recognition, that is, for 'an effective historical embodiment' of herself as subject, and for a 'credible subject position' (1991, 32). For Makhoere the battle for recognition as a political subject must be waged from

within an (undivided) community, constructed self-consciously in her narrative. Her text cannot indulge in acknowledgements of vulnerability or self-doubt which would distinguish her from the body of the oppressed; personal concerns are dismissed as individualistic. There is a certain poignancy in this (although at times the text encourages little else other than indignation). When the struggle for recognition is urgent (the 'possession' of self insecure), probing questions which may expose vulnerabilities and precarious solidarities are all the more threatening to incipient articulations of subjecthood. It has to be said that my own expectations of an autobiographical text, as a white middle-class academic, are influenced by having read, for the most part, in a western tradition where notions of selfhood shun dogmatism in favour of post-Freudian scrutiny of subjectivity.

The writer's own (complicated) relation to articulated selfhood and authority has been the focus of this discussion. A second focus is integral to the conceptualisation of writing as a means to political recognition: the role of the intangible 'reader' or 'critic' whose imagined presence grants recognition to the writer in becoming a ('credible' or 'authentic') subject. The authorising role of the reader will be discussed at length in the following chapter. For the purposes of this discussion it is important to note that the process of asserting oneself as a subject in language, a subject of history, is not unambiguously empowering. The 'contract' between writer and reader, in which the reader is appealed to (as Jean-Paul Sartre puts it) renders the writer dependent on the reader for the completion of his/her creation of identity:

Since the creation can find its fulfilment only in reading, since the artist must entrust to another the job of carrying out what he has begun, since it

is only through the consciousness of the reader that he can regard himself as essential to his work, all literary work is an appeal. (Sartre 1967, 32)

Stated differently, the power of entering language carries with it the disempowering facet of being exposed to judgement by the other to whom one addresses oneself and in whose terms one articulates one('s)self:

What I seek in the Word is the response of the other. What constitutes me as subject is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name which he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me. I identify myself in Language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. (1967, 63)

For Michel Foucault, too, control does not ultimately rest with the author:

[T]he agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know. (1978, 62)

The subject in language is vulnerable, appealing to a capricious reader for acknowledgement.

For those who have remained outside of the discourse of published literature, and whose experiences as part of a group or class have been excluded from formal, written history, autobiography may present a feasible option to assert a hitherto unacknowledged subjecthood and to challenge the prejudices and exclusions of received 'textbook' history. For detainees whose histories and identities have been violated through the discourses of imprisonment, writing may promise a means to regain self-identity and release themselves from the horror of detention and isolation. Ann Rosalind Jones,

writing about autobiographical texts, suggests that the writers are promised an opportunity to resist the 'assignment' to 'a negative position in culture' (as 'criminals' for the purposes of this discussion) by becoming 'subject[s] in discourse' as opposed to remaining 'subject[s] of discourse' (1986, 132). But in so doing, they enter a sort of double bind by relinquishing their texts to patriarchal scrutiny, and by declaring their participation in that discourse and in what Sidonie Smith calls the 'ideology of individualism' (1987, 52). Smith quotes Julia Kristeva, who argues that an autobiographer 'raises herself to the symbolic stature of her father' (Kristeva 1977, 28) when she 'opts for the scenario of public achievement' and 'justifies her claim to membership in the world of words' (Smith 1987, 52). 'She assumes the adventurous posture of man' (52) which then allows the assumption that (all) women may do so.

Having said this, it is necessary to move away from the paralysing sense of futility, both as writer and critic, which may accompany a discussion regarding the unavoidably fraught arena of language. To recognise, as critic, the interests and contradictory postures assumed by writers is not to undermine the significance of the act of writing, nor necessarily to negate the potential challenge within the text. Houston Baker rejects what he sees as a nihilistic critical approach:

Rather than taking refuge from the logical paradox thus presented in paralyzing skepticism or solipsistic idealism, we can simply take the stance 'nevertheless it moves'. That is to say, while we will have to qualify all claims to the absolute, and certainly to absolute and objectively valid 'truth', we may nevertheless note that our phenomenological investigations move us beyond the tedious cleverness of skeptical 'reading' that takes comfort in a commitment to absolutely 'nothing'. (1991, 60)

As to the inevitable ambiguity of language and the impossibility of ever securing authority, I would suggest that a more helpful analysis would not ignore but move beyond the fallibility of the articulating subject to explore the tensions and challenges of that position, of speaking 'as one who is both of the prevailing discourse, and on the outskirts of it' (Smith 1987, 49). Possibly the most engaging task of a critic might be to analyse attempts to negotiate apparent expectations, desires, tensions and contradictions within any given text, and to comment on the significance for the critical institution.

In the movement towards articulating a self-history and coming into 'constitutionality' where previously there was silence, the tensions are likely to be immense, the promise of recognition only problematically fulfilled, if at all. Gayatri Spivak's work deals in part with the process — and difficulties — of coming to 'constitutionality', that is, articulating oneself as a subject, and the fact that entering language brings with it the added burden of becoming part of society whose discourse further marginalised women. Writing (or language more generally) produces the subject as-much as she produces her text.⁸ By establishing herself as a subject through the act of writing the autobiographer occupies the ambiguous position of being both subject and object, creator and creation in language:

Trying to tell the story she wants to tell about herself, she is seduced into a tantalizing and yet elusive adventure that makes of her both creator and creation, writer and that which is written about. (Smith 1987, 46)

⁸ See, for example, Spivak's interview with Elizabeth Grosz in The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues (1990, 1-16).

Autobiography offers a writer the opportunity of exerting control over her public identity, although in Sartre's terms this can only ever be an 'appeal' to an unknown and unknowable readership to continue the process of creating her identity. The writer merely 'sets up' the 'landmarks' for the reader, who 'must go beyond them' (Sartre 1967, 31). 'In short,' he argues, 'reading is directed creation'. Smith suggests that for women writers the relationship to a reader is 'particularly troubled' (Smith 1987, 49), more especially so when risking the 'public self-disclosure' which autobiography entails (48). In Sartre's terms, one might say that the 'appeal' is that much more urgent as the risk, or the cost, of disclosure is that much greater.

Elizabeth Bruss has also pointed out that one's identity 'is composed not only by acts of self-perception but by "other-perception" as well' (Bruss 1976, 13).⁹ But the 'other' is never a single, coherent entity. Particularly where the act of writing is in itself transgressive of social laws, a writer's consciousness of the multifarious disapproving responses is all the more likely to be acute. This may be particularly true for women prisoners, criminality being a slur which further marginalises women, specifically, making it all the more difficult to adopt a credible subject position. Smith argues that the urgency of her appeal is apparent in the 'speaking posture' of women writers (52):

[T]he autobiographer reveals in her speaking posture and narrative structure her understanding of the possible readings she will receive from a public that has the power of her reputation in its hands.... Often, projecting multiple readers with multiple sets of expectations, she responds in a complex double-voicedness, a fragile heteroglossia of her own, which calls forth charged dramatic exchanges and narrative

⁹ Bruss quotes H. Phillipson Laing's term, 'other-perception', explained in Interpersonal Perception (1966, 5-6).

strategies.... Always, then, she is absorbed in a dialogue with her reader, that 'other' through whom she is working to identify herself and to justify her decision to write about herself in a genre that is man's. (48, 50)

The 'historical bases for [the] right to subjecthood' clearly had to (and has to) be fought for, despite the limitation of doing so through language. Houston Baker discusses the decision to write arrived at by seventeenth-century slave narrators, and in particular Frederick Douglass, who was, says Baker, 'quick to realize that it was only through engagement with the public, symbolic order that he would be able to venture statements that would come legitimately to be defined as in/on the slaves' liberational behalf' (Baker 1991, 14). However, when discussing the movement of 'Black Power' in the United States as part of a challenging, alternative form of writing and criticism for Black Americans, Baker questions the potential of (specifically) historical discourse to incorporate alternative narratives, and to be changed by them. He asks, '[h]ow many historical facts, examples, out-of-print texts will suffice radically to alter the rhetorical power ratios between Afro-American's traditions [sic] and those of a white, theoretically dominant cohort?' (1991, 18).

Can the text under focus, then, or any text, act as a potent challenge to that which has been received as fact, or history, in its articulation of an alternative 'history', based on personal experience when it is constrained by the conventions and demands of truth-producing discourses? Joyce Sikakane's A Window on Soweto seems to integrate almost imperceptibly a documentary-like, informative narrative of life in Soweto and a narrative which involves the author's own experience. The two are often not clearly distinguishable which raises important questions about the techniques or strategies necessarily adopted in

'history-producing' texts of which I believe autobiography to be a part. The role of personal memory seems to work both to authenticate and to bring to the narrative a necessary vitality and interest not often expected in strictly 'historical' documents.

William L. Andrews, writing about nineteenth-century slave narratives in the United States, speaks of the need for 'authenticating devices' in autobiography and of the pressure on autobiographers to 'invent devices and strategies that would endow their stories with the appearance of authenticity' (1986, 2) because the 'skeptical public would believe nothing but documentable fact in a slave narrative' (5). Similarly, the degree to which an autobiographical narrative of a black South African woman might be received as a credible and even historical account might depend on the extent to which it mimics a piece of historical writing. The task of a critic would then be, in part, to consider the constraints placed on the writer, and to see those constraints as an aspect of the writing itself, for they are utilised by the writer and incorporated into the narrative project in an effort to have her history heard and believed.

2. The Dynamic of Interrogation in Prison Narratives: the Position of the Reader in the Reconstruction of the Subject

In a challenging indictment of the structures of law and language, Phyllis Naidoo asserts, 'Yes, laws make criminals out of mothers and babies' (Schreiner 1992, 101). For those denounced as criminals, law — as opposed to being a language of entitlement and security — becomes a brutally 'impartial' language through which the self is rewritten in its own harsh, criminalising terms. Paul Gready writes:

[Through] interrogation, legislation, the political trial and prison regulations the prisoner was rigorously and violently rewritten. The written self created was unrecognisable and unwanted and a testimony to powerlessness. The word became a duplicitous lie beyond the prisoner's control. (1993, 492)

And yet, by way of challenge, language may equally offer a means of countering the alien and ravaged version of self that the language of 'Law and Order' has thrust forward. In particular, autobiography provides a model — an admittedly limited one, constrained by its own convention and language, but a model nonetheless — to counter-write that which is forcibly imprinted through the 'vocabulary' of imprisonment. Those interrogated are made to defend a criminalised identity, through means both aggressive and subtle, threatening confusion and self-alienation. For some, such as Emma Mashinini, the foreign version of the self is (almost) internalised even while it is despised and rejected. For a writer such as Caesarina Kona Makhoere (who is only interrogated, in the

narrow sense of the word at the beginning of her detention, before being sentenced) her resistance armoury is (almost) never allowed to slip.

To take up the pen is to pursue the promise (which can never be satisfactorily fulfilled) that a new assertion of self will be acknowledged. Gready speaks of the 'rival "powers of writing"':

While prisoners had little or no control over the manner in which they were captured and fixed in official writing, other written forms, from scratched messages on cell walls to the writing of autobiographical accounts, provided a way of regaining control. (1993, 492)

It seems necessary to temper Gready's enthusiasm for 'the rival powers of writing' with a bit of poststructuralist pragmatism; that is to say, that while one acknowledges that there is undoubtedly power in the written word it is ill-advised to assume that oppositional writing works only to re-empower, for it may also position the subject inflexibly, oppressively. (For example, Emma Mashinini tries desperately to erase the scratches on her cell wall because they represent the horror of her supposed criminality.) As to the notion of the 'power of writing', Michel Foucault offers this word of caution: 'the turning of real lives into writing is no longer a procedure of heroization; it functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection' (1977a, 192). This is exemplified in the writing on the wall, classic signifier of prison existence, which both releases the prisoner from the confines of enforced a-literacy and produces her as criminal.

The subversive potential of language does not lie in dogmatic assertions of authority but through invitations to new and challenging meanings. While language is the locus in which supremacy in power relations is played out, so too may it be an instrument with which to undermine hegemony. Such challenge

may be extracted, as an elixir, in the process of interpretation. When the text is read 'against the grain' its potential to unsettle meaning is released. However, some texts stand more obviously as a challenge: it is in the marginality of the scratches on the prison walls, its 'otherness' that its offence to the totalising, criminalising discourse of the prison, and hence its subversive power, is located.

For J. U. Jacobs the prison confession itself provides the form for a restructuring and a reasserting of the self. There are significant similarities between prison confession and writing: autobiography involves a self-interrogation of sorts. There is a disclosure of the writer's 'real' self to another mimicking confession itself, where the all-important notion of 'the truth' marks the specific value of the exchange (as opposed to fictional narratives which may have value as entertainment or philosophy). Using Dennis A. Foster, Jacobs lays bare the parallels between autobiography's confessional stance and the scene of interrogation in prison, arguing that a confessional narrative 'involves a narrator disclosing a secret knowledge to another, as a speaker to a listener, writer to reader, confessor to confessor' (Dennis A. Foster 1987, 2):¹⁰

In each of these South African prison memoirs the first-person narrator recounts the deconstruction of his own world and language by a whole range of physical and psychological stressors, up to the point where the compulsions to confess provide the very means of restructuring the self, and the interrogator's devices for destroying the language of the victim become the victim's strategies for self-creation. (Jacobs 1992a, 125; emphasis added)

¹⁰ Because of the double meaning of 'confessor' I have chosen to use the term 'confessant' to indicate the listener, reserving 'confessor' for the speaker only.

However, it is only the interrogator or listener (imagined, at the moment of writing) who has the power to accept the authenticity of the account and thereby to validate the emerging articulation of self. Herein lies the crux of this discussion. Writing (autobiographical texts, that is) is in effect an appeal as much as it is an assertion of self. The latter is dependent on the (imagined) response of the other actor in the textual dynamic: the reader. What follows is an exploration of the positioning of the reader in the writer's project of giving her own account of herself to counteract the ravishing of her history and person while in prison.

At one point in the interrogation of Ruth First two distinct levels of interrogation become apparent, the first involving her Security Branch interrogators, the second, her readers. This double-telling is structured into her very sentences: an addendum appears after a comma or in parentheses to mark that information which she conspiratorially offers us, the readers, which is kept from the prison interrogators:

Who wrote articles in Fighting Talk under the pseudonym XXX, they wanted to know. I did, I said. (Though I had not.)

'What about sabotage?' I was not involved in sabotage and I could tell them nothing about it, nothing at all; this had been something in which I had not got involved.

Who had I met most frequently at meetings? A. and E. and L., I said. (All out of reach of the Security Branch.)

Where had I been to meetings: In my house, in my motor-car parked in some quiet place, in the home of D. (long settled abroad). (1965, 121)

The security police are not blind to the rationale behind her choice of names, but are caught up nonetheless (as is the reader) in the game of uncovering the 'truth' of her thinking as she reports on her experience:

Viktor looked interested at this point only. I was engaged in the collection of information. For writing purposes. I needed to interview the veteran Congressmen with whom I was banned from communicating in normal circumstances, and I had made regular attempts to meet them at the underground headquarters and interview them about their lives of political struggle. (121)

We are told that the dynamic set up as the prisoner reveals information to the interrogators is one which captures their interest and attention despite their suspicion that they are being taken for a cleverly thought-out ride. When asked what she had been doing at Rivonia, First begins to report on her alleged activities (always keeping abreast of the interrogators, though, so as not to incriminate herself or any other of her comrades). Here it is not clear whether her explanation of her activities is directed at the reader or the prison interrogators until attention is drawn to the conscientious presence of Swanepoel who 'went on making notes all the while' — a detail clearly directed towards the reader.

Perhaps the most striking example of this double-voicedness, where First sets up the reader as yet another interrogator to whom she has to direct yet another truth, is found later on in her account of the interrogation:

Why had I fled to Swaziland during the 1960 State of Emergency after Sharpeville? one of the detectives demanded to know. 'Because you would have arrested me without preferring a charge or bringing me to trial, like you did to 1,800 others,' I said. The Security Branch knew very well that I had spent emergency months in Swaziland; they did not know that I had come back to live underground in Johannesburg during the second half of the emergency, and I did not tell them. (125)

There is a certain thrill in discovering as reader that the information offered is privileged and that 'even as we speak' the Security Branch does not know. This

impression (as reader) of being party to a secret, revealed under circumstances which make it of particular value, is much like the atmosphere that pervades during interrogation: the more clandestine and difficult to extort, the more alluring and interest-awakening is the tale. Although the reader is to some degree imagined as a sympathetic listener and an accomplice in the task of fighting the oppressive order of which the prison authorities are a part, s/he must nonetheless be lured into sympathy by being offered privileged and intimate information. The writer cannot afford to be apathetic in convincing the reader of her bona fides. (Her very identity rests on the reader's belief in her.) The suggestion, then, that the reader is set up as (or willingly becomes) confessant or interrogator of sorts is hard to refute.

No memoir makes this ambivalent relationship of writer to readership quite as disturbingly clear as Breyten Breytenbach's The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist. Breytenbach explicitly acknowledges 'the faceless addressee, shifting from "Mr Investigor" [sic] through "Mr Investerrogor," "Mr Interrogator," "Mr Confessor," and "Mr Eye" to the initialized "Mr. I" — the shifter of the first person singular' (Schalkwyk 1994, 26). David Schalkwyk recognises the disturbing implications this has for the South African reader/investigator who is positioned 'as [an accomplice] in the master-slave dialectic writ large in South African society, and exemplified in the relationship between detainee and interrogator, the latter itself concealing and containing the "terrorist" of the title' (Schalkwyk 1994, 26).

First, too, cannot trust her audience, although her text seems to include her audience as allies. In an interview with Jack Gould of the British

Broadcasting Corporation she acknowledges having removed a paragraph from 117 Days listing the extent of her involvement for fear that it would 'give something away' (First, qtd. in Pinnock 1993, 195). She is thus still having to conceal. Exposure to this hidden, diverse audience is (still) too risky. Her written text does not reflect the extent of her knowledge at the time of her arrest:

When she was detained she knew, in her own admission, 'a helluva lot, really an awful lot' about the underground movement.... She also knew beforehand about the closely-guarded plans concerning the escape from prison of Harold Wolpe, Arthur Goldreich, Jassat Moolla and Mosie Moolla. (Pinnock 1993, 194)

This is certainly not made explicit in her narrative. First seems to draw the conclusion that Harold Wolpe had escaped only when Anne-Marie Wolpe is brought into Marshall Square Prison: 'If Anne-Marie had been taken, Harold must have got safely away' (20). Thereafter her account immediately defers to an italicised third-person account of the escape, with retrospective hindsight. Her narrative does suggest that she would not divulge anything that she thought the Security Branch might not know, which suggests that she was withholding some information at least. But she does not, in fact, make her readers privy to this information, although her narrative sets up her readers as allies in her bid to outwit her interrogators by trying to glean how much they knew of her involvements. What the readers are not told, however, is the extent to which the Security Branch are right in identifying her as a key potential informer. In an interview with Walter Sisulu in September 1992 Donald Pinnock ascertains that it

was 'by pure chance' that First was not present at the Rivonia house¹¹ when the raid took place:

[As described by Sisulu] she had been party to the decision to purchase the farm and other properties with funds from outside the country and was involved with the development of the underground movement which used the Rivonia house as its base. According to Joe Slovo she knew 'almost everything'. (Pinnock 174)

The interviews took place in 1992, almost 30 years after First's detention, at a time when Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the African National Congress (ANC) was unbanned. First's text, however, was first published in 1965, a matter of months after her release from detention and decision to go into exile. For First, to write freely is dangerous and, in fact, impossible when her readership is not equally sympathetic. (At the time of the interviews the readership, of course, was still not equally sympathetic but with a different political climate in South Africa it was not as dangerous to speak freely.)

The 'presence' (or influential awareness) of a reader (albeit imagined, constructed) at the scene of writing in response to whom the text is articulated has been explored by acclaimed literary theorists, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, M.M. Bakhtin and Jacques Derrida, who have mooted that there is no other way of writing. The addressee is so integrally part of language as articulated that even when apparently addressing herself the writer does so 'via' the other. Bakhtin concludes that 'every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates' (Bakhtin

¹¹ The house, legally owned by Arthur Goldreich but bought with organisational funds, was used as a meeting place by leaders of the African National Congress who were arrested and charged with treason in the famous 'Rivonia Trial' of 1964.

1981, 279; emphasis in original). This 'contradictory environment of alien words' or expectation of an antipathetic and adversarial response is manifest not 'in the object' (of the reader him/herself) but in the 'consciousness of the listener with his apperceptive background, pregnant with responses and objections' (281). It is the writer's awareness of a potential readership that is significant.

In the case of memoirs, one may ask whether 'the other' need necessarily be considered present when the person being addressed is identical to the person who is articulating. Jacques Derrida argues that even in cases where 'the addresser is the addressee' one writes via an other, the listener. During a discussion printed in The Ear of the Other Pierre Jacques asks about the notion of the 'addressee': 'What happens when Nietzsche writes, finally, to himself?' Derrida replies:

When he writes himself to himself, he writes himself to the other who is infinitely far away and who is supposed to send his signature back to him. He has no relation to himself that is not forced to defer itself by passing through the other When he writes himself to himself, he has no immediate presence of himself to himself. There is the necessity of this detour through the other (1985, 87)

The place of the other, the listener, is thus of crucial importance because the text is constituted and the identity of the autobiographer secured with his/her agreement. However, it is important to stress that this 'place' is not occupied by a real readership but rather an imagined one which has not yet (nor ever will) come into existence. Stephen Clingman has developed Sartre's notion of a 'virtual public' (which Clingman calls a 'listening public') in his discussion of

Nadine Gordimer. Clingman's conception of audience is not dependent on a literal 'potential reading public':

[Rather, it is] a kind of listening public, waiting in implicit silent judgement on everything the writer [writes]. It [is] a hitherto oppressed world against whose significance, causes and values the significance, causes and values of all writing now [has] to be measured. Thus the virtual public can make silent, historic demands on the writer, becoming a presence and a problem he cannot ignore. (Clingman 1984, 170; second emphasis added)

It is not a matter of the writer's writing 'directly for' but rather 'towards or in favour of her virtual public' (170). In the case of texts of confession, as Jacobs describes prison testimonies, the 'presence' of a confessant is perhaps more 'real' and the moment of defending the 'truth' of oneself that much more anxiety-inducing as the confessor finds herself exposed to the throbbing heat of the spotlight, while the identity of her confessant remains ever veiled, imagined, protected from scrutiny.

The task of asserting a new self (in writing) to contest the criminalising 'vocabulary' of the state security system is both undermined and made all the more urgent by the overwhelming self-doubt which that system induces. Emma Mashinini feels tremendous anxiety that her father, in particular, and her friends would think of her as a criminal. She feels 'shame at having been a prisoner' (1989, 94) even on her release and has a pressing need to undo the discrediting of herself. In writing there is the imagined promise (which cannot be confirmed) of securing an identity in opposition to the criminalised self that is presented and supported by the full force of law. But can autobiography, with its own promise of 'truth' as experienced and recounted, ever contest that jaundiced and

damaging version of herself effectively, and what impact does this have upon the notion of 'the truth'?

Differing versions of 'the truth' emerge in oppositional writing, particularly that which involves personal testimony. 'The truth' becomes fundamentally unsettled, unfixed through the experience of imprisonment: not only is it profoundly mistrusted and feared, it also seems to shift endlessly according to the demands of the interlocutor. The concept of 'truth' becomes thoroughly problematic, even alienating, as a signifier of the pernicious, unrecognisable version of the prisoners' lives which is thrust upon them by the interrogators. 'The truth' constitutes the predetermined story which they are (sometimes brutally) bullied into accepting or 'offering' as fact. In Emma Mashinini's account we read that 'always they wanted the truth, when I had no more truth to tell. I don't think they ever really understood that in fact there was nothing to give away. But they always tried to find it, this nothing' (75). 'The truth' is synonymous with what the interrogators expect to hear, that she is guilty as defined by the politically antagonistic penal system. The 'truth' is also that account or story which, if accepted and owned, seems to hold the promise of her release: Mashinini speaks of the 'emotional battery' (as opposed to physical abuse) to which she is victim when a Security Branch policewoman cajoles her, "'If you tell the truth and nothing else you will be able to go back to your children in good time'" (76).

For First it is slightly more complicated, however, because she purposefully lies to protect herself and her comrades. The Security Branch are, in a sense, quite right not to believe her and her narrative, as I have said, does

not try to conceal this. Her integrity and commitment to justice are not undermined by this representation of (narrowly defined) dishonesty. There is another notion of 'truth' underlying the narrative which is not breached by these admissions of falsehoods. Information is purposefully avoided in the interests of a higher 'truth' which encompasses notions of justice and honour (in respect of her comrades particularly). A slavish obedience to avoid lies in any given utterance does not amount to a commitment to truth.

If Jacobs is right in reading the 'confession' of autobiography as a mimicry of interrogation in form, the prisoner/writer's alienation from 'the truth' raises further complexities for the writing of autobiography as the construction of a narrative which promises to submit to the requirement that it be corroborated by an outside 'truth'. Gready speaks of the 'tyranny of objectivity' which exacts 'factually insistent narratives' — evidence from outside the moment of articulation (Gready 1993, 490-1). For those subject to interrogation, 'the truth' is the story of the detainee's guilt which is presented by the interrogator to the detainee for verification. Anything which differs from what the interrogator has settled on as the truth, regardless of the apparent sincerity of the speaker, is rejected as 'lies'. In 117 Days Ruth First is told by her interrogator, "And if you tell me anything it must be the truth, or I will know" (141). The interrogator's claim that he has greater insight into the prisoner's truth of herself (that he 'knows' more) would undermine the conviction of even the most confident of confessors, particularly when accompanied by the other ways of breaking the prisoner down explored at a later point in this dissertation.

