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A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This PhD in English: Prose Writing is in two parts.

The first part is a full-length novel, entitled *Once Upon a Time in Soweto*. The main focus of the narrative is the Students Uprisings. These riots took place in Soweto on June 16th, 1976, when students attempted to protest the Department of Education, imposing Afrikaans as a medium of teaching in the black schools.

The second part is an academic thesis, entitled *South African Literature, The Writers, Their Works, and Censorship*. It explores the lives and works of South African writers who wrote during the turbulent years of apartheid, notably those whose lives were significantly affected by censorship regulations imposed under the apartheid laws. This part attempts to make sense of a reality that is perceived to be such a horrifying phase for South African Writers. On the other hand, it demonstrates the story of the different authors and writers in their own words who suffered

during this period and, also specifies how censorship contributed to the liminality of South African literature.

Keywords: Soweto, South African Writers, Apartheid, Censorship, Liminality.

1.1 Introduction

Many years of reading narratives by South African writers brought me to new enlightenment: to fully comprehend and appreciate South African literature, one must look at it within the framework of liminality and explore the historical context in which it originated.

In this piece, I will explore the history of censorship and the rise of South African literature as related to black culture; and delve into the lives of black writers, mainly those whose works were banned and those who were forced into exile. These authors passionately believed in what they had to say. Determined to be heard, they risked imprisonment, banishment from their homeland and families, and worse.

I will also investigate the meaning of liminality and inquire into what role it played in South African literature and the effect it had on black writers who published during the apartheid era and were popularly known as 'anti-apartheid writers' or 'protest writers'. These writers wrote (even in their fiction) more to record history than to entertain, as evidenced by this quotation by Miriam Tlali, author of the banned book, *Amandla*:

I always feel that our history must be recorded. The future generation has the right to know what has happened during our time. The role of the writer is to conscientise people so that they wriggle out of this oppression. (Tlali, 1986, pg.13)

Many writers of that time shared this sentiment; for instance, Sepamla, the author of *Third Generation*, once stated that he did not see his role as a provider of entertainment but as a writer whose duty was to 'spread hope for the future and sympathy for the present'.

1.2 Background of the study

I have always had a keen interest in Nadine Gordimer, J.M Coetzee, and Njabulo Ndebele - all of whom wrote during and after apartheid and, like me, tended to focus on the relationships between blacks and white South Africans. I devoured some of their best novels from both eras, juxtaposed them to see if there has been a change in the writing style, especially after the eradication of censorship laws. I was fascinated by Nadine Gordimer's new characterisation in *July's People*. In previous novels, i.e., *Burger's Daughter*, Gordimer's protagonists were customarily white activists to help the black crusade. However, in *July's People*, the roles were reversed. In this novel, it was the white people who were now seeking refuge with their black servants. The shoe was on the other foot, and it was interesting to see how perfectly Nadine Gordimer handled this - the language, the attitude of the suspicious villagers towards their uninvited guests, and vice versa.

Although there have been few literary works on the Soweto Students Uprising, the themes of apartheid, censorship, and exile abound in South African literature. Despite the dangers they faced during those turbulent apartheid years, black writers and white writers never shied away from those making these issues core tropes in their oeuvres, regardless of whether they were writing fiction, poetry, or memoirs. Authors such as Nadine Gordimer, Themba, Nat Nakasa, Es'kia Mphahlele, Alex La Guma, Sipho Sepamla, Lewis Nkosi, André P. Brink, J.M. Coetzee, focused on no other motifs. Consequently, they all had one book or more banned at some point during the apartheid years when the censorship legislation was still in effect...

1.3 Research Questions

1. What was the impact of apartheid censorship on South African Writers (and other artists)?
2. How did censorship contribute to the liminality of South African literature (especially writings by black South Africans)?

CHAPTER TWO: CENSORSHIP AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

2.1 What is Censorship?

In 1972, Nadine wrote an article entitled 'Apartheid and Censorship.' The article was republished twelve years later by the magazine *Index on Censorship*. In it the author proclaimed:

Censorship is the control of communication. Not 'communications', mind, but 'communication', that concept that covers the thoughts set in train by the written or spoken word, as well as the word itself, and that in the final analysis is the process by which men reach out and find each other. We speak of the failure of human relationships as one in which there is 'no communication'. Control of information is merely one of the functions of censorship; its ultimate purpose as a political weapon of apartheid is to bring about a situation where there is 'no communication' between South Africa and the world of ideas that might cause us to question our way of life here, and 'no communication' within our society between

the sections of people carved up into categories of colour and language. Communication is, at once, intangible and ultimate in social integration. So long as the lines are down, there is little likelihood of people finding a common cause. (Gordimer, 1972 p.152)

At the end of this article, Gordimer put forward this question: 'How did censorship function as part of the grand design of apartheid? Moreover, just how effective was the strategy?' (Gordimer, *ibid.*) To try and answer this question, it is necessary to go back to the very beginning and explore the annals of apartheid censorship and the logic behind it.

2.2 History of Apartheid Censorship

Peter McDonald, in his book *The Literature Police* (2009) states that censorship predated the Afrikaner Nationalists' rise to power in 1948. The first Statutory Board of Censors was created in the racially segregated Union of South Africa under the British Empire, founded in 1910, under the Entertainments Act, 1931. Unlike the British Board of Film Censors (BBFC), which was an independent body, the South African government made the Board of Censors a governmental body. Its powers included film and all forms of pictorial representation, as well as a theatrical performance. In 1930, its powers were extended to include imported books and periodicals. The prohibitions stipulated in the 1931 act did not refer to artistic merit. Many were taken from the list of forty-three taboo topics T.P. O'Connor identified in his capacity as the first president of the BBFC.

McDonald also mentions that the South African Act listed nineteen specific causes banning 'offensive' depictions of anything from 'white slave traffic' to 'passionate love scenes; from drunkenness and brawling, 'rough' handling or ill-treatment of women and children, offence

to 'religious convictions or feelings of any section of the public', 'reference to controversial or international politics', 'scenes representing antagonistic relations of capital and labour' and the 'intermingling of Europeans and non-Europeans'. This legislation prescribed that the initial committee of Censors oversee the importation of books and periodicals throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The foundation of that would essentially become an apartheid censorship system which would be officially become legislated in 1954.

McDonald further enlightens us that the apartheid censorship system came into being as a result of the newly elected Nationalist government launching a Commission of Inquiry into 'Undesirable Publications'. In response to a court case the year before, this inquiry was itself a response to an article on prostitution in two popular Afrikaans magazines. These magazines incited widespread moral apprehension within the administration, but another objective of censorship was to grapple with the concerns various church groups raised about pornography throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Seen in the context of contemporary judicial evolution, however, it is apparent that the Publications Inquiry, which was tasked to review the regulations of locally produced, as well as imported books, also suited the government's larger political objectives at the time. It was just one of its many newfangled enterprises. The main goal of this initiative was to manipulate the government's authority to subjugate the public sphere at a time when an extra-parliamentary expostulation against the new apartheid order was still palpable and fervent. The Publications Commission concurred, for instance, with a bona fide investigation into the press, which ran for an astounding thirteen years from 1950, and which was contrived fundamentally to rein in the dominant white-owned liberal English-language newspapers. It followed a series of other legislation, the most notorious being the Suppression of Communism Act, 1950. Designed to

outlaw the South African Communist Party, this Act would result in the formation of future censorship laws, which would later be used to mute most forms of political opposition to apartheid.

2.3 Impact of Censorship on the African writers

Censorship imposed by the Commission affected individual writers, poets, artists, and performers. Many had their works banned in South Africa and, in some cases, suffered punishment in the form of imprisonment or banishment. Some, like Nat Nakasa, Nkosi Lewis, Alex Guma, Can Themba, and Zakes Mda managed to escape and continued writing and publishing while in exile. Like my protagonist in *Once Upon a Time in Soweto*, these banned and exiled writers had something important to say and a need to be heard. However, because of censorship regulations, acting on that need was tantamount to placing a price on one's head. It meant sacrificing oneself for the benefit of the cause, and this was exactly what these writers did. Just as soldiers go to war with rifles as weapons, they went to work armed with their voices, sharpened minds, and pens and paper. Ready to endure unspeakable torture, imprisonment, exile, and even death.

Apartheid censorship could keep them quiet and dictate what they could or could not write, but apartheid censorship only existed in South Africa. Once in exile, those who managed to get away could proclaim the truth from the rooftops, put pen to paper, and write candidly without fear of reprisal. More importantly, what they wrote could be published without anyone suffering any ramifications. The authentic truth would be out there for the whole world to read and know. The South African regime had the power to mute their voices - for good if it felt necessary to do so, but only within its punitive walls. Outside those walls, these writers were untouchable. Thus, one by one, they fled. Some took refuge in neighbouring countries like Botswana, Swaziland,

Tanzania, Rhodesia, Malawi, and Zambia. Others who had more resources fled to further territories like Cuba, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany, and other European countries. A few others still made it as far as the United States of America. Amongst this latter group were Nat Nakasa and Lewis Nkosi.

Once safe from the clutches of the tyrannical rulers of their motherland, these authors got to work. They wrote in the hope of political transformation and empowerment. They told of the harsh socio-political conditions; of what life was like under apartheid - that oppressive, punitive system that operated by systematically entrenching racial segregation and exclusivity while simultaneously promoting cultural dominance by the ruling party.

Then some remained. These writers stayed because they had no means of escape or could not bear the thought of trading life with their loved ones for an uncertain life in solitude in a foreign land. They stayed put and continued fighting apartheid through their writings, resigning themselves to being targeted for random arrests, erratic periods in detention, torture, harassment, and worse. Amongst the stayers were Njabulo Ndebele, Miriam Tlali, André Brink, and Nadine Gordimer, who once stated, 'Truth is not always beautiful, but the hunger for its is.'

They became marked as 'listed' writers, poets, activists, or whatever they had been known to do before the undesirable nature of their activities deemed it fit for them to be stopped. After that, every word they wrote or uttered was fiercely scrutinised.

2.4 Impact on magazines and newspaper publishers

Censorship imposed by the Commission initially targeted individual writers specifically. However, it was later expanded to include newspaper and magazine publishers. Through its study of the 'Bantu' in the townships surrounding Pretoria, the Commission had concluded that magazines intended for white readership contained much more 'undesirable' material than those

for blacks. They also believed that newly 'urbanised' black readers preferred 'ecclesiastical books' and 'books for study'. It argued that certain magazines of the 'Bantu' were causing 'discontent and unrest' because they were estranging black readers from their own culture.

