

**CHAPTER TWO: THE WRITING BENEATH THE WRITING: GCINA
MHLOPHE: A STORY-PERFORMER FOR AN EMERGENT
AUDIENCE.**

The production history.

Have You Seen Zandile? (2002a) was first performed at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg in 1986, and subsequently in Edinburgh, London, and Switzerland by the original cast – the main author and Thembi Mtshali (with Maralyn Van Reenen directing) - and then in Chicago and Tennessee by local actors and on BBC Radio – the African Drama service. The latter was a one-woman show - Mhlophe performing and narrating a shortened version of the play. The main author and the play won three awards: one in Chicago, one for the BBC production and one at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe – a Fringe First. The play is revived by school students in South Africa from an edition published by Kwa-Zulu/Natal University Press.

The dominant African and the ignored or repressed Khoi and San cultures?

Gcina Mhlophe regards herself as “one of the masses” (Perkins 1998:81), by which she means, using their own jargon, the urban and rural black people of South Africa as seen by politicised militants of the liberation struggle. These militants included those who in the 1980s’ criticised her modern folk-play *Have You Seen Zandile?* for not being serious enough (*ibid*). To put these responses into historical perspective: she writes, tells stories and performs in the

vein of a long pre-colonial tradition stemming from the communal societies of the Iron Age pastoral/agricultural Bantu-speakers of Southern Africa. The Bantu-speakers arrived about 1500 years ago from the north and in great numbers from the 16th century. They displaced and absorbed the New Stone Age Khoi and San pastoralists and hunter-gatherers. Evidence exists of the Khoi and San presence from as long as 20,000 years ago. The Khoi and the San were Africans with a different cultural and economic ethos occupying Southern Africa before the Iron Age immigrants, before the Dutch *trekboers*, before the British destroyed perhaps 250,000 of them and their way of life. The Khoi and the San, like the Bantu-speakers and later Europeans were direct descendents of *homo sapiens* which evolved over millions of years in east Africa.^{1 2}

Perhaps ignoring the Khoi and the San traditions which were available to her in anthologies (Gray 1968) or maybe repressing them in an historical amnesia in what we have already noted Jameson (*op. cit.*) calls the prison house of language³ Mhlophe sustains and modernises the Iron Age Xhosa *iinstomi* –

¹ See fns. 1-17 in Leonard Thompson (1990) pp. 248-249. See the Lydenburg terracotta heads dated 520 CE in Manaka 1987:30.

² That the “Bushmen” were regarded as subhuman or more exactly wild animals: M. Wilson and L.M. Thompson (eds. 1971) *The Oxford History of South Africa*. Vol 1 and Shula Marks (1971) cite whole campaigns of genocidal commando actions undertaken by whites and “Basters” against the San and the Khoi throughout recorded history in the struggle for land and domination: the more technically developed social systems exterminating the original hunter-gatherers who preceded the European and black immigrants and were ecologically perfectly adapted to the environment before these irruptions. For an unsentimental Afrikaner discourse concerning Dutch genocide and mutual brutality see the pseudographical *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee* in J.M. Coetzee’s *Dusklands* (1974). Only after this genocide and resistance were commando raids and outright battles conducted against the African Iron Age pastoralists, who, rendered landless, were necessary for and found they had to adapt to a white agricultural and industrial economy as a proletariat after land reservation, and diamonds and gold were discovered in the Victorian period. Further, they were too numerous and too advanced militarily to be totally exterminated. Mhlophe’s “Bantu Education” history at school would avoid this.

³ Thus in *HYSZ?* the grandmother tells Zandile a Christianised story concerning the origin of spiritual and actual death - pagan limbo for the sinner, with the common motif of the dead or the banished having to suffer alienation in the moon. In the modern Zulu version the moon has a

tales usually told by women around the fireside at night or on special occasions during the day. The purpose was to entertain and edify both children and adults.

Harold Scheub the great ethnographer of the Xhosa puts it this way:

The *ntsomi* is an organic extension of the [pre-colonial] culture from which it springs; it is the image of the perfect society, preserved through the years and daily renewed in performance. The performer is the intellectual in this oral society, she is the educator. But she is also an artist, and she desires to project an image that is at once a reaffirmation of her own inherited ideals, an extension of her culture, and - most important - a thing of beauty. These cannot be separated in performance ... The *ntsomi* performance is not only a primary means of entertainment and artistic expression in the society, it is also the major educational device.