The notion of the 'truth' as it operates during interrogation is, quite simply, that which the interrogator demands to hear. The extraordinarily difficult task of the detainee is to find a path that will be tolerated by the interrogator as 'truth' (and be rewarded with release) while at the same time remain faithful to her own sense of integrity. Ruth First writes:

I had to convince him, my present interrogator, that I really had told the truth, the whole truth — 'And if you tell me anything it must be the truth, or I will know' — and he then personally had the power to effect my release.... I was practising deceit but searching myself not to make it self-deception. (1965, 141)

'The truth', then, could be understood to be that which, once agreed to, will bring an end to interrogation although, as is suggested in the final chapter on torture, extracting 'the truth' may not be the only point of interrogation as very often the interrogators already know the facts. It is clear from this passage that another, more powerful understanding of truth and deception is at work: in trying to remain 'true' to her comrades and her cause (for that is the ultimate 'truth') First must 'deceive' the interrogators, and this without deceiving herself.

Emma Mashinini's book Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life: A South African Autobiography is not exclusively a prison narrative but the second half of her book is dominated by her account of her detention as a result of her work as a prominent trade unionist. (She was head of the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa at the time of her arrest in November 1981.) The isolation of detention and the hostility of the interrogation experience are harrowing for Mashinini. Her account sheds light on the interrogatory dynamic involved in self-construction in the aftermath of trauma.

When, after her release, Mashinini undergoes treatment at a clinic for victims of torture in Denmark, the telling of her life story is again subject to the predetermined script (in the dialogue with the white doctor). Dr Inge Genefke (who is not a psychotherapist) encourages Mashinini to be more self-interested. In response Mashinini searches out instances as evidence (in this case) that she has acted out of selfish need. Here the 'accusation' is that Mashinini does not care enough for her 'self': the procedure of interrogation/confession is repeated in that Mashinini feels pressurised to point to external 'facts' to support the story that she has to produce to please her listener, in this case Dr Genefke:

She would say, 'You've got to be selfish about yourself.'

I was giving her examples to say that yes, I thought I was a selfish person. I said I was a person who could stand up and speak for herself. She said, 'Give me one good example.' And I gave her an example....

Well, I told her that example. But she said to me, 'That's not enough. That's not being selfish. That is standing up for your rights.'

I tried everything to prove that I can be selfish, and I did not find one thing.... I left Denmark prematurely, I know. Inge felt I should stay longer, but I couldn't. I was really longing to be out of hospital and to go back to my family. (94-5)

It seems that in this final choice too Mashinini's experience of hospitalisation mimics interrogation where the only way to protect herself is to opt for silence. Ultimately Mashinini chooses to leave the scene of examination, to withdraw to her own world where she is labelled neither 'criminal' nor 'patient', and where her spoken identity is less likely to be judged according to its consistency with a preordained text from an ideology and culture alien to her.¹²

¹² I had the opportunity of meeting Dr Genefke at a conference in Cape Town entitled 'Caring for Survivors of Torture: Challenges for the Medical and Health Professionals' (15-17 November 1995). In conversation after her talk on a project to train doctors in India to deal with survivors of torture Dr Genefke spoke of her interaction with Mashinini, tacitly acknowledging its failure: 'We are much cleverer now', she said, in that they know not to confine torture survivors to hospital beds.

What of the truth that autobiography itself strives to tell? The predetermined strictures of autobiography demand that, unlike fictional texts, the story be verifiable by events from 'real life', the text outside of the printed text which is produced, to some degree, in the act of 'recording'. Although it is more commonly accepted that the notion of 'objective fact' is not fixed and certain, the most significant feature nonetheless which distinguishes the autobiographical text from any other is that it promises that what is offered is the 'truth', as perceived and etched in language by the subject of the tale.

The ability of anyone to know and represent herself fully is, of course, limited.¹³ One is ineluctably constrained by the self-evident limits of understanding and openness to a consciousness of the 'darker' elements of one's psyche — that which is repressed in order, inter alia, that one is able to operate within society. Moreover, the autobiographical text depends as much on the 'mature' self at the time of writing as on the remembered self of the time of experiencing (which then makes possible an almost infinite number of autobiographies of any one life).¹⁴ Most significantly, the notion that there is ever a single, apprehendable version of the self which can be found outside of the moment of writing and rightfully displayed as 'the truth' of the self is questionable. When discussing autobiography, J.M. Coetzee writes that he knows 'as little about [his] purpose, which lies in the present, as about the drives and desires, lying in the past, that [he wishes] to explore' (Coetzee 1991, 118).

¹³ See Gayatri Spivak's 'Introduction' to Jacques Derrida's Of Grammatology (1974).

¹⁴ See Dorothy Driver (1991) who analyses how this split is differently employed in autobiographies by Mary Benson, Caesarina Makhoere and Emma Mashinini.

Moreover, when considering the reproduction, or construction, of the 'truth' of autobiography, he toys with proposing this 'definition of autobiography':

[I]t is a kind of self-writing in which you are constrained to respect the facts of your history. But which facts? All the facts? Of course not. All the facts are too many facts. You choose the facts insofar as they fall in with your evolving purpose. (118)

The experience of interrogation, and then re-interrogation through the writing of prison texts, suggests that the presence (albeit imagined) of the listener, the interrogator with his/her (imagined) script, contributes significantly to the selection of admissible facts in the production of the autobiographical text and of the production of the self. The writer is detained and questioned at the scene of writing and must offer an explanation and the necessarily concomitant external evidence for verification in order for her text to bear the title 'autobiography' with its promise of 'the truth'. It may be that for writers of prison texts the notion of a listening, judging public is that much more virulent and more 'present' at the moment of articulating, the need to produce verification that much more pressing, and the sense of both the danger and the redemptive potential of the 'confession' that much more intense.

It is perhaps fitting to conclude this discussion with a rather different perspective on the dynamic of telling: in her chapter on testimonial writing Dori Laub posits that the articulation of one's experience is a vital form of psychic survival, despite the futility of any attempt to recreate experience in language, the 'impossibility of telling' as it were. Laub has focused on the role of bearing witness in the lives of Holocaust survivors:

Some have hardly spoken of it, but even those who have talked incessantly feel that they managed to say very little that was heard. None find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent.... The 'not telling' of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor's conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events. (Laub 1992, 79)

Thus the horror is somehow contained in the naming of it. But central to the act of bearing witness is the place of the other who, in Laub's understanding, makes possible the dynamic without which healing (and therefore meaningful and not just literal freedom) cannot occur. Without having an other to address, one is not able to address oneself. Referring to the Holocaust again:

There was no longer an other to which one could say 'Thou' in the hope of being heard, of being recognized as a subject, of being answered.... But when one cannot turn to a 'you' one cannot say 'thou' even to oneself. (Laub 1992, 82)

Turning back to Mashinini we can see how this need for a (sympathetic) addressee was true of her, although the particular dynamic of the Danish hospital did not make it a place of healing for her, a place where she felt able to tell her story and be believed. Jacobs suggests that 'Mashinini learned the value of self-interrogation as healing, and when she later approaches Dr Liz Floyd, friend of Neil Aggett, for assistance, narrative is consciously perceived as therapy' (Jacobs 1991, 124):

When I went and told her about all my problems it was like a psychological release. I started emptying and talking, and it was a great relief. This was not a doctor and patient discussing. It was two friends who'd come from prison, and prison is not something you can leave behind. (Mashinini 105)

This therapeutic exchange would seem to suggest that there is a redemptive role, then, in being a listener although for Mashinini it was necessary that her listener be one who had shared her experience and who is ideologically kin. Dr Genefke, who tries to persuade her that it need not be devastating to be called as a state witness, cannot play this role, for she does not understand the importance of acceptance by her community, for her own sense of self:

This sent me totally berserk, to think of being a state witness. So I told her this, and she asked me, 'Why are you so concerned or afraid of being a state witness?' And I said, 'It's because the community can never accept you having been a state witness.' And she was educating me, saying, 'You know that at times people are made state witnesses very much against their will, and they may have broken down, or there may be other very good reasons why they have eventually gone to become a state witness.' After all the trauma, to go back to the community and be rejected again. It means you are killing this person twice over. (94)

To betray her community would be tantamount to a (second) annihilation of self.

This points to a second aspect of her experience at the Danish clinic which made it uncomfortably reminiscent of prison for Mashinini: she was isolated and without a sense of community there. She was unable to communicate with other patients who did not speak English. It was like 'again being in a sophisticated prison', Mashinini said in a telephonic conversation, for 'I could not communicate with the people'. It was a 'solitary confinement' of sorts (Mashinini 1996).

Without a community within which to speak, she is silent.

Mashinini described to me how she began to write: 'I thought I was not a writer.' She had a friend question her in order to facilitate her narrative, after which she would transcribe the conversation. She later dispensed with that device because 'I used to repeat myself'. As a result, 'I became a writer'. The

parallel which Jacobs draws between the interrogatory 'devices' of the Security Police and the 'victim's strategies' for self-expression is corroborated by this information (Jacobs 1992a, 125). But there are also fundamental differences in the interrogatory exchanges between prisoner and interrogator on the one hand and the ideologically and emotionally sympathetic dialogue Mashinini finds with friends, on the other. What is sure is that without an addressee — that is, a sympathetic addressee with whom she is able, first, to identify and, second, to communicate — Mashinini cannot embrace the nurturing dialogue that encourages her, ultimately, to take up the pen.

3. Representing the Violated Self in Prison and in Prison Writing

Autobiography distinguishes itself from other narratives in that the writer and subject are uniquely synonymous and, more interestingly, what is promised is a subjective account of a life. A contradiction emerges in the co-existent expectation that what is created is both objective truth and the subjective — and therefore historically unreliable — account of a self. David Murray suggests that, as readers of autobiography, 'we are prepared for inaccuracies, even lies, since the guarantee of authenticity offered is not of historical accuracy or objectivity, but precisely of first-person subjectivity' (1991, 67).

While this discussion is not primarily concerned with poststructuralist questioning of the validity of a written 'truth', it does seek to explore the way in which the notion of the truth operates in autobiographical prison narratives. By laying claim to the integrity implicit in the truth, those who have been silenced and detained are given the opportunity to counter the tale of the self thrust forward by the criminalising 'vocabulary' of the prison. However, albeit potentially empowering, the act of writing is deceptively simple: autobiography is necessarily a negotiation of facets of a self, where the audience is appealed to before the credibility of the signature can finally be agreed to and an identity can be carved in stone as it were.¹⁵

It has already been suggested that this process is particularly fraught for writers of prison narratives whose credibility has already been thoroughly undermined through incarceration. It may be that the experience of interrogation

¹⁵ The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines 'subjective', in part, as 'belonging to, of, due to the consciousness ... as opposed to real or external things; due to one's own feelings or capacities rather than being actually existent' (emphasis added).

provides a sort of blue-print for the act of asserting identity in the face of a hostile audience. While the undermining of credibility may in no way unsettle personal moral conviction, it is conceivable that the experience of interrogation (where one is not believed and one's bona fides are not accepted) would profoundly affect that other dynamic of telling where an interrogatory audience is addressed in writing and presented with the truth of herself.

J. U. Jacobs has suggested that interrogation works productively in providing the structure and language with which to make this appeal, with which to confess to, or assert, the truth of the self. Jacobs argues that 'the compulsions to confess provide the very means of restructuring the self, and the interrogator's devices for destroying the language of the victim become the victim's strategies for self-creation' (1992a, 125). In a recent article David Schalkwyk cautions, however, that 'it is a mistake to project homogeneity into South African prison writing.' Schalkwyk's analysis of Breyten Breytenbach's The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist shuns a simplistic genre-building critical approach, by highlighting the profound differences between Breytenbach and Jeremy Cronin, selected for Schalkwyk's discussion precisely because of the superficial similarities of their backgrounds. Schalkwyk's analysis of Breytenbach's ironic play with the dynamic of confession suggests that to treat all prison narratives as uniform is inappropriate. Even Breytenbach's self-conscious play with confession is a deceptive strategy for this representational game makes 'rehabilitation' through confession 'impossible', Schalkwyk argues, 'by the framing structure of a continually displaced confessor':

It is like confessing to God, Christ, and Satan at the same time, and renders inevitable a dissipated self, the authority of which is negated by

being unable or unwilling to settle upon the authority of any single confessor or site of confession. (Schalkwyk 1994, 26).

While I, too, am reluctant to accept Jacobs's blanket description of all prison narratives as 'confessional texts', this discussion takes a lead from Jacobs's suggestion that the assault on the self in prison interrogation will have a profound influence on the text of the detainee/writer. In particular, the notion of the truth is complicated as the autobiographer tries to find the version of herself which will both meet with approval and be consistent with her own sense of integrity and, as in the case of the anxious articulations made under interrogation, ultimately be rewarded with freedom.

In her negotiation of an identity, one may well ask what constraints and obstacles the prison writer may be faced with. How does the prisoner find agreement between the identity she claims for herself, on the one hand, an identity which is constructed within the context of a strong sense of community, perhaps, and in political struggle, and that which is ascribed her via the prison vocabulary on the other hand (the vocabulary of clothing, dependency, incarceration, prohibitions, isolation, alienating description of herself as dangerous, amongst others). On reading a text such as Emma Mashinini's Strikes Have Followed Me All of My Life (1989) one cannot presume to find a clear split between a free, confident self and the criminal or traitor created through imprisonment. At one point Mashinini writes rather jokingly, it seems, and certainly with a measure of remove, of the absurdity of employing a large contingent of prison staff to guard her (1989, 74): 'all just to take me from prison to prison. The waste of manpower in this! Sometimes it would depress me very much, the waste of these working people, with more education just

handed to them than we blacks could get with all our struggles — for what?' Even when she acknowledges the degree to which it affected her (so that at times 'I would believe them, that with all that manpower I must be a very dangerous person') one is not struck here by the profound sense of self-doubt and insecurity evident at a later point. Mashinini fears that, as a 'criminal', she may be shunned by the very community with which she has identified in political struggle and that, more especially, her family and friends would reject her:

I'm always going away and now here I am in prison. It means again I have found myself to be a nuisance in my family. I'm always causing them pain by going away. All I could hope was they understood that I had not committed any crime. I hoped I had not done anything to offend them. I worried about my friends. I thought, Are they going to receive me when I come back? (87)

What is striking is the way in which the possibility that she might in fact be a criminal has become assimilated into an earlier understanding of herself as a politically active woman and therefore a failed mother so that two versions of self ('criminal' and 'mother') become mutually determining and she cannot find shelter from the label of 'criminal' in her identity as 'mother'. Being in prison becomes, if just for a moment, a logical extension of an apparently unacceptable and frequently manifested tendency to neglect her family. The process of constructing an identity is thus not a struggle fought externally, on paper, so to speak, but a deeply internal wrestling where nothing is self-evident and anything asserted may be used to undermine the subject by an unseen (and internalised) critic, as Derrida puts it, the 'ear of the other' (1985).

It is thus not surprising that external 'truths' may be invoked as evidence in the fight for credibility. When one's word about oneself is no longer enough (because one can no longer be sure that one knows oneself) the word of another may be the

only salvation. It is significant that Mashinini chooses to include, as a sort of preface to 'Part II' which deals with her time of incarceration, letters from other unionists (which are not given an introduction) and an extract from a newspaper article which both tells the story of her arrest and offers responses to the news of her arrest (59-60). In addition, there are footnotes throughout the book in which an unacknowledged editor refers to Mashinini in the third-person (but informally, as 'Emma') when including information on South African history, language, politics, and the like. For example, a footnote on page 67 informs us that the 'DPSC [Detainees' Parents Support Committee] was formed in September 1981, following the spate of detentions that was to lead to Emma's own arrest in November.... For the minutes of the meeting to which Emma refers, see Appendix B.' This has the effect of bypassing her subjectivity, as though an objective voice would lend credence to the account. In a subtle way this voice undermines her own voice while trying to support it, through the implicit suggestion that her own account does not carry sufficient authority and that external evidence is necessary in order to achieve a more 'objective' ordering of the events.

The struggle to claim a public voice is not a new struggle for women and is made all the more fraught through having to make space for the conflicting identities of woman, wife, mother, activist, comrade, worker, and so on. The disclosure of a public self may in itself be a challenge to an aspect of a woman's identity under patriarchal norms, such as 'supportive wife'. To return, briefly, to an earlier discussion, it seems appropriate to note Sidonie Smith's contention that, for women in certain cultures, to write (and be published) is transgressive and therefore anxiety-inducing (1987, 50). This is true, as regards formal

speech-making, for Maggie Resha who is alarmed at the prospect of writing a speech as leader of a delegation of the ANC Women's League to the World Congress of Women in Moscow because 'at home we usually addressed meetings off the cuff' (1991, 220). She prefers that her husband take this more ceremonious role. Her language is surprisingly strong: 'I was shattered. I had never before written a speech' (220). The same anxiety does not apply to speaking spontaneously at community or political gatherings 'at home'.

According to Smith, the transgression of speaking out cannot be managed without a severe cost to the autobiographer herself, for it would require that she 'silence that part of her that identifies her as a daughter of the mother' (Smith 1987, 53). For Resha, however, the speech does not amount to a departure from her role as dutiful daughter for it contributes to the political objectives of her (ANC) community. It nurtures rather than transgresses community values. Her husband is supportive of her independent role as political activist and of the speech in particular.

For Caesarina Kona Makhoere the cost of her outspokenness is much greater. Not only does her father disapprove of her student activism, but as a policeman himself he is prepared to lead the police to where she is hiding. Makhoere both excuses her father who 'suffered a lot of mental torture' (1) on her account and recognises that 'he was the one responsible for [her] being behind bars' (2). Although she does not direct anger towards him explicitly, her text dispossesses him of his role as father. He is described as 'really pathetic' (2). Later, when she is told that he had died, she 'only cursorily acknowledges the tragic news before returning to the political work of prison' (Harlow 1992, 155). She has excised all daughterly

feeling towards her family in favour of the new community of activists represented in her text.

The disintegrating legitimacy of the family patriarchy that Makhoere introduces in the first chapter of No Child's Play is radically left behind in prison.

Makhoere quickly undertakes the urgent work, even from within a partial solitary confinement, of remaking an organized social order of resistance and struggle among the women prisoners. (1992, 155).

Her position as daughter disintegrates, as is confirmed when represented in her text.

Her title draws attention to her lost childhood: life as a dissident is 'no child's play'.¹⁶

However, she is able to construct in her text a new 'family' which is free of disharmony.

Leigh Gilmore suggests that autobiography, and in particular the confession, may be usefully appropriated by women writers in the attempt to secure an authoritative subject position: 'these narratives can be understood as a canny raid on the discourses of truth and identity' (Gilmore 1994, 226). For a woman who has been declared a criminal, such an appropriation will not be uncomplicated and without enormous obstacles, not least of all the fear that publication would invoke the horror of being arrested again: Emma Mashinini writes that 'I had been told when I was released never, never to speak about my detention.... I was fearful, terribly fearful, that this would leak out and get to them, and I would be rearrested and charged for having spoken about things' (92). It is useful to turn to specific texts to explore the possibility that language itself, and not simply publication, has the

¹⁶ See Dorothy Driver (1991, 349) for a fuller explanation of the significance of Makhoere's title.

capacity to betray and disempower even as it secures a victory in the battle against silence.

3.1 The Word as Weapon

In plain terms, writing may be thought to 'set the record straight'. For Mashinini it provides a welcome relief from the threatening spoken interaction of interrogation, even while the security police have an expectation that a written piece would reveal what they have not yet been able to extort through interrogation.

They'd make me sit down and write, and perhaps in my writing they wanted me to say things, but here was nothing I could write that would give anybody away, because I'd write about my trade union matters. I would sit and write, and write, and this was better for me. Maybe it was a way of being able to think what to say without for once anyone pushing me and going on — 'come on, come on, now. Speak.' And being rough about it. (75-6)

Breytenbach spends even more of his time under interrogation writing, with his interrogators confident that his text will reveal the truth, that is, the information they need to clinch their case (1984).

In a satisfying reversal of the conventional power dynamics in prison language offers itself as a tool for the detainee's use, as articulated in A Snake With Ice Water, edited by Barbara Schreiner.¹⁷ For Barbara Hogan (who, as an ANC activist, spent eight years in prison charged with treason) the language of the law provides some power and can be used to intimidate the wardresses.¹⁸ She describes this as

¹⁷ Barbara Schreiner edits this South African collection of prison memoirs, photographs, drawings poems, fictional stories and interviews almost exclusively with political prisoners under South African apartheid legislation.

a 'war': 'In this war we never spoke Afrikaans, although I did occasionally, but we used English, and we used language like they use language against black people. We used academic language and we overpowered them in terms of intellect and understanding and things like that' (1992, 37).

Ruth First, too, recognises the potential potency of her linguistic skills. In prison she has been 'disarmed of all weapons except for the last, my tongue' (44). First and Hogan are both mother-tongue English speakers. For others the only strength is in silence, to refuse the terms of the interrogators, and even to refuse to engage in language itself in what is a deeply threatening environment. Even the dialogue of concern is seen by Mashinini as a further, more subtle part of the intricate and gripping web of the imprisonment:

And when [the inspector] said, 'Any complaints?' I never made any complaint. It would not serve any purpose. They knew. They had their little window and the nurse was coming in because of my hypertension. So they knew all was not well with me. They did not need to ask what was wrong. (64)

For her, then, the language of concern is a sham; its purpose is not as it appears — to enquire about difficulties and undertake to change them. The ability of the authorities to spy on her is most unnerving for Mashinini, controlled as it is by those on the other side of the wall. They have their information (as evidenced also by their not needing to ask her where her offices were, by their driving straight to Khotso House on her arrest).¹⁹ Were she to participate in the dialogue frankly she would be

¹⁸ The writers studied in this project use the feminine form of the noun ('wardress') to refer to the female prison staff. I have elected to do likewise for the sake of consistency and for clarity of meaning when commenting on excerpts from the texts.

¹⁹ The Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) which Mashinini led at the time of her arrest, had been offered office space at Khotso House by the Desmond Tutu, then General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), as

exposing herself to being rewritten according to their language, using their 'vocabulary', which she recognises has no bona fides. By responding to the questions in their own terms (that is, in terms of 'wanting' things) she thus protects her 'true' self and remains invulnerable. "There is nothing I want." She registers more than what is apparent. To the extent that her answer differs from their reading of her situation — via the instruments available to them, that is, the peep hole and the nurse (they 'did not need to ask what was wrong') — an answer is given them in terms of the subtext of their exchange: she is resisting their attempt to establish their control over her in the particular power struggle of the prison. She will not grant them access to herself through dialogue.

Like Mashinini, Joyce Sikakane, who is also imprisoned under South African detention legislation, refuses to respond to a dishonourable offer of a job in London from the Security Police. 'Then they repeated their offer of a job offer in London. I didn't bother to reply yes or no, I just kept silent' (Sikakane 1977, 63). Silence is a refusal of more than the offer itself. It denotes a language of its own, one which resists the co-operation involved in the convention of dialogue and any concomitant acknowledgement of her would-be interlocutor's humanity. Their answer in turn is to lock her up once more, but the significance of her refusal to be engaged (and thereby 'encaged') linguistically does not seem to be lost with the reassertion of her physical imprisonment. Her later strategy is to 'answer' their questions by questioning them in a way which implicitly challenges the ethics underlying her imprisonment.

¹under the Group Areas Act [of 1950] blacks were prohibited from leasing offices in white areas' (Mashinini 49).

Every so often, the Special Branch officers used to come and ask "Have you thought it over? Will you agree?" and I used to answer "When are you releasing me? When are you charging me? I want to go home."
(Sikakane 1977, 64)

In this way she is able to use language — their interrogatory prison language — to register resistance and at the same time avoid being inscribed in the code which labels her 'prisoner' and 'criminal'.

However, language need not be experienced as an empowering tool. At times in Ruth First's text there is evidence of a profound mistrust of language or, more rightly phrased, a fearful belief in its power to betray the one who(m it) speaks. First refuses to engage in language of (almost) any sort with her captors, choosing instead the illogical gibberish of 'the fluffy-minded frightened girl in a spot, given to inconsequential comment, with an inflexible inability to concentrate and grasp the essence of a problem'. She fixes on one previously constructed sentence (unspecified) and repeats it regardless of its applicability to the context, an act which for her is distinct from 'talking': 'I could not talk any more because I would be giving myself away, I insisted, and somehow or other, I didn't know how, they would find a way to use my own statement against me' (128). One is struck by an overwhelming sense of her powerlessness; there is nothing at her disposal which she can trust, not even her own powers of speech. Earlier, when being pressed to continue her insubstantial statement, she had 'repeated that the only way I knew how to protect myself in detention was by my silence' (126).

First chooses to withhold from her readership what it is that she repeats to her interrogators which holds significant implications for an investigation into the dynamic of writing and reading prison narratives. She can recount the moment of

opting to speak nonsense as a protection device; she can even describe the role that she acted out, that of the 'fluffy-minded frightened girl in a spot', and can also comment on the nature of her 'inability to concentrate' (128). The effect of this is to distance the writing First from the detainee who is the object of her narrative. Were she to offer for scrutiny her actual words, she would risk being placed under further judgement, this time from a readership whose sympathy and respect she courts. She cannot afford to identify herself too closely with those words, as the response, she fears, may rob her of the identity she asserts in this new statement of self, constructed under the spotlight of autobiography. In the same way, then, one could infer that 'the only way [she] knew how to protect [her]self when she is detained, not at the prison but now at the scene of writing is, again, 'b y [her] silence' (126).

3.2 The 'Baring' of the Self

Following Jacobs, I suggested earlier that the experience of interrogation can, to some extent, be seen mirrored in the dynamic of telling in autobiography. This needs further inquiry. Jacobs writes that the 'stripping of the prisoner, both literally and mentally by a series of interrogators, provides the metaphor for the compulsive baring of self that is autobiography, conscious self-disclosure through narration' (1992a, 124). One obvious challenge to the applicability of Jacobs's metaphor lies in the fact that autobiography could be seen as a 're-clothing' of the self, where a new identity is constructed and reasserted, as much as a 'baring' of self. Neither enforced nakedness nor the exposure of oneself in interrogation should necessarily

be assumed to be an uncomplicated mirror of the processes involved in writing prison narratives and autobiography more generally.