No specific titles were named in the Act, but the fact that it listed, curiously, 'jazz, jive, and slang,' among these substandard and unconventional 'European' influences, suggests that it was referring to *Drum*, the popular consumer magazine that was launched in 1951 and immediately became a vital channel for a new generation of young black writers. The success of *Drum* had created new hope and opportunities for upcoming black writers and, by the mid-1950s, it had begun to give voice to ideas for a progressive, metropolitan African culture, defiantly spurning the deeply engrained tribalistic sentiments of apartheid.

2.5 PEN's Protest

In the late 1960s, during the state of emergency incited by police barbarity in Sharpeville and Langa township, the newly elected Nationalist government of HF Verwoerd introduced a bill for a new, concentrated censorship strategy. This new legislation advocated for more rigorous forms of prepublication vetting. The draft legislation, which included censorship of the press, was widely condemned both inside and outside Parliament, with one of the most abrasive denunciations coming from the South African PEN Centre, the long-established and most reputable writers' group in the country. In a painstakingly contended thirteen-page memorandum presented to the appropriate select committee, PEN decried the bill as an 'undemocratic' breach of the rule of law, and a threat not just to freedom of expression, literature, and the arts but to political debate, the wider society, and the state itself.

The memorandum deposed that censorship impeded the imperative advancement of the nation by curtailing free thought and expression amongst those of its citizens who could contribute

intellectually to it. It insisted that courts alone could and should deal with pornography – one area where it felt state regulation was warranted. The memorandum postulated that 'literary' and 'artistic' merit could not be assessed by nonspecialists, except through free criticism and comparison of accredited works of art over a sustained period, declaring: 'A censorship system which claims to exempt works of art from banning or mutilation is, in effect,' claiming to determine a work's literary or artistic value and to do so before professional criticism has tested it'.

2.6 New Acts and Worsened Situation:

In July 1962, the General Law Amendment (or Sabotage) Act was passed. This new legislation culminated in muting over one hundred anti-apartheid activists, including the novelist Alex La Guma, and the poets Dennis Brutus and Cosmo Pieterse. The Act was also accountable for influencing the razing of most of the prominent rival journals of the time. Following the stipulations of the Suppression of Communism Act, this new 'gagging clause' banned various writers and journalists as persons, removing their right of association, among other things. It also made it illegal for them to be quoted in public. In the years ahead, the government would continue to use this kind of legislation to stifle most of the prevailing black writers of the 1950s and 1960s and the leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s.

PEN SA's protestations had the minutest impact. In 1963, the government endorsed the Publications and Entertainment Act, which served as the focal point of the apartheid censorship bureaucracy for the next decade. The Act broke new ground by making 'undesirable' material (excluding certain newspapers) produced locally and abroad a statutory infraction of the law, punishable by severe fines and prison sentences.

Between 1964 and 1974, more than ten thousand publications were proscribed, and less than thirty appeals were heard (many of this concerned Scope, a digestible, mildly titillating local

weekly popular amongst blacks.). In 1974, when the government introduced the new censorship legislation, it orchestrated an extra-judicial Appeal Board, and all but scrapped recourse through the courts. The provisions of this Act were as follows:

A publication or object shall be regarded as undesirable if it or any part of it is

- 1) indecent or obscene or is offensive or harmful to public morals.
- 2) blasphemous or is offensive to the religious conviction or feelings of any section of the inhabitants of the Republic.
- 3) brings any section of the inhabitants of the Republic into ridicule or contempt.
- 4) harmful to the relations between any section of the inhabitants of the Republic.
- 5) prejudicial to the safety of the State, general welfare, or peace and good order.

Ultimately, censorship became part of the state security system, a far cry from the intended social protection. All forms of censorship possessed inherent contradictions that, at times, stimulated literary protests. Censorship contributed to what is regarded as the liminality of South African literature, explicitly works by black South African writers.

Since South Africa had severed its official ties with Britain and the Commonwealth two years earlier, fulfilling the National Party's long-held ambition to revive the traditions of the nineteenth-century Boer-republicanism, the new legislation was signed into law, not by the Governor-General of the Union, but the State President of the new Republic. The precise terms of the 1963 Act were a testament to the limited effectiveness of the white legislative process and liberal anti-censorship protests, which did not so much curb as obscure the government's will to control this area of legislation. In other areas, there was little, or no checking conducted to determine the extent of its power over direct political censorship. In the years ahead, the government would continue to use this kind of legislation to silence most of the renowned black

writers of the 1950s and 1960s and the leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s.

Foreigners visiting South Africa for the first time were often (rightfully) puzzled by the fact that South African newspapers were able to report what might be perceived as controversial political issues. They wondered (with good reason) how that could be possible with censorship rules in effect. They did not know that whites held a stake in and had significant control over newspapers and that it all came down to how objectionable the article was regarding the press restrictive laws. It was common knowledge to South Africans that 'censorship' did not exist when it came to newspapers. One editor pointed out that there was no need for it because the censoring the government required was carried out by the newspaper staff themselves and their lawyers. It was known as 'complying with the law'.

As Gordimer would later observe: 'The laws which enmesh the press in South Africa have brought us a long way along the path of being told only such things as statecraft would wish us to know.'

As for literature, particularly the literature of concepts, the government did very little to shroud its suppression. Literature by black South Africans was obliterated by censorship. White South African writers, on the other end, were free to chronicle, albeit within stringent boundary lines, their opinion of blacks and the resentment they felt towards them. This might be viewed as another way that the whites confirmed their supremacy.

There is a false conception that censorship affects only the writers, but the fact of the matter is that there are many more readers than writers. As Nadine Gordimer put it:

Writers whose works are banned may hope to be read another day or elsewhere, but a whole generation of South Africans are growing up in the world with ideas closed to them. (Gordimer, 1994, p.178),

CHAPTER THREE: SOPHIA TOWN AND THE BIRTH OF DRUM MAGAZINE

3.1 Origins of Sophiatown

To most black South Africans who grew up in the 50s and 60s, the name Sophiatown stirs up memories of a vibrant, creative, multicultural community, where artists, writers, and musicians flourished against the odds in an atmosphere of racial intolerance. In the fifties, Sophiatown offered unparalleled opportunities for blacks to 'choose and invent their society from the novel distractions of urban life'. It was strongly associated with the potential for the emergence of black urban culture. As Gready stated, 'It operated mythically in the black literary writings of the day as a symbol of cosmopolitan possibility.' This led to it being dubbed the Chicago of South Africa. The 1927 Liquor Act forbade Africans and Indians from entering bars, let alone running them – but that did little to stop Sophiatown's residents. *Shebeens* (speakeasies) mushroomed with names like House of the Moon, House of Truth, and House of Saints.

Some *shebeens*, especially the prominent ones, hosted live music, especially jazz, and local meetings and were known to be frequented by 'big names', essentially people in politics, and successful businessmen. They were predominantly run by women, who went by the epithet '*Shebeen Queen*.' These *Shebeen Queens* took their role seriously and considered themselves businesswomen in their own right. They brewed illicit liquor and at night turned their sitting rooms into a makeshift speakeasy where they sold their brew and, sometimes, a plate of pap and grilled meat could be obtained for a few extra shillings.

The story of Sophiatown has been told before but never with the eloquence that Don Mattera brings to his book *Memory is the Weapon*. In it, the legendary poet, writer and struggle veteran declared:

Sophiatown also had its beauty; picturesque and intimate like most ghettos. Mansions and quaint cottages stood side by side with rusty wood and iron shacks, locked in an intimate embrace of filth and felony. The rich and the poor, the exploiter and the exploited, all knitted together in a colourful fabric that ignored race or class structures. (Mattera, 2007, p 116)

Anthony Sampson, the editor of *Drum*, later remembered: 'In Sophiatown, however spontaneous it was, there always seemed to be a party. Can Themba. However, like Chicago, Sophiatown had a hard edge. American, German, and Russian gangs patrolled its streets, where they competed with local gangsters, called *tsotsis*.

3.2 Drum Magazine

It was in this vibrant, stimulating sphere of Sophiatown that *Drum* magazine was born. The magazine became part of the socialising process of the 50s: it helped to record and create the voices, images, and values of black urban culture at the precise moment that the minister of Native Affairs, Hendrik Verwoerd, was setting out to render untenable any permanent African presence in the so-called 'white' cities. '*Drum*' recorded many of the political events of the decade, including the Defiance Campaign, the adoption of the Freedom Charter by the Congress Alliance at Kliptown in 1955, the trial of Alliance leaders for treason in 1956, bus boycotts, the rise of the Pan-Africanist Congress, and the shooting by police of unarmed protesters at Sharpeville in 1960.

By chronicling everyday experiences, many scholars have subsequently taken the position that the *Drum* writers showed quite graphically the significant impact of the apartheid system on

black South Africans. As Louis Nkosi recalls of the Sharpeville incident in his book, *Home and Exile*:

No newspaper report on Sharpeville could ever convey the deep sense of entrapment significantly that black people experience under apartheid rule. It is difficult to imagine a mode of expression that would adequately describe this sense of malaise. (Nkosi, 1983, p.136)

Grady has argued that it was in their journalism, rather than their fiction, that the Drum writers offered a compelling critique of apartheid. In the postcolonial moment, Drum has been characterised as providing alternative ways for black South Africans to imagine themselves. As Fanon has argued, colonialism and its successive forms locked black people into categories they could not escape.

Drum allowed its readers to connect to black communities across the world imaginatively, on the one hand, in Africa, on the other in America. Even before it began circulating satellite editions in East, West, and Central Africa, *Drum* ran stories from across the continent and had correspondents in many territories in pursuit of what publisher Bailey called a 'Pan-African common market'. *Drum* was the first transnational popular publication in English to be published and circulated in Anglophone Africa in both colonial and post-colonial eras. On the other hand, some critics have also accused the widespread publication of not taking a more militant stand against the apartheid state.

Under the guidance of Es'kia Mphahlele (the fiction editor from 1955 to 1957), *Drum* encouraged fiction. During that time, authors such as Todd Matshikiza, Bloke Modisane, Henry Nxumalo, Casey Motsisi, Arthur Maimane (alias Mogale), Lewis Nkosi, Nat Nakasa, Can Themba, Peter Abrahams, and Alex la Guma published over 90 short stories. Their stories described the people of the street (jazz musicians, gangsters, shebeen queens, and con men) and were written

in a unique Sophiatown-influenced blend of English and *Tsotsitaal*. Mphahlele also trained a generation of rising black photographers, including Ernest Cole, Bob Gosani, and later Peter Magubane. This creative period has been called the Sophiatown Renaissance.

The magazine's linchpin was crime, investigative reporting, sex (especially across the colour line), and sport. This was fleshed out by creative photography. The formula worked and made for compulsive reading. Each issue of *Drum* was read by up to nine people, passed from hand to hand on the streets, in the clubs, or on trains. It became a symbol of black urban life. By September 1959, the number of copies distributed across Africa each month was estimated to be over twenty thousand. No other African magazine had ever achieved this number before.