Scheub (1975: 88)

According to Scheub rather than expressing herself analytically and descriptively in the words only, the performer prefers to make ample use of body movements, gesture, vocal dramatics, song, and an over-all rhythmic framework, which can never be captured by the written representation (Van Niekerk 1990:18, referring to Scheub *op.cit.* p.45). Scheub avoids comment on the redundancy of the traditional, unmodernised Xhosa tale as a declining phenomenon today and its existence as a layer of discourse covering up previous archaeo-historical layers of Khoi and San cultures.⁴

We have the script and stage directions of Mhlophe's play and her prose

Christian hegemony over the Christian Sabbath. However in the San version the spirits of the dead go on living in the moon and their realm is seen in the crescent of the new moon of hope, not frozen in the baleful full moon. See *HYSZ?* (Mhlophe 2002a: 12-14) and compare with the San oral narrative *The Origin of Death* (anthologised by Annemarie Van Niekerk 1990: 29-31 from W.H.I Bleek and L.C.Lloyd 1911 and 1968). Gray's 1968 anthology reprinted which contained San and Khoi poetry was widely available in South Africa. It is unlikely that a multi-lingual poet would not have known consciously about pre-Bantu speaking literature. The two legends are analysed again below pp 148ff.

⁴ Scheub might have added: "... an educational device which is also a means of repressing or transforming knowledge of conquered peoples living in the very territory claimed by the Xhosa story-teller". See additional later comments in this chapter (pp. 148-150 & fn35) on the way the Gogo *Zandile* perhaps unknowingly transformed a San legend into a Zulu legend told to Mhlophe/ Zandile. It is possible that Mhlophe would by the time of her politicisation know about San genocide and its cultural-ideological implications.

and poetic pieces (Mhlophe 2002a,2002b) as well as numerous reviews of her performances and a BBC CD of a radio broadcast of the play as a one-woman dramatised narrative (1986 and see Bibliography and Appendix). We are able therefore to piece together her acting and writing in the context of the modern post-colonial or rather what some might regard as a neo-colonial New South Africa - by no means a modern democratic and ordered society as understood in the west.

The coexistence of populist political and *naïf* writing in Mhlophe.

Mhlophe is well-educated in Western-style popular writing and children's literature. She does not pretend to write "within the canon" of a world feminist literature like Alice Walker whom she admires, but whom, as she said in a final interview with the researcher, off the record, on 30/04/90, in the inspiring and dangerous days on the eve of the New South Africa, she cannot emulate.⁵

Nevertheless the pertinent question remains. Politically minded people regard her as a powerful woman (Perkins *op.cit*). Why, they ask, is she writing what she writes, which is essentially for children, the young at heart and no doubt for those not fully literate in the sense of an international written literature? The latter may be orally articulate within a local culture and an indigenous language as well as in demotic English. Implicit in her folk-play is the question as to why one should take seriously what those like Nadine

⁵ See the Appendix "Interview and comments on Gcina Mhlophe's 'real life' and fictional intertexts" at the end of the Bibliography.

Gordimer regard as *naïf* writing⁶. Gordimer, being white and of European cultural origin although a Nobel prizewinner for literature, can be dismissed by adherents of militant black consciousness. But if not dismissed the answer must be not only with Harold Scheub but in terms of the appeal to adults of a modernised fairy-story with overtones of Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel and the Wizard of Oz fused into a indigenous Southern African romance of individual development, a kind of black girl's *bildungsroman* on the stage. This is a legitimate collection or fusion of genres in its/their own right. This is especially so with the genres' ideological overtones of individualistic feminism, not often manifest *on the stage*, although Bessie Head (1972, 1974) and Tstitsi Dangarembga (1988) had written or would write in this genre in the form of the novel in, respectively Botswana and Zimbabwe. In South Africa the "typical" black woman novelist was perhaps Miriam Tlali (1979) a black consciousness writer who put black solidarity ahead of women's individuality without neglecting the suffering of individual black women *but treating them as part of a group*. Mhlophe's accent and stress was new in the context of an already highly polarised South Africa bordering on civil war in the black townships and the white suburbs in the 1980's exactly because apartheid was in crisis and groups were solidifying.