Jacobs suggests that the 'narrative design' of prison memoirs as outlined in his discussion 'is a universal one' (1992a, 117), and not specific to South African prison memoirs only. He then goes on to consider the significance of enforced nakedness for prisoners and its impact upon their writing (118). There is a danger, it seems to me, in leaning too heavily on the metaphor of 'baring' and applying it universally, that is, without examining the specificities of the process of interrogation as such and of each act of writing. Jacobs does not consider the particular difficulties nakedness might have for a woman prisoner for whom physical exposure may signal a sexual danger. Relations of power are implicated in hierarchical viewing: for a black woman prisoner to be utterly naked before the penetrative gaze of a white woman wardress would have a particular political significance in apartheid South Africa. The prisoner's exposure performs her own powerlessness in the face of the apartheid system's dominance. It cannot be assumed that these power dynamics are recreated in the process of (re)presenting oneself before an audience which is constructed, at least in part, as sympathetic.

In an extract from Hell-Hole, Robben Island: Reminiscences of a Political Prisoner in South Africa quoted by Jacobs, Moses Dlamini describes how he refuses to follow suit after watching the other prisoners exposing themselves under duress: when 'the turn of us political prisoners came, we handed the warders the clothes, opened our mouths, lifted up our hands, turned round with naked dignity and refused

to do the "tauza" (Dlamini 38).²⁰ Immediately thereafter, and in reference to the quotation, Jacobs writes that, for Dlamini, the 'exposed self can be deliberately and calculatedly revealed in a narrative about the prison experience in which the reader becomes discomfitingly obliged to occupy the position of witness to the paraded truths of the prison memoir' (118). What Jacobs overlooks in his argument is that, in fact, Dlamini does not participate in the humiliation of the 'tauza dance' in which orifices are examined by the warders (although he is naked). Moreover, the use of the verb 'reveal' seems inappropriate for it suggests a disclosure of something secretive or even devious. Dlamini could be said to 'clothe' himself with dignity and volition (to reverse Jacobs's metaphor) in representing himself as able to evade the humiliation of (full) bodily exposure. His text is more an assertion of a robust self than an exposure of a vulnerable self.

The problem of trying to construct for oneself a credible subject position in the face of disbelief (whether real, in the case of interrogation, or imagined, as at the moment of addressing the unseen audience in writing) does seem to be prevalent, however. Despite the reservation already raised it is useful to explore Jacobs's metaphor, while listening carefully to the text at hand. It is clear from a number of prison texts that the experience of being stripped of all clothing and exposed (even to the extent of being watched going to the toilet) is profoundly unnerving for those subjected to it. The responses range from humiliation and fear on the one hand to

²⁰ The 'tauza dance' is the name given by prisoners to the set of steps prisoners have to 'perform' (naked) in front of the prison staff to ensure that contraband articles are not smuggled into prison. An extract from Maggie Resha's narrative describes this in greater detail.

Dlamini wrote an account of the two years he spent on Robben Island while imprisoned for furthering the aims of a banned organisation, the Pan-African Congress. J.U. Jacobs discusses the narratives of prisoners held on Robben Island and the discursive significance of the island as 'the ultimate margin to which the Pretoria government banished its opposition' (1992b, 73).

outrage and a sense of moral supremacy on the other: Maggie Resha describes the 'Tauza Dance' referred to by Dlamini and other prison narrators such as Caesarina

Kona Makhoere:

This 'dance' is very disgusting. One has to strip naked, then put one's hands on the floor and jump over one's legs in order to expose one's private parts. This is all done in public and is the worst humiliation I've ever experienced. (Resha 1991, 166-7)

For Resha the experience is somehow mitigated by the thrill in having outwitted the wardresses during a ritual which is designed to ensure total exposure on her part.

The purported aim of the 'tauza' is to make it impossible to smuggle contraband goods, such as drugs, money and weapons, into the prison. Resha defies this by managing to conceal pills in a carefully executed manoeuvre. This does not negate the humiliation itself in any way, but it allows her to evade the position assigned her, that of victim and impotent inmate, and at the same time expose the fact that the more successful functioning of the 'dance' lies in the degree to which it humiliates; its ability to frustrate attempts at smuggling is limited.

I had wrapped the tablets in a little piece of plastic, then placed them under my breasts. Before we handed our clothes and shoes in, to be kept, we were made to go through the 'Tauza Dance'.... As I undressed, I slipped the tablets into one of my shoes. Then, after I had done the dance, I put on my prison attire.... It was at this stage that I transferred the tablets from my shoe back to my breasts. That time the Nonna and the Mvakachi were busy scrutinising the next prisoner's private parts; they could not see what the people who were already dressed were doing. My breasts served as my medicine cupboard for the whole period that I was in prison. (1991, 166-167)

Enforced nakedness, then, does not simply signify a loss of protection and vulnerability for Resha. The presence of her fully clothed adversaries leads to acute

humiliation, but she is never utterly stripped of herself and the resources on which she can rely. She is not robbed of her mental acumen nor the fullness of her body's means. Her breasts offer her a secure hiding place: in her very body, then, she is able to find the protection that clothing previously would have afforded her and, one could argue, the association with healing that her nurse's uniform would have allowed her in the past.

This is not so with Mashinini. There is evidence in Mashinini's text to suggest that the anxiety in being made naked is not so much as a result of the exposure of the body as symbol of an essential and vulnerable self, but rather as a result of the (irrational) fear that without clothes to affirm and attest to identity, one risks discovering that one has no identity. Nakedness figures as a possible nothingness or non-existence rather than the unveiling of an essential being. The question seems to lurk rather troublingly: what if there is no self once all vesture and adornment is removed?

Mashinini's earlier experience of being utterly alone and without the opportunity to interact or read leaves her with a skeletal, but certain sense of self: '...with nothing to read. Just with myself. The bare me' (60). A later moment, however, finds her unsure of what the 'bare me' is. She is dependent on the borrowed clothing of another for familiarity:

I didn't think I knew myself any longer. There was no mirror. It's odd what happens when you don't see yourself. You think, who am I? All I had to recognise was a jersey which was sent to me by a friend. It was her jersey and I could recognise it. But I didn't know any longer how to recognise myself. (87)

The ultimate challenge in the experience of imprisonment (and, one could argue, in writing, alone, at one's desk) is that of retaining a strong sense of self without the support of any of the external aspects of one's life which make up one's identity under normal circumstances. Isolation is frightening, particularly for those held under the 90-day clause of the Security Act because it is indefinite (contrary to its name). Moreover, letters, books and any of the other privileges allowed to convicted prisoners are prohibited. The fear is born out of the engulfing void within which one must survive, secure in the knowledge of oneself. Prisoners are relatively powerless in the construction of their own identities in prison and, for the most part, political prisoners are isolated. Ruth First is not expected, indeed, not permitted, to participate in the cleaning ritual of the prison but must remain an auditory observer from her cell in Marshall Square. The effect of this is to enforce on her the identity of the 'White Madam' which outside of prison she has chosen to shun. She writes of this persona with a certain detachment: 'The cleaning session was a chance to get out of the cooped-up communal African cells on the other side of the building and an opportunity to check on the police station talk that in the women's cells were sitting well-dressed Madams equipped with suitcases, pillows and thermos flasks, as though they had fallen on bad days...' (38). Shortly hereafter she describes how the 'cha-cha cleaners' were ordered 'to bring hot water for the "missus". That was me' (39). The 'me' that is thrust upon her by the racist prison system is antithetical to the identity she builds outside of prison as an activist against racism. Set apart from black prisoners, she is allowed to keep her cotton and thread, her nightgown and her own clothing.

Mashinini, Makhoere and Resha, however, are stripped of all belongings and forced to don the belittling prison garments as a sign of their criminal identity. For Resha the ugly brown uniform and red 'doek' lock her into a sort of madness. The prison uniforms are seen in direct contrast to the 'clean, white uniforms' of her nursing colleagues. The text sets up an institutional opposition of hospital (place of healing and respectability) to 'lunatic asylum':

And the more I put this in my mind, the more I hated the ugly uniform we had on, and the red scarves on our heads. It was so depressing; I felt as if I were in a lunatic asylum. (Resha 1991, 176)

There are other ways in which prisoners are locked into an identity inimical to them. Resha is profoundly disturbed when branded a prostitute by the matron as punishment for having protected her knees while polishing the floor:

What I had feared was physical punishment, but that was nothing compared to being called 'Tickie Line', which was a synonym for the cheapest of prostitutes. Although I was very angry, I was powerless to do anything about the label 'prostitute'. (172)

After explaining old South African currency she exclaims that 'you can see how terrible the insult was' (173). What smarts is not simply the suggestion that she is licentious, but that she is of little value, 'cheap'. Without the support of her family structure, her Congress involvement and her relationships within her community there is little to point to in defence of who she understands herself to be. She has recourse to nothing when undermined by the matron whereas, in relating to other prisoners, her reputation goes before her to secure something of her free self. Resha is not in isolation and, unlike First who as the only white woman political prisoner is kept separate throughout her stay in detention, she is expected to

participate in the daily work routine of the prison. As a result, she is able to interact with other women and experience a sense of solidarity in being a fellow-inmate. At least, this is what is constructed in her text which allows her the opportunity of representing her own activism as respected by other prisoners (although, according to Resha, few of the other prisoners are politically active). Her activism immediately places her in a discursive (and political) category which Resha indicates by the use of quotation marks:

[T]wo long-term prisoners remembered me from 1958. They were very kind to me, and gave me extra blankets. They also related to others how the 'Congress Women' helped to solve the problem of the exchanging of sanitary pads. (1991, 168)

In this way an image of herself is sent back to Resha and she is not left unnerved and unsure of herself. The experience of being left in bleak isolation, however, makes it very difficult to keep alive any sense of self at all, without more dynamic, interactive relationships with the people and objects with which one surrounds oneself. It is not surprising, then, to find that, for Mashinini, interrogation seems to operate as a sort of mirror in providing a welcome opportunity to 'recognise' herself through experiencing herself in dialogue with others. Interrogation is the only possible mirror, even although the image it returns is distorted and refracted via the scurrilous, twisted lens of the state security system. When this mirror is taken away from Mashinini, she is at a loss.

And then, one day, the interrogations just stopped. That was it — bang. No word. Nothing about why. And I missed them. I thought once again I was going to be sitting in that room all by myself. (87)

The concept of a mirroring or recognition of self presupposes a sure image or visual 'self-possession' at a stage prior to the moment of seeing and belies the inescapable fact that identity is not fixed, and never can be, so that any attempt to present a complete and coherent self will necessarily fail. It is perhaps only the anxiety itself, evident in both Mashinini passages discussed above, that speaks truthfully. The need for the consoling reflection of a mirror image speaks of the persistent fear that there may be nothing to see. However, it is precisely the text's acknowledgement and even tolerance of this anxiety which marks its value for an exploration of the process of self-representation in language. Moreover, it is precisely this vulnerability which makes reading the text a moving encounter.

4. The Captive Body as Symbol and as Subject

4.1 Resisting significations and the role of the body

Caesarina Kona Makhoere's account of her imprisonment following the 1976 student boycotts articulates more clearly than the other narratives in this study that, contrary to what one might assume, the object of state power can be said to be the body itself. Imprisonment is an attempt to subjugate and contain the insubordinate body. It is her black, dissident, (militarily trained) female body — already deprived and discriminated against by what she calls 'the apartheid gods' — which is imprisoned. Consequently, her demands while in prison are all bodily demands, her fight for political recognition is a fight at the level of the body itself.

Makhoere grew up in Mamelodi, a 'township' on the Eastern borders of Pretoria, north of Johannesburg. In describing the events in which Mamelodi schools were burnt down, Makhoere argues that 'that was the only way we could show our bitterness' (5). The first and most famous incident took place on 16 June 1976 when 15,000 Soweto school pupils marched on Orlando West Junior Secondary School in protest against the educational authorities' insistence on Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in certain subjects. Peaceful protest was met with brutal treatment from the police. Rubber bullets were shot into the crowd when they failed to disperse with tear gas. Two students were killed, hundreds injured. The rest of that year was characterised by a series of confrontations between reactionary police and boycotting students, on a national

scale. What Makhoere's text does not reflect is the fact that much of the excessive violence was carried out, with the support of the police, by the older angry African hostel dwellers, angered at the disturbances of the youth.²¹

Responding to violence with further violence, she offers this rationale for having physically beaten up the white state-supporting teachers: 'this was the language they understood best' (6). Certainly violence is used against Makhoere with alarming frequency, both before and during imprisonment. According to her account, she experiences great brutality during her five years of imprisonment. Her text records with obsessive attention the tussle between the prison authorities' attempts to extort obedience and her own refusal to comply. The battle inside prison is as much a war as the military battle being waged by 'our brothers' on the borders and within the country. Her frequent threat to the warders is that the Umkhonto weSizwe (MK) soldiers fighting in Angola will retaliate. Her identification with MK goes further: she compares her fate with that of an executed soldier, Solomon Mahlangu: they are comrades fighting in the same war against 'the racist regime' (73). During one of her beatings she accuses her assailants of cowardice:

[T]hey were afraid of our brothers on the borders, let them go to Angola, SWAPO would shoot them to pieces, the bloody fucking cowards, they were just ill-treating women, knowing that we did not have weapons, anything; I'd just smash them to pieces anyway — after liberation. I would just show them. (61)

²¹ Tom Lodge writes that 'a section of the migrant worker population of Mzimhlope Hostel in Soweto, with the toleration and even alleged encouragement of the police, raged through the streets of the township killing any young people they found in their path.... There were similar tensions between Langa hostel dwellers and school pupils in Cape Town later in the year' (1983, 329).

However, Makhoere is able to find weapons — both literal and figurative — while imprisoned. Certainly she is fully conscious of the physical nature of her own battle and thus expresses no remorse for her part in inflicting physical pain as she resists attempts to subjugate her and her comrades. When she attacks the hated wardress, nicknamed 'Mbomvana' (meaning 'red') because of her anger towards political prisoners, Makhoere's only regret is that she does not finally manage to kill Mbomvana in the series of scuffles that ensue. For the rest, 'we had nothing of which to repent' (75). The first attack on Mbomvana continues until blood flows:

We stabbed her several times with those mathematical instruments. We had made up our minds that this person was not going to treat us like this; we wanted to kill her, there and then. Let us kill her and they can hang us. Because we have had enough of her. We assaulted her for a long time, stabbing her in the face, on the head, on the body, all over. She was bleeding on to the passage floor. After we had satisfied ourselves we went back to our cells. (64)

After one of Mbomvana's retaliatory attacks (there are several which follow this initial incident) Makhoere herself is left in great pain: every 'part of [her] body was screaming' (68). However, it is not the physical pain itself that is most disturbing to Makhoere, but what the powerlessness signifies: 'I learnt what helplessness meant. I couldn't do anything. I was beaten.' During this attack by Mbomvana, Makhoere wishes she could kill her. Nothing less than the (final) destruction of the wardress's body would satisfy her, and the fact that she is unable to effect this reduces her to tears.

When they left, I just dropped on top of my bed and cried. Everything was painful; but what made me cry most of all was that I knew that if I had been able to kill Mbomvana, it would have been better for me. At least I

would have known that I had killed this one pig who had made my life so miserable. (68)

This is an extreme example of the instinctive awareness which pervades the text, that the battle for empowerment and autonomy is waged physically. It is bodily obedience that is sought by the authorities as a symbol of their hegemonic power. Thus, wherever possible, Makhoere elects to defy the regulations which require physical co-operation. To comply physically would be to submit to the arbitrary discipline of the system and participate in the obliteration of her political autonomy. Anthony Giddens (whose insights into the structures of disciplinary space will be discussed at length in chapter six) makes the controversial suggestion that subjugation requires 'more or less continuous compliance' from those who are its 'subjects' even if 'the achievement of compliance is itself a fragile and contingent accomplishment ...' (Giddens 1985, 287).

To yield to prison routine and to accede to the disciplinary regime would be to affirm the power of the authorities. Makhoere, for her part, refuses to comply at every possible opportunity. She recognises that the arbitrary regulations requiring her to stand to attention, dress in a particular way, etc., are vectors of a much more (politically) significant and sinister coercive strategy than is implied in the rationale of maintaining neatness and order. It is designed to stifle any opposition from Makhoere and other dissidents with whom she may identify. Her strategy is therefore to refuse whatever is being demanded of her, thus registering her opposition; resistance is what propels her narrative, as Dorothy Driver has argued:

Given that her intended focus is her refusal to give in, the dramatic direction of her narrative is always towards survival: the survival of a

fighting spirit which refuses to bow down under the systematic dehumanisation dealt it both outside and inside prison....

Reversal is Makhoere's consistent strategy. (1991, 349)

When the head wardress demands that she stand to attention, Makhoere recognises that this would be to symbolise her acquiescence (and therefore the supremacy of the warders and their regime): whenever 'she talked to me she wanted me to stand up with my hands behind my back. She always wanted me to show obedience' (9). Makhoere is therefore intractable and refuses thereafter to stand to attention or to parade during the rest of her time in prison (33). The fact that the wardresses elect not to challenge this act of resistance is an affirmation of her power. When other political prisoners follow suit, their unity — and thus their efficacy — is strengthened.

In a rather extraordinary reversal of the structures of discipline, Makhoere manages to secure the obedience of the wardresses who have to ask permission to eat from the peach tree of which the prisoners claim (moral) ownership. 'Eventually the wardresses accepted that it was more peaceful to ask our permission to eat those peaches' (20). The prisoners are thus not entirely powerless, as acknowledged by the wardresses' 'obedience'. This particular battle over the peaches takes place in a context of a greater struggle, involving tensions between authorities' attempts to maintain a veneer of legitimate governance and the dissidents' determination to expose the system as being corrupt. Makhoere is quite explicit: life in prison is a continuation of the struggle against apartheid going on outside.

The wardresses were not free to abuse the (political) prisoners. The international outcry following Steve Biko's death in detention in 1977 had

sparked a limited attempt on the part of the authorities to tread more carefully with political prisoners.²² Moreover, the new generation of activist was unlike the old, as Nelson Mandela recounts in his autobiography:

These young men were a different breed of prisoner from those we had seen before. They were brave, hostile and aggressive; they would not take orders, and shouted 'Amandla!' at every opportunity. Their instinct was to confront rather than cooperate. The authorities did not know how to handle them, and they turned the island upside down.... In their anxiousness to deal with these young lions, the authorities more or less let us fend for ourselves.... (1994, 471, 475)

On Robben Island manual labour was brought to an end in 1977, which Mandela ascribes to protest and 'simple logistics'. The new prisoners were 'so bold that each man seemed to require his own warder' (Mandela 1994, 475).

So, when the hated Mbomvana tries to 'assume control of our beautiful peach tree' it is easier for the wardresses not to fight. Makhoere and fellow prisoners lay claim to a moral authority in demanding that she comply. What is at issue in the matter of the peaches is not the peaches themselves nor the rightness of who should have access to them, but the assertion of control.

She had to ask permission from us, which we often refused, to get near that peach tree. The supervisor in charge of our tree was Mama Dorothy. We gave permission to all prisoners only. We very rarely gave permission to prison officials. Agh, those peaches were nice. (20)

²² In November 1974 South Africa had been expelled from the United Nations General Assembly and in July 1975 the Organisation of African Unity had adopted a Pan-Africanist Congress document the effect of which was to declare South Africa's international status illegal (Lodge 1983, 314-15). Politicians inside the country continued to feign indifference while heavy censorship kept citizens ignorant of political realities, such as the extent of the discontent within the country, the war against Angola as part of a regional destabilisation offensive and international condemnation of apartheid abuses.

The expression of satisfaction is linked with having access to the language of domination ('permission', 'supervisor in charge') but it is the materiality of the peaches which provides the focus for this contest over social control. The peaches, as objects of ownership and fairness, are the tangible, visible indicators in the tussle over control, just as her own body, in its refusal to perform obedience, functions as a symbol of her resistance.

When Mbomvana ignores their demand they are able to lodge an official complaint. Thus they exploit a rare moment when official channels may be used to the prisoners' advantage and protection. As Don Foster and Diane Sandler suggest, in their investigation into conditions of detention in the 1980s, detainees' access to official protection in the form of doctors, prison inspections, etc. was infrequent and arbitrarily given. This, they argue, was contrary to the evidence of state records. Makhoere's account suggests that her experience as a convicted prisoner was somewhat different: '[w]e had many visits from prison staff members, asking for complaints. Now we took a resolution that we were not going to speak to them' (52). Official visits merely become another object upon which to encode her resistance.

The recurring refrain of Makhoere's text is, simply, an insistence on saying "no". 'Her way of being heard and recognised — her fight against mutedness and invisibility — is, simply, to say No. She says No at every turn' (Driver 1991, 349). Even towards the end of her sentence, spent in bleak isolation in Klerksdorp Prison, she continues to assert her resistance, articulated plainly: 'You have to be able to say no' (119). Her text valorises resistance above all else: 'a person has to continue to resist to the very last, irrespective of the

pressure that person is under' (84). In the same way that the 'people said "no"' to the apartheid state (47), so too would she continue to assert her refusal while in prison: refusal to work, refusal to clothe herself in prison gear, refusal to accept the discriminatory treatment of prisoners of different race groups.

They had been under the illusion that they would just break us, turn us into ja-baas (yes-boss), divide us, break our spirits, shatter our unity. We made it clear they would never succeed in chaining our spirits. They had the idea that putting us in prison would solve the problem, keep us quiet; it surprised them that even in prison we said 'no' to the apartheid regime, we said 'no' to the oppressors, we said 'no' to the exploiters. We demanded equal treatment, resisted all their discriminatory laws. (47)

Throughout her narrative she insists that her body itself can be as intransigent and uncompromising as her 'spirit'. Her body will not be positioned, passively, without fierce — sometimes violent — resistance. Her insistence on 'no' is thus also, and primarily, delivered through her body which is represented as being invulnerable in its assertion of defiance. The power of her proclamation is not affected by beatings and hunger strikes. Hunger, in her text, is a signifier of the degree to which she has been wronged and so is used textually as yet another weapon. The hunger is not allowed to indicate weakness:

Full people, people who had eaten a delicious breakfast who had filled up on healthy food for the whole week, came to fight women they thought must be weak from not eating. But perhaps they did not know that you can get really angry when you are hungry. (51)

Their bodies are represented as being indestructible, which suggests that a distinction must be drawn between the way the body functions in the text and what her experience of her body might have been in reality.

When the station commander at Silverton Police Station forbids her to sing, her uncomplicated enjoyment of singing takes on a new and more satisfying delight because it becomes a vehicle of the same message of denial: 'He threatened that if I continued with that kind of behaviour he would send me away. I liked that, and started to sing louder' (11). Singing is both a physical and a linguistic activity, epitomising, as I see it, the nature of Makhoere's defiance: utterly physical in its production yet self-consciously vocal. Anthony D. Cavaluzzi highlights the linguistic nature of the songs which he describes as a means to overcome the effective ban on communication imposed on prisoners by solitary confinement. Makhoere's songs were 'combinations of spirituals and revolutionary hymns, often ending with a call for violent action against the oppressor' (Cavaluzzi 1991, 16). 'This rewriting of basic christian lyrics is not uncommon to groups attempting to break free from a colonial situation' and thus links Makhoere to a tradition of resistance (1991, 16). The songs do not simply constitute defiance in the face of a warder's command; they are invested with signifiers of resistance.

Makhoere's strategy of ignoring the wardresses entails a similarly physical yet richly communicative statement. She assigns (or, as she puts it in the text, 'we' being used instead of 'I', they assign) a name to this (non-)action, 'dis'. This suitably irreverent abbreviation could also be read as a brutalisation of the English word 'this' and thus as a signifier of her refusal neatly to adopt a dominant language (in the way that, for example, African American rap culture might do). Makhoere is at pains to explain how it is used linguistically:

They would come and we would ignore them. We called it 'dis', for 'disregard' — you 'dis', you give them 'dis'. That one weapon completely frustrated them; they became flustered. (52)

Other actions are less obviously articulations of resistance but equally self-conscious in their message. Her violent objection to wearing the prison uniform is a response to the diminishment of self that the clothing symbolises:

Looking at this ensemble, a normal, reasonable person could see that this was insane. The place looked like a mental asylum when we appeared in these crazy combinations of clothes.... These people had decided to treat us like mad people, but identically mad, a uniform insanity. (21)

She initiates a boycott of the clothing about which other prisoners feel ambivalent. Her own position is uncompromising and based on the discriminatory nature of the sets of uniforms: 'I have told these people I wish to wear the same type of clothes as the white prisoners' whose uniforms were more varied and, according to Makhoere, more stylish (35). The attempt by the prison staff to placate Makhoere by providing her with roughly hewn 'sandals' (which were in effect poorly adapted shoes) is met with anger and further recalcitrance. The style of shoe itself — whether open or closed — is irrelevant. The discriminatory denial (for it is a denial to black prisoners only) of the privilege of choice (albeit limited) is not. Her rejection of the Christmas day privilege of wearing civilian clothing may appear to contradict her previous demand for the right to wear her own clothing, but Makhoere recognises that the relations of power are unchanged by one exceptional occasion of privilege. The apparently generous offer merely entrenches the fact that the prisoners are still dependent, still treated prejudicially, still without autonomy.

[W]e did not intend to take as a special Christmas privilege something that we regarded as our right the whole year round. So we refused to put on our own clothes.... we should wear our own clothes every day, all the year round, just like the white prisoners did, not only on Christmas Day. (24)

The contest around food similarly suggests that Makhoere is fully conscious of the degree to which (punitive) physical arrangements constitute the currency in the exchange of social and political control. She recognises and is enraged by the fact that rotten and unwholesome food for black prisoners articulates the same apartheid hostility which drove her to join the resistance movement. Repeated throughout the narrative is the charge that black prisoners are treated inhumanely: the food is not fit for human consumption, and therefore implies that the prisoners are not accorded the dignity and value of a juridical person. Her response is simply not to eat, in order to demonstrate the living death to which she is subjected and to demand an acknowledgement of her subjecthood.