Politically, Sophiatown became a target. From Desmond Tutu to Nelson Mandela, its residents were among the loudest and most active in the struggle against apartheid. Freedom Square was the site of protests, speeches, and consistent congregation of the ANC; it was where Mandela called publicly on the ANC to take up arms against apartheid. Sophiatown had become an era of 'political corn inside the apartheid boot,' Bloke Modisane wrote in his book, *Blame Me on History*. (Modisane, 1963: p.104), In 1956, one hundred and fifty-six leaders of the Congress Alliance were arrested for treason after holding the Congress of the People, where they drew up the Freedom Charter, a document that spelt out rights for all South Africans. The trial dragged on for several years before the accused were acquitted. In 1960, police opened fire on unarmed protesters at Sharpeville, killing sixty-nine and injuring about 200. The government declared a state of emergency for several months after the Sharpeville incidence. During this period, writers for *Drum* were constantly intimidated by police. Eventually, the magazine was banned and ceased publishing for four years. During the banning period, many of its pioneering journalists left the field. The increasing repression in the 1960s by the apartheid state, as well as the hideous

persecution by the political regime, were intended to destroy and *Drum*, its writers and the intellectual community of black South Africans.

Talking about his former *Drum* colleagues, Nkosi had this to say:

I grew up reading *Drum*. The '*Drum* boys' (as they would later come to be known) stood out in that they had no desire to expand the categories of journalism, reinvent nonfiction, or compete with novelists. Rather, their identities were determined by the society in which they lived, both the constrain of the state and the lively possibilities offered by communities such as Sophiatown. Their challenge lay in deciding which kind of stories should be told and telling them with as much nerve and panache as possible.

I was especially drawn to Can Themba's writing style and impressed by the way he fused into the English language, township idiom and rejuvenated empty words with extreme imagery deriving from a life of danger and violence.

Although most of his stories were humorous, Themba also wrote serious, thought-provoking pieces, dealing with socio-economic problems affecting many people in the townships. '*Terror on the Train*' is a story about *tsotsis* (thugs) who menace commuters, which highlights a set of issues, such as lack of education, cultural and religious discrimination, overpopulation, unemployment, and rampant corruption. '*Kwashiorkor*,' for example, is a story about the abandonment of a sickly, malnourished child by her wild, teenage mother and the social worker who tries to rescue her from her fate. Even though Themba still manages to inject some humour into this piece, it is clear that his aim in writing this particular story was not merely to entertain but also to shed light on the sensitive topic: the issue of extreme poverty. Dave, the brother of Eileen, narrates the story. He is a social worker with the Social Welfare Department of the Non-European Section of the Municipality of Johannesburg, which is another way of saying she evaluates, records, catalogues, and analyses the derelict lives of the wretched and destitute blacks in

Johannesburg. She studies their living habits, their recreational, sporting, and drinking habits, and the incidences of crime. Dave often accompanies his sister on her Saturday home visits, especially when those calls are to Alexandra, a township he describes as 'ferocious' and 'a hell-hole where it was never safe for a woman to walk the streets unchaperoned or go from house to house, asking testing questions.' (Themba, 1972, p.14)

One of Eileen's cases is the Mabiletsa family, which consists of an elderly mother, her seventeen-year-old daughter, and the daughter's three-year-old child afflicted with advanced kwashiorkor - a condition caused by severe malnutrition. Eileen describes the child's teenaged mother, Maria, as a 'good time girl who has abandoned her parental responsibilities to her ageing mother, Sarah. The child's father is unknown, and the only other family member is Sarah's brother, who is serving a 15-year sentence for armed robbery and murder. Eileen's verdict on the family is that it is 'desperate.' Dave describes the family's home as a 'battered house in 3rd Avenue, Alexandra', which was 'just a lot of wood and tin knocked together gawkily to make four rooms' (Themba, 1972 p.15).

The house stands a few yards from 'the sour, cider-tasting gutter' (Themba, 1972, p.15) and in the back is a row of outrooms constructed like a train and let to smaller families or bachelor men and women. This, the narrator goes on to inform us, is the 'main source of income for the Mabiletsa family' (Themba, 1972, p.16.). In this vivid chronicle, the narrator is not only outlining the poverty of the Mabiletsa's but also the general population of black people living in the townships. In these overcrowded conditions, it was routine for people to let outbuildings to others and allow the erection of shacks. Moreover, the sight of children with distended bellies (a sign of kwashiorkor), swollen ankles and feet, and thinning, reddish hair was not extraordinary. Furthermore, it was not uncommon for a young mother to disappear into the unknown, leaving their children with family members.

Maria's story is not atypical. Countless young girls never made it past Standard 5. Desperate to escape poverty, many, like Maria, left school to work in the white people's kitchen. Illegitimate children were an event that in Alexandra, Johannesburg, and all urban areas elicited no surprise whatsoever. Illegitimate children were born to young black girls every day. In this story, Themba also touched on illiteracy, which affected millions of blacks in South Africa. Superstition was rampant and accepted among the black population. The uneducated mind held onto the irrational belief in supernatural influences, especially in matters pertaining to good or bad luck. Themba used his character, Maria, to portray this ignorance.

Themba is best known for his short story, '*The Suit*' which was first published in 1963 in the inaugural issue of *The Classic*, a South African Journal founded by Nat Nakasa and Nadine Gordine. The tale is about Philemon and his adulterous wife, Matilda. In the opening of the narrative, the couple is portrayed as blissfully married - in the mind of Philemon. However, while waiting for the bus, Philemon learns from a neighbour that his wife has been entertaining another man while he has been at work. Philemon immediately rushes back home and catches the two lovers red-handed. Matilda's lover makes a getaway through a window but, in his haste to escape, leaves behind his suit. The cuckolded Philemon's reaction is to subject his wife to unthinkable humiliation, insisting that the suit be treated as a guest in their home. At mealtimes, he instructs her to set a plate and dish for the suit, and during the day, she is to take it out for walks. Matilda, powerless, silently complies and endures the disgrace. However, as this punishment increases in intensity, Matilda commits suicide.

Themba transcended the 1950s and his time. In a special *Drum* edition to celebrate 60 years of the magazine, contemporary author Zukiswa Wanner dedicated an article to Themba, entitled, '*Dear Can...*' in which she entered into a fanciful dialogue with the late author:

And now for the news that is bound to make you smile, Can. Would you believe so many years after you wrote 'The Suit' it is still definitive in short-story writing? Yes, dear Can, though I mourn your dying before you could write a longer story, it still rocks. How well does it rock? Well, let me just say, at the turn of the century, 'The Suit' inspired a short story from a young writer called Sipiwo Mahala. He decided to reply to you from the perspective of the guy who jumps out of the window in 'The Suit' Hilarious, I tell you. He called his piece, 'The Suit Continued'. It went on to be published in quite a few anthologies. And then, early one morning, after reading your and Mahala's pieces side by side, I decided there was no gender equality. So, guess what I did? Yup. I decided I was going to write a piece from Matilda's perspective. Seeing as you chose to kill Tilly at the end of your short story, I had to find a way of dealing with this. So, I wrote her side of it as a suicide note – 'The Dress That Fed the Suit'. So, you see, Can, your brilliant story is a gift that keeps on inspiring other writers. But in case you're thinking that today's writers so lack in imagination that all we do is find new ways of recycling your stories, I need to brag that we have been writing more than you guys could have imagined. A friend of mine says that one could go a whole year without reading anything other than a South African writer, and he is right. And, of course, because South Africa is no longer a pariah state, our writers are competing with the rest of the world – and winning. Can, you would sob in your whiskey with pride, man. In this, the 43rd year of your death and the year your DRUM turns 60, what would I say to you if you were still alive? I would tell you I'm grateful that you inspired a generation of writers like me. I would also tell you that my generation writes better than yours. Irrelevant? Egotistical? *Ja!* (Wanner, 2017, p.27)

Like Mathilda, who could not relate her reality, the banned writers in exile were denied a response, displaced in the ultimate liminal space without context and meanings, and from which there was no hope of return. In exile, with his writings banned in South Africa, Themba was denied dialogue. For many, such as Nat Nakasa and Themba, death was the only escape.

Viewing the writing of Nkosi and Nakasa through the prism of the fringe country also prevents these works from folding undistinguished into the canon of protest writing. While these pieces did indeed exist within a broad tradition of anti-apartheid journalism and criticism, that strict classification obscures the often uncomfortable complexity of resistance to National Party rule. Individuals and their works did not slot neatly into the different categories that the moral drama of modern South African history so easily lends itself to – the oppressor and oppressed, resister and accomplice, or even black and white – but traversed the murky space between them in what South African literary theorist, Sarah Nuttall, has termed 'entanglement', those 'unexplored terrains of mutuality that course beneath the surface of apparently divided cultural and historical spaces' (Nuttall, 2008).

According to Bloke Modisane, black intellectuals in Johannesburg in the 1950s were known as a 'situation', something not belonging to either, but tactfully situated between white oppression and black rebellion' In *The World of Nat Makasa*, Nakasa claims that in the 1960s, he and Lewis Nkosi found themselves enmeshed in what he deftly termed 'fringe country', an informal, multiracial collection of artists and intellectuals who chose to resist apartheid by merely attempting to live as if it did not exist. Nakasa provided a quick summary of how writers attempted to transcend their liminal 'situation', in the 'fringe country':

All those Africans who wanted to be loyal, hard-working, intelligent citizens of the country are crowded out. They do not want to bleach themselves, but they want to participate and contribute to the wonder that that country can become. They do not

want to be fossilised into tribal inventions that are no more real to them than they would have been real to their forefathers. (Nakasa, 1963, p.28)

In a tribute to Nakasa after his death, Gordimer wrote: 'He belonged not between two worlds, but to both. Thus, in him, one could see the hope of one world. He has left that hope behind; there will be others to take it up.

In the 1980s, the ban on many of *Drum's* writers of the 1950s was lifted, and their writing was released back into South Africa's public domain.

The 1970s brought a literary revival of black South African voices that had been silenced by repression. That period is widely regarded as a defining period for the development of political consciousness among black South Africans, with the rise of the Black Consciousness (BC) movement, of which Steve Biko, who died in detention in September 1977, was a leading figure, and the youth revolt of 1976. By then, literature had become instrumental in the advocacy of political ideals of anti-apartheid illustrious crusades. Campaigns were conveyed through plays and poems, published in such journals as *Black Review*, a publication in which Steve Biko played a prominent part. The most notable writers from this period are Mongane (Wally) Serote, Sipho Sepamla, Oswald Joseph Mbuyiseni Mtshali, Christopher van Wyk, Mafika Gwala, and Don Mattera. Their poems were often performed at political rallies. Then in the 1980s, the ban on many of *Drum's* writers of the 1950s was finally lifted, and their writing was released back into South Africa's public domain.