Mhlophe had already written about "the masses" in the *persona* of her life unemployed, as a factory worker and as a maid in Johannesburg, and reflecting back on the fate of her maritally raped half-sister in the rural Transkei. If we want to use the white western analogy in *naïf* writing, she was a kind of

⁶ Personal communication 1990.

Cinderella not sentimentally but actually so, because she *was* a Cinderella – a neglected, deprived person. And, like Cinderella by dint of the Real equivalent of fantastic magic - through a remarkable degree of literacy, creative talent and skill at networking - she was able to break into journalism, educational radio and acting at the Market Theatre. She became a person *in her own right* not as a prince's wife, as in the fairy-story. The prevailing tone of her interviews with the researcher and with journalists (see Appendix) – not her stories of her early struggle which are often fierce and gloomy - her personal “text”) - is that she feels that what she is too modest to call her courage and integrity – her “hope” perhaps - had a positive outcome for her in her struggle for individuation. Again I use the white western language of literature-psychology. By the way, Bettelheim suggests that this approach may be relevant in so-called pre-literate societies in Africa.⁷ This characterisation does not do justice to the very different cultural ethos of the African folk-story. However, as Bettelheim and ethnologists of folk-lore have long maintained, this particular theme is present in literally scores of languages all over the world. On the other hand as Zipes (1979 *passim*) has pointed out, the way the modern fairy-story is used is often as propaganda for parents modelling the ideal, conformist child.

Populist womanism in split genres

Perhaps one way to approach Mhlophe is to put aside any definition of what is dramatic literature as rateable on a league table of aesthetics or feminism and see her theatre first of all as something valid in itself – perhaps more in the

⁷ See Bruno Bettelheim (1978/1991: 236-277) on the psychodynamics of “Cinderella” and “Aschenputtel” and his fn on p. 285 of his book on the universality of fairy-story themes including in pre-literate African societies.

genre of what Alice Walker calls “womanism”⁸ – a variety of black feminism which puts the problems of even abusive and exploitative black men and black women – in Mhlophe’s case her abusive mother – into perspective.

Unfortunately I personally will not succeed in being entirely non-judgemental either aesthetically or in terms of my understanding of what social realism *could* offer *Zandile* morally (pp 165ff and 169ff below). But we can see her play *Zandile* as part of her autobiographical journalism. Her prose journalism is much “heavier” politically than a folk-genre could sustain. The play’s strengths and weaknesses in terms of social realist truth values are exposed in a hidden way – that is as an inscription of another, partly-realistic, partly-psychoanalytically-received, partly-hidden ideological discourse thrown into relief by considering the genres in relation to each other, although Mhlophe keeps them apart. Is that a weakness or a strength? In either event it is a fact. If she did bring them together an aesthetic of literary depth might become more “objectively” relevant.⁹

After her very early “Cinderella” experiences – including the threat of a

⁸ Walker uses the term in some editions of *The Color Purple* in the introduction and in *In Search of Our Mother’s Garden: Womanist Prose* (1981).

⁹ The psychoanalytic account of *an aspect* of literature may be ideological or it may be a master-discourse depicting the limits of representation and finitude as Foucault suggests. See Foucault’s perspective in the Preface of the dissertation (Foucault 1974: 374). “The aesthetic” unless believed in as a self-validating myth in its own right *and* giving pleasure is perhaps *also* an ideological by-product of a class of creative intellectuals such as Gordimer within a growing urban and industrial society, and a by-product of the loss of an satisfying, purifying, transcendental “organic” relation between art and any earlier society in the history of Western civilisation in Europe and now in economically developed parts of South Africa. See Terry Eagleton *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (1990) and *Literary Theory* (1983) on what is (defined as) literature. The fairy-story or folk-tale even with elements of popular “girls and women’s” (romantic) fiction can be seen as a palimpsest covering what Mhlophe as one of the urban and rural masses discovered in a much rawer form: painful isolation, alienation, loneliness. Bettelheim (1991) sees the fairy-story as a rehearsal for psychological development in adulthood. However see Zipes (1979) qualification about the way the modern fairy-story is used as “health” propaganda in child-rearing.