Thus, the 'hunger strike began. It had never happened in the history of South Africa that women prisoners had been on a hunger strike' (30).²³ Her narrative immediately establishes the communal nature of the act of protest and positions it within the context of the liberation struggle. The target of the protest is 'the system' which continues to oppress blacks. So, what is in essence a personal and bodily activity — consumption of food — becomes an intensely and

²³ Ruth First embarked upon a brief hunger strike after having been rearrested immediately after her release from the first period of ninety days in detention. See *117 Days*, 112-13. Makhoere's hunger strike may be the first embarked upon by a group of women in a South African prison. Makhoere does not attempt to give historical evidence for this assertion (which would possibly work to detract from its forcefulness). Regardless of the historical accuracy of the claim, it speaks of Makhoere's perception of the enormity of the undertaking and her belief that she (extended, as is typical in her text, to 'they') is (are) uniquely defiant.

self-consciously political activity. The body's starvation signifies and re-enacts the horror of being denied political empowerment while simultaneously articulating a potent challenge and flouting disempowerment. The physical weakness brought on by lack of food is glossed over and is not separated in the text from the anger her defiance produces: 'This anger helped me to be strong' (70). She addresses the wardress:

We have nothing to lose if we don't eat. This system is not afraid of scandals; you are used to them. Having killed a person like Steve Biko, then who are we: So we don't think you mind killing us or any other people. We won't stop fighting for our rights. You'd better know that. (30)

She mocks the veneer of paternalistic benevolence maintained by the prison system, refusing the medical treatment offered by the prison staff: 'I'm not going to see their doctor. Because I don't need his treatment.... I'm not ill. What I want is proper food, edible food' (30-31). In fact the weakness brought on from lack of food is life-threatening, so that on two separate occasions fellow hunger-strikers are put into straitjackets and force-fed. But this response on the part of the authorities is as brutal a counter-offensive as, for example, Makhoere's attack on Mbomvana. When Elizabeth Nhlapo calls for help, weak from going without food and from a kidney operation, Makhoere demands that the prison staff 'go and attend to that comrade who is ill' (53). Makhoere is anxious that Nhlapo's treatment not involve eating food because 'the minute they were able to force one of us to eat — putting Elizabeth in a straitjacket would mean that — everything would flop' (53). What constitutes being 'ill' or 'well', 'good treatment' or 'bad treatment', 'good food' or 'bad food', 'acceptable shoes' or 'unacceptable shoes', 'hooligans' or 'fellow prisoners', and so on, is entirely under the control of

Makhoere's pen and depends on the political agenda of the textual moment. (Nhlapo's illness ceases to be a concern at this point. She is mentioned again much later [89 and 91] as one of four political prisoners who are transferred to Pretoria Central Prison soon after Makhoere is moved there.)

Makhoere and her comrades are not alone in bodily resistance. She recounts the experience of a condemned prisoner, Caroline from Cape Town, who was sentenced to death for killing her employer after the woman had threatened to have her arrested for stealing:

I knew the voice of the doctor and those of the medical people. They were trying to force her to eat her food. It was Caroline who was refusing to eat, yelling that she did not see the reason why she had to eat, since the apartheid regime had already decided to take her soul away... She was refusing to take a bath, refusing to talk to anyone. (85)

Caroline's refusal to keep her body functioning normally may well be suggestive of severe depression rather than ardent protest (which is how Makhoere represents her own numerous and self-affirming hunger strikes). Despite Caroline's apparent resignation to the fact that she is already damned — designated dead — by the state, her story, as represented in Makhoere's narrative, attests to what Michel Foucault proposes: at the heart of the penal system it is the body that is at issue (1977a). It is the body which is imprisoned in a bid to circumscribe the (political) subject and to constrain other 'free' citizens within a carefully guarded system of social control. The move away from the spectacle of punishment to the institutionalised 'rehabilitation of the soul' merely obscures the fact that, according to Foucault, what is at issue is the body itself, as signifier of the politically constituted subject.

In a country where censorship has played such an important role in suppressing dissidence Foucault's emphasis on the body might seem inappropriate. For censorship works powerfully to stifle thought, not only making invisible or inaccessible that which has been articulated, but stunting thought at its inception through self-censorship. It is important to note two things, if Foucault's emphasis on the body is to be proven useful. First, the body, as conceived of by Foucault, is not separate from the 'mind' or 'spirit' or other formulations, such as Spivak's notion of the subject's 'constitutionality' (1988), which acknowledge politically substantial subjecthood. Their interconnectedness will become evident in the course of this discussion and the analysis of Makhoere's text.

Second, the phenomenon of censorship itself deserves closer attention. In an essay which provides an overview of censorship legislation in apartheid South Africa and its effects on literary studies, Nick Visser describes how the Minister of Interior went about justifying the provisions in Section 9(3) of the proposed Publications Act 42 of 1974 which banned for possession literature which was deemed 'dangerous to the state' (Visser 1992, 490). The Minister cited literature detailing plans of power stations and water reservoirs, or instructions on how to make bombs, as examples of those publications likely to fall foul of the Act. According to Visser, within four years of the Act a third of all books banned were banned for possession under Section 9(3). Visser's point concerns the alarming proportions of bannings issued with reference to censorship laws originally aimed to curb the planting of bombs. Even mildly anti-racism texts, including most works of fiction by black South African writers, were censored. There is another point to be stressed. The attempt to impose heavy

ensorship, as articulated in the Parliament of apartheid South Africa, had at its root a paranoia about 'physical' safety. The maintenance of 'Law and Order'²⁴ was dependent on limiting access to ideas as well as armoury. For the threat of political dissidence (of the sort that was likely to emerge from reading a dissenting book) was conceived of as a physical threat.

4.2 Michel Foucault and Structures of Discipline

In the opening chapter of Discipline and Punish (1977a) entitled 'The Body of the Condemned' Foucault observes that the disappearance of public executions in France at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries marked the point at which the object of punishment shifted from being the body itself, locus of pain and object of spectacle, to being the more nebulous entity of the juridical person:

The guillotine takes life almost without touching the body, just as prison deprives of liberty or a fine reduces wealth. It is intended to apply the law not so much to a real body capable of feeling pain as to a juridical subject, the possessor, among other rights, of the right to exist. It had to have the abstraction of the law itself. (1977a, 13)

Punishment becomes focused on constraining liberty and tempering personhood, so that from 'being an art of unbearable sensations punishment has become an economy of suspended rights' concerning which the body functions as a tool, the corporeal expression and only tangible evidence of the infliction of the more complex

²⁴ The 'Ministry of Law and Order' was the name given to the governmental department dealing with the police service, before the change of government in South Africa in 1993.

manipulations known as punishment (1977a, 11). The use of 'technicians' in the developing fields of the human sciences, from doctors and warders to chaplains and psychologists, attests to this historical shift (1977a, 11). Furthermore, their use speaks of another radical shift: the discourse of criminology addresses itself to the individual, so that the criminal as well as the crime is judged:

Certainly the 'crimes' and 'offences' on which judgement is passed are juridical objects defined by the code, but judgement is also passed on the passions, instincts, anomalies, infirmities, maladjustments, effects of environment or heredity; acts of aggression are punished, so also, through them, is aggressivity; rape, but at the same time perversions; murders, but also drives and desires.... They are judged indirectly as 'attenuating circumstances' that introduce into the verdict not only 'circumstantial' evidence, but something quite different, which is not juridically codifiable: the knowledge of the criminal, one's estimation of him, what is known about the relations between him, his past and his crime, and what might be expected of him in the future.... The criminal's soul is not referred to in the trial merely to explain his crime and as a factor in the juridical apportioning of responsibility; if it is brought before the court, with such pomp and circumstance, such concern to understand and such 'scientific' application, it is because it too, as well as the crime itself, is to be judged and to share in the punishment. (17-18)

The heightened sophistication of a criminological jurisprudence which appears to aim its penal code at the criminal 'soul' rather than the body responsible for a given crime is misleadingly disingenuous, if one follows Foucault's reasoning. While 'the penalty ... no longer addresses itself to the body' but to 'the soul' (1977a, 167) the altered strategy has more to do with an impulse on the part of the judicial system to abdicate responsibility, to appear to be a mere conduit of an humane, natural and paternalistic justice rather than the author of an arbitrary and controlling code. According to Foucault's analysis the employment of so-called experts in the human 'sciences' to make a judgement about the psychological state of the alleged criminal obscures the judicial system's discretionary role in according punishment. By

deferring to 'non-judicial' elements, such as psychiatric evidence regarding the appropriateness of the sentence (based on a character assessment of the alleged criminal) the judgement parades itself as 'the cure' in what Foucault terms 'medico-judicial treatment' (1977a, 22). What Foucault refers to as the 'new penal system' (1977a, 22) has the veneer of a new sense of humaneness, having apparently (and ostentatiously) abandoned the excesses and cruelties of the old. According to Foucault, those extra-judicial disciplines which have become part of the penal process have not been redefined in legal terms specifically in order to obfuscate the operation of juridical power:

[W]hat is odd about modern criminal justice is that, although it has taken on so many extra-judicial elements, it has done so not in order to be able to define them juridically and gradually to integrate them into the actual power to punish: on the contrary, it has done so in order to make them function within the penal operation as non-judicial elements; in order to stop this operation being simply a legal punishment; in order to exculpate the judge from being purely and simply he who punishes. 'Of course, we pass sentence, but this sentence is not in direct relation to the crime. It is quite clear that for us it functions as a way of treating a criminal. We punish, but this is a way of saying that we wish to obtain a cure.' (1977a, 22; emphasis added)

Nonetheless, Foucault argues, all penal systems are steeped in 'a certain "political economy" of the body' so that 'even when they use "lenient" methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue' (1977a, 24). The body is central in the production of knowledge which has at its core the operation of power (1977a, 28). The increasingly sophisticated dynamics of modern penal codes has merely masked the fact by introducing the concept of the 'soul' through the fields of psychiatry, criminal anthropology, religion, education, etc., yet still at root is the subjugation of 'the body'. For Foucault, 'the soul is the effect and

instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body' (1977a, 30; emphasis added). The notion of the 'soul' provides the stumbling block to freedom; because the 'soul' is invoked, the body will be imprisoned.

This reversal of the maxim is startlingly thought-provoking and perhaps easily misunderstood as a denial of subjectivity. Foucault's challenge is to the institutional commandeering of the notion of the 'soul', with all its religious overtones of 'good' and 'evil', in order more slickly and less obviously to strengthen a system of social control. Thus, while previously the discourses of imprisonment were undoubtedly focused on the corporeal and material, it became necessary to introduce a more subtle system of social control which did not lend itself as easily to being resisted:

[Previously there were] revolts, at the level of the body, against the very body of the prison. What was at issue was not whether the prison environment was too harsh or too aseptic, too primitive or too efficient, but its very materiality as an instrument and vector of power; it is this whole technology of power over the body that the [subsequent] technology of the 'soul' — that of the educationalists, psychologists and psychiatrists — fails either to conceal or to compensate, for the simple reason that it is one of its tools. (1977a, 30)

The rehabilitation of the 'soul', then, is merely the sophisticated recasting of a process of subjugation similarly harsh and controlling and just as crude — and corporeal — as any public display of torture in the eighteenth century.

Never is this more apparent than when the penal system addresses itself to political dissidents whose actions are not easily translated into the vocabulary of the criminal justice system without implausible reference to social delinquency and the spiritualised morality implicit in the notion of the soul. The careful provision of a bible, when no other reading material is allowed, is pointed to by both Caesarina

Kona Makhoere and Ruth First as being one of the ironies of the South African penal code. First's text makes a mockery of the false piety implicit in the policy and a warder's exhortation that she read 'the Book. And get down on your knees, down on your knees' (64).

[T]he Security Branch conceded us the Bible not to deepen our faith and understanding and improve our religious erudition, but out of deference to the Calvinist religion of the Cabinet and the Nationalist [sic] Party which, mysteriously, justifies apartheid policy by its interpretation of divine teaching, and could therefore deny the ballast of this theology to no prisoner, not even an atheist political. Giving us the Bible, they seemed to think, fulfilled the State's Christian duty to us as prisoners. We had the Book and our consciences in solitude ... (65-6)

Makhoere's sense of outrage drowns out any subtle satirical tones: 'And these same people call themselves Christians' (101). Her text acknowledges a particular formulation of Christian values which is offended by the apartheid regime's wrongful appropriation. But Makhoere's reference to Christianity is strategic, lending support to her construction of herself as having been wronged. For the rest her text is quick to expose the illegitimacy of the authorities' stance as guardians of lost souls and the hypocrisy of religious figures such as the African priest whose damaging testimony is crucial in securing the case against her.

Foucault's analysis of the use of psycho-spiritual terms exposes their use as being saturated in oppositional relations of power. The humanitarian gloss is shallow, argues Foucault, for the 'soul' — along with concepts such as 'psyche, subjectivity, personality, consciousness' — is a discursive construct which conceals the more sinister agenda of retribution, the focus of which is the body.

Even in his earlier use of the 'body', however, it is clear that Foucault's conceptualisation of the body is not as an object in physiological terms alone. For

Foucault the body functions as a site of political and cultural investments and operates within discourse, not apart from it. An unusually explicit articulation of his conceptualisation of the body points to this most clearly:

The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated Self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the processes of history's destruction of the body. (Foucault, 1977b, 148).

The body is thus imbued with political significances and representations of selfhood, as becomes more explicit in Foucault's later writing. In The Uses of Pleasure (1984a) and The Care of the Self (1984b), the last two volumes of The History of Sexuality (1978), Foucault turns his attention from modern penal codes and regulatory institutions to Greek practices of self regulation and sexual conduct. Elizabeth Grosz rightly points out that while the themes of ethics, power and containment are still a focus, he is now 'primarily concerned with the genesis or self-creation of subjectivity' (158). Foucault articulates his project this way: 'to analyze the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire ... [so that they] discover, in desire, the truth of their being' (195). Existence is intertwined with the activities and positioning of the body, that is, how the body is represented and 'read'. The functioning of the body as the palimpsest upon which the self is inscribed is the primary object of Foucault's investigation, for the body is the substance through which being-in-the-world is experienced and represented.

It is for this reason that the concept of the body demands to be addressed in a discussion of the constitution of the subject, particularly where subjectivity has been challenged through the institution of imprisonment and where writing functions as an act of resistance and self-assertion as in the case of Makhoere's text. It is useful to examine the way in which bodies are represented in narratives which are self-consciously invested with articulations of identity and selfhood.

5. Bodily Specificities

5.1 The 'Body' as a Cultural Entity

Foucault conceives of 'the body' as the result of the workings of power, rather than a natural entity to which one can refer in an apparently transparent language. This is not to deny the 'material reality of anatomically discrete bodies' but it is to suggest that 'it is impossible to know the materiality of the body outside of its cultural significations' (McNay 1985, 30). The body is not separate and distinct from the way in which it functions in discourse. It will always be imbued with the workings of power: 'the body cannot be known in its unadorned state' (McNay 1985, 30).

It is precisely in view of this conceptualisation of the cultural value of the notion of the body that Lois McNay declares Foucault's own expositions inadequate in accounting for the gendered body. Sandra Lee Bartky has cautioned that Foucault is 'blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine. To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed' (Bartky 1988, 64). 'For Foucault, the prisoner's body, indeed the disciplined body in general, is often implicitly assumed to be male' (McNay 1985, 34) whereas in fact female criminality is often understood to differ from male criminality and the institutions which address themselves to each articulate themselves differently. This is particularly true in South Africa where prisoners are grouped with reference to gender/race categories (such as, 'white women' and 'black women') and treated accordingly. 'Race and gender most

obviously function as potent signs in the organisation of power relations in South African society' argues Judith Coullie (1991, 12).

White women political prisoners, for instance, have carried an added burden of condemnation for 'betraying' white nationalism. Marion Sparg, a journalist and ANC activist in the 1980s, was sentenced to 25 years imprisonment on a charge of treason in November 1986 for planting bombs at police stations in Port Elizabeth and Johannesburg. In the Supreme Court judgement in which leave to appeal was refused, Justice P.J. van der Walt exclaims: 'It was the first and hopefully the last case of this nature in our country of a white woman who joined a black terrorist organisation.... She was sentenced for her lack of repentance and for what she did. Rehabilitation is out.'²⁵ In his original judgement he was even more explicit about the significance of her race. According to a report in The Argus the judge 'regarded as an aggravating feature the fact that Sparg was white' whereas if 'a black South African was in that position his actions could be understood although not excused'.²⁶ A similar sense of horror and outrage is evident in articles which indulge in more speculative journalism than legal reporting allows, but explanations are found for Sparg's traitorous acts. In an article entitled 'Inside the Tortured Mind of Marion Sparg' journalist Ann Palmer who, we are told, 'knew Sparg as a reporter', represents her this way:

Fate dealt young Marion Sparg a crushing double blow. She was a desperately lonely schoolgirl, and a weight problem caused even her fellow students at university to reject her.

Haunted and consumed by her desperate loneliness, Sparg was perfect terrorist material many years before she ever thought of planting bombs. (The Argus 9 Nov. 1986)

²⁵ 'Sparg Refused Leave to Appeal Against Sentence,' The Argus 28 Nov. 1986: N. pag.

²⁶ 'Sparg Gets 25 Years,' The Argus 6 Nov. 1986: N. pag.

Sparg's resistance is thus refigured as pathology. Ruth First, who is considered an intellectual, is represented with more respect and less paternalism, particularly in 1982 after her death, being referred to as 'Professor First'.²⁷ At the time of her arrest in August 1963 she evokes greater disquiet in the popular press. She is consistently identified by the label, 'a named communist'.²⁸ One strategy of containing this disquiet is to domesticise her so that her identity as 'Ruth First', writer of banned books, is represented as extraneous to her 'true' (because more acceptable) identity as wife and mother: 'As "Ruth First", Mrs. Slovo has written a book on South West Africa.'²⁹ 'In her private life she is Mrs. Joseph Slovo' we are told after hearing of her role in bringing South Africa's human rights abuses in South West Africa (as it was known then) to the attention of the United Nations.³⁰

As a (white) woman, Ruth First is told in prison that she should 'count [her] lucky stars that we still have respect for women in our country':

You could have been charged in the Rivonia case. But we didn't want a woman in that case. We still have some feeling for women. (122)

While this rather unsettling acknowledgement of sexist treatment might bring a modicum of relief, the insidious tactics of First's interrogator, Viktor, are steeped

²⁷ 'Letter Bomb Kills ANC VIP Ruth First,' The Argus 18 Aug. 1982: N. pag.

²⁸ See, for example, 'Mrs. Slovo to Leave S.A.' in The Argus (13 March 1964. N. pag.) and 'New Orders Served on Three,' The Argus (4 Feb. 1963. N. pag.).

²⁹ 'Mrs. Slovo is Arrested in Wits. Library,' The Cape Times. 10 August 1963. N. pag.

³⁰ 'Court Hearing Helps Refute Slurs on S.A.' The Argus. 17 March 1966. N. pag.

in sexual innuendo. First is all the more vulnerable because the tactics are not easily identifiable in the intricate web of their subtly sexualised relationship. This form of psychological battery is not accounted for in discussions of the body which are not gender-specific, and the hostility meted out to a black body in apartheid prisons cannot be compared to that of a white body. (These issues will be discussed with detailed textual reference in the final chapter which deals with techniques of torture and the effects these have on articulations of self.)

Elizabeth Grosz is critical of Foucault for using a male body as the generic:

Implicitly, or without adequately acknowledging it, Foucault talks only about the male body — with the exception of one or two paragraphs. The treatment of prisoners is especially clearly sexually linked — the kinds of punishment received, the kinds of crimes committed, the kinds of judgments (and what it is that is judged) are clearly different for the two sexes in ways that he does not explain. (Grosz 1994, 157)

*Cherry-Lind & Pallas
diff. - also theory*

Moreover, if Foucault is right in thinking that the 'hysterization of women's bodies' — a 'process through which the female body was analysed ... as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality' (Foucault 1978, 104) — is centrally part of a (sexual) power play, one would have thought the discourse of female criminality all the more deserving of a thorough critique. Grosz finds the discussion of the hysteria 'as an effect of power's saturation of women's body' inadequate in that, for example, Foucault 'ignores the possibility of women's strategic occupation of hysteria as a form of resistance to the demands and requirements of heterosexual monogamy and the social and sexual role culturally assigned to women' (157-8). While critical of Foucault's acknowledged exclusion of women in much of his work (it was 'an ethics for men: an ethics thought, written and

usually feared as dangerous men in the eyes of society, the disgraced and dishonored woman has always been considered pathetic':

This view has its roots in the fact that women's most frequent offenses were violations of the normative code with respect to sex and drunkenness. Moreover, women who committed criminal offenses tended to be regarded as erring and misguided creatures who needed protection and help rather than as dangerous criminals from whom the members of society should be protected.... 'Treatment' for women meant instilling in them certain standards of sexual morality and sobriety and preparing them for their duties as mothers and homemakers. (Giallombardo 1966, 7)

In South Africa's divided society, however, this is not universally true. Black women, Makhoere's text continually asserts, are not treated as human beings and the violence to which she is victim while serving her five-year sentence certainly cannot be described as 'lenient'. Ruth First, on the other hand, is forced to occupy an uncomfortable position as 'Madam' while in prison. She is exempt from manual labour and, as the only white political prisoner for most of her detention, she is separated from other women. Viktor's treatment of her suggests that he keeps alive the fantasy of her as a feminine ideal. Certainly white women were seldom beaten physically (the exception being the case of Stephanie Kemp whose head was banged against the floor and whose arm was broken) although they were more likely to experience lengthy periods in solitary confinement, while for black women — particularly those detained post 1976 — physical torture was the norm. The reality of conditions in detention in South Africa during the 1980s is exposed in a study by Don Foster and Diane Sandler (1985 and 1987). Unfortunately the authors do not distinguish between white women and black women, but their report makes strong claims that Africans were much more severely treated and that women as well as men suffered some form of physical pain. Amongst their findings they

identified age as being a significant factor affecting the harshness with which detainees were treated.

Gelfand exposes the contradiction in the lenient approach to women's criminality which has, by the same rationale, historically been branded all the more heinous, indeed savage, because of its inconsistency with 'natural femininity'. Indeed, the very fact of having transgressed societal laws and of having positioned herself as deviant would have made a woman fearsome. Arguably, for black South African women, their 'otherness' is already established by virtue of their race and political activism and is not so closely connected with being branded 'criminal'. The insults flung at Emma Mashinini (54) stem first from her being black ('You're fat, Kaffir meid') and second from her activism ('You're a nuisance and a trouble-maker').

Gelfand's analysis of the rise of individualism in the late eighteenth century is nonetheless useful. She argues that the apparent freedoms that emerged at that time did not necessarily apply to women:

... if assertion of individuality was admired in men, in women it was perceived as threatening. As a result, submissiveness became the most valued sign of female normality. And a criminal act, seen as the strongest form of self-assertion, was considered the complete refusal of women's passivity and the denial of their assigned role. (43)

Compare this chapter to Zimbardo's pts

Thus, the definition of and explanation for what has historically constituted 'criminal activity' in a woman is dependent on the degree to which what is seen as 'virtuous' behaviour has been transgressed. As a result, Gelfand argues, many women prisoners' texts display an alarming degree of self-doubt and an obsessive impulse to escape the stigmatisation of criminality (and other perceptions of transgressive

behaviour). Characteristics such as defiance, anger, delight in 'wickedness', indeed the very desire to speak out: these cannot be assumed to be an uncomplicated part of a woman's narrative simply because the text can be slotted into the 'genre' of prison narratives. Women have a different relation to language and to systems of control, Gelfand argues, and therefore to 'the topoi critics have assumed to be ... the prime characteristics of prisoners' writing' such as '[p]ower, domination, transcendence' (20).

In calling for new approaches to prison writing that are not based on a universalised male experience, Gelfand makes an important critique. However, she also tends towards an essentialism of her own in uncritically making a series of assumptions about writing by women. While she argues convincingly that '[n]ew theories are needed about women writing from prison, since universalizing ones do not work' (22), she sweepingly refutes the generalities ascribed to male texts. Initially describing the texts on which she is focused, she argues — naming specific authors in parentheses — that there is little evidence of 'a will to dominate or to possess; there is at best a sense of weakness inverted into irony ... or solitude glorified as martyrdom' (20). However, this specifying gesture is abandoned in favour of a more generalised comment on narratives other than recent ones: 'There is likewise little evidence of triumph over circumstance and, until recently, no evocation of transcendence' (20). It is not clear which recent texts have been examined in order to make the last observation, but thereafter the distinction she sets up between the lives of men and women is so thoroughgoing that her argument loses its earlier specificity:

The act of creating in a hostile environment like the prison cannot be universalized so long as women's and men's lives in a 'normal'

environment — which prison in large part reflects — remain radically different. (20)

My contention with Gelfand is not her refusal uncritically to assume male norms in representing all prison experience, but the fact that she leaves uninterrogated the discursive monoliths, male and female. Indeed, "normality" is different for each sex' (19) but this totalising concept covers over many more differences than this dichotomy of human experience. It has become standard in feminist practice to acknowledge the diversities which an unsophisticated use of the category 'women' cannot accommodate. Teresa de Lauretis, for example, writes of the 'other axes along which oppression, identity and subjectivity are organized — such as race or color and ethnic or sexual identification' (1988. 134). Her particular contribution is to point out the transforming interconnectedness of different forms of oppression which together constitute a particular permutation not correctly represented as the sum of each form: the 'layers of oppression are not parallel but intersecting and mutually determining' (135). Her point is that women occupying different race and class positions will experience sexism differently.

Thus, the category 'women' is wrongly assumed by writers such as Gelfand to be homogeneous and already historically constituted. Chandra Mohanty distinguishes, significantly, between the 'discursively consensual homogeneity of "women" as a group' and 'the historically specific material reality of groups of women' (1988, 65). The problem with the former use of the term — that is, of "women" as a group, as a stable category of analysis' — is that 'it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity among women based on a generalised notion of their subordination' (72). Moreover it positions women, simplistically, as victims, and men as perpetrators:

Because women are thus constituted as a coherent group, sexual difference becomes coterminus [sic] with female subordination, and power is automatically defined in binary terms: people who have it (read: men), and people who do not (read: women). Men exploit, women are exploited. Such simplistic formulations are both historically reductive; they are also ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions. All they do is reinforce binary divisions between men and women. (73)

It is important to note that Mohanty does not reject out of hand the discursive usefulness of the term 'women'. Her challenge, however, demands a commitment to specificity and circumspection in its use. For even the well-intentioned impulse to oppose oppressive practices under a united banner, as it were, involves a similarly totalising gesture in which women's identities and experiences are again masked in an attempt to achieve political coherence.