In '*Creative Nonfiction: Researching and Crafting Stories of Real Life*', Philip Gerard says that every writer chooses to write on topics they have pondered over countless times, lost sleepover, or even sought psychological help for when they could not find meaning themselves or come to terms with their experiences (Gerard 1996: p.**). They may then take a memory that

serves some significance for them and present it within a bigger frame for analysis. For me, this rings true in the writing of my novel, and the South African writers who inspired me to write.

As a child of the black South African diaspora, I was naturally drawn to write about the Soweto uprising and the events that both preceded it and resulted from it. During the Soweto riots, the death of 13-year-old Hector Peterson on June 16th, 1976, was a watershed moment in the history of South Africa, one which precipitated the ultimate dissolution of apartheid.

It seems surprising that not many literary works depict the Soweto riots. One explanation for this hiatus might be found in my history. I was just a small child and not yet in school when the 1976 Soweto students Uprising protests occurred. Although I was too young at the time to fully comprehend everything I was hearing, talk about the riots were all around me. Years later, after my family and I escaped South Africa and came to England, I continued hearing about talks about then. When my parents held dinner parties for their friends, most of whom were also exiles from South Africa, the topic at the dinner table turned to the 1976 Soweto riots and the mood in the room would turn melancholic. Each of our guests had lost someone or knew someone who had lost their lives during the riots and each had a tragic story to share.

One of my parents' friends, Mr Mbhatha, had been a teacher in Naledi High school when the riots broke out. He had been one of the many accused of being an 'instigator' of the riots and was imprisoned for six months. He was tortured in jail, and when he was released, he found that his home had been burned to the ground and his wife and four children had disappeared. Mr Mbhatha moved in with his brother and his family and visited every known jail, hospital, and morgue to find his wife and children, but to no avail. Even though he was now homeless and jobless, the police harassment continued. Finally, his other brother, who had escaped to England a few years earlier, secretly smuggled him out of the country. Even though he managed to resume his teaching career and make something of a life for himself in London, Mr Mbhatha never fully

recovered. When I asked him why he did not tell the world his story, he replied: “My story happened to a lot of people, *ntombazana*. It is nothing special. What happened to me happened to many others - to a lot of families in South Africa. Ask your parents, and they will tell you.”

However, I did not ask my parents. Even though their story was no less tragic than Mr Mbhatha's (we were all in the same boat after all - political exiles in a foreign land), they were not nearly as interesting to me because I had heard them too often - knew them too well; it was nothing special. It was only much later, enlightened by the constructs of narrativity and liminality, that I realised that I had yet to make sense of these stories that needed to be told. Taylor explains as below:

He describes the protagonists in the three literary texts she analyses as liminal texts that they are in a situation of exile from their societies of origin and, therefore, find themselves liminal and relationally weak. As wayfarers, strangers, and exiles, these narrators have no established authority for telling their stories. However, there is a power available in this kind of weakness, a power derived from their history and the stories they have to tell in their particular situations. (Taylor 1998: p. 114)

Schiff says that an essential aspect of narrating is telling the experience to make known what we have lived through. Memoirs and autobiographies are often primarily interested in making life experiences known. This is especially true in cases of hardship and injustice. For example, the publication of journals and stories from the trenches in World War I is voluminous. However, even more exceptional are the stories of concentration and death camp survivors after World War II, which provided written and oral testimony of the inmates' experiences. In the language of Holocaust studies, witnesses make present their memories through their testimony. Making this presence is a claim to the truth of holding on to the reality of the past. This is one of the nuances of the idea. In making a presence, speakers are making claims about the reality of their

experiences or knowledge. Part of the object of making present is to clear a space to make an argument for the narrator's understanding of reality.

These excerpts from Taylor and Schiff serve to cement my notion that South African literature is best understood within the frameworks of liminality and narrativity.

CHAPTER FOUR: SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE, LIMINALITY, AND CENSORSHIP

4.1 Liminality of South African Literature

Censorship contributed to what I regard as the liminality of all South African literature, but especially to the writings of black South Africans. The theory of liminal space begins with the study of ritual in tribal cultures in the work of the anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep. Van Gennep likens this exchange to communion. Rites of incorporation involve reintegrating into society with the knowledge needed to fulfil a particular role (typically in a hierarchy).

Liminality is a midpoint between a starting point and an ending point. As such, it is a temporary state that ends when the initiate is reintegrated into the social structure. In *Liminality and Communitas*, Turner describes liminal people as 'neither here nor there. They are in between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony' (Turner, 1969, p.96). Turner then goes on to name the nonstructure or antistructure that he continually refers to in 'Betwixt and Between' through such concepts as the 'realm of pure possibility' and structural

invisibility. (Turner, 1969), Turner chooses the Latin term *communitas* to refer to this idea of antistructure and refers to social structure and *communitas* as the two foremost 'models' for human interrelatedness. These models are defined as follows: the first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions, and the second, which emerges recognisably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders (Turner, 1967, p.95).

This second model of human interrelatedness, *communitas*, has different cultural manifestations, of which liminality is the only one. The two other manifestations that Turner mentions are marginality and inferiority. To express the relationship of these manifestations to social structure in spatial terms, they are in between (liminality), on the edge (marginality), and beneath (inferiority). As an example of *communitas* in modern Western society, he cites the Beat Generation, the hippies, and teeny boppers. According to Turner, these have opted out of the social structure and chosen to manifest *communitas* through inferiority.

Turner outlines aspects within the liminal that produce *communitas*; a yearning for a coalition with others that arises from the deprivation and neediness encountered during the liminal predicament. Intrinsic to any rite of passage is the return and reincorporation into the indigenous social structure. For black South Africans, no such return was possible. My argument is that black South Africans were forced, through legislation, into a liminal space politically, legally, economically, socially, and geographically. Stripped of all political power and indeed the power to participate in a structured society, they occupied the geographical areas on the margins of white settlements. The name 'Soweto' is a syllabic abbreviation for South Western Townships. As

Soweto is located to the South-West of Johannesburg, it derived its name from its spatial relation to a white settlement.

The concepts of community and marginality find a gestalt in the black townships, and inferiority in the social and legal-political status conferred on blacks by the Nationalist Government. Censorship further strove to deprive them of *communitas*. However, this state of affairs was intended not as a transitional phase but as an ontological reality. Apartheid itself was the creation of liminal space, one from which there was no reintegration and no return.

According to Taylor, the transgressive, by its violation of the convention, places one in liminality. Drawing upon Turner's and Derrida's sociological and philosophical works, Schabner selected three characteristics that she believes are intrinsic to liminality: transgressive, a search for sacred meaning, and a potential for *communitas* (Schabner, 2017, p.123). Transgression, in the broadest sense, can only imply an act of passing over or going beyond current expectations, and this kind of transgression may render one liminal, at least temporarily (by being censored, by being incarcerated, under house arrest, or jailed offshore on Robben Island). Trespassing or crossing over a line is formidable because any threshold can represent an encounter with death at the final point.

4.3 Intensification of Liminality

For black writers, activists, and other artists, the sense of liminality increased as the degree of violation intensified. It was further intensified by being jailed, placed under house arrest, and forced into exile, most often for breaking the rules associated with censorship. In *The Liminal Novel* Nyatetu Waigwa (1996) describes ongoing liminality as:

a structuring principle which colours each major image, each event, each place. Liminality in modern cultures occurs when an individual transgresses or breaks with his or her societal origins, crosses national borders, and spends time in another culture. In contrast to those undergoing tribal rites of passage, none of these liminal figures ever were in the society from which they broke away; consequently, their marginality remains continuous. Therefore, the question of belonging to any world has become provisionally unresolvable. (Nyatetu Waigwa, 1996, p.109)

This echoes Turner's statement: 'Transition has here become a permanent condition'. This is true for many South African writers who never returned to South Africa, such as Eskia Mphahlele, Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, and Lewis Nkosi. It also applies to me since I have never returned to the country of my birth. By not being white, it can be safely argued that black South Africans were transgressive. Existence for blacks in South Africa became a matter of transgression and liminality by degree.

CHAPTER FIVE: AN OVERVIEW OF THE WRITERS, BANNING, EXILE, AND SUICIDE

5.1 Banning and Exile

Nadine Gordimer was not only a towering figure of world literature but a passionate campaigner against racism. In her early writings, her books focused on the theme of apartheid and its effect on the lives of South Africans (both black and white) and the moral and psychological

tensions of life in a racially divided country, focusing mainly on the oppressed blacks. Because of this, her books were the most scrutinised, and three were banned for various lengths of time. However, despite the bans, harassment, and threats, Gordimer refused to accommodate the system. She showed defiance and self-belief by refusing to go into exile and continuing to write her novels, all based on her impassioned subject, apartheid.

Throughout the 60s and into the 70s, the prolific, convent-educated writer maintained her status as the most acclaimed South-African author. Her resilience and great conviction were rewarded when in 1961, she won the WH Smith Literary Award and, again, a decade later when she was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize (for fiction). In the next three decades, she would go on to secure ten more awards. Except for *A Guest of Honour*, which is set in an unspecified postcolonial African country, all of her novels from the first three decades of her career have a more or less contemporary South African setting. They focus on the struggles of various white protagonists, from the English expatriate Toby Hood in *A World of Strangers* to the South African Rosa Burger in *Burger's Daughter* (which was initially banned by the censors), having to come to terms with themselves, their histories and responsibilities within the fluctuating politics of the resistance from the 1960s to the 1970s.

In all her novels, Nadine Gordimer is consistently and undeniably engrossed in the public interpretation of the world of apartheid politics and, particularly, the private spheres of family, friendship, sexuality, and, indeed, individual thoughts and feelings. *Can Themba*, explores family, intimate relationships, and how apartheid has decayed relationships. The difference between the two authors is that *Can Themba* primarily does this with Black society, whereas Nadine Gordimer does it with interracial relationships. In my novel, I also explore these motifs. I explore interracial relationships through my main character, Bafana, and his white employer, Sam, whom he jokingly calls Baas, and who later becomes implicated in his troubles.