forced marriage in early adolescence, Mhlophe went to a boarding establishment, Mfundisweni High School where she achieved her matriculation in 1979. This was when she was 21. It was there that she was apparently “saved”. It had become a “Bantu education” school in the Transkei. It was originally part of a British missionary school system in the Eastern Province and Mhlophe used it to her best advantage. Somehow *English* as a medium of instruction to some extent survived without having to be fought for, whilst as I showed in Chapter One, in the townships of Johannesburg and the Cape the school students were battling the police in the streets against the imposition of *Afrikaans* from 16th June 1976. Her saviour, she implies, was a father-figure Father Fikeni, who helped her use her literary gift. Of this kind of stimulus and of her innate potential most working class and rural women in South Africa were and are still deprived or do not discover. Still today in the post-1994 New South Africa poorer men and women suffer extreme inequality of access in the virtually segregated schools of the largely black rural and township urban areas¹⁰ . It was only after this apparently sound basic foundation at high school

¹⁰ The great inequalities under apartheid and in the post-apartheid eras in all spheres of South African life have been documented extensively. See *The Oxford History of South Africa* Vol. II (eds M. Wilson and L.M Thompson) 1971 concerning segregation and apartheid and Leonard Thompson *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999 and 2001) on the transition years. But by dint of talent, work on her writing and good luck in whom she met in Johannesburg after her matriculation from high school Mhlophe escaped the extreme hardship to which the social structure would have condemned her and the majority of young people in her position. Some of her writings appear in anthologies which indicate the wide spread of Mhlophe’s appeal as an “icon” to white liberal and black consciousness intellectuals, to black and white feminists in South Africa and overseas. Perhaps in young educated and clever black women rested the symbolic hope for an escape from the breakdown of 1985 – the war in the townships, caused by P.W.Botha’s “total onslaught” and the prospect and actual process of economic implosion due to the overseas economic and financial boycott.

Perhaps Mhlophe became an icon because she articulated quite clearly and yet sympathetically the emotional and physical poverty of her life in the Transkei from which she escaped to many literary and political audiences e.g.: “Nokulunga’s Wedding” “The Toilet” and “My Dear Madam” in *LIP from Southern African Women* (ed. S. Brown et al 1983), pp 82-83; Mthobe Mutloatse (1983) *Reconstruction*, pp180-198 ; Anne Oosthuizen (1987) *Sometimes When it Rains*: pp. 1-7, 8-9, Annemarie Van Niekerk, (1990) *Raising the Blinds*, and Andre Brink

that her talent and hard work enabled her to transcend “Bantu education”. Then she came to Johannesburg from the Transkei to “seek her fortune” – again putting it into *naïf* western-type genre terms.

Mentors

As a praise-poet at school she performed at first not at all in the vein of the modern polemical black poets of Southern Africa, but in the traditional mode. Of course. This was a Bantu Education school with a missionary tradition in a rural area and Father Fikeni would not have encouraged contact with the emerging literature of black consciousness. Mhlophe mentioned to the researcher in the interview of 9/03/90 later mentors like Zora Neale Hurston, A.C.Jordan as well as Alice Walker who influenced her only after she came to Johannesburg in about 1979/80. It was after she worked as an unknown member of the actual black masses – a servant and a factory worker - that she came across the contemporary South African black playwright Maishe Maponya (in whose play *The Nurse* she had a leading role when she was talent-spotted as an actor-performer for the Market Theatre). Maponya is a black consciousness writer and like many black theatre people of this period adheres to a very heightened social realist vein espousing a black viewpoint enlivened with song and dance. But in this literature she did not immerse herself totally. She arrived after the heyday of Wally Serote, Sipho Sepamla, Oswald Mtshali, and Miriam Tlali. The white radicals were probably of even less interest to her - the

J,M,Coetzee (1986) A Land Apart, London: Faber & Faber, 38-45. These stories and poems are collected in Mhlophe's (2002b) Love Child . Her main play is the 1988 Have You Seen Zandile? Braamfontein : Skotaville, 1987 reprinted 2002a. HYSZ? is also on a video made in Chicago on a tour of the play in c.1986/7/8. There is a one-woman show based on the play, called Zandile made by Mhlophe and recorded for the BBC World Service Radio Drama for Africa in c.1986.

surrealist poet Breyten Breytenbach, the intense and profoundly lyrical Ingrid Jonker, J.M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer and Doris Lessing with their width and depth in perspective as novelists, Lewis Nkosi as a critic. These writers appear to be outside her ambit. Apart from the writers already noted¹¹, however, she does mention Bessie Head, Njabulo Ndebele and Es'kia Mphahlele without discussing them.¹²