My concern is not to try to identify an alternative set of terms with which to discuss sexual difference. There is not scope for such a discussion, nor would it be a task I would choose. Rather, the purpose of this discussion has to do with the way in which women are positioned as women discursively and the degree to which the body operates as a signifier of difference.

5.2 The Body of Difference

It is not surprising that feminists are suspicious of a discussion of the body for it has long been the rationale behind the prejudicial treatment of women. The body is the distinguishing feature of sexual difference: it has been used historically as the rationale behind the perceived inferiority of women, the so-called 'weaker sex'.

Psychoanalysis itself has made use of a bodily model in defining women as 'lack'.³² The body figures as difference in a system of dualities which sets women up as the inferior partner to men, corresponding to what body is to mind, nature to culture, psychical to 'real'. This system relies on binary differences, which depend on apparently irrefutable 'natural' phenomena — such as the body itself. Elizabeth Grosz points out that uninterrogated epistemological assumptions are based in the acute and lived experience of the body:

[B]odies provide a neuralgic locus for the projection and living out of unreflective presumptions regarding the sexes and their different social, sexual, and biological roles. The sciences themselves are not immune to — indeed, they depend for the very mode of their formulations and operations on — everyday assumptions and beliefs of scientists and others regarding knowledge, power, desire, and bodies. (1994, x)

A reconsideration of the epistemological certainty of the body has radical implications not only for the social sciences but also for the natural sciences themselves, Grosz argues. She takes issue with the common separation between sophisticated discourse on cultural investments in the body and apparently objective expositions on the tangible physicality of the body. Introducing the thesis of her book she denies 'that there is the "real" material body on one hand and its various cultural and historical representations on the other'.

It is my claim throughout this book that these representations and cultural inscriptions quite literally constitute bodies and help to produce them as such.... (x)

³² In her discussion of the psychoanalytic concept of 'lack' Elizabeth Grosz quips that 'there is no lack in the real, as Lacan is fond of saying' (1994: 60).

She is at pains to unsettle the assumption that body constitutes the 'bedrock' of 'real' and unchangeable biological fact upon which psychological and social meanings are inscribed.

Grosz refutes the binary distinction between body and mind: she does more than just propose their connectedness, but goes a long way to developing a language which is able to slip between both concepts: 'If bodies are objects or things, they are like no others, for they are the centers of perspective, insight, reflection, desire, agency.... Bodies are not inert; they function interactively and productively. They act and react. They generate what is new, surprising, unpredictable' (x-xi). She appropriates Lacan's metaphor of the Möbius strip, the horizontal three-dimensional figure of eight, and uses it (differently) to conceptualise the fluid interconnectedness, indeed oneness (if also visually distinct) of the body and mind. The model 'provides a way of problematizing and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychological interior and its corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of the one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside' (xii). Thus, in her conceptualisation of the relationship between the body and mind (or subjectivity), the two are not distinct, nor is the body simply a signifier of identity. Grosz speaks of the body's being 'psychically constituted in order for the subject to acquire a sense of its place in the world and in connection with others' (xii).

'Being a body is something we must come to accommodate psychically, something we must live' (Grosz, xiii). A crucial part of 'accommodating' our

physicality is responding to the way in which our bodies are read and positioned by others. Grosz devotes a chapter of her book to a discussion of body image which she proposes as a third term 'intervening between and requiring the operations of both mind and body' (62). Body image — what another critic has called 'the psychic representation of one's body' (Manganyi 1981, 117) — emerges out of the dialogue between, on the one hand, the lived perception of the body from within, as it were, and, on the other hand, the external, surrounding space and the objects in the body's field of vision. The 'inner' body, involving 'libidinal investments' and self-identification, includes the 'outer' body, or that which is determined in social relations. Body image is both internal and external, 'introjected' (84) and projected outwards. It attests to the fact that self-conceptualisation is socially circumscribed and steeped in bodily consciousness.

Grosz's primary concern with body image is the extent to which it 'mediates the mind/body polarization':

The body image does not map a biological body onto a psychosocial domain, providing a kind of translation of material into conceptual terms; rather, it attests to the necessary interconstituency of each for the other, the radical inseparability of biological from psychical elements, the mutual dependence of the psychical and the biological, and thus the intimate connection between the question of sexual specificity (biological sexual differences) and psychical identity. (85)

However, implicit in the notion of body image are relationships of viewing which do not form a focus in Grosz's discussion. Grosz does speak of 'visual sensations' (83) thus placing an emphasis on the bodily experience of looking — as opposed to being looked at — but this points only fleetingly to the role of the exchange of looks and the multiple positions simultaneously assumed by the

subject in looking at her own body. To form a mental (and psychical) picture of the body requires also an externalised eye. (An extreme form of this distancing from one's own body is described by Grosz as a condition called appersonalisation, which involves treating one's body as an external object belonging to another.)

This reflexivity of viewing entails both a dispossession and an embodiment of the self constructed in response to the look, under the spotlight, as it were. In the body of the prison cell, where the prisoner's own body is held in tension as both 'dangerous' (because locked away) and vulnerable (to harsh treatment), the self which emerges in that tension can only be split, explosive, uncertain. The scene of the prison cell brings the body into focus sharply where previously it was free to occupy positions less defined and fiercely imposed. In the prison cell relations of viewing are distorted, turned in upon themselves, allowing for no affirming (or even unthreatening) visual exchange. To be looked at is to be caged by the hostile eyes of the other (as will be discussed later with specific reference to Mashinini). Similarly, to look at one's body from within the cell is to have the message of criminality returned in the bleakness of the cell walls. As a mirror of sorts their statement is unrecognisable and fear-inducing. The prisoner is displaced in the hostile environment of that dungeon-like womb, alienated from her own construction of self and from her own body which is produced (through being looked at) in terms of the authorities' contempt. As such the body is made overwhelmingly present,³³ but it is an alien body (as is the case when Mashinini

³³ Elaine Scarry has argued that the infliction of pain in torture has the effect of making the body the sole object of awareness, obliterating all other contents of the detainee's consciousness. I discuss Scarry's thesis at length in chapter seven, using her conceptualisation of the effects of pain to discuss the bodily discomforts of psychological torture and sexual harassment.

loses her sense of who she is through being unable to see and recognise herself, discussed earlier). The body — marked, viewed, beaten, starved, caged, categorised, positioned, named, and inscribed with anatomical signifiers of social significance — is thus at the heart of constructions of identity and representations of self. And as a key signifier of identity, the body is at the heart of identity politics.

5.3 Identities and the Body

The deconstruction of the meanings attributed to the concept 'body' is not meant as an attempt to refute the materiality of the body, but rather to dislodge the arbitrarily but firmly secured scaffolding on which social categories (in particular categories of race and gender) rely. It is not my intention to deny sexual difference per se, but to examine the processes through which difference is constructed and entrenched in discourse. It is the fixity of the naming of difference which needs to be examined, its contradictions which need to be exposed.

To speak of the body in general terms will not produce an analysis of the complicated matrix of relations between bodies (and subjects) which are discursively identified as male and female, black and white, or with varying sexual preferences. What follows is a closer look at the negative significations of the black body and the female body (and the black female body, following De Lauretis' reminder) in order to consider how these significations might be encoded in the prison narratives of this study. For it seems that the practice of imprisonment is a particular physical expression of discipline which is directed at — and in fact produces — the dissident

body. Makhoere, for example, self-consciously makes her (black) body her instrument of protest in the same way that it had been the focus of the racist treatment she receives. The way in which she represents her body and responds to the significations accorded it are thus crucial to her narrativised articulation of self.

Historically read as sexuality itself, the female body is defined in terms of anatomical differences from the male body. Elizabeth Grosz argues that the bodily signifiers of essential 'womanness' are arbitrarily identified:

If women have been defined on the side of the body and men on the side of the mind, then there are particular bodily zones that serve to emphasize both women's difference from and otherness to men. There is nothing inherent in these regions and zones that makes them more suitable for culturally representing sexual difference — many others would have served this function just as well; what culturally marks sexual difference is biologically arbitrary, conventional. With the developments of puberty, what becomes visible and tangible as a measure of womanhood is the development of the so-called secondary sexual characteristics, the filling out of breasts and hips, the growth of pubic hair, and perhaps most strikingly, the onset of menses. (203)

Female bodily fluids come to signify the horror of difference in a way that male fluids do not. Male differences have been elided because 'the specificities of the masculine have always been hidden under the generality of the universal, the human' (198) while women's bodies 'and sexualities have been structured and lived in terms that not only differentiate them from men's but also attempt ... to position them in a relation of passive dependence and secondariness to men's' (202). Women's bodies have been seen as receptacles for men's assertive desires and seminal fluids. One is conscious of the figurative use of 'seminal' to mean originating, of great significance, productive, ground-breaking. To the

extent that women's bodies emit fluid it is seen as a seepage, a contaminating defilement associated with excrement (Grosz 203, 206) and death.³⁴

Similarly, the black body carries with it significations of defilement and is saturated with sexuality.³⁵ N. Chabani Manganyi, a South African clinical psychologist and Black Consciousness critic writing from the 1970s, has considered how the polarisations operating on the body influence black body image. The black body has become, 'in race supremacist cultures, a medium for the development of racist symbol systems and fantasies' (Manganyi, 1981a, 105). He does not speak of an essentialised black body, or make a virtue out of stereotypical meanings traditionally associated with being black, but recognises the centrality of the body in social relations: 'we make our approaches to the world through our bodies' and vice versa (Manganyi 1973, 6).

For Manganyi 'skin colour in itself' is not what is at issue. 'What is more important is what the skin actually signifies in sociological and psychological terms. The skin only becomes significant in these terms as body' (1973, 18). The opposition set up between good and bad, purity and impurity, reason and savagery, bodily strength and 'anality' finds its damning parallel in white and black. Manganyi seeks to explode the 'mystery about the heavens and the depths, God and the Devil, whiteness (purity, good, chastity) and blackness (bad, dirt, faeces)' (1981, 108). However, the way blackness is read has devastating implications for the meaning of 'being-black-in-the-world'.

³⁴ See Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection (1980: 71).

³⁵ See Leon Kamin (1993) who, in 'On the Length of Black Penises and the Depth of White Racism', exposes the racist assumptions and dubious scholarship which continue to exoticise blacks as being more sexually potent than whites.

The negative values associated with blackness (blackness as dirt, impurity, smell) become vehicles in race supremacist cultures for the racist's attempts to adapt to his estrangement from the reality of his body. The projection of these undesirable attributes of the human body to the victim of racism as a convenient scapegoat, is part and parcel of the process of denial and self-deception which characterises the cultural heroics of Western culture and civilisation. (1981, 113)

For the black child the traditional distinction between the upper and lower bodies — respectively the seats of reason and defecation — can provide no psychological comfort. The lower body, with its associations of impurity, cannot be repressed in favour of the upper body because the 'devaluation of the lower axis of the body' (108) and the set of categories attached to it encompasses, for the black child, the entire body: the 'anxiety of the black child, however, must be understood in terms of a body that is stereotypically devalued as a totality' (115). As a result any positive sense of self is always overshadowed by a form of self-hatred.

Aspiring to greater 'whiteness' (which is how Mashinini describes herself as a younger woman who used skin lightening creams and wigs) produces an alienation from self: the meanings attributed to blackness cannot be obscured by the camouflages produced while 'trying for white'³⁶ and the attempt further denigrates the social value of being black. Dorothy Driver explains the complex nature of Mashinini's representation of her relation to racial categories in her article, 'Imagined Selves, (Un)imagined Marginalities' (1991). Mashinini employs (to a limited degree) the common autobiographical convention of a split between a younger, more impressionable self (formed before her encounter with Black Consciousness) and a mature self who has been freed from racist self-hatred

³⁶ A colloquial expression commonly used in South Africa in judgement of blacks who are thought to imitate white attributes (hair styles, clothing, accents, etc.).

through the gift of Black Consciousness (BC). Nevertheless she is also able to move beyond the dualisms reproduced in BC. Her distance from BC is partly a result of her construction of a self outside of BC in order to reproduce 'that developmental process' (346) but partly owing to the measure of self-questioning tolerated in her text (353).

For to enact a neat reversal is similarly entrenching of stereotypes. Frantz Fanon, an Algerian psychologist and philosopher (whose analysis of the psychology of racism contributed to the burgeoning Black Consciousness movement in the United States in the 1960s and in South Africa in the 1970s), argues that the inferiority complex suffered by the colonised is not innate but internalised as a result of racist undervaluing of black physical and cultural identity in colonialist ideology.³⁷ Cyril Couve, in discussing Fanon's perspectives on the psychology of the colonised, writes of the strategies adopted to counteract this undervaluing of blackness:

The division within colonised subjectivity, however, rests centrally on the conflict between this internalised sense of inferiority and the compensatory manoeuvres to combat it: that is, the setting up of an ideal guiding fiction. (Couve 1988, 57)

The 'guiding fiction', according to Fanon's analysis, takes the form of identifying with whiteness or exchanging the idealisation of whiteness for an idealisation of blackness. Couve is critical of Fanon's tendency nevertheless to construct an oppositional black identity as 'a unitary category' despite Fanon's liberating analysis of the constructedness of racial categories. The way in which the body is read and

³⁷ See Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks (1952) and The Wretched of the Earth (1961).

represented is thus at the heart of both racism itself and strategies to counteract racism.

According to Makhoere, Resha and Mashinini, being read as a black female body can be deeply disturbing. Their strategies of coping with this differ. When Mashinini is insulted it is first her body which is verbally abused, then her personal and political person. The two, however, are one and the same: "You're fat, Kaffir meid," one said to me. "You're a nuisance and a troublemaker" (54). Later on in her narrative she revisits this label without the distance of quotation marks: 'I was nothing but a Kaffir' (74) which suggests that the insult could not easily be discarded.

Maggie Resha turns racist aversion back in on itself by using her (sexed and sexual) black body as a weapon. After a raid on her house by the Security Branch, one of the men lingers, alone, in her house after his colleagues have left:

When he did not move, I became hysterical. 'You get out; you want that, when your friends come back, they arrest me and charge me of having broken the Immorality Act with you?' I was now screaming at the top of my voice. Immediately I mentioned the Immorality Act, (which dated from 1927, but which had been amended in 1967 in order to tighten up the definition, as well as the penalties for 'immorality' between whites and black people) he shot out of the house like a bullet from a gun. (193)

In her 'hysterical' fear that he might threaten her, Resha invokes the racist laws his work supports (which outlaws sexual relations between white and black), using her body and sexuality as a weapon which has the effect of ousting him, pulling a trigger so that his body becomes 'like a bullet'.

In an unexpected moment in her text Makhoere invokes the negative significations of 'black' in her description of the brutal interrogator, Selepe, who

stands in opposition to her. After giving an account of his merciless treatment of her she describes him as a 'big, very black, policeman, threatening and boasting to a defenceless young woman' (7). Here 'black' is set up in opposition to 'woman'. For the most part, however, the unifying, unquestioned category of 'black' is one of the unassailably fixed textual categories in which she finds protection from the white world and from self-doubt and isolation. She uses 'the people' in a similar way. Gitahi Gititi writes that while 'there can be no doubt about Makhoere's commitment to the cause of liberation, there is evidence of political sloganeering, not necessarily peculiar to her, but disturbing because categories such as "the people" are often used uncritically and with a great deal of abstraction' (1991, 48).

Makhoere recognises the denigrating conception of blackness, but her way of evading the negative significations is not to expose them as fictitious constructions but to reverse the set of dualities through which 'black' is vilified. She describes the 'nasty, cruel and racist' Brigadier du Plessis as seeming 'to belong to that group that would rather die than see blacks sharing power. He had it in his mind that blacks were devils and whites, especially Afrikaners, were the chosen children of God and that South Africa was the promised land' (13). Makhoere, however, is able to disconnect herself from Du Plessis's racist belief structure, placing him and what he has 'in his mind' in a similarly dismissive category rather than concurring with his categorisation of her. She cannot remain quite so easily unaffected when she hears of the 'strange' practice of using black bodies as shooting targets at Pretoria Central. It is all the more disturbing because it comes up in casual and seemingly friendly conversation with the wardress Erasmus who mentions that 'they were learning how to shoot straight' (78).

Erasmus seems unaware of the menacing implications in having 'a board with a black man painted on it, with various parts of the body circled'. Makhoere says:

They would shoot at the board, and the person who hit the indicated parts was congratulated. They are instilling the idea that they have to know how to kill black people. (78-9)

This is confirmed by Erasmus:

I questioned her. 'Tell me, if they are teaching you how to shoot, who are you going you [sic] shoot? Are you going to kill black people?' Her reply was, 'If it is necessary, yes.' Here was an honest Afrikaner woman.... (79)

For Makhoere, though, this is indicative of the racist's monstrous inhumanity rather than the hatefulness of blacks. 'What kind of humans are these?' she asks (79).

The contest over the meaning of being black is central to her representation of the battle over access to clean laundry; her outrage at being denied clean laundry is focused on the racist categorisation of blacks as 'smelly' which she denies by reversing the traditional association of blacks with dirt. In prison access to bodily cleanliness is regulated, along with food, exercise, clothing and so on. In her representation of her endeavours to secure the privilege of bi-weekly laundry

Makhoere overturns racist assumptions:

There is one particularly stupid belief of many South African whites: that all blacks smell. It sits within the minds of those wardresses, that we are smelly. Fine: if we smell, whose fault is it? They use perfumes, they have all the showers and the baths, they can wash as many times as they want. But you take a common-law prisoner who is denied the opportunity of showering after working for them in prison.... Here these common-law prisoners work in a laundry at Pretoria, this steaming place, doing washing for the very same people who tell them they are smelly.... [T]hese very same apartheid gods, who can't even wash their own panties, they take their panties to a laundry — they have the audacity to say we are smelly....

So I demanded that my clothes be washed twice a week, that whether I was in prison or what, I just had to be clean. (90)

Her demand to have access to clean laundry is a direct response to the derogatory meanings associated with being black. The strategy with which she evades the damning associations of blackness is simply to overturn the assignment of meanings by logical argument in this way: while she is committed to being clean, whites cannot maintain cleanliness themselves without the support of expensive perfumes and black labour. Whites are dirty, she is clean. The dualistic structure which privileges one category over the other is maintained, its chauvinistic strategy boldly employed.

The association of blackness with criminality continues to be a source of bitter resentment throughout Makhoere's imprisonment and it is this which is at the heart of her unrelenting protest (in the form of hunger strikes, largely) about the two issues of food and labour. Race itself is punished more severely than crime, her narrative suggests, in that white prisoners, regardless of the natures of their crimes, are given privileges simply on account of their being white whereas black prisoners are given punitive rations. This is also clearly articulated in Maggie Resha's account, which is similarly indignant about the discriminatory practices in prison, if not quite as harsh in her response:

We were not given [tea and coffee], because we were black, and therefore not entitled to such items.

Throughout our stay in prison, we never had any of these foods, nor were we given sugar, milk, fruit, fish, cheese, butter or eggs, which we saw formed part of the everyday diet of the white prisoners — no matter what crime they had committed.... (171)

Moreover, black prisoners are compelled to work while in prison. Resha's text highlights the connection between work and punishment: the more strenuous

work (washing heavily soiled canvas as opposed to ordinary clothing) is reserved for those who are being punished:

Each morning, after breakfast, was time for laundry. We did heaps and heaps of washing: our uniforms, as well as that of the male prisoners. Those for the men were made out of canvas, and very difficult to wash. Worst of all, some of these uniforms of the men were full of blood and pieces of dead skin and pus on the area of the buttocks.... These bloodstained clothes were always sorted out and put aside to be washed by women who were punished for one thing or the other. Noone [sic] could escape punishment in prison, because it seemed that prisoners were wrong all the time. The swearing at, and beating of prisoners, by the white wardresses was a daily thing. Other prisoners cleaned the cells and washed the dishes; but the majority did the laundry. White prisoners, we were told, did no work while in prison. ... [I]n South Africa a black prisoner is a slave of the government. (169-70; emphasis added)

When saying that 'noone could escape punishment' Resha clearly means no black prisoner, as white women detainees were not as a matter of course expected to work (as is evidenced in Ruth First's text where she describes being the 'White Madam' who has to have her hot water brought to her). Resha considers the work 'a form of punishment.... At least, that is what everybody thought it was' (172).

Makhoere, Resha and First all tell of the way in which black women were used to wash the clothing of senior government officials. Resha comments on the vested interests of the magistrates whose washing was done by the women whom they had sentenced:

Another woman ... boastingly said: 'See, I am washing for the Chief Magistrate!'

... What came into my mind was 'so these white magistrates were filling the prisons by sentencing women for petty crimes, like drunken noise, to make sure that they got free prison labour'. (174)

It is worth noting that discrepancies still exist in the kind of work allocated, in practice, to white and black prisoners, according to the 'Human Rights Watch' report referred to earlier (Brown, et al, 1994). This is despite the fact that the Correctional Services Act of 1990 has outlawed discrimination between prisoners (and prison staff) of different race groups:

[Whites are] more quickly promoted to the highest 'privilege group', where they would avoid the worst hardships of prison. This differential treatment was also confirmed to us by some warders to whom we spoke outside prison walls, and by some white prisoners. In particular, whites have greater access to training facilities and are assigned to less onerous work. In prison after prison, we observed a high proportion of whites among prisoners employed in the kitchen (one of the most desirable work assignments in prisons worldwide). (Brown, et al, 1994, 19)

Makhoere responds assertively to the discriminatory prison regulations requiring that she work. She refuses to participate in the actions which signify the degree to which black bodies are considered despicable and delinquent. She refuses to eat the food designated for blacks³⁸ and to do any work while in prison: 'I never did work again... I am not a prisoner, I am not a slave.... They thought they were going to work me; I made them work thoroughly instead' (45). These strategies are part of a greater project of refusing to comply with the way in which she is positioned. She thus identifies an 'other' and attributes to them the negative associations to which she has been victim. So, in her terms, convicted white criminals should be thrust into the discursive category which encompasses evil, delinquency, ignorance and barbarism. In relation to discriminatory food allocation Makhoere asks this of the prison staff:

³⁸ Accounts of her numerous hunger strikes are to be found throughout her text (30, 32, 34, 48, 79, 80, 85, 93).

'Are your white prisoners, all those hooligans you have here, and these hobos who commit petty crimes, you accommodate them here, you treat them like kings and queens, with all the privileges you can think of. Privileges, just because they are white. And I am denied decent food. I think I am also capable of appreciating good food.' (31)

She thus claims access to the nebulous social category of people who are capable of appreciating good food from which the delinquent and socially despised ('hooligans' and 'hobos') are excluded. Her strategy of controlling the way in which she is read, is to deny, often forcibly, the meanings imposed on her — black, lazy, smelly, uncultured, without value, delinquent, and so on — and to assign them to another group within her text. Thus polarities are reproduced and, once overturned, firmly re-entrenched. Her text is indomitable in beating out the rhythm of her revised structure of meaning which relies entirely on an 'us'-and-'them' hierarchy. The content of those categories may not be consistent (such as when she describes the hated Selepe) but the structure is always one of dualities. The representation of her own body — clean, invulnerable, free to be at leisure and so on — is crucial to this strategy, as is her representation of the bodies of others.

Mashinini differs from Makhoere in being able to acknowledge the complicated relation she has to 'whiteness' and the meanings associated with it. Her mistrust and fear of whites is marked, all the more so because of the contradictory pulls, the double bind in which she finds herself as a result of the racist privileging of whites: she feels envy and awe of them because of their association with wealth and privilege on the one hand but also great anger at the discriminatory ideology upon which white privilege is based, on the other. For while Black

Consciousness has 'saved us all from hating the colour of our skin' the insults of the wardresses carry much power, as argued earlier.³⁹ It is only after she recognises the degree to which she has been abused at the hands of her white warders that she is able to distance herself from the perverse impulse to envy whites and aspire to what she associates with 'whiteness':

I was so sick of seeing those white people. To see always white people, white people pushing your food at you through the door, white people pushing you and telling you 'Come' or 'Go' and what to do — it was making me ill. Because when you are black you have a need for persons of your own colour. And with my envy of white people, now to be surrounded by them made me realise again how stupid that was, to envy their skin or hair. It was no privilege to be among them. It was a misery and a deprivation. (73)

Mashinini does not need to overturn and repeat the derogatory labelling to which she has been victim in order to release herself from the damning significations of her blackness. It is true, though, that her experience of abuse by whites is so formative that it affects her ability to be unguarded with her white doctor in Denmark:

But for me I was speaking to a white doctor, and I had spent so much time with white police, surrounded by white people. It was a white woman who had refused me chewing gum, and a white woman who had put those bracelets [handcuffs] on me. And it was hard, very hard, to trust her, this new white woman. (92)

However, her acknowledgement of this difficulty to trust whites immediately introduces a dimension to her representation of race that is not evident in Makhoere's text. The acknowledgement itself attests to a reflectiveness which is not

³⁹ I am indebted to Dorothy Driver (1991) for this quotation from Mashinini in particular and for an analysis of the significance of Black Consciousness in the narratives of Mashinini and Makhoere.

found in Makhoere's text. For Mashinini does not have to construct her doctor simplistically and dogmatically as untrustworthy in order to explain her own inability to trust whites. This has the effect of opening up a space in her narrative to move beyond the fixed structures of identity and struggle which circumscribe Makhoere's text, asserted in order to secure her story. For Makhoere, to be tentative in her judgement, and to risk uncertainty, would be to threaten the security of her position as subject. Dorothy Driver suggests that this difference in the texts of Makhoere and Mashinini may be due to generational and educational differences:

While [Mashinini's] doubts may simply mean she is more circumspect [than Makhoere], and may also point to the fact that she has been educated in a different era, which gives her a perspective on the Black Consciousness that Makhoere inhabits, they also reveal the kind of interest in her own self-construction that necessarily places her outside it, in an interrogative position. (1991, 352)

The brutality that Makhoere has been victim to is also crucial to her reconstruction of self. I have argued that the positioning of body — that is, the way in which it is read and the degree to which it functions as a focus of systematic violence against dissident subjects — is formative of subjectivity. So too, then, is the body central in the representation of self offered in response, or, for Makhoere, offered in self-conscious retaliation. To allow for any sort of uncertainty in the construction of her identity may threaten to dislodge the heavily bolstered self which is made available through invoking the absolute categories of identity politics. The body itself, as it is linguistically and culturally represented, gives Makhoere access to this apparent security as a subject in battle.