As for the banning of Gordimer's novels, it is baffling that the censors found only some of her books threatening enough to warrant censorship. Despite her constant narrative experiments and relentless self-questioning, her work displays a remarkable consistency. Take, for instance, two of her books: *Burger's Daughter*, which was praised as her most political and the most moving of her novels, and *July's People*, which is my favourite. I found the book to be wonderfully written, succinct, and spare. The ending was uplifting (literally and figuratively). The two books were published two years apart when apartheid was still operating in force. Both of them deal with the usual Gordimer themes: apartheid, politics, interracial relationships, family dynamics, and personal conflicts. The only difference between the two is that in the second novel, unlike in all of Gordimer's other books, the protagonist seems to be the black servant, the house boy, who has suddenly gained the upper hand and become the saviour of his employers; he is the one who holds their lives in his hands. Gordimer had never done this in any of her novels (this sudden reversal of roles), and I think this is what fascinated me most about the novel, enough for me to read it at least a half dozen times. *July's People* is perhaps Gordimer's most powerful novel; it projects into the future the final disintegration of white dominance, and what that might mean for white and black people on an intimate level. Although this novel is set in the early eighties when, in fact, apartheid was still in full force, and although it is fiction, Gordimer seems to be playing a clairvoyant in *July's People*, predicting the future of the suffering blacks at the end of apartheid, which would not come for another decade.

If the reason given for the banning of her books was that they were offensive, why were *July's People* not banned? *Burger's Daughter* was first published in London and had been banned in South Africa three months previously. The reason the ban was later lifted was just as ambiguous as the reason it had been proscribed in the first place and why its counterpart, *July's People*, had not been similarly banned. The last book would have been more offensive to the

sensitive white reader. In his review of the novel, Lewis Nkosi, the late South African writer and critic, said this about *July's People*:

Unlike her earlier fiction, whose strength as well as psychological stress lay in telling us what it was like to be a member of the oppressing class, Gordimer's latest fiction, encouraged by well-intentioned but ignorant praise from the international community, has not only tried to record the daily injuries of ordinary individuals in South African Society but now strains to be the voice of the South African revolution. (Nkosi, 2016, p. 91)

Reading Nkosi's review, I couldn't help but think that he took somewhat unwarranted offence at the writer's novel because the two were thought to share a warm friendship and, besides that, Nadine Gordimer was well known for her contribution to South African life and literature, and showed unfailing generosity and support for black writing. Needless to say, Nkosi's review of *July's People* made me curious to read his evaluation of his supposed friend's other books, or Gordimer's 'apartheid' books, as he now termed them, as well as of his other fellow writers and colleagues. It is neither a secret nor a coincidence that the majority of Nadine Gordimer's books all bear the same thread regarding themes. Even she once wrote:

I was obliged to read through my five existing collections of stories and saw how there are some stories I have gone on writing, again and again, all my life, not so much because the themes are obsessional but because I found other ways to take hold of them. (Gordimer 1975: p.4)

This admission was made in the introduction of her *Selected Stories*, published in 1975. She went on to stress that 'the change in social attitudes unconsciously reflected in the stories represents both that of the people in my society - that is to say history - and my apprehension of it; in writing, I am acting upon my society, and in the manner of my apprehension, all the time

history is acting upon me' (Gordimer,1975, p.6). Gordimer's undeniable talent and confidence are visible in the way she takes hold of the recurrent motifs so that even when the tale is narrated over and over, she always brings a disparate stance, giving freshness to the subject. Each of her novels unveils a new stage in the politics and history of South Africa. It is for this reason that her novels have received unrivalled critical praise throughout the years.

In 1963, Gordimer published *Occasion for Living*, in which she explored the natural relationship between blacks and whites in a politically charged society, and scrutinised the tintured milieu of kind gestures. In 1966 she did the same with *The Late Bourgeois World*. Both novels carried a suggestive hint of liberal white failure. Perhaps one might have thought the author would have tired of delving into the political world of a country whose problems were intractable. Not Gordimer. It is accurate to say that the country's 'intractable problems' is what gave steam to her novels. Many of her stories dealt with intricate and inane apartheid laws, whether from a black perspective or a white one. For instance, 'Six Feet of the Country' is a short story set on a farm outside of Johannesburg. It follows a man and a wife, two 'sort of' farmers, and their reaction to the knowledge that a refugee from Rhodesia has fled to their land and died from overexposure.

The narrative is told from the perspective of the husband, Bass. He regards himself and his wife as pseudo-farmers because he makes most of his earnings from a 'luxury travel agency' and bought the farm — ten miles outside of Johannesburg — as a pleasant distraction for his wife, Lerice, who is an ageing former actress. One night, Bass is alerted that something terrible has happened in the barracks where the young servant boys – all black – sleep. Reluctantly, the man travels to the dorms. There, he is told that another young boy he has never seen before has died, likely from pneumonia and heat exhaustion. He learns that the mysterious boy was the brother of Petrus, one of his trusted employees. Petrus, distraught over his brother's death, tells

his employer that the boy travelled from the impoverished area of Rhodesia to the big city, looking for work.

Petrus's family wants to give the boy a decent burial and pay dearly for the expense. However, on the day of the funeral, they learn that the body in the coffin is not that of the young boy. They demand a refund for the funeral home's mistake and to have the body of their loved one back. However, the funeral home, run by white Afrikaners, refuses, saying that they had (technically) already done their job; the fact that they had buried the wrong body was not their concern. Petrus and his family implore their white employers to intercede on their behalf. Bass and Lerice attempt this, but they are neither rich nor influential enough to overcome South Africa's racist bureaucracy. Petrus's family then must live with the knowledge that their loved one was not properly buried six feet underground. He was not afforded even 'six feet of the country.' (Gordimer, 1956, p.43)) Here, Gordimer exposes the authentic truth and the quintessential relationship between blacks and the powers that be; the uncompromising directorial apartheid laws designed to keep one race a slave to the other.

In another short story in the same collection, Gordimer goes further to examine the dynamics between the two races. In this story, ironically entitled 'Good Climate, Friendly Inhabitants', she again uses the voice of a middle-aged white, although in this case, the narrator is a dogmatic female secretary who prides herself on her youthful appearance. She is driving around suburban Johannesburg, thinking about her life working in a local garage while wandering through various shopping malls. She is divorced and has one daughter, and for some reason, has only seen her grandchildren once. It soon becomes clear that that may be due to her overbearing racism and her ignorant opinion of black people. She views them all as childlike and can only endure their presence when they act in a servile manner.

One day, she confides her fear of dying alone to a black worker. He is very kind in return. She gives him her address and says to bring people there should she ever die. He stops coming to the garage, and she starts to become paranoid that he has ill intentions toward her. She finds him later reading a newspaper, acting as if the two of them had not had an emotional encounter. She concludes that a woman living on her own has to be suspicious of everyone. Through the narrator's mind, whose suspicious thoughts about the black worker are unwarranted, the author lets us into what is another type of relationship between whites and blacks – a distrustful one. Her conviction, which she uses to justify her paranoia, echoes the notion of most of her race, that a woman living on her own has to be suspicious of everyone.

'Country Lovers' is the first story Gordimer narrates in the third person. In it, she delves into another one of the country's intricate and unfair apartheid laws by focusing on the criminal trial of an interracial couple, the white Afrikaner, Paulus Eysendyck, and an unnamed black woman. Interracial relationships were strictly forbidden during this time. Paulus is accused of poisoning their love child. It is hinted that he did murder the child, but because South African law favours white Afrikaners in almost all criminal cases, he is not charged with any murder. It is evident that in the telling of this story, Gordimer sought to expose, to a full extent, the unjust system.

In 1974, almost a decade after *The Bourgeois World*, Gordimer published *The Conservationist*, which was followed by *Burger's Daughter* in 1979. Predictably, the theme was familiar (politics, interracial relationships, and white liberal failure), but these two novels were criticised as having 'an even more arid mood of monolithic, intransigent, white 'occupation'.

It was not until 'July's People' that Gordimer showcased her skills to the fullest extent. Rife with tension, fascinating, and complex characters, this story brings forth questions of identity when one has lost everything - both material goods and a sense of place in the world. In this novel,

Nadine Gordimer depicts the lives of a liberal, white South African family, the Smales, forced to flee to the native village of their black servant, July. Gordimer sets her novel during a fictional civil war in which black South Africans violently overturn the system of apartheid. *July's People*, published in 1981, is set an end to apartheid through a civil war.

I found this ending uplifting (literally and figuratively). *July's People* probes into the psychological turmoil of apartheid in South Africa. Furthermore, it illuminates the antagonism that was ingrained in apartheid. The rift between the white and black population's lives is thrown into stark contrast by the role reversal experienced when the white family finds themselves dependent on their 'house boy'. July volunteers to protect them in his village when they are forced to abandon their way of life as war breaks out in the country. Once there, the family, having lost everything, is reduced to living as the villagers live, without a shared language or an understanding of their hosts and the everyday existence of their lives.

The relationships between adults are complex and infinitely interesting. As always, Gordimer's writing is packed with meaning; each paragraph must be read twice to fully understand its meaning. In my opinion, *July's People* is a profound and timeless novel.

5.2 Overview of some famous writers of this period

CAN THEMBA

As mentioned above, Nadine Gordimer was just one of the many gifted South African writers and artists who suffered harassment and punishment by having their voices suppressed in one form or another in their own country. Another such talent was Can Themba, one of South Africa's best authors. He was described by Lewis Nkosi as follows:

Having an impish grin which hovered between self-deprecation and the mockery of others, he gave the impression of a nimble delighted observer, always on the look-out for drama, excitement, and fun. He was also a fast talker, a very deft, quick thinker with an equal facility for the apt, if outrageous, phrase. His excitement about ideas, his delight in throwing them up himself, or sharing the company of those whose primary interest was ideas, showed him to be first and foremost intellectual in the original sense of that word. For him, the pursuit of ideas was not just an abstract humourless activity: it was a form of play. The intellectual activity was nothing if not fun, which led some to regard him as flippant, reckless, and irresponsible. For though he had studied English and philosophy, he eschewed the turgid, the solemn and the pretentiously weighty language of those who merely wish to sound obtuse. He lent to his thoughts the same vivid imagery, sharp staccato rhythm of the township language of the urban *tsotsi*, because he was the supreme intellectual *tsotsi* of them all, always, in the words of the blues singer, "raising hell in the neighbourhood". (Nkosi,1972, p.4)

Lewis Nkosi described the neighbourhood in which he raised hell was that sombre, fearful community of the intellect so hideously terrorised by the political regime in South Africa.

Themba was a schoolteacher who won the £50 first prize in the first Drum short-story competition for the heart-breaking tale, *'Mob Passion'*, published in 1953. In response to this success, *Drum*, a newly launched magazine targeted at black readers and featuring entertainment and market news, immediately hired him as a writer. The magazine, described as the first black lifestyle magazine in Africa and recognised primarily for its 1950s and 1960s reportage of township life under apartheid, employed many accomplished writers, including Nkosi Lewis, Nat

Nakasa, Ezekiel (later, E's kia) Mphahlele, Casey Motsisi, Bloke Modisane, and Henry' Mr DRUM' Nxumalo.