She was introduced to the traditional praise-poet by Father Fikeni at Mfundisweni, and she feels that this event changed her life. Although she lived in the Transkei during her middle childhood and adolescence, she never came across *Xhosa female praise poetry* (Mhlophe 2002b:8 but see Gunner in Cherry Clayton ed. 1989). There was every reason for her education in an apartheid-controlled syllabus to be purged of a fuller scholarly concern for traditionalism or a subversive polemic – the latter came later. Besides, she wanted to get through her exams and leave. Her education was being paid for by her half-sister who worked in Johannesburg as a domestic servant. She had learned the Zulu form of the female folk-tale from her paternal grandmother near Durban in middle childhood and retained the form throughout her Xhosa- and English-language secondary education in the Transkei and it became part of her livelihood.

¹¹ Hurston, Jordan, Walker.

¹² See the individual novels, collections, studies or anthologies by Doris Lessing (1961), Oswald Mtshali (1971), Robert Royston (ed. 1973), Jacques Alvarez-Pereyre (1979), Mothobi Mutloatse (ed. 1980) Tim Couzens and Essop Patel (eds.)1982, Michael Chapman and Achmat Dangor (eds. 1982), Lewis Nkosi (1983), Stephen Gray (1985), Nadine Gordimer (1973), Dovey (1988 on J.M.Coetzee) and Ingrid Jonker (1988), for references to these writers in the black African context.

When she and her group wrote and performed *Zandile* Mhlophe had not put aside the romances and agony-aunt psychology of women's magazines like (in South Africa) *Bona* and *Fair Lady*. Why should she? Millions, perhaps billions read pulp fiction throughout adolescence and adulthood or watch their equivalent in the form of soaps and sit-coms on TV and Hollywood and Bollywood movies. Popular girls' and women's fiction leaves its mark on her plays and other writing insofar as her output is also modernised, consumer-conscious but still *naïf* (low-brow) "folk"-stories situated in the competitive market amongst the advertising of women's cosmetics, clothes and agony aunts purveying the latest brand of sexual / social skills knowledge in the guise of female wisdom.¹³

There is also Christian Puritanism, as in Cinderella in many of its variants. In her biography and stories ugly and greedy white women and indeed her mother, figure as objects of fear and sources of irrational cruelty, eventually punished. Mhlophe eventually came to terms with a harsh, exploitative and emotionally punitive mother in a spirit of Christian reconciliation. This is cleverly combined with the militant spirit of the 1980's - evidenced in "The Dancer" (1988) reproduced at the end of this chapter.

"Undertexts"

Her journalistic stories, then, such as "The Toilet" (2002b) and "My

¹³ See the scenes in *Zandile* in which the protagonist and her friend Lindiwe as young adolescents discuss menstruation and pregnancy about which they know nothing scientific (perhaps caused by a water-snake) and are then fascinated to learn from a girls' or woman's magazine that criminal behaviour is not necessarily (genetically?) inherited. See Goodman (1993) who finds the whole play "charming" and written in a traditional folk-genre, without noting the strain between modernity and the mythological in Africa. Cf. Kathryn Hughes (2008) on popular western women's publications where the mythologies may be different.

Dear Madam” (2002b) may derive from real life “undertexts” for the portrayal of the cruel mother and white female employers who all take on the aspect of the malignant Other. But, additionally, she describes how she sublimated her way out of unwanted Other entanglements. She describes in *Lovechild* (2002b) how she avoided sexual and emotional affairs at the boarding high school, became the academic high achiever rather than the one the favoured rugby player from Port Elizabeth wanted to have as his girl friend (Mhlophe 2002b:3). And in accord with the intention of “Bantu Education” she seemed at *that* stage effectively cut off from the politicisation which in the mid-70’s swept centres of apartheid education – especially in the Eastern Province – the heartland of Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement. (Biko’s home was not far away in King William’s Town). But what was an undertext in her journalism (“Nokulunga’s Wedding”, “The Toilet”, “My Dear Madam”) becomes an overtext in her womanist polemical poetry.

The *chora*.

At this point it should be interpolated again: she came to praise-poetry experientially without knowing the whole range of this art-form in any academic way. She says her art became like a child to her. I interpret this to mean that it is generated as a result of sublimation but from the *chora*, a womb-like sense of gestation, the semiotic unconscious described by Kristeva – a transforming moment like “having a first baby” (Mhlophe 2002b:8) although of course this is also a conscious event. It is the *fantasy* of having a baby to which she compares her initiation into the oral-literary-performative role.