6. Prison space and personal space: a closing-in of subjectivity

The opening line of Ruth First's 117 Days, an account of her time (literally, 117 days) as a political prisoner in apartheid prisons, points immediately to the degree to which the (enforced) position of her body defines her identity: 'For the first fifty-six days of my detention in solitary I changed from a mainly vertical to a mainly horizontal creature' (9). Thereafter her text is infused with accounts of her struggle to inhabit the space designated as hers and with her obsession with the passing of time. Indeed the title conferred upon her text is one which demands that attention be given to the passing of time. The carefully structured focus of the book which is limited to a particular period mimics something of the strangeness of being locked into a space sealed off from the rest of her life.

First's 117 Days chronicles her imprisonment under the 90-day detention law in South Africa during 1963.⁴⁰ Prior to her arrest in 1963, First had worked as a journalist in various capacities. She had been editor of the left-wing South African publication, Fighting Talk, for nine years before it was banned. She herself was then banned from writing or publishing or even entering newspaper premises and so enrolled for a librarianship course shortly before her arrest (11).

⁴⁰ First quotes the relevant section from Clause 17 of the General Law Amendment Act of 1963 which provided for the arrest without trial of people deemed politically dangerous:

Any commissioned officer ... may ... without warrant arrest ... any person whom he suspects upon reasonable grounds of having committed or intending or having intended to commit any offence under the Suppression of Communism Act, 1950 (Act No. 44 of 1950), or under the last-mentioned Act as applied by the Unlawful Organisations Act, 1960 (Act No. 34 of 1960), or the offence of sabotage, or who in his opinion is in possession of any information relating to the commission of any such offence or the intention to commit any such offence, and detain such person or cause him to be detained in custody for interrogation in connexion [sic] with the commission of or intention to commit such offence, at any place he may think fit, until such person has in the opinion of the Commissioner of the South African Police replied satisfactorily to all questions at the said interrogation, but no such person shall be so detained for more than ninety days on any particular occasion when he is so arrested. (50; First's emphasis)

First was arrested along with those who were to become the Rivonia trialists. Except for a brief spell during which Hazel Goldreich and Anne-Marie Wolpe, wives of two of the four Rivonia trial escapees, were held for questioning, she was the only white woman political prisoner in Marshall Square Prison Station, Johannesburg, or in Pretoria Central Prison, where she spent 28 days.

First's text is remarkable in that it self-consciously draws attention to the space-time dimensions of her incarceration and how they affect her experience of herself. Not unlike Makhoere who pointedly trades in bodily retorts, First's articulations bespeak an acute spatial sensibility. This discussion will explore the way in which space-time dimensions influence First's representations herself and the set of social relations of which she, as prisoner, is a part. How she sees the space she inhabits is indicative of how her political and personal self is being controlled. Her use of spatial metaphors to represent herself attests to the complicated way in which time and space are invested with her selfhood, both passively, as a function of the way in which she is positioned by the state, and actively, in her own representation of self where her environment comes to stand in for her.

In an interview with Paul Rabinow, Michel Foucault proposes the interconnectedness of space and being:

I think it is somewhat arbitrary to try to dissociate the effective practice of freedom by people, the practice of social relations, and the spatial distributions in which they find themselves. If they are separated, they become impossible to understand. Each can only be understood through the other.... (Foucault 1993, 163)

In prison, the arrangement of space is an essential form of control which works insidiously to deliver the message of disempowerment to the prisoner.

Thomas Markus, who provides a useful historical overview of the development of architectural models for prisons, writes of Jeremy Bentham's unquestioning faith in the centrality of architecture in moulding social life. It was Bentham who in 1791 first conceived of the panopticon as an architectural model for prisons which formed the basis of modern penal institutions, although inadequately reproduced, according to Markus. Bentham's 'belief in architecture was absolute':

Morals reformed — health preserved. — industry invigorated — instruction diffused — public burthen lightened — Economy seated as it were upon a rock — the Gordian knot of the Poor Laws not cut but untied — all by a simple idea in Architecture! (Bentham 1791, qtd. in Markus 1993, 127)

Bentham's conception of the perfect prison will be discussed in greater detail towards the end of this chapter, but his belief in the extraordinary power of spatial arrangement to transform social relations is worth noting here.

The impact of space and time on social relations is not new to the social sciences,⁴¹ although the pertinence of space-time considerations to theories of literary representation is not commonly proposed by theorists in that discipline. Edward Soja argues for a revision of the opposition which privileges historical over spatial or geographic considerations in materialist analyses and explicates the complex constructions of social space and its connectedness to 'existential dimensions':

⁴¹ See, for example, social and cultural theorists such as David Harvey, T. Hägerstrand, Edward Soja, Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens whose respective analyses of the impact of space (and, increasingly, space-time) on social existence are frequently cited.

Just as space, time, and matter delineate and encompass the essential qualities of the physical world, spatiality, temporality, and social being can be seen as the abstract dimensions which together comprise all facets of human existence. More concretely specified, each of these abstract existential dimensions comes to life as a social construct which shapes empirical reality and is simultaneously shaped by it. Thus, the spatial order of human existence arises from the (social) production of space, the construction of human geographies that both reflect and configure being in the world. Similarly, the temporal order is concretized in the making of history, simultaneously constrained and constraining in an evolving dialectic that has been the ontological crux of Marxist thought for over a hundred years. (Soja 1993, 147; emphasis added)

Soja thus points to the constructedness of what could otherwise be understood simply as natural data.⁴² He thereby claims the usefulness of analyses of spatiality for discussions of the construction of the human subject. He directs attention to a comment by Foucault which links explicitly the manipulation of space and the wielding of power. For Foucault, writing in 1980, the political dimensions of space (and the spatial dimensions of social politics) had yet to be explored:

A whole history remains to be written of spaces — which would at the same time be the history of powers (both of these terms in the plural) — from the great strategies of geopolitics to the little tactics of the habitat. (1980, 149)

My concern rests not so much with the call to plot a history of the organisation and use of space as with an analysis of the force of space-time dimensions in the shaping of subjectivity and representation.

⁴² See also Edward Soja, 'The Spatiality of Social Life: Towards a Transformative Rethorisation' (1985).

D.H.J. Morgan and Sue Scott have warned against over-theorising and thereby rendering abstract the body in space which, they argue, is necessarily steeped in the concrete, that is, daily experience.

One possible difficulty here is that the three terms, body, space and time, add up to a large number of abstractions with the consequences of distancing and alienation from experience that we have noted in connection with some other theoretical enterprises. Yet time, space and bodies are not just abstractions; they refer to the immediacies of everyday, lived experience. (1993, 18)

And yet Morgan and Scott's tendency to privilege experience above a theoretically informed understanding of social organisation is dangerous in that it masks the symbolic functioning of daily life. It is precisely the constructedness of space as a socially laden concept that allows for its usefulness in a discussion of representation, such as this one. So, too, with the structures such as fences, walls and gates which enclose spaces (spaces and their enclosures being integrally connected). This is particularly evident in prison space which imposes a certain value and identity onto the inmate whose very identity is constructed by virtue of her/his being enclosed, her/his space circumscribed. She is likely only to experience herself as a criminal when incarcerated: her existence in a cell makes her an inmate; her refusal to re-enter the cell also identifies her as a dissident (such as in the case of Makhoere's onetime campaign during which she and others resisted entering their cells).

Identity and space are thus intertwined and mutually constitutive, for space functions symbolically as much as it operates in the 'real'. The symbolic value of space and structure is not distinct from the structure itself and a narrative whose language weaves comfortably and indistinctly the strands of symbolism and

reality cannot be dismissed as mere metaphor. David A. Napier asserts the inseparability of the symbol and the 'real':

The symbol becomes the basis for other sympathetic relations, so much so that actions occurring in the real, actual, or architectonic world may be inseparable from their symbolic content. (1992, xviii)

First is transformed as a result of being enclosed in a tiny space where the bed is the only place of comfort. Her description of herself as a 'mainly horizontal creature' for whom a 'black iron bedstead became [her] world' (9) suggests that her bodily position comes to be read as her-self. The bleak and inhuman environment, which she describes at length as being 'grey', 'catacomb-like, claustrophobic', covered in a 'dirty film' of dust and 'sticky black soot', leads to a fear of becoming 'one of those colourless insects that slither under a world of flat, grey stones, away from the sky and the sunlight, the grass and people' (9).

Later the metaphor she uses to describe her prison existence is one of being confined to a 'matchbox' and relegated to orderliness:

On the iron bedstead it was like being closed inside a matchbox. A tight fit, lying on my bed, I felt I should keep my arms straight at my sides in cramped, stretched-straight orderliness. (9)

The closing-in of First's space enacts a closing-in of her control and volition, just as the enforced extension of temporal experience in that space functions as a performance of her being abandoned to the seemingly unlimited and arbitrary power of her captors to confine her. The architecture of the space she inhabits symbolises the social space assigned to her and functions to structure her social

(and, to the extent that she as subject submits to it, her psychological) identity. It also sets up relations of power: First's horizontality ensures that she is held in the passive position, a 'kept' woman, whereas the prison staff operate vertically. In this set of relations verticality could be said to signify (phallic) power.

Anthony Giddens proposes a useful term, 'locale' (1981, 161), which differs from 'space' or 'place' in that it allows for a more conscious integration of the erstwhile dualities of physical structure and the human interaction, thereby also introducing the factor of the passing of time. 'Locales refer to the use of space to provide the settings of interaction, the settings of interaction in turn being essential to specifying its contextuality' (Giddens 1985, 271; original emphasis). Giddens is critical of much time-space geography because of its tendency to reproduce the 'dualism of action and structure' and its emphasis, following the seminal work of T. Hägerstrand, on 'identifying sources of constraint over human activity, given by the nature of the body and the physical contexts in which activity occurs' (Giddens 1985, 266). What this approach produces, according to Giddens, is a dangerously biologicistic conception of the subject and an inflated view of human agency which is understood to be 'constrained' by external physicalities rather than produced in situ, as it were. Elsewhere too he finds fault with time-space geography because it 'operates with a naïve and defective conception of the human agent' (1985, 270). According to Giddens, Hägerstrand 'tends to treat "individuals" as coming into being independently of the social settings which they confront in their day-to-day lives' (1985, 270). Rather, the positioning of bodies in contexts within which power relations operate has a significant impact on the vagaries of subjectivity. Human

existence is not merely constrained by the confines of prison space; it is produced in relation to space.

In discussing the work of Giddens, John Agnew articulates a particularly useful 'angle' on space (1993). Even Giddens's notion of 'locale' fails to move beyond a conceptualisation of space as object or 'thing', albeit acknowledged as contributive to the dynamic within which subjectivity is constituted. Agnew's contribution is to highlight the lived perception through which the meaning of space is constructed, 'from the inside' as it were. He argues that 'place is also more than an "object"', drawing on Raymond Williams's notion of a 'structure of feeling' (1977) and Allan Pred's critique of the rigidity of spatial metaphors in discussions of space.⁴³

But place is also more than an 'object'. Concrete, everyday practices give rise to a cultural mediation or 'structure of feeling' ... or 'felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time'. This sense of place reinforces the social-spatial definition of place from inside, so to speak. The identification with place that can follow contributes yet another aspect to the meaning of place: one place or 'territory' in its differentiation from other places can become an 'object' of identity for a 'subject'. (263; last emphasis added)

Agnew's emphasis on the construction of spatial significations from within a lived experience of place is helpful. However, it seems that his conceptualisation of the dynamic process of constituting self in relation to one's surrounds is surprisingly one-dimensional, focusing as it does on the 'definition of place' and, despite itself, on the way in which space does, or at least 'can' (Agnew 1993,

⁴³ Agnew quotes Allan Pred, 'Structuration and Place: On the Becoming of Sense of Place and Structure of Feeling'.

See also Allan Pred, 'The Social Becomes the Spatial, the Spatial Becomes the Social: Enclosure, Social Change and the Becoming of Places in Skåne' in Social Relations and Spatial Structures (1985).

263), function as an object of identification. His analysis ultimately fails to produce a fruitful reading of the necessarily complicated, dialectic process within which identity is constructed in relation to human space. For this reason it seems that his use of Pred is simplistic, particularly given that elsewhere Pred critiques geographers who describe the space-identity dialectic in precisely the phraseology used by Agnew (although Pred does not take issue with Agnew himself). Pred is emphatic in his critique of the ways in which human geographers have treated space as rigid, defined, fixed, productive of meaning rather than produced in relation to subjective psychological arrangement. '[P]laces have been portrayed as little more than frozen scenes for human activity,' Pred argues:

Even the 'new humanistic' geographers who see place as an object for a subject, as a centre of individually-felt values and meanings, or as a locality of emotional attachment and felt significance, in essence conceive of place as an inert, experienced scene. (Pred 1985, 337; emphasis added)

Pred thus distances himself from Agnew, by implication, as a geographer who conceives of place as 'an object for a subject'. For although this conceptualisation of place does acknowledge that the subject is constituted in relation to place which can function as an object of identity, Pred's proposal as to the meaning and function of place is more explicit in understanding place as a product of human signification. Place and subjectivity are more mutually constitutive than Agnew's analysis suggests:

Place always represents a human product; it always involves an appropriation and transformation of space and nature that is inseparable from the reproduction and transformation of society in time and space....

It is not only what is fleetingly scene [sic] as place, a 'locale' or setting for activity and social interaction.

For the purposes of a discussion on the representation of self within prison space, Pred's assertion that place is necessarily a 'human product' is useful. Space is constitutive of identity as identity is constitutive of the meaning of a place. But in prison one is not fully in control of one's space (and body); others are at least in part constructing one's space and hence one's modes of subjectivity. The ways in which writers of prison narratives represent their bodies suggest that for white and black women in apartheid prisons, bodies and subjectivities are produced differently by state power.

Throughout her text Ruth First adopts metaphors drawn from the space she occupies when representing herself, using a language that is steeped in the physicality of the prison to articulate both her own sense of volition and the powers of the state. When first allowed out of her cell to exercise in the courtyard the symbolic step over the threshold of her cell takes her into a boundary-lessness which seems, through the reference to a figure of eight, to promise a continuousness of being. Here the term 'space' is charged with the magnitude of outer Space itself:

The few steps out of the cell were like a hurtle through space on a fun-fair figure of eight, and my stomach leapt as my legs moved across the concrete threshold. (42)

The whirl of a figure of eight is gravity-defying: there is no distinction between the upper and lower positions. As a two-dimensional mathematical symbol it functions to represent infinity. Moreover it introduces the suggestion of third

dimension, given the reference to the movement of a rollercoaster ride at the funfair, and the freedom to occupy space fully, continuously. 'Fun-fair' also evokes a sense of hysterical excess, and the ambivalence associated with what excites even as it terrifies. Rather ominously, it speaks of the degree to which the physical bounds of her prison existence have come to figure as her own edges so that in crossing over that (psychical) threshold she is threatened with a frightening lack of control as she steps into the expanse.

But all too soon she realises that the same symbols of entrapment are at work in that enclosed space, for despite its grander proportions and the fact that the courtyard is in the open air, her status as captive is as entrenched, her freedom as determinedly kept from her, her movements under as vigilant surveillance as when she was in the smaller space of the cell. The enclosing power of the prison building has extended to the sky itself, that ultimate signifier of boundless infinity; the sun itself, source of daylight's cycle, has become regulated by prison time.

But the exercise yard was too like a cell. The sky was trapped by brick walls extending upwards and, like the warders regulating my stay in the courtyard, the brick walls officiously limited the shine of the sun. (42)

The brick walls, given the quality of officiousness, have taken on the identity of the imprisoning system. 'They' have in fact become the system of incarceration. There is no distinction to be made between the regime by whose wrath and unjust laws First is punished as prisoner, the authorities and hapless warders who carry out the daily tasks of imprisoning her and the very walls of the prison buildings themselves.

Nor is First's own person distinct from the space with which she identifies, that is, the open freshness of the sky and warmth of the sun. Later First speaks of how she followed the sun during her daily hour 'outdoors': 'On sunny days I basked in the patch of sun, moving with it, if I could stay long enough, as it inched westwards across the courtyard and then out of reach' (42). The force of the verb 'bask' invokes the metaphor of an animal emerging from hibernation in dark corners to soak up the energising warmth of the sun. She lives within the sun's regulated space. But the sun too can be imprisoned by the tall walls of the courtyard which shut out the sun and set boundaries around the sky. This recalls both Makhoere's and Mashinini's insistence that the confining powers of the state extend beyond the prison too: life outside is only a 'kind of freedom' for Mashinini (88); the same nightmare of discipline and deprivation that Makhoere experiences in prison extends to all life in apartheid South Africa for blacks for the 'evil system has made our lives a pitiful thing.... Until the people shall govern our people will still be sleeping in ditches, in trees' (118).

For First the meaning of the enclosed courtyard is utterly transformed, however, through the written testimonies of the prisoners, so that it comes to be read as their register, recreating their togetherness: 'Arthur Goldreich had written his and Hazel's name in his precise architectural printing; Harold was there too' (43). His script, in mimicking something of his character (that is, his meticulousness), comes to stand in for himself. Moreover, the walls, as the pages on which signatures are inscribed, acknowledge the presence, across time, of what becomes a community of prisoners. Despite her physical solitude (and the dictates of the prison which proscribes communality) she is constructed

as one of a community of fellow sufferers, fellow activists. In this way an identity is made concrete through these representations of community.

The large exercise yard had become our place of reunion and our archive. Next to the names were scratched the dates of detention, and simple arithmetic calculations deduced that the fate of those arrested was continuous detention, except for those who had escaped or left the country. (43)

Despite the hostile role of the place, it has been able to function positively as a site where the political prisoners are able to make a gesture which is invested with themselves, representing their individual and communal presence.⁴⁴ This presence is reassuring because it lingers across time; the fact that the prisoners are not all physically present at the same time is irrelevant in this realm where time is felt to be held. It also functions as a warning of the extent of the state's power to incarcerate indefinitely, thus limiting that power which uses the fear of the unknown as a tool. (The following chapter will consider the role of unpredictability in disempowering prisoners.)

In the horror of time itself being held captive, the specificities of time are represented in a remarkably physical and explicit way. For it is, paradoxically, fear of the very infinitude of time held that produces the impulse to make concrete, make physical the nebulous, limitless passage of time. So, the obsessive need to measure time becomes dominant. The sounds of the life in the police station 'were welcome', First writes, 'in a series of endless days when time was determined only by [her] scratches on the wall and the visits of Security

⁴⁴ Barbara Harlow writes that the 'political fraternity [sic], its historical record, is in many cases inscribed on the prison walls themselves, which become archives of the resistance' (1987, 128).

Branch interrogators' (32). At another point she writes of the intolerable pain of waiting through time in a state of anxiety. The role of time is crucial, frighteningly akin to physical beating:

Yet, I told myself, I was subjected to no beating, no physical pain. The passage of time in anxiety was painful, and my ulcer was the recording instrument of that discomfort. But theoretically one could endure for years like this, in cold storage, with the pulse reduced. (75)

She uses a spatial metaphor to describe the formlessness of limitless time: 'It was not only the pain of existing in a vacuum. It was the indefiniteness of it all' (75). If a vacuum is correctly spoken of as 'space devoid of matter' (OED) it seems that, in using a spatial metaphor, she is drawing attention to the indefiniteness of time in detention. It is precisely the nothingness of the (temporal) dimensions in which she exists that inflicts pain. The physical void exists because of the lack of temporal structure or, at least, because of her powerlessness to determine the structure. The void is a function of the emptiness of her volition, her lack of control.

In her attempts to out-wit time (that is, her own sense of the passing of time) she becomes slavishly committed to the carrying out of trivial tasks with an obsessive attention to detail:

I made the bed carefully several times a day, I folded and refolded my clothes, re-packed my suitcase, dusted and polished everything in sight, cleaned the walls with a tissue. I filed my nails painstakingly. I plucked my eyebrows, then the hair from my legs, one hair at a time, with my small set of tweezers. (When I got into the sun I pulled out the strands of grey hair growing at my temples.) I unpicked seams in the pillow-slip, the towel, the hem of my dressing-gown, and then, using my smuggled needle and thread, sewed them up again. (73)

The most significant of these tasks is the one by which she records her existence: her needlework calendar. This (lived) metaphor of creating days through sewing stitches suggests that to measure time is to create it, but what is being created is not time itself but an inhabitable temporal structure and a confirmation of her own efficacy:

Ninety days. I calculated the date repeatedly, did not trust my calculation, and did it all again. Every day I repeated that little rhyme 'Thirty days hath September' and I counted days from 9 August, the date of my arrest. My wall calendar had been left behind at Marshall Square; in Pretoria my calendar was behind the lapel of my dressing-gown. Here, with my needle and thread, I stitched one stroke for each day passed. I sewed seven upright strokes, then a horizontal stitch through them to mark a week. Every now and then I would examine the stitching and decide that the sewing was not neat enough and the strokes could be more deadly exact in size; I'd pull the thread out and re-make the calendar from the beginning. This gave me a feeling that I was pushing time on, creating days, weeks, and even months. Sometimes I surprised myself and did not sew a stitch at the end of the day. I would wait three days and then give myself a wonderful thrill knocking three days off the ninety. (74; emphasis added)

But, as her narrative acknowledges, the 'thrill' in being able to record (and therefore govern) time is precarious because artificially constructed. She is as trapped by her own obsessive discipline (set up to affirm her control of her life) as by the routine imposed on her by the prison itself. In relation to the carrying out of her tasks, First writes that the 'repetition of these meaningless tasks and the long loneliness made me a prisoner of routines' (73). While at this point in her prison spell her ability to record and represent her relationship to the passing of time may contribute to her sense of control, her narrative structure burdens the reader with the knowledge that it is not, in fact, 90 days but 117, as the book's title announces, that she must endure. After the 'cruel pantomime' (112)

of being released and immediately re-arrested she abandons her 'calendar' as each new day becomes a signifier, not of her increasing endurance, but of the increasing (and immeasurable) power of the state. It is now left to her ulcer to register the passing of time, 'ulcer [which was] already recording, with a steady dilating pain in my inside, the state of my nervous anxiety' (113).

6.1 Surveillance

Central to the discussion thus far has been the question of control as a crucial mechanism of imprisonment: the prisoner's lack of control over who has access to the space she inhabits and how it is defined, with time (and therefore existence) being controlled by prison routines and structures. So too, visibility is not determined by choice but is entirely subject to the whim of the authorities. The prisoner is not always watched but is always visible, with 'the penny-sized peephole' a constant reminder 'of the humiliation of being locked away' (First 28-9).

To recall Foucault's work on the disciplining structure of the prison discussed earlier, the role of arbitrary and enforced visibility is an important disciplinary mechanism. He is attentive to the technology of observation itself as indicative of the greater project of subjection. The physical construction of 'observatory' spaces plays a fundamental part in the practice of control and in its representation. An 'architecture of discipline', so to speak, is not designed simply for public viewing of prisoners and cadets but functions 'to permit an

internal, articulated and detailed control — to render visible those who are inside it' (Foucault 1977a, 172):

[I]n more general terms, [it is] an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. (Foucault 1977a, 172)

Thus in Foucault's view the mechanism of control at work in prison institutions is not simply one of confinement but of control through visibility, what Tony Bennett, in a different context, calls 'the opening up ... to more public contexts of inspection and visibility' (1994, 137).⁴⁵ Foucault's sub-heading to his chapter on the 'means of correct training' makes explicit the inequality in this relationship of viewing: 'Hierarchical Observation' (1977a, 170). The structure of the prison ensures that the inmate is always under surveillance, the object of an unknown but controlling look. The controller remains veiled; his are 'eyes that must see without being seen' (1977a, 171).

This invisible surveillance contributes to Mashinini's horror at being caught unawares by what she describes as 'two eyes piercing me' (64). The warders' eyes, peering at her unannounced through the hole in the door, are intrusive to the point of inflicting injury yet remain hidden and seemingly dissociated from anything human. In contrast to Mashinini, First is able to neutralise the horror of being positioned as an object of a malevolent gaze both in her spoken challenge to the wardresses (which immediately situates her as a subject) and in the authority of her textual representation of the event which positions the warders

⁴⁵ Both Bennett's and Foucault's analyses are supported by a wealth of historical observations which will be absent in my discussion because of its specific scope and concerns.

as exhibits of her gaze. Once published, her text, through representing the wardresses linguistically, makes them objects of a much more potent look which is ultimately more constitutive of them than their positioning of her is able to be.