Although the Drum gang had no real programme, its Morpheus was Can Themba. Like Nadine Gordimer, Can Themba leaned towards exploring intimate domestic themes and the negative effect of apartheid on these relationships. In *The Boy with the Tennis Racket*' where he writes about his late Drum colleague, Nat Nekasa, Themba describes his voice as that of 'self-corrosive cynicism.' Nowhere is this more evident than in '*The Suit*', his most famous story, once banned in South Africa by the apartheid regime, and now a high school set work, then a local and international theatre hit in the 1990s. While in South Africa, for my research, I had the opportunity to question some of the writers, both white and black.

I interviewed them on how they felt about 'The Suit.' I received interesting and conflicting reactions, but one stood out particularly for me. It was from a white, CapeTown based South African writer who gave me a lengthy and interesting response: "Well when I read it, I was horrified by the mental cruelty of Philemon. However, seen in a larger context, like so many people who are abused as children, only to grow up and become abusive, Philemon, the oppressed becomes the oppressor. I am particularly interested in liminality in literature, and to me, 'The Suit' is a liminal piece of work, in the same way that *The Heart of Darkness* and the *Picture of Dorian Gray* are. First, liminality has been variously defined. From a purely anthropological perspective, Turner's definition is that the period when a person goes 'over the threshold' into another space and before returning to society (very much like Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey*) or the netherworld in Greek literature."

Days later, after returning home to England, I could not stop thinking about Peggy's comments about 'The Suit', and this got me pondering about liminality again - what it meant, particularly in reference to marginalised people and communities; its connection with literature

that does not fit neatly into one genre, and thereby opens other views and spaces. The writers of the 50s occupied such a liminal space in many ways. They were forced to inhabit a strange place between urban and rural; their writing also inhabits a peculiar place between journalism and literature, and as such, they were writing their own identity, as Michael Titlestad states: blacks were compelled to live in a liminal state - between the devil and the law - transgressive by being. Black writing occupied a liminal space outside the canon of traditional South African literature. (Titlestad, 2005, p. 63)

'The Suit' continues to fascinate because just like Heart of Darkness and Dorian Gray, it is constantly open to new interpretations in the secondary literature that actively creates and dismantles literary canons over time, and it is also inspiring 'offspring' - gendered ones. Therefore, here, I see 'The Suit' as a kind of analogy for the whole of South African society: Phillemon, the patriarch (whose identity seems wholly constructed concerning others) manifests cruelty which reflects the cruelty of the regime; it mirrors the draconian power imbalance. Milly asks Philemon's permission, just as blacks had to ask permission. Philemon grants permission in a way that makes him seem benevolent. We do not know for sure how Mildred died, but one can assume it was suicide. Philemon's regret mirrors the regret of whites after the tragic nature of their actions becomes apparent. Themba was truly 'ahead of his time.' Even though his kind of performance prose is maligned now, as it has been overdone in our tabloid age, Themba's early 1950s ghetto dispatches were strikingly innovative in their inexhaustible supply of musical adjectives, pentameters, and compositional devices unseen before in the South-African print.

The gang would gather in Themba's room, which had earned the epithet House of Truth (or HOT) to drink and debate about modern cinema, hot molls, and literature. It was rumoured that some of them (like Casey Motsisi) were deft enough to turn their drunken anecdotes into art, the language itself assuming an inebriated slant, and by this means, they found the truth. At other

times, the Drum journalists trawled shebeens and clubs in search of material for their stories. Jazz and alcohol-fueled life in Sophiatown underscored their smooth, rhythmic writing.

That writing - mostly about police brutality, the 'hypocrisy' of the white domineers, and the Defiance Campaign on the one hand, and township freaks, gangbangers, and racy babes with thunder thighs on the other - flourished through their unique, highly exaggerated impressionistic approach. It is said that Todd Matshikiza and Can Themba often tried to out jazz each other while stretching the English language far beyond the imaginations of the language's custodians. Others, such as Lewis Nkosi and, later Nat Nakasa, found a space to test drive their brand of cerebral reporting, blending wit with ice-clear political observations. As for the rest, Bloke Modisane, Arthur Maimane, Themba, all the coastal boys - except for the rigid Ezekiel Mphahlele - hid their sharpest wounded feelings beneath a typically playful township comic stance and wordplay. Later in exile, they all, except for Themba, who died in Swaziland, went on to play significant activist roles that apartheid authorities were fooled into thinking was far from their minds in the boozy 1950s.

After Themba's death, his friend and former colleague, writer Lewis Nkosi, said this about him:

Can Themba's actual achievements were more disappointing because his learning and reading were more substantial, and his talent proven. Still, he chose to confine his brilliance to the journalism of an insubstantial type. It is almost certain that had Can Themba chosen to write a book on South Africa, it would not only have been an interesting and to use an American word 'insightful' book, but it might have revealed a sophisticated and refined talent for verbalising the African mood, and no doubt such a book would have been a valuable addition to the literature of South Africa. As it is, we mourn a talent widely misused or neglected; we mourn what may have been. However, to have known Themba, to have heard him speak, is to

have known a mind, both vigorous and informed, shaped by the city as few other minds are in the rest of Africa. (Nkosi, 1985, p.72)

I agree with most of Nkosi's appraisal of Themba's life. However, I think he was wrong about his talent being 'largely misused or neglected' because Themba's stories are still influencing new writers fifty years on.

It is not wholly clear what inspired his stories, but I sense that personal experiences triggered some of them. For example, in 'Crepuscule ', his protagonist is dating a white girl, a fact which displeases his former girlfriend who is quick to run to the police to report him. Though, thanks to his restlessness and sudden suspicion, he and the white girl manage to evade the police that night. Writings about Themba's life, including the obituary Lewis Nkosi composed for his funeral, confirm that Themba did, indeed, have an affair with a white British woman while he was living in Sophiatown. It was that affair and his excessive drinking that led to the loss of his job at Drum.

Although most of his stories were humorous, Themba also wrote serious, thought-provoking pieces, dealing with socio-economy problems affecting many people in the townships. *Kwashiorkor*, for example, was meant to shed light on a sensitive topic: extreme poverty. Likewise, *Terror on The Train* was Themba's way of addressing a set of issues afflicting the black community, to which the apartheid government had long decided to turn a blind eye. These pitfalls included: lack of education, cultural and religious discrimination, overpopulation, unemployment, and rampant corruption.

HENRY 'MR DRUM' NXUMALO

Born in Port Shepstone in 1917, Henry Nxumalo was the eldest of seven children. When Henry was at school, his father died. The family was short of money. However, Henry wanted an education, so he worked in the school kitchen to pay for his school fees. After leaving school, he briefly undertook domestic work, which he hated. So, he left Durban and headed for Johannesburg, where he soon found work in a boilermaker's shop. During his free time, Henry wrote for the 'Bantu World' newspaper. The same newspaper then offered him a job. The job offered was not what Henry was hoping for. He wanted to be a writer, not a messenger boy. Eventually, he summoned up the courage and told his bosses that he wanted to write. After a while, they let him write, and he wrote about sports.

Then in 1939, the Second World War began, and Henry joined the army. He went from Egypt to England, where, for the first time, he saw a new world – a world without apartheid. Henry forgot about 'Europeans only'. He made friends with British people and other Black people in England. Then the army sent Henry back to South Africa. In Johannesburg, although challenged by racial boundaries, Henry resumed working for a newspaper and pursuing his passion for writing.

There were few publications for black readers, and the ones that existed were either too small or controlled by white business interests. However, everything changed for black journalists in 1951 when Jim Bailey took over *Drum* with Anthony Sampson as editor. Henry was initially appointed as a sports editor and later promoted to assistant editor. He had a clear vision of what he wanted to achieve with *Drum*: a tradition of investigative journalism that had not existed in South Africa before. He often risked his life to get the full story. He believed he was contributing to the process of change Africa so desperately needed. His articles, written under the pseudonym 'Mr. DRUM' exposed many cases of exploitation and humiliation. Henry's first big story was about the lives of farmworkers in Bethal.

In 1952, Henry, posing as a farmworker, went to Bethal. There he spoke to 50 workers who shared their distress with him. They complained that the farmers were cruel and had tricked them into signing contracts. He also visited the workers' compounds, which he would later describe as looking 'like jails: 'they have high walls. They are dirty. They are often next to a cattle kraal. The workers breathe the same air as the cattle' (Nxumalo, 1952). After a few days, Henry contacted Drum and asked for a photographer. The photographer took pictures of the farms, the compounds, and the farmers with their whips. When he returned to Johannesburg, Henry went straight to work and wrote an article based on his findings. He entitled the article 'Bethal Today'. The story appeared in the next issue of Drum, and all copies sold out. The government did not react well to the story. The Prime Minister accused Drum of writing the story 'to make trouble'. Even more distressed were the farmers in Bethal. They did not want people to read how they treated their workers, so they bought hundreds of magazines and burnt them.

After the story about Bethal, the farmers treated their workers a little better. People also learnt about the danger of contracts. Mr Drum wrote more stories about farmworkers. He visited the wine farms in the Cape and sugar farms in Natal. He wrote stories about the workers on these farms. Mr Drum told the world about the suffering of people in South Africa. Henry also wrote stories about life in the town. One of his stories was about gangs and *tsotsis*. There were many famous gangs like 'The Russians' and 'The Americans'. Henry and other Drum journalists wrote about the gangs. The work was dangerous; the gangsters often wanted to kill the *Drum* journalists. But the work on gangs was sometimes funny. Drum wrote a story called 'Clean up the Reef'. The story said the police must clean up the gangsters and *tsotsis*, and the police decided to listen to the story. They arrested hundreds of *tsotsis* and gangsters. One night the police arrested Henry during a 'pass' raid, and he spent the night in jail. The jail was full of *tsotsi*. Henry asked the warder

what was happening: "Ag, haven't you read Drum man? We're cleaning up the Reef", the warder said.

Henry's next famous story was about jails. In 1954, he set about exposing conditions in the 'Fort' (the Johannesburg prison I write about in my novel). He had himself been arrested as a past offender and was sentenced to five days imprisonment. His first day was spent weeding the lawns of a nearby college. He wrote that when he slacked off, the old white warder, who was carrying a big riffle, 'slashed me on my bare legs and said, "*Ek donder you, kaffir*".

Back at the Fort, he and the other inmates were told to strip and do 'tausa' jumps - leaping and spinning, while clapping and landing in a crouch to dislodge anything hidden in the rectum. When Henry did not perform the *tausas* correctly, the white warder hit him on the jaw. His story was published under the headline 'Mr DRUM Goes to Jail'. The photographer Bob Gosani took pictures with a long lens from a block of flats opposite the prison. The story resulted in the conditions of the prison improving for a short time.