She exposes the sinister mission of the peephole with satirical indignation:

By prison standards it was designed to have the prisoner under scrutiny from the outside, not for the prisoner to view anything from the inside of the cell. 'Back from the door!' the wardress would cry when she saw the pupil of an eye up against the peephole. The hole was hers, to see if the prisoner was on the bed or off it. Sitting up or lying down. Laughing or crying. Facing the wall or turned away from it. Alive or dead. Locked up or escaped. I resented the spyhole and felt that to be peered at through it was a violent infringement of my privacy. Above all I objected to being talked to through the hole. 'If you want to see if I'm here, or say anything to me,' I told the police and the wardresses, 'Open the door. Don't spy at me through that hole.' (29)

In a subtle reversal of the criminalising discourse of the prison, First's speech, and then her text as well, categorises the warders themselves as villains (who 'spy'). It is she who demands respectful interactions. And yet her attempt to reverse the positions is not altogether successful for when she tries to appropriate the role of observer by peering through the keyhole she is discovered and suffers further shame: 'I felt humiliated every time I was detected standing on tiptoe trying to look out. It was as though my curiosity had got the better of my ability to exist in isolation' (29). By desiring to look she has transgressed her own code that she not capitulate. But her shame is only produced when she is 'caught out' by the wardresses as wanting (and needing) to look, as if it were a sign of her weakness and thus of their power to unnerve her through surveillance. Thus Foucault's analysis of the connection between

viewing and relations of power makes explicit what First and Mashinini as narrators implicitly know:

Disciplinary power ... is exercised through its invisibility; at the same time it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility. In discipline, it is the subjects who have to be seen. Their visibility assures the hold of the power that is exercised over them. It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection. (1977a, 187)

Jeremy Bentham's conception of the panopticon in the late eighteenth century was the first articulation and encoding of this inequality of visibility. Bentham conceived of the panopticon as a solution to his brother's problem with unproductive factory workers, which in itself highlights the sinister disciplinary purpose of the structure of surveillance. It was later applied to prisons. Central surveillance was fundamental to Bentham's structure as it 'achieved total and continuous control' (Markus 1993, 123). The numerous attempts thereafter to reproduce this model through building 'centric' prisons did not, Thomas Markus argues, correctly establish the requisite viewing pattern of Bentham's design:

They lacked that total asymmetry of power which was an essential feature. Inmates could see and hear each other, or they could see their keepers, or there were periods when they escaped surveillance. (Markus 1993, 123)

There are two essential features to Bentham's design: first, the invisibility of the authorities and second, the separation between prisoners. Barbara Harlow writes of 'the one-way observational control of the Benthamite panopticon ... whose modern counterpart is the "peephole"' (1987, 150). Bentham's design does not consider the possibility of other forms of 'seeing' or recognising people.

First is quite explicit about the uselessness of sight in prison, but she has an alternative: her ability to hear.

I could dispense with my eyes. Ears were more useful in isolation. There would be the jingle of keys and the clang of doors to announce the approach of an intruder, or a new episode in the regulated monotony of life in a cell. (30)

She is able to monitor the life in prison and become acquainted with the personalities on the staff (with remarkable insight) and in this way re-empower herself to 'see': 'I identified the wardresses by the sound of them long before I saw them. Female voices. Raucous. Shrill. Pained. Competent' (30). The authorities' power over the prisoner is no longer absolute once they have been 'examined', that is, analysed psychologically. First makes use of the strategy of objectifying her warders by assigning them satirical names, thereby exercising an authority of sorts over them. She thus escapes their humiliating categorisation of her as criminal and traitor.

Bentham stipulated that the hierarchy of surveillance was to be applied to the warders themselves: 'successful surveillance required the guards themselves to be under surveillance in hierarchically ascending layers in which the Governor was finally subject to Boards, Visitors, Commissioners and Overseers' (Markus 127). First's text suggests that when her guards are seen to be similarly under surveillance, the scope of their power is diminished in the eyes of the inmates. When the institution of the 'Key Man' is introduced to monitor the wardresses' use of the key to the second, bigger lock on each cell, First is alert to the wardresses' humiliation. The wardresses, once figures of great power (potent in

their verticality, I suggested earlier), are reduced to being lackeys of the system, and of the prisoners themselves.

The keys in the hands of the wardresses, once a badge of office, had become a mockery. The wardresses locked the prisoners in their cells, but were themselves powerless to regulate their incarceration. They had degenerated into skivvies, into messengers sent to fetch a man carrying a key ring.... Big Brother, hauled from the ranks, was watching them. (28)

There is a marked difference between this irreverent representation of the imprisoning symbols and an earlier moment in 117 Days when the extraordinary symbolic power of the key itself is acknowledged. First is 'transfixed by the largest of the keys' and fantasises about its size thereafter: 'Four and a half inches long, yet when I heard its rattle in the lock it seemed to grow in my mind's eye to the size of a poker' (19). The hierarchy is clearly gendered, according to First's account. The phallic proportions of the key — wielded by 'Big Brother' — suggest that ultimate power is his.

The second essential aspect to Bentham's design is that the prisoners are to be kept apart from one another. According to Markus, 'Bentham had foreseen that cellular solitude was crucial to prevent prisoner solidarity' (127). When prisoners have voluntary access to one another a modicum of control is lost to the authorities. Barbara Harlow describes how an illicit conversation between Jacobo Timerman (author of Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number) and a fellow prisoner undermines the controlling design of isolation (1987, 150). Giddens argues that 'presence-availability' is crucial to social organisation of space. In prison, there is a doubleness to this phenomenon, for prisoners have to endure an enforced 'co-presence' (being always available to hostile or

unwanted encounters with other prisoners or with warders) while at the same time they are denied access to a self-identified nurturing community:

Prisons and asylums are often associated with enforced continuity of co-presence among individuals who are not ordinarily accustomed to such routines of daily life. Prisoners who share the same cell may rarely be out of each other's presence for the whole of the day and night. On the other hand, the 'disciplinary power' of prisons, asylums and other types of 'total institution' is based upon disrupting the gearing of presence-availability into the routines of daily trajectories 'outside'. Thus the very same inmates who are forced into continuous co-presence are denied the availability of easy encounters with other groups in the prison, even though those others may be physically only on the other side of the walls of the cell. (Giddens 1985, 276)

Giddens does not consider the features of prison space in greater detail and thus does not comment on solitary confinement specifically, which is a fundamental part of apartheid South Africa's security legislation. (Solitary confinement will be discussed in the following chapter.) However, an application of his use of 'presence-availability' highlights the horror of being always about-to-be-seen, which is not only a question of visibility but also a matter of being compelled to be constantly available, without access to privacy, yet isolated from the community with which one identifies. As First comments, isolation and privacy are not 'the same thing by any means' (29). Her isolation cuts her off from her own community while imposing on her an utter dependence on a different, hostile community of jailers. As the only white woman detainee at this time, First is the only woman in her section of the prison during most of her detention. (The exception is Anne-Marie Wolpe who was briefly detained following the escape of Harold Wolpe from prison.) This meant that First was set

apart from other women prisoners and forced into a particular class position within the prison and thus a further isolation:

I, a prisoner held under top security conditions, was forbidden books, visitors, contact with any other prisoner; but like any white South African Madam I sat in bed each morning, and Africans did the cleaning for the 'missus'. (37)

This 'enforced sequestration' of prisoners is, according to Giddens, a 'defining feature of a 'total institution' (Giddens 1985, 276). The dominant tool of this task is what Foucault refers to as the 'meticulously sealed wall, uncrossable in either direction ... the monotonous figure, at once material and symbolic, of the power to punish' (1977a, 116).

The spatial arrangement in prison is thus fundamental to the authorities' project of breaking down the prisoners' dissidence (particularly in the case of those charged with political 'crimes'). The structured relationship between building, inmate and guard is a complex one. For while the 'body' of the prison is the site within which the prisoners are constructed as prisoners, it can also be their place of self-construction. The prisoner's self-identification must take place in relation to a hostile (and, in the case of torture, painful) environment. But the intimate nature of the cell, despite its infliction of dishonour and subjugation, makes self-expression possible so that its inhabitants, remarkably, are never entirely without recourse.

7. The Body of the Prison as Bearer of Pain

Ruth First equates her incarceration in Pretoria Central with 'being sealed in a sterile tank of glass in a defunct aquarium' (71). The sterility itself and the dazzling harshness of the place (which 'shone of bright polished steel') threaten asphyxiation, both to her body and her spirit: the text links the description of the barren prison with the fact that she 'grew increasingly subdued' (71).

I would initially like to consider the difficulties arising out of the physicality of the prison, and the physicality it both enforces on and entrusts to the prisoner whose entire world takes on an intense physicality, and for whom bodily proportions become the dimensions through which life and being are experienced. A space utterly unfamiliar to the prisoner and empty of all that she 'is' — indeed a space antagonistic to, and even denying of the self forged in warm and intimate abodes — functions as the site of a profound disorientation. All that is tangible must be grasped, read, interacted with, in the absence of more conventional interlocutors. The anatomy of the prison is the body within which and in resistance to which identity is made dynamic, is brought to life, is allowed to breathe.

What also concerns me is how one's experience of one's body in prison, and the physical space, the pain, the fact of being denied freedom physically to be elsewhere, the fact of being dressed in a uniform, of being cold, of being in a place of death and of brutality — how these discomforts affect the prisoner's sense of self and, most especially, how the writers of prison narratives talk about

their experiences of their bodies and the symbolic use made of body in their texts. But first to the 'body' of the prison.

7.1 Anatomies of Prisons and Constructions of Self

Elaine Scarry approaches the relationship between physical space and psychical awareness of self differently from the human geographers discussed earlier.

She suggests that in a complicated way the physical structure within which one moves becomes an extension of oneself, indeed the object onto which one projects oneself. This physical structure is, in effect, an 'enlargement' or 'magnification' (Scarry 1985, 38) of the body in that it plays the protecting and delimiting role that the body plays, offering shelter, keeping others at a distance, ensuring warmth, etc. It can also be seen as a 'miniaturization of the world' in that the walls, as independent objects, stand in for the external world against which the body positions itself and in relation to which interaction takes place:

[The walls are] objects which stand apart from and free of the body, objects which realize the human being's impulse to project himself out into a space beyond the boundaries of the body in acts of making, either physical or verbal, that once multiplied, collected, and shared are called civilization. (Scarry 1985, 39)

The walls, then, participate in the creative process during which identity is forged. This surely accounts, in part, for the common impulse to decorate one's domestic space so that it feeds back an image both with which one can interact and through which one's sense of self is reinforced. In addition, the walls act as a filter to the outside world, particularly so in prison where the single cell door

along with the window is the only point of access to the little of the outside world which the prisoner is shown. The edges of the room mark the point at which the subject engages with and contributes to the dynamic of cultural and political production of meaning Scarry refers to as 'civilization'.

As such, the 'body' of the room (or prison cell) takes on a particular significance. Because it mimics the protective and identifying edging to the prisoner's self-identified and public persona, it literally 'stands in for' the body of the prisoner. Under more 'normal' circumstances, the outer structure of a room (including the furniture, Scarry argues) does the work of the body: the room 'accommodates and thereby eliminates from human attention the human body' (1985, 39). The body is displaced, relieved of its watchdog task. Consequently, the body is no longer the 'obsessive object' of concern (39) so that the subject is free to focus its attention and consciousness on objects beyond itself, thereby enlarging its world. When this set of relations (physical to psychological) is distorted in the horror of imprisonment and torture, the prisoner's world begins to shrink and the body is made terrifyingly present and overwhelmingly a focus of awareness.

Central to Scarry's thesis is the notion of the 'undoing' of 'the world' through the infliction of pain (of which enforced isolation is an example). The conventional function of the room is perverted when it is used as a weapon against the body (by, for example, locking the prisoner into its enclosing space, and thus inflicting fear and disempowerment in a way in which a domestic room would not). It is 'undone', its meaning radically altered:

[T]he room in both its structure and its content, is converted into a weapon, deconverted, undone.... The domestic act of protecting becomes

an act of hurting and in hurting, the object becomes what it is not, an expression of individual contraction, of the retreat into the most self-absorbed and self-experiencing of human feelings (Scarry 1985, 41)

Undoubtedly the 'protective' role of the room becomes duplicitous when it also takes on the hostile role of locking in its inhabitant and rendering her powerless. Moreover, when its very nature — as a cell, dirty and cold, designed for punishment and identified with criminality — imposes on the prisoner a perverse identity, her place of shelter becomes (also) a fearsome participant in the political battle being waged against her.

An ambivalence, born of the multiple roles played by the enclosing cell, is evident in Emma Mashinini's response to her space and the walls which define it. She is able to draw strength from her physical space once it is decorated out of its prison 'shape'. At one point in her narrative she describes how she made meaningful use of the five-litre fruit juice boxes which her husband had brought her while in John Vorster Square.

One time it was peach, orange, apple and so forth. I had these boxes in my cell. When they were empty I kept them. The colour meant much to me — the green, the orange — it was my closeness to nature. It kept me going. (1989, 77)

The boxes, now devoid of their juice content and even their box shape, offer sufficient substance nevertheless to function as a symbol. Interestingly, it is not simply 'nature' which they symbolise for Mashinini, but 'my closeness to nature'. Displayed on the cell walls, they affirm for Mashinini a perceived aspect of her identity — that of her link with things natural — which cannot be represented in the bleakness of the cold grey stone. It is worth noting that we are not told more

about this 'closeness' and it is never concretised elsewhere in the autobiography (which is not only about prison life) by reports of outdoor excursions. But the mounted boxes are able to signify and thus keep alive an aspect of her identity: the boxes 'keep me going' in an environment which forbids her access to the tools of representation crucial to constructing one's own subjectivity. By displaying the boxes she is able to represent herself as being 'close to nature' in a way in which any actual excursions into nature could not do, at the level of representation.

And yet being confined in an excruciatingly enclosed space where she is watched, 'like an animal', is ultimately profoundly disturbing to Mashinini. Ironically, the concept of 'nature' is invoked at an earlier point in her narrative to articulate the dehumanising experience of being caged: 'I thought, it's like an animal, to see those two eyes, and I'm in a cage. It was frightening' (64). Most troubling is the fact that the structure of her cell enables the wardresses to look in without her sanction. The room no longer functions as a protector and a place of privacy which shields her from unwanted intrusion. Instead it takes on the terrifying dimensions of a cage. The distressed repetition of the third-person plural pronoun 'they' — the faceless, all-knowing, all-seeing agent — suggests that her own sense of control is frighteningly absent.

They knew. They had their little window and the nurse was coming in because of my hypertension. So they knew all was not well with me. They did not need to ask what was wrong.

It was a very frightful thing, that window. Whilst I was sitting on my only sitting place — there was no chair, I had to use the bed to sit, to sleep, to do everything — I was always sitting opposite that window, which was sealed. But then when I was on the bed, trying to sleep, not expecting anybody, I would just see two eyes piercing at me. All I could see was their eyes. It was very, very frightful. I couldn't get used to it. I thought,

it's like an animal, to see those two eyes, and I'm in a cage. It was frightening. (64)

The eyes themselves become an obsessive focus for Mashinini ('all I could see was their eyes'). The eyes are the classic reminders of animal eyes in the dark, but with even greater force they are suggestive of eyes behind the barrels of a gun. She is in their 'sights'. It is Mashinini, then, who is produced as an animal. Although from her view the eyes are framed by the little window it is she who is framed, even for herself, through looking at eyes which themselves are looking. In seeing the eyes of the other, Mashinini sees herself (via the other's gaze). She is constructed through being looked at — through seeing herself being looked at. The eyes of the other occupy a crucial position in her own construction of self, just as the ear of the other must be present to mediate and to verify the subject's own message. The anxiety about the look — or censure — from the other attests to the centrality of that mediating position in self-construction.

Later a paranoia about the 'dirt' of that space emerges and she tackles every part of the cell with disinfectant. The text is surprisingly clear in linking the slur of 'criminal' with the desire to sanitise the space and expunge it (and thus herself) of its (and her) sulliedness.

I asked at this time for things to clean the place. I was given disinfectant for the toilet, and I cleaned the walls and the floor. It was interesting cleaning the walls, because in places I could read, 'I WAS HERE FOR RAPE', and a signature, or 'I WAS HERE FOR STEALING CARS'. Everybody who had been in that cell wrote on that wall what they were there for, and it kept me busy, reading all this. But then it began to torture me, because I thought that I was not a criminal. Why must I be sitting in a cell of rapists and people who stole cars and who were selling liquor? So I washed the walls as far as I could, and my toilet was now nice and clean, and again and again I'd pour the disinfectant into it. (80)

There is a certain poignancy in the text's acknowledgement of the impossibility of achieving this sanitising objective: we are left with the picture of Mashinini pouring the antiseptic liquid 'again and again' with no sense of ever reaching a state of cleanliness which could allow her to rest, cleansed and restored. This action can be read as an attempt to exercise control in producing herself as subject ('pure' as opposed to 'criminal'); the fact that she repeats it compulsively is an acknowledgement that it is impossible, ultimately, to secure identity. The criminal slur cannot be erased, although the impulse to do so is urgent and ongoing.

For the literal text inscribed on the walls and their signification, as cell walls, of criminality threaten to produce Mashinini as criminal. But the same text is initially fascinating to Mashinini. She is drawn to the writing as though it offers her a welcoming, potentially self-restorative context and a shelter from the isolation she fears. The signatures themselves constitute, symbolically, a community of fellow prisoners who have managed to testify to their existence in this small but crucial way. She is a member of that community simply by being present to read and attest to the (erstwhile) presence of the other prisoners. But if her own identity is to be constructed with reference to their representations Mashinini must reject that instrument of self-representation for herself and, moreover, erase the testimonies of others. It is only later, once she is outside the walls which were built to house criminals, that Mashinini can embrace a community of (ex-)prisoners, in the healing solidarity which she finds with fellow activist and detainee, Liz Floyd. Later still she finds yet another context within

which to articulate and thus to restore her sense of self, another (sympathetic) dialogue within which to represent herself. Barbara Harlow writes that the 'forbidden use of "we," in prison discipline as in the conventions of autobiography, is challenged by the writing of the prison memoirs of political detainees' (1987, 153). Writing offers her the tool and the community for her self-construction.

The same anxiety is not found in the book written by Caesarina Kona Makhoere, who uses her own body as a weapon (No Child's Play: In Prison Under Apartheid). She simply refuses the signification of criminality (although acknowledges proudly, for example, having attacked Mbomvana with the intention of killing her). Rather, she self-consciously presents herself as a freedom fighter. She goes as far as to say, quite simply, 'we were not prisoners' (and this while in prison). Her defiance is clearly articulated in a refusal to comply with the bodily subjection of prison discipline. Earlier I considered the way in which she uses her body to defy the way in which she is read by the apartheid prison system. What I did not consider was the reciprocal relationship: how the prison structure — the cell in particular — is used against her, and the way in which she responds to it (and represents it in her text) as a statement of her identity

Unlike Mashinini who endeavours to transform the messages of the prison cell, investing them with something of herself, Makhoere rejects prison significations out of hand, refusing at one point even to enter the cell.

One day the authorities started to block the windows. There had been proper windows; instead they put a four-cornered steel plate, about half a meter high with small holes in it. Those windows were made for storerooms. Really, these people are terrible. I don't have a suitable

word for them. They clearly believed they could treat political prisoners like dry goods. (Makhoere 1988, 40)

The decision to 'take action against this type of treatment' promises an appropriately physical response (that is, to remain outside the cells). This follows months of verbal 'complaining':

[W]e announced: 'we are not going back to our cells until something is done about the windows. We have been complaining ever since early 1978, and it is now January 1979. It simply means you are not willing to treat us like human beings. We are not going into our cells.' ... They tried to plead with us. We said 'over our dead bodies'. (40)

The implicit threat of suicide, along with the numerous hunger strikes, operates as a weapon of intimidation which threatens to expose the artificiality of the role of caretaker professed to by the prison authorities. It is not surprising that Makhoere elects death itself as an instrument, given that the 'meaning' of the structure of the windowless cells is understood by Makhoere to erase the life of its inhabitants, who become 'like dry goods'. (Historically, however, the state security system in South Africa has used the phenomenon of suicide to explain the numerous deaths in detention, denying that detainees were ever tortured. Presumably the death of a detainee is therefore not as threatening to the prison authorities as the text suggests. In fact, Ruth First is at pains to hide her attempted suicide from the prison staff because she fears they would delight in it as a confirmation of their power and her capitulation.)

Makhoere's campaign throughout her time of imprisonment (and throughout her text) seems to be in part an attempt to force the authorities (and her readership) to recognise her humanity. She defies the signification of

lifelessness by which she is oppressed: 'at some point you no longer know you are human; that's how I felt' (8). This is particularly clear early on in her text when she describes Pretoria Central:

This building is a nightmare. It was a government mortuary before it was converted into a prison. This is where people who are sentenced to death are hanged ... (8)

The building, as a place for dead bodies, threatens to impose a kind of lifelessness on her, which her belligerence and her text, itself, seeks to defy. She remarks on the fact that '[b]lack prisoners were hidden whenever I was supposed to go out of the cell. If they appeared when I was led out they were shooed away before they could even see me' (9). Here and later at Silverton Police Station her response is to register her existence through outspokenness, and to seek contact and statements of solidarity. Both strategies make use of the structure of the prison, of its body and hers:

As my cell was sandwiched between two other cells I could hear footsteps coming and going. If they unlocked the door of the first cell, I would know there had to be people in there. A few minutes after they had locked up I would bang on the wall with both my feet and hands. I would bang until they hurt and the other detainees would respond by also banging on their side of the wall. That would excited me so! The windows had a wire mesh with a small hole between the wire where one could open the window. I would open the window and shout a greeting to the prisoner next door who had just responded to my banging, and she would shout a greeting back through the window.... Talking to these prisoners kept me sane, kept me going. (10-11; emphasis added)

It is not insignificant that she uses precisely the same expression used by Mashinini to describe her new sense of courage and reassurance when decorating her cell with colours. The fruit boxes, Mashinini said, 'kept me going'

as does the stolen contact for Makhoere, made possible through the reverberation of the cell walls. Banging on the cell walls comes to signify that she is there, is alive, and, moreover, that she continues to be part of a community.

Her text stands as a confirmation of this. She asserts not only her own existence but that fact that she exists within the community represented in her narrative.

7.2 Pain and Subjectivity

The infliction of pain and deprivation which Makhoere and Mashinini respectively try to counteract is integral to the disempowering strategy of imprisonment. The prison strategy is a complex one, involving the body in a sophisticated manoeuvre in order to assail the subject and her world. When pain is inflicted on the body, subjectivity itself is assaulted. Scarry is useful in demonstrating the interconnectedness of the body and subjectivity. With the infliction of pain the prisoner's whole world is diminished to the immediacy of her own body. Scarry deals primarily with brute physical pain; it seems necessary in addition to include, more broadly, physical discomfort and the psychological distresses associated with bodily humiliation and deprivation which are referred to explicitly, by Mashinini and First particularly. I will also consider the discomfort of sexual harassment as a kind of physical ordeal which brings the body sharply and exclusively into focus.

Scarry argues that the phenomenon of pain is exceedingly difficult to represent for it is language defying. Pain has 'the ability to destroy language, the power of verbal objectification, a major source of our self-extension' (54). Moreover, it 'annihilates not only the objects of complex thought and emotion but also the objects of the most elemental acts of perception' (54). Through pain the prisoner's entire world, it could be said, is rendered void.

[A]s the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject.

World, self, and voice are lost, or nearly lost, through the intense pain of torture and not through the confession as is wrongly suggested by its connotations of betrayal. The prisoner's confession merely objectifies the fact of their being almost lost, makes their invisible absence, or nearby absence, visible to the torturers. (35)

Pain renders the body exclusively and obsessively the focus of the subject's consciousness: it 'occupies the entire body and spills out into the realm beyond the body, takes over all that is inside and outside, makes the two obscenely indistinguishable, and systematically destroys anything like language' (54). It is only when 'the body is comfortable, when it has ceased to be an obsessive object of perception and concern, that consciousness develops other objects, that for any individual the external world ... comes into being and begins to grow' (39). Now, to the extent that the subject is produced linguistically and is itself an object of perception, subjectivity itself could be said to be obliterated when language and consciousness are destroyed in the horror of acute bodily awareness.

Inflicting pain is thus primarily an act whereby the torturer's power is extended and confirmed, and the prisoner's power diminished along with the

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Inflicting pain is thus primarily an act whereby the torturer's power is extended and confirmed, and the prisoner's power diminished along with the

contraction of her world and self. Torture is a 'conversion of the enlarged map of human suffering into an emblem of the regime's strength' (56). The torturer (and what he stands for) is exalted through the act of torturing, which Scarry articulates as an amplification of the torturer's voice as the prisoner's voice is obliterated:

[U]ltimate domination requires that the prisoner's ground becomes increasingly physical and the torturer's increasingly verbal, that the prisoner become a colossal body with no voice and the torturer a colossal voice ... with no body, that eventually the prisoner experiences himself exclusively in terms of sentience and the torturer exclusively in terms of self-extension. (57)

The confession which may result from torture cannot be seen as the voice of the prisoner, Scarry argues, but an extension of the voice of the torturer and signifier of his predominance. Confession is thus wrongly understood to be a form of betrayal:

To assent to words that through the thick agony of the body can be only dimly heard, or to reach aimlessly for the name of a person or a place that has barely enough cohesion to hold its shape as a word and none to bond it to its worldly referent, is a way of saying, yes, all is almost gone now, there is almost nothing left now, even this voice, the sounds I am making, no longer form my words but the words of another. (35)

The three facets are thus intertwined: the body of the prisoner, which Scarry argues is overwhelmingly present under torture, the prisoner's ability to articulate her/his existence in language, and the relationship of power between the state and the prisoner.

A crucial aspect of the respective magnification and contraction is the system's denial of the reality of the pain so that even the prisoners' own perceptions of themselves and their credibility is lost to them:

The act of disclaiming is as essential to the power as is the act of claiming.... [The torturer] first inflicts pain, then objectifies pain, then denies the pain — and only this final act of self-blinding permits the shift back to the first step, the inflicting of still more pain, for to allow the reality of the other's suffering to enter his own consciousness would immediately compel him to stop the torture. (57)

The ability to deaden oneself to the pain of another, to deny it in order to inflict it, requires a kind of dehumanising on the part of the torturer. This points to another of Scarry's insights into the dynamic of torture, that the torture itself is a sign of the torturer's own diminishment of self (58, 59). Born of an anxiety and vulnerability, and a desire to be empowered, torture signifies the torturer's brokenness. The prisoner's pain cannot be acknowledged: the torturer thus condemns himself to his own silence.

The history of detention and torture in South Africa is thus not surprisingly hidden; for years the Nationalist Government denied detainees' reports of excessive torture during interrogation and justified sinister and uninhibited powers of detention in security legislation with innocuous-sounding titles such as the 'Public Safety Act'⁴⁶ and the 'Internal Security Act'.⁴⁷ Don Foster and Diane Sandler point out that 'numerous cases for damages [were] settled out of court' which is 'tacit admission of irregularities' (Foster and Sandler 1985, 26). At the time of their report (1985) which was based on interviews with some 135 ex-

⁴⁶ Act 3 of 1953.

⁴⁷ Act 74 of 1982.

detainees, there had been no public acknowledgements of the practice of torture and no published documents gathering information on the strategies of coercion and maltreatment used in detention. It is noted under the section of Foster and Sandler's report entitled 'Recommendations' that professional bodies in the fields of law and psychology had not by 1985 made any attempt either to investigate or publicly to condemn the practice of torture. For much of the period of apartheid rule, then, detainees were unprotected both because of the enforced silence of extensive censorship and bannings and the tendency towards complacency on the part of socially powerful institutions within the country.

Ruth First's narrative includes an account (italicised in her text) of the inquest following the death in detention of Looksmart Solwandle Ngudle, a prominent Cape Town ANC activist who was found dead in his cell sixteen days after his arrest on 16 August 1963. The Security Branch denied ever using torture as a coercive strategy to induce a prisoner to talk, despite the widespread accounts of torture in prison. Ngudle's body was buried and his clothing disposed of before his mother had arrived from the Transkei.

Detective-Sergeant Ferreira was in charge at the time of Ngudle's death. When cross-examined by Advocate Vernon Berrange, Ferreira is asked what would happen if a prisoner were not prepared to answer questions and the interrogators were convinced he had valuable information:

'Well, he has got to be asked again.'

'And again' — 'Yes.'

'And again' — 'Yes.'

'And again' — 'Yes.'

'And again' — 'Yes.'

'I see, the idea is to wear him down, I suppose?' — 'I make no comment.'
(First 1965, 96)

Ferreira acknowledges the horror of the interrogation experience unwittingly, however, when asked to consider what would happen if the detainee were in fact not in possession of the information the Security Branch were after:

'That would be a dreadful thing to happen to a man, wouldn't it, if in fact you were wrong?' — 'Yes.' (97)

Although the verdict of the magistrate corroborates police denials by concluding that Ngudle has 'committed suicide by hanging himself' and explicitly absolves the police of all responsibility, First's text celebrates the opportunity, by representing the inquest and her own experience, to lift 'the lid ... on the systematic resort to torture of Ninety-Day detainees by the Security Branch': it was not possible 'for officialdom to try to stifle' that evidence of and, by inference, this published testimony of the reality of torture (102). First's account of the banning of Ngudle after his death reads satirically as another (futile) attempt to gag abused dissidents whose very existence, once exposed, is necessarily subversive. The overwhelming power of the state, then, is unthreatened only in the hidden spaces of the torture rooms, although First's incorporation of Ngudle's story introduces the suggestion that the terror of detention and torture is so because the state's power to dispose of bodies is extensive. Ngudle's death is not just a linguistic obliteration, nor does it only concern identity in language. Death in detention symbolises the precariousness of a person's existence under prison conditions, and it is this awareness which — as we shall see — contributes to Mashinini's (psychological) 'torture' while in detention.

Torture is not easily defined for it encompasses a limitless variety of devices, the primary aim of which is to inflict pain purportedly to extract information regarding crimes against the state from which it derives the veneer of official sanction. However, as Scarry argues, that legitimising motive must be treated with suspicion and considered in relation to 'the final product and outcome of torture', namely power itself, created and demonstrated in the act of torture.

Article 1 of the 'Declaration against Torture' adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in December 1975 defines torture in this way:

[T]orture means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted by or at the instigation of a public official on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or confession, punishing him for an act he has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating him or other persons....⁴⁸

Torture is said to involve 'cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment'⁴⁹ which, along with the explicit reference to 'mental suffering', undoubtedly includes solitary confinement as experienced by detainees under South African security legislation (Foster and Sandler 1985, 6). This is corroborated in Mashinini's narrative which describes the agony of being denied access to information and contact with the outside world. When she is ordered to leave her cell she is left anxiously to wonder what awaits her. 'These people have fine ways of torturing you. They let you torture yourself' (65). When she catches a glimpse of a headline announcing the death in detention of a detainee and is not given the

⁴⁸ United Nations. 'Declaration on the Protection of all Persons from Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment', 1975.

⁴⁹ As defined in Part 2 of Article 1 and quoted in Foster and Sandler 1985, 6.

identity of the person by her interrogators she describes this as a form of torture: he 'never told me who that person was and this was a torture and a hell to me' (77).

Makhoere's account on the other hand resists a closer analysis of complex psychological responses to imprisonment, generally remaining on the level of the physical deprivations. She describes the rationing of food, which 'assumes major proportions in prison' as a 'form of torture' (80). However, at one point she acknowledges, briefly, the incomparably disturbing effects of solitary confinement.

I spent two-and-a-half months there, alone. From August until the end of October.

That segregation was the most destructive part of the sentence. If I had had to stay there until November I would have gone raving mad. I was on the brink of it. (75)

This acknowledgement of her vulnerability is not allowed to linger, though.

Within a few lines her narrative has returned to its characteristic defiance: 'At times I think I am tough. They did not break me then, either' (75). In an earlier reference to the psychologically destructive devices of detention Makhoere retains this tone: Makhoere describes the 'stupid' deputy head of Kroonstad Prison, Colonel Steyn, as being 'a racist and a sick racist at that':

He wanted to make you feel that you had failed, that you were no longer a human being. That you were going to succumb to everything he told you. He thought he could switch you on and off at will. (29)

Ever defiant, Makhoere exalts in the failure of Steyn's attempts to break her: we 'gave him the shock of his life' (29).

For Mashinini it is not quite as easy to evade the shattering effects of detention. The greatest pain she experienced while in prison, Mashinini writes, is the pain of not being able to remember her daughter's name.

One day, thinking about my own children ... I could see my youngest daughter's face and I wanted to call her by her name. I struggled to call out the name, the name I always called her, and I just could not recall what the name was. I struggled and struggled. I would fall down and actually weep with the effort of remembering the name of my daughter. I'd try and sleep on it, wake up. I'd go without eating, because this pain of not being able to remember the name of my daughter was the greatest I've ever had. (87)

Scarry's analysis of the language of pain suggests that there is a confusingly doubled sense of agency which identifies the body itself as the agent of pain — "my body hurts" (47) — while at the same time the source of the pain is somehow external, veiled (52-53). Scarry speaks of this as the 'unseen sense of self-betrayal in pain', all the more acute when a prisoner is forced to exercise or to maintain an uncomfortable position for a protracted length of time (47). The body itself produces the resultant pain. The dynamic in which the other's look constructs the self is reproduced here in a moment of extreme confusion when the hostile and pain-inflicting will of the other is internalised, producing a crippling alienation from self. The (hurt) body hurts the body.

So too with psychological pain. Mashinini herself is responsible for the act of forgetting Dudu's name, thus inflicting enormous pain not only on herself but on her daughter who becomes the object of her apparent neglect and lack of care. Forgetting a daughter's name is a disavowal of the relationship itself, and therefore also of a fundamental part of Mashinini's identity: 'mother'. The threat of losing an essential part of herself is excruciating for Mashinini and, like bodily

pain, it overwhelms her consciousness and annihilates all other thought content, to use Scarry's terms. The poignancy of this moment emerges from the intolerable convergence of guilt and agonising impotence.

A similar sense of being both victim and perpetrator of a self-inflicted agony is painfully evident in 117 Days: 'I was wide open to emotional blackmail, and the blackmailer was myself' (127). For, unlike physical torture where the perpetrator is more easily identifiable (even if the source of the pain is also experienced as being within the body), psychological torture is more insidious and therefore more difficult to recognise and contain. First feels acutely responsible for her disorientation under interrogation:

I had presided over my collapse with a combination of knowingness and utter miscalculation. My conceit and self-centredness had at last undone me.... I had been stupid. Weak. A failure.... I was a spider caught in my own web, spinning finer and finer threads in my head to make disentanglement impossible. (130)

First's text also acknowledges the degree to which her profound confusion is a form of assault: the 'bombardment from Swanepoel split my bamboozlement wide open and it dropped from my head like a broken husk' (123). Elsewhere, too, First uses a strikingly physical image, similarly violent, to describe the mental collapse she and others experience, who 'crack like egg shells' under the strain of detention (134). The overwhelming impression is one of fragility: selves (like egg shells) are easily cracked and irreparable.

Foster acknowledges that no 'precise operational definition of what constitutes psychological torture' has been (or could be) proffered. He adds

some content to the United Nations' description of 'cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment':

[D]efinitions of psychological torture should additionally include some notion of distorted communication techniques, vicarious forms of abuse such as those involving witnessing other persons' maltreatment, and psychological devices that have been shown to weaken or disorient basic mental and emotional functions and so render the person more vulnerable and less capable of rational or emotionally stable form of thought or action. This third criterion would include treatment such as solitary confinement, sleep deprivation, hooding and blindfolding, and administration of drugs. (Foster with Sandler and Davis 1987, 104)

Foster's study does not, however, consider the particular forms of abuse meted out to women prisoners, nor does he distinguish in his study between the treatment of black women and white women who were categorised quite differently in South African prisons, as shown in the narratives discussed in this study. Although Foster includes being forced to undress amongst a list of psychological forms of torture, there is no mention made of sexual harassment or threatening sexual innuendo. Nor does he consider how enforced nakedness might be different for women and men prisoners. There is thus another area of psycho-physical affliction which demands attention in this discussion. Scarry describes pain as the 'unmaking' of the detainee's world through being overwhelmed by bodily consciousness. The bodily discomfort of being positioned sexually, of being looked at and humiliated, could be said to be torturous and similarly destructive of one's ability to articulate oneself as subject.

A previous chapter has focused on First's discomfort with the 'violent infringement of [her] privacy' which she suffers while in detention (29) and on the

part surveillance plays in penal practice. The strongest language used by First, however, is in reference to the unwanted nocturnal visits from officers:

I hated the night inspections when officers came from the police barracks and sidled up to the peephole to see for themselves. Some of the wardresses shared my indignation for reasons of their own prudery. If men warders wanted to see women prisoners, they said, they should ask the wardress to unlock the door and herself see if it was 'safe' for a man to look. Only then should the officer be invited to make his inspections. (The Key Man, it was implied, should open the door with his eyes closed.) (29)

The satirical tone with which this quotation ends belies her earlier candour: in fact she shares the misgivings of the wardresses, which she then dismisses as 'prudery'. Her jibe at the impossibly contradictory criteria of the wardresses indicates her unease at the fact that there should be a 'Key Man' at all; it implies more than disapproval or mockery of their puritan sensibilities. She too does not want the men to peer into her cell. However, she cannot embrace the wardresses' sentiment as though it constituted a form of empathy or identification with her, because at other times they themselves assume the role of voyeurs in a dynamic of looking which is equally unnerving for First. The wardresses too are bearers of a penetrating, objectifying gaze designed to monitor her obedience to an oppressive system.

The most unnerving voyeur is her interrogator, Lieutenant Viktor. Their interactions are steeped in sexual innuendo. When she abandons herself to 'uncontrollable hysterical weeping' after her suicide attempt, Viktor ('snooping as usual') suddenly appears at her side offering her his handkerchief. Some days later she expresses her anger at the intimacy he assumes, coming into her cell while she is in bed. His sexually menacing response confirms the

appropriateness of her discomfort: he asks her whether she had been wearing a nightie or shortie pyjamas (131). He notices the one and only day she forgets to wear lipstick and asks her about it, censoring himself midway (but not before she had understood what he was thinking). At another point — and in response to her retort that he 'keep away from [her]' — he comments on her physical posture in a gesture which insinuates that his gaze can penetrate her psyche:

'I've watched you when you walk out of here back to your cell, and your head drops and your shoulders slump as you go in.' (140)

In the angry exchange which follows (regarding First's refusal to complete her statement), First imagines that he is about to hit her:

For the first time I saw his temple throb and his hands clenched on the table between us in a fist which seemed to make a swift perhaps involuntary movement towards me. 'You've got a twisted mind,' he snarled. When his fist clenched I tilted my chin upwards in mock acceptance of the blow. He had regained control. 'I'd rather kiss it,' he said. (140)

The account suggests a great deal of self-possession on the part of First, who scratches off the veneer of Viktor's role as 'nice guy'. However, she goes on to acknowledge her own disturbing ambivalence and the difficulty of maintaining a wary distance from the man as he disingenuously courts her trust (and desire):

I loathed myself but it seemed I could not resist taking part in this exchange with another human being...; he was exerting every muscle to prove that he was different, susceptible to me, so that I would prove susceptible to him.

I was practising deceit but searching myself not to make it self-deception. I had to admit that I was desperate for company, to be able to talk to someone, that I was enormously relieved that it was neither the deadly deliberation of Nel nor the showy bombast of Swanepoel. Viktor came laden with calculating charm and flattery thick with treacherous

intent: could I see it clearly every time he turned on the charm? (140-1; emphasis added)

Even if his attention is at times welcome, his more overtly sexual gaze is horribly threatening to First. When she is given a thriller to read, the title articulates for her the dread (associated with being looked at) which his charm has not allowed her fully to recognise:

The Night has a Thousand Eyes came, and for the first time in my life I was afraid of a book, because the thousand eyes were the force of telepathy and I felt the eery [sic] presence of Viktor's scrutiny continually at the back of my neck. (142)

The power of his gaze goes beyond the opportunities he has actually to look at her (which are many, given that he has limitless access to her via the peephole). His gaze is, for First, always upon her. In a complex manoeuvre which is designed to break down her self-composure, Viktor establishes himself as having uncanny, ever-present in-sight into her: 'Viktor said he knew me better by then than I knew myself' (144). He tries to make her emotionally dependent on him in ways that are suggestive of a father or lover: he is her source of comfort, bringing her homemade cookies, a handkerchief when she weeps; he calls her intimately by her first name, Ruth, and says with an air of authority that '[t]his is no place for you' (140).

The relationship is thus more intricate, their sexualities invoked to a greater degree than is suggested simply by the figure of a man leering at the body of a woman. It is a perverted courtship, which at times First craves and at other times abhors. Certainly his hold over her is extensive, so that even on her release she has no faith in her ability to be free of him: 'by the time I got home it

was lunch-time, though Viktor had brought his release order early that morning. When they left me in my own house at last I was convinced that it was not the end, that they would come again' (144).

Her text, written at a (later) moment of greater composure, is the place where she is able to analyse the complex strategies of psychological abuse to which she is victim and in this way distance herself from the effects of it, what Scarry calls 'objectifying' the pain. First quotes J.A.C. Brown in The Techniques of Persuasion who argues that "[p]olitical indoctrination depends as much upon sympathy on the part of the inquisitor as upon threats" (First 1965, 137). Significantly, she then extends Brown's syntax to identify the strategies which were used against her, thus investing his comment with her personal experience and infusing her account with his scholarly authority:

Friendliness instead of hostility. 'I'll never lose my temper with you,' Viktor told me repeatedly.

The use of a friendly period to find out everything about the detainee and win his [sic] confidence. 'I know you better after a month than people who have known you your whole life,' said Viktor. (137)

In moments such as this one First is able to expose, for herself and for the audience whose recognition is so crucial to her survival as a subject of her own construction, the reality of the pain she had experienced. Moreover, she asserts the astonishing fact of her having withstood it: in 'the depth of my agony I had won' (138; her emphasis). Through representing the events she is able to assert a control over Viktor, to undo his power over her and expose his manipulations through her own (textual) manipulations. By distinguishing between 'a younger (experiencing) self' and 'the "mature" narrator' common in autobiography (Driver

1991, 339) she is able to assert a superior comprehension over her earlier, bullied self and thus rescue herself from Viktor's control.

In discussing 'poststructuralist insistence on due recognition of the differences between narrator, protagonist(s), implied author and real author', Judith Coullie puts it this way: 'the real author [Mashinini] is not simply an older version of the protagonist but someone who has experienced a period of rehabilitation in a Danish clinic for torture victims' (Coullie 1991, 5). Although First has not undergone 'rehabilitation', as such, she is able to restore a measure of control in producing herself — and Viktor himself — once outside the hostile environment in which Viktor's gaze is all-powerful. Writing itself is an agent of renewal.

Concluding remarks: writing as an agent of renewal

Scarry argues that the prisoner's articulations make possible a diminishment of the pain itself by reversing the negation of language and self which pain produces.

To acknowledge the radical subjectivity of pain is to acknowledge the simple and absolute incompatibility of pain and the world. The survival of each depends on its separation from the other. To bring pain into the world by objectifying it in language, is to destroy one of them: either, as in the case of Amnesty International and parallel efforts in other areas, the pain is objectified, articulated, brought into the world in such a way that the pain itself is diminished and destroyed; or alternatively, as in torture and parallel forms of sadism, the pain is at once objectified and falsified, articulated but made to refer to something else and in the process, the world, or some dramatized surrogate of the world, is destroyed. (50-51)

There may be a danger in too glibly attributing the destruction of pain to the telling of it. Barbara Eckstein calls Scarry's book 'controversial' as a result (1990, 70). Pain and language (that is, representations of self) are wrongly set up in neat opposition. However, to objectify pain through naming it is in some way to contain it: the relief of having withstood institutionalised (and yet deeply intimate) psychological battery emanates from the pages of First's text.

Don Foster, Dennis Davis and Diane Sandler's work on detention in South Africa suggests that what is at issue in recovery from torture is not language per se (or, retrieving one's voice) but re-establishing control (whether by personal testimony or by more overtly political re-empowerment). Using data from concentration camp survivor studies they argue that 'the issue of control emerges as a crucial factor in the ability to survive the trauma' (Foster with Davis and Sandler 1987, 74). As part of the same phenomenon Foster, et al, cite the

ability to prepare oneself or to anticipate the trauma. With reference to laboratory studies carried out by psychologists they argue that 'it is not the trauma itself but the inability to control it that is responsible for the condition of helplessness' (1987, 81). While 'technical distinctions may be made between predictability and controllability, the two are difficult to separate' (81). Certainly, their study argues convincingly that the unpredictability of unspecified periods of incarceration contributes significantly to the trauma of detention.

First writes that the crux of her struggle in detention 'was the indefiniteness of it all' (75):

I was convinced that everyone, myself included, could make an adjustment to a known situation.... But the greater part of this matter of adjustment is knowing to what to adjust. Deadly boredom can be withstood if there is an end in sight. A prisoner, even one facing a life term, has some security in the cessation of fear of the unknown. (75)

Her evocative descriptions of the horror of existing in a vacuum have already been discussed. Suffice it to say, then, that writing offers her the welcome opportunity to identify that horror and objectify it, to use Scarry's terms. Through writing she is able to impose a structure onto the limitless days — in exactly the way her painstakingly stitched dressing-gown calendar is able to do, marking the passage of time and in that way containing it. The stitches become 'certificates of endurance' (First 1965, 75) in a gesture which 'domesticate[s] the power of the totalitarian state' (Scott 1996, 10). The state's regulation of time is transformed into a familiar action (which is thus less frightening to her) and the pattern she imposes on the passing of days offers her a means of regulating the days. A similarly domestic act becomes the script of resistance in Makhoere's text when

she recounts how a fellow prisoner, Thandi Modise, embroiders, as if in blood, her message of protest:

We were still wearing the vests. And we had these red and white bedspreads. Thandi pulled the red cotton from the bedspread, smuggled in a needle — don't ask me how she managed to do that — and embroidered on her vest 'FREE ME' in red. (88)

Modise thus creates a means to articulate herself, overcoming the imposition of silence and obedience. To label herself as imprisoned and to demand freedom does not threaten her self-construction but produces a kind of freedom (of expression, at very least). For Mashinini it is different. Her anxious moment of erasing the signatures of other prisoners on the cell walls suggests what Scarry's neat opposition between language and pain is not able to do: prison writing itself (prisoners writing themselves, that is) threatens to produce them as prisoners even as it promises its subjects the freedom of self-expression. To speak is not (necessarily) to abolish pain, at least not in what remains a hostile environment for Mashinini.

The liberating potential of prison narratives is circumscribed by the conventions (and, simply, the name) of the genre. J.U. Jacobs comments on the privileging of some South African writers' prison identity in the labels they give to their texts. For to 'enter prison is to acquire a new language and a new name for the self, and thereby a new subjectivity' (1991b, 7). Jacobs considers the significance of the signatures and titles of South African prison narratives and finds that the authors' 'subjectivity is forever attached to a prison identity' (13). He points out examples where writers (specifically, Moses Dlamini and Indres Naidoo) 'give prior status to their prison numbers as the "name" of the author on

the title-pages of their memoirs' (13).⁵⁰ Jacobo Timerman identifies himself through his lack of identity: Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number. His text both reproduces that absence and challenges it, both by drawing attention to the namelessness in the title and by denying it (simply, by authoring the text).

Previously I have spoken of written testimony as a means to achieve a 'restoration of self'. The process is more complicated than that phrase suggests, for writing does not 'restore' the pre-imprisonment subject but grants to the (ex-) prisoner a position as subject. Nonetheless, writing is also productive of power, as is evidenced in the state's refusal to allow prisoners access to reading and writing material and in the extensive censorship legislation enacted by repressive regimes, as argued earlier.⁵¹ Barbara Harlow writes that the 'authoritarian control over the "power of writing" is especially evident in the case of political prisoners in the ban on all writing and reading materials' (1987, 125). Having been detained as a result of the political activity associated with writing (in some cases, such as Ruth First), the prisoners are 'already a serious threat to the authorities' control over the "power of writing"' (125).

⁵⁰ Indres Naidoo's book, Island in Chains: Ten Years on Robben Island (1982), is the story of the ten years he spent on Robben Island (1963-1973) as told to Albie Sachs, which introduces a new dimension into the dynamic of representation, complicating the relationship of subject to signature. As Jacobs points out, Naidoo is author and subject, but 'it is only through the narrative intervention of Albie Sachs that he is realised as subject of a prison memoir.... In a real sense, this prison memoir is a collaborative undertaking' (1991b, 13).

⁵¹ Foster with Davis and Sandler (1987) quote the Appellate Division decision to reverse the more lenient ruling of a lower court granting detainees access to writing materials. The court concluded that 'it was not the intention of Parliament that detainees should as a right be permitted to relieve the tedium of their detention with reading matter or writing materials.' [Appellate Division in Rossouw v Sachs 1964(2) SA 551 (A) at 565.

Jamie S. Scott suggests that the 'oppressor knows that writing per se enacts resistance' and quotes one of Nawal el Sa'adawi's prison guards: 'writing is more serious than killing'.⁵² None of the writers studied in this project (unlike Breyten Breytenbach) were able to write while in prison and their narratives are written with an awareness that even outside prison writing and publishing are dangerous. Mashinini is told on her release 'never, never to speak about my detention':

So whenever I spoke I was leaving something out. I was fearful, terribly fearful, that this would leak out and get to them, and I would be rearrested and charged for having spoken about things. (93)

Ruth First, whose book was published in 1965, just two years after her release at a time of severe repression in South Africa, knew that the consequences of writing were potentially enormous. In the interview with the BBC referred to earlier she acknowledges having to censor herself for fear that her text might further incriminate her and other activists. When First lived in exile in London and Mozambique following her release from detention she continued to write and began also to teach, as Director of Research of the Centre for African Studies at the Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique. Helena Dolny, wife of Joe Slovo, describes the centre as 'the major policy studies centre serving the Mozambican government' in her introduction to Slovo's The Unfinished Autobiography (1995, xi).

⁵² Scott quotes from Memoirs from the Women's Prison, The Women's Press: London, 1986: 73.

The most shocking evidence of the threatening power of (her) writing is the fact that in August 1982 she was the victim of a letter-bomb attack which killed her. 'The letter bomb bore her name. The intent to kill was clearly personalised' writes Helena Dolny (1995, xi). In analysing why she, an unlikely target for such an attack, was chosen, Joe Slovo writes in the introduction to 117 Days that she 'was not associated with the planning or implementation of the type of resistance activity the authorities feared most — armed actions' (6). However, she continued to be outspoken and influential outside South Africa in an academic institution which was concerned, in part, with the construction of history and contributed to policy formation in Mozambique, a supporter of the resistance movement in South Africa. Most of First's writing, even when in exile, involved critiques of South Africa's destabilising role in the region, such as The Barrel of a Gun: Political Power in Africa and the Coup d'État (1970), a study of military rule in Africa, and South West Africa (1963). Perhaps most threatening to the Nationalist regime would have been her exposé of covert international support of the regime in The South African Connection: Western Investment in Apartheid (1972).

As a writer and intellectual, First's political challenge could not be (totally) dismissed despite the hysteria about communism in South Africa during the apartheid years. A prominent liberal Cape newspaper describes her as 'Professor First' and gives precedence to her identity as 'a well-known researcher' over the label 'communist' in its report of her death. A similar order is employed further into the article:

To many she was the intellectual power behind the South African liberation movement — to others Ruth First was just a notorious communist, just Joe Slovo's wife.

But the attractive dark-haired woman was respected internationally as a writer of rare perception.⁵³

For the authorities, First's representation of history was enormously powerful. (She herself and her books were banned in South Africa until 1990.) Although it may appear that in a political arena things tangible and material are the objects of struggle, writing itself is considered dangerous. For to articulate one's own, dissenting truth is to challenge the realms of organised power or at very least the silence by which one is disempowered. Autobiography, and prison narratives in particular, represent the 'powerful and healing moment when a human voice reaches the person whose sole reality had become his own unthinkable isolation' (Scarry 1985, 50). For in that moment of even tentative articulation the inchoate force of the violated self is given expression.

For those historical subjects who have found themselves without a legally valued identity and a platform from which to articulate the challenge of their experience, the process of writing autobiography, albeit constrained by the self-evident limitedness and instability of such a project, may well offer an invaluable chance to assert a truth, to reclaim a self and a credibility and in that way to create a kind of freedom.

⁵³ 'Letter Bomb Kills ANC VIP Ruth First,' The Argus 18 Aug. 1982: N. pag.

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