Unfortunately, like so many of his colleagues, Mr DRUM turned to drink as his coping mechanism, and his binges often lasted days. However, in his case, alcohol had nothing to do with his death. His determination to change society through his writing was his ultimate downfall. Mr DRUM was murdered in 1957, aged only 39. He was stabbed to death in Newclare, near Coronation Hospital while investigating a backstreet abortionist. His murder was never solved, but, according to Sylvester Stein, Drum's editor from 1955-1957, a petty criminal later admitted to killing him after being paid £25 by an 'unknown white man'.

ALEX LA GUMA

La Guma was another notable 'anti-apartheid' writer who contributed immensely to the revolution against Apartheid in South Africa. He became involved in politics from an early age and, in 1956, was arrested for treason along with one hundred and fifty-six others. He was acquitted of the charges four years later. During the state of emergency following the Sharpeville massacre, La Guma was arrested again and detained for five months. Continuing to write, he endured house arrest and solitary confinement. In 1966, La Guma left South Africa as a refugee and moved to London, where he lived in exile until he died in 1986. *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories* unveiled him as one of the most high-ranking African writers of his time. The collection exposed the plight of non-whites in apartheid, South Africa, laying bare the lives of the poor and the outcasts who filled the ghettos and shantytowns.

Born and bred in Cape Town, Alex La Guma was the son of a coloured politician. At a young age, Alex joined the Communist Party and became a member of the Cape Town District Committee Party until the Nationalist Government banned it in 1950. The following year, he was one of 156 men and women of all races who were rounded up by police all over the country and flown to Johannesburg to stand trial on a charge of treason. In December 1962, La Guma received a notice confining him to his house for twenty-four hours a day. The only visitors permitted were his mother, his parents-in-law, a doctor, and a lawyer who had not been named or banned. Another condition of his house arrest was that nothing Alex La Guma said or wrote could be reproduced in any form in South Africa.

This promptly led to the banning of *A Walk in the Night*. The book, published in 1962 by Mbari Publications in Nigeria, became a forbidden reading for all South Africans. However, through smuggling, a few copies of the debarred paperback managed to make their way into the country and were surreptitiously passed from hand to hand. The book won instant recognition as

a work of talent and imagination. In 1966, La Guma left the country on an exit permit. It is safe to assume that the South-African authorities were only too pleased to be rid of him.

A Walk in the Night provided fictional insights into what life in Cape Town's District Six and, by extension, in other South-African ghettos was really like. About the same time, his stories were beginning to find their way into journals like *Black Orpheus*, so that it was finally possible to consider his work in terms of quality and weight.

The characteristics which make La Guma's fiction so compellingly accurate and immediate are not merely its fidelity to its source material - a life of complete, naked brutality under a repressive regime - but the quiet exactness of its tone and the adequacy of its correct pressure. In *A Walk in the Night and Other Stories* (all set in Cape Town's notorious District Six). The stories examine issues of poverty and are charged with captivating characters such as Willieboy, Mikey, Miss Gipsy, and Raal). Reading the anecdotes, it is easy to be struck by the stunning precision of La Guma's observations and his bare-limbed canniness of prose. The ever-critical Lewis Nkosi had this to say about La Guma's writing:

La Guma is exceptionally cool. He shows the pace of a lithe dancer or a boxer in good shape. Every muscle is tight, spare, equal only to the job at hand. Equally tough-minded and self-assured, he does only what any good novelist does and no more, which is to see and see clearly. After seeing it, he records it faithfully, but it is his ruthless selection of what counts that makes him, finally, a superb artist. What makes La Guma stand out is the excellent, creative way in which he handles dialogue. I see this as his significant contribution to South African fiction in English. He gets into the English dialogue, the Afrikaans' accents and rhythms of the Cape Malay. Besides that, he gives authenticity to Johannesburg in *A Walk in the Night*, by his selection and accumulation of details about the lives of coloured people - all those gestures, accents of voice, and seamed lineaments

of faces, the suppressed, wanton gaities of District Six – which defy the surrounding drabness. It is as if La Guma were holding a movie camera on Hanover Street. (Nkosi, 2016, p.87)

In 1969, three years after arriving in London, Alex La Guma was granted the Lotus Prize for Literature.

BLOKE MODISANE

'Bloke' Modisane was born William Modisane on the 28th of August, 1923. He was the eldest son of Joseph and Ma-Willie Modisane and grew up in Sophiatown, a multiracial suburb near Johannesburg, South Africa. His father was murdered and, a short while later, his sister died of malnutrition. To support the family, Ma-Willie started running a shebeen. As Modisane would later write in his autobiography: 'My mother wanted a better life for her children, a kind of insurance against poverty by trying to give me a prestige profession, and if necessary, would go to jail whilst doing it.' (Modisane, 1963, p 32)

In the 1950s, Bloke joined Drum magazine as a journalist and became one of 'the Drum Boys' along with Henry Nxumalo, Can Themba, Es'kia Mphahlele, and Lewis Nkosi. The fifties were Drum's prosperous years, and it was during that period that Bloke Modisane was also taken on the role of jazz critic at Drum's sister publication: the weekly tabloid Golden City Post.

It is rumoured that his nickname 'Bloke' was inspired by a character in the Leslie Charteris novels. Modisane tried to facilitate nonracial progress in the arts by making concerts and theatre

available to Black audiences and tried to further the efforts of the Arts Federation and the Union of South African Artists, both of which were nonracial.

Bloke wrote several short stories that were published in *Drum*. One such story, 'The Situation', derived from the *Tsotsitaal* (slang) for educated blacks who rise above their station (i.e., situated above their station) but do not fit into their new milieu. Don Mattera mentioned this when describing the journalists: 'There was a definite class division. We were in the streets, and they were at the desks. And we used to call such people situations.' (Mattera, 2007, p. 34) Bloke found an outlet in acting. He joined the African Theatre Workshop and played in the first production of Athol Fugard's *No-Good Friday* (1958). One year later, he co-wrote *Come Back Africa*, filmed in Sophiatown that same year. Becoming frustrated by the political situation and oppression under the apartheid regime, Modisane moved in 1959 to England, wherein 1963, his autobiography, *Blame Me on History*, was published. This detailed his despair at the bulldozing of Sophiatown mirroring Can Themba's short story *Requiem for Sophiatown* and his frustration and anger with apartheid. As a result, the book was banned in South Africa in 1966.

Modisane continued acting and had a leading role in Jean Genet's *The Blacks* at the Royal Court Theatre in London. He appeared in an uncredited role in the 1964 movie 'Guns at Batasi', which starred Richard Attenborough, John Leyton, and Mia Farrow. In the 1968 action classic 'Dark of the Sun', Modisane had a small but memorable supporting role as Corporal Kataki, a sensitive soldier caught up in the rage and horror of the 1960s Congo civil war. This particular film starred Rod Taylor, Kenneth More, and Yvette Mimieux. It was a major box-office success when first released.

In the early 1960s, Modisane settled in Dortmund, West Germany, where he died in 1986 at the age of 63. Banned when it was first published in South Africa in 1963, Modisane's *Blame's* biography, *Me on History*, an account of life as a black in South Africa in the 1940s and 50s, is

still for me one of the most vivid and insightful reminiscences of apartheid. As he remembers his youth in Sophiatown, his survival tactics, the deaths of his siblings by starvation, and his father in a brutal gang fight, he returns again and again - as a refrain - to the last days of Sophiatown whose eerie emptiness echoed his internal alienation and sense of futility during the darkest days of apartheid. In his evocative style, he paints a picture of the vibrant shebeen culture of Sophiatown and some of its famous and notorious inhabitants but without the romantic gloss of some writers. His lack of romanticising is refreshing, as well as his inclusion of graphic descriptions of the casual violence and lawlessness of gangs - unrestrained by the white police - who terrorised the community.

He was one of a team of black writers, first for the Golden City Post, then for Drum magazine before becoming an actor and playwright. In 1958, shortly after the bulldozing of Sophiatown, Bloke turned his back on South Africa and headed for West Germany. *In Blame Me on History* Modisane substantiates his sharp sense of the terrible ironies and absurdities of apartheid, as well as a wealth of historical and political details of South Africa in the 1950s and 1960s. He provides a fascinating, sobering, and illuminating window on the experience of a black intellectual trying to survive in South Africa in the 1950s.

NAT NAKASA

Nakasa was a former *Drum* writer and founding editor of the Johannesburg literary journal, *The Classic*. Like most of his colleagues at *Drum*, he died in exile. His death, though, was by his own hands. Nakasa, aged just twenty-eight, decided to end his life by jumping out of his friend's New York apartment window. He had been at Harvard University as a Nieman Fellow for just under a year, having left South Africa on an 'exit' visa, after being denied a passport by the apartheid government. After his fellowship ended, Nat attempted to extend his visa but was

denied. Unable to return home, he found himself in a treacherous limbo and fell into a deep depression. Lonely and feeling homesick, Nat had lost all hope and started drinking heavily, and on one July morning in 1965, he decided that his life was no longer worth living.

'His death,' wrote former friend and colleague, Lewis Nkosi, 'removes one of the most eloquent voices in African journalism' He went on to testify that Nakasa represented something unique in African life: only industrial South Africa could have produced a personality as urbane, sophisticated, and paradoxical. His ambiguity and irony that were such deadly weapons, not only in his writing but also in his confrontation with a unique brand of white stupidity, were bred by the city and developed with an exclusive brand of finesse.

Nakasa's stories were later compiled in *The World of Nat Nakasa: Selected Writings of the Late Nat Nakasa*. What stands out most about his stories is the wit, but I suppose this is what made him a 'Drum boy'. A razor-sharp sense of humour and street-smart, jazzy language is the common thread that tied those gifted men together. Nakasa was often compared to Themba. Although their writing style is not quite the same, there is a similarity in their love of irony and satire. Indeed, Lewis Nkosi seems never able to speak about one without mentioning the other.

LEWIS NKOSI

Nkosi was born in Durban, but he left the sleepy town at the age of 19 and headed for the bright lights where he believed he would enjoy an exciting life as a writer. Soon after arriving at the city of gold, he landed a job as a writer at Drum, a magazine he later described as 'not so much a magazine as it was a symbol of the new African cut adrift from the tribal reserve - urbanised, eager, fast-talking and brash' (Nkosi,). Shortly afterwards, he embodied an even newer African cut adrift even from his continent and found himself living in exile in the US after leaving

his native land on an exit visa to study as a Nieman Fellow. Later, Lewis Nkosi would move to New York, which he found to be 'the loneliest city in the world'.

Hence, it is not surprising that Nkosi sought to remake his 'home' through writing and language, space and place, in which he was free to construct 'home' to be anything he wanted it to be. Similarly, and possibly for the same reason, Miriam Makeba chose the concert stage as her home place, because 'this is the one place where I am most at home and where there is no exile' (Makeba,1988). Exile as a multifaceted concept, and hence requires a radical redefinition, reinterpretation, and modification as a term for dislocation, as it has moved away from a strictly political definition to include a wider cultural and economically driven displacement. Exile is not only a division between the self and others but is also a manner of perception from the margins of another world. As Nkosi observes, modern exile is not exclusively confined to 'the massive displacement of peoples from their homelands but can also be found in specific forms of silencing opposition without expulsion' (Nkosi, 2016, p.112).

Nkosi refers here to a form of exile that was imposed through the gagging orders under the Suppression of Communism Act in South Africa. Hence, exile as a history of spatial displacement is often driven and enforced by political forms of power. Defining 'exile' in terms of postcolonial concerns has remained a complex and important intellectual debate for theorists, particularly due to the multiple and variegated evolution of this ambivalent term. No two writers or intellectuals think of exile in the same way. Perhaps Stephen Slemon's modality of the terms 'colonial' and 'post-colonialism' in his essay 'The Scramble for Post-Colonialism' (1995) can serve to define the term 'exile' and the displacement experience in describing exile:

Postcolonial theories often fail adequately to include the cruel realities which inscribe the concept of exile and the rhetoric of exit, displacement and return - the many expressions of this state of being encapsulated in attenuated labelling:

separation, expatriation, banishment, deportation, eviction, disruption, acculturation, integration and estrangement being a few. (Slemon, 1995: p. 86)

Suleiman logically puts it in a nutshell: 'in its narrow sense, political banishment, exile in its broad sense designates every kind of estrangement, from the physical and the geographical to the spiritual.' (Suleiman, 1995, p.97)

This implies that the experience of forging a new cultural identity inclusive of the personal, the national, the ideological, and the historical, is wholly dependent on the individual's understanding and interpretation of his/her new cultural context. Bhabha, it would seem, advocates a move away from markers, such as race, class, and gender, as primary conceptual categories, promoting instead the in-between spaces which are produced in the articulation of new strategies of selfhood as an alternative (Bhabha 1994: p. **). Thus, the concept of exile is much like the exiled subject, a dynamic organism thriving on the interstices of the social and the political, and continuously reinterpreted and modified by the exiled subject. As he was later to admit, in defence of the vagaries of exile, 'new spaces are also an arena for forging new identities'. Nkosi's critical reviews and literary contributions reflect not only a personal engagement with division and loss but engage with the complexities common to all troubled societies living under segregation.

His polemics seek to expose the politics of literature through argument and debate and, in doing so, his writing creates new ways of seeing. His often acerbic, dissonant yet principled voice has enriched the nouns of black literature, both locally and internationally, with his sharp creativity and skilled craftsmanship with words: 'What we need in South Africa is a vocabulary which bears witness to our diversity as a people, but which may also do more, securing us as an individuality, a sense of repose in our completeness as a nation'. In many ways, exile enabled Nkosi to realise his potential as a writer, a creative energy which perhaps would have been lost

to the literary world had he remained in South Africa to become just another apartheid casualty. There are other South African exiled writers, irrespective of race, such as Breyten Breytenbach, Es'kia Mphahlele, and Perseus Adams, who speak for the exiled writers when they attest to their banishment experiences as not being altogether a punishment, but rather, a spiritual boon. Adams' experience was much like Nkosi's: for no other reason than being a black person, Nkosi was denied a social space during his formative years in the broader South African community. 'Home' to Nkosi was the townships, which, he asserts, were created mainly for people like himself, not those who did not have to live there, but for those displaced there.

Always writing from the double borders created by the spaces between continents and straddling two worlds, that of the dispossessed exile and the lettered world of academia, Nkosi outlived all of his colleagues at Drum, although, like most of them, he spent many years (thirty, to be precise) in exile. He died in 2010, still a very opinionated man even at the age of seventy-five. In South Africa, irony was used as a defensive stance. One cannot defeat a brutal and oppressive regime, but irony can assist for a while in concealing the pain and wounds until the anguish becomes unbearable. Nakasa's tortured soul finally could not contain or hide the pain any longer through employing irony, and he saw suicide as his only way out. Themba, on the other hand, never got to make that agonising choice: the alcohol did it for him. Those who knew him well say he always disguised his pain behind a devil-may-care attitude, together with a prodigious reliance on alcohol as a drug. His drinking was phenomenal, they say. I say his writing was even more so.

To summarise, the deaths of all those writers from the apartheid era or 'golden age', as they liked to call it, were wasteful, although the brilliant writing they left us will continue to inspire young authors. Discussions on cultural identity often cite Stuart Hall's explanation that there are two different ways of thinking about the subject. The conventional approach views identity in terms of a shared culture, a collective 'one true self' hidden inside many other, superficially or artificially

imposed 'selves' which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in stock (Hall, 1993, p.77). For previously colonised cultures, unearthing such an essential identity is an essential part of their creative self-discovery. In the case of South Africa, the rise of white Afrikaner nationalism, in reaction to British imperialism and the Anglo Boer War (1899–1902), was the result of the deliberate construction of an Afrikaner cultural identity. In turn, the rise of black counter nationalism in the second half of the century was likewise based on reclaiming cultural values that had previously been muffled.

ES'KIA MPHAHLELE

Es'kia Mphahlele was the first black fiction editor of *Drum*. However, he felt that *Drum* did not deal seriously with social issues and that it was not in the proprietor Bailey's interest to produce substantial content because of his investment in white South African business, especially the mines. Notably, *Drum* never did a story on conditions in the mines. Mphahlele resigned in anger when Bailey insisted on cutting the fiction section, which had been a standard feature of *Drum* for years, and, in Mphahlele's opinion, an essential contribution to black cultural life.

Ndebele has argued that this cultural dialectic produced South African literature in the 70s and 80s of white villains and black victims, which replicated the reductive binary mind of the racist hegemony. This hegemony is repeated in my novel, which is located within that specific temporal space. Moreover, in this liminal space, identity, self, and black nationalism are explored. The second perspective from which to examine cultural identity, according to Hall (1993), is based on critical points of profound and significant difference and separate histories of rupture and discontinuity. From this perspective, cultural identity is not a fixed origin to which we can return,

but rather 'the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture' (Hall, 1993, p.66).

Bhabha argues that hybrid postcolonial cultural identities are formed in the liminal spaces between cultural differences in postcolonial criticism. According to Schabner(2017), we use narrative structures to order experience, self-narrativity being a nontrivial issue because ultimately all we have are our experiences, which occur over time. The challenge is how to make sense of them - that is, to determine whether there is a relationship between our experiences, and if so, what that relationship is, and to determine what meaning can be attached to those experiences. Narrativity is the notion that we see or experience our lives as a story, or, at least, in a narrative fashion. Schabner, however, disagrees, pointing out that these views emphasise the product and stated that we take 'a classical narrative arc as a model for our lives as we try to order our experiences' Schabner, 2017. 106) However, life is not static; it does not resemble a motion towards some end in Aristotelian terms but could be viewed as a process subject to transformation.

5.3 The emergence of Black South African writers

Blacks could not own property but were able to obtain freehold rights in certain parts of Johannesburg. In 1921, Sophiatown, which was relatively close to the Johannesburg city centre, was made available for freehold tenure for blacks. From the 1930s, there was rapid population growth in the area and was both a multiclass and a multiethnic community. By 1950, Sophiatown had a population of 40,000 people. Around it, Johannesburg's white residential suburbs were also growing, and Sophiatown was always under the threat of removal to make way for development.

On the other hand, Sophiatown, unlike white Johannesburg, was a place where races could mingle, parties were held, and its shebeens, music, celebrities, and gangsters became

legendary. Rabkin calls it the birthplace of a new urban society (Rabkin, 1975: p.89), and Gready compares it to St. Petersburg of nineteenth-century Russia, with its 'gnarled' and 'surreal' modernism (Gready ****: **). Literature by black South African writers was marginalised in the canon of traditional literature and occupied a liminal space. Marginality and liminality are so closely related that some theorists use them interchangeably. Turner does that also, but he makes a technical distinction, labelling as 'liminal' as the change element in the interstices of a structure, while the marginal works at the structural edge. Both of these concepts, interstices and the structural edge, will be referred to in relation to works by South African writers and by myself.

Turner's primary interest was in the second series – the spatiotemporal. He concentrated his study on time spent in the liminal spaces outside of structures: 'What I call liminality, the state of being in between successive considerations, is a sphere or domain of action or thought rather than a social modality.' (Turner, 1967, p 97).

CONCLUSION:

It was designed to silence, destroy, punish, annihilate and by banishing writers, the Censorship Act achieved its end. Like Matilda, who could not relate her reality, the banned writers in exile were denied a response, displaced in the ultimate liminal space without context and meaning, and from which there was no hope of return. In exile, with his writings banned in South Africa, Themba was denied dialogue. For many, such as Nat Nakasa and Themba, death was the only escape.

In 'The Suit' there are clear parallels between Philemon's treatment of Matilda's transgressions and the South African government's treatment of its black citizens' 'trumped up' transgressive behaviour. The power imbalance in 'The Suit' reflects that of the all-powerful state with its licence to punish the defenceless. In this story, Matilda has no voice; she is invisible, both to her husband and the reader. We only see her as quiet and obedient just as the government expected blacks to be. Her attempts at appeasing her husband fail to bring absolution, as Philemon shows no intention of exonerating her. What we see is the gradual destruction of Mathilda through a state of intensifying liminality – one which leads to being wholly silenced and self-concept, separate identity, independence, and agency annihilated. We see Matilda carrying the suit just as blacks carried their passes. Failure to carry the suit was punishable, as the failure to carry a pass was punishable. Matilda is 'exiled' to an existential space in which she, suit in hand, is the only inhabitant, and she has no means to relate her experience. The story portrays the macabre dance between the oppressor and the oppressed until the situation becomes untenable to the point where death is the only escape. 'The Suit' has a prophetic quality. It foreshadows the annihilation of the voices of the Drum boys, as well as thousands of other black writers and activists.

According to Turner, liminality is one of the three cultural manifestations of *communitas* - it is one of the most visible expressions of antistructure in society. Even though it is the antithesis of the structure, dissolving structure, and perceived as dangerous by those in charge of maintaining systems, it is also the source of design. Just as chaos is the source of order, liminality represents the unlimited possibilities from which social structure emerges. While in the liminal state, human beings are stripped of anything that might differentiate them from their fellow human beings - they are in the social structure, temporarily fallen through the cracks, and it is in these cracks, in the interstices of social structure, that they are most aware of themselves.

For black South Africans, no such return was possible. My argument is that black South Africans were forced, through legislation, into a liminal space politically, legally, economically, socially, and geographically. Stripped of all political power and indeed the power to participate in a structured society, they occupied the geographical areas on the margins of white settlements. The name 'Soweto' is a syllabic abbreviation for South Western Townships. As Soweto is located to the South-West of Johannesburg, it derived its name from its spatial relation to a white settlement.

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