Toril Moi summarises Kristeva's position on literary creativity not of women alone but of all artists:

The semiotic is linked to the pre-Oedipal primary processes, the basic pulsions of which Kristeva sees as predominantly anal and oral; and as simultaneously dichotomous (life v. death, expulsion v. introjection) and heterogeneous. The endless flow of pulsions is gathered up in the *chora* (from the Greek word for enclosed space, womb), which Plato in the *Timaeus* defines as 'an invisible and formless being which receives all things and in some mysterious way partakes of the intelligible, and is most incomprehensible' [...]. Kristeva appropriates and redefines Plato's concept and concludes that the *chora* is neither a sign nor a position, but 'a wholly provisional articulation that is essentially mobile and constituted of movements and their ephemeral stases Neither model nor copy, it is anterior to and underlies figuration and therefore also specularization, and only admits analogy with vocal or kinetic rhythm'

Moi 1985: 161-162

I felt baptised as a poet too. I think I wanted to say something clever, but all I could do at that moment was smile and fidget with my button-holes. The [praise-] poet went on to talk with other people, who called him Cira.

It was a Monday afternoon and I was lying on my stomach in my favourite spot under the black wattle trees when I wrote my first poem. I'd never had a child, but the great feeling that swept over me then was too overwhelming for words; I wondered whether that's how people feel when they have their first baby. I sat up and read it out loud. I liked the sound of my own voice, and I liked hearing the poem. I put the paper down and ran my fingers over my face to feel my features - the smile that wouldn't leave my face, my nose, my cheekbones, my eyes, my ears - including the pointy parts at the top that made my ears look like cups; I even felt my hair and I liked that too. For the first time, I liked the texture of my hard curly hair and my face didn't feel so ugly - everything just felt fine. My voice sounded like it was a special voice, made specially to recite poems with dignity. Resonant - was that it? That's the day I fell in love with myself; everything about me was just perfect.

I collected my books and the towel I was lying on, stood up and stretched my limbs. I felt tall and fit. I felt like jumping and laughing until I could not laugh anymore. I wanted tomorrow to come so that I could go and buy myself a new notebook to write my poems in. *A woman praise poet - I'd never heard of one, but what did it matter? I could be the first one!* I knew Father Fikeni would agree with me. I couldn't wait to see his face when I read him my poem. Across the fence, a big red cock flapped its wings and crowed loudly at me, as if in agreement.

Mhlophe 2002b:8

Apartheid had succeeded in depriving not only Mhlophe but Father Fikeni of the knowledge that were other women praise poets (Gunner in ed. Clayton 1989 *op. cit.*). But the New South Africa, before it had even fully

arrived, had succeeded in giving this initially uncertain, gifted woman confidence in herself, her sexuality, her gender, her creativity. Yet, again, apartheid had initially “succeeded” in cutting her off from not only traditional women’s praising but the contemporary war-songs/war-dramas that overlap with black consciousness theatre, and stem as much from Kristeva’s semiotic, the pulsations of the *chora*, the pre-oedipal, the oral, the anal, the phallic connection with the symbolic through identification with imperial Shaka and revolutionary Biko as she was identified with Cira the male-praise poet she had just heard and by whom she was “baptised”. In her polemical womanist poetry she reaches out into women’s transcendent place in time by simply denying patriarchy - as evidenced by this genre of poetry in her collection *Lovechild* (Mhlophe 2002b).

A male Imaginary and a male Symbolic: black consciousness and anarchism

What follows is part of a “poem-dra” by Mothobi Mutloatse a dramatic praise-song updated in honour of revolutionary, anarchist, delinquent children and young people, activists in the 70s’ and 80s’ using violent hyperbole, oxymoron, extremes of simile, obscenity, self-deconstructive logic designed to conscientize (politicise/radicalise). Thematically and stylistically this is quite the opposite of Mhlophe’s agenda but also connected to the semiotic in pre-oedipal, oral and anal modes – literally and violently so with no phallic connection to any rational symbolic world other than conscientization – but to what end? There seems little thought of a post-revolutionary programme, policy or settlement other than the non-existent pre-lapsurian anarchist paradise - content against which Mhlophe reacted ideologically by anticipating the

liberal/conservative individualistic culture of the New South Africa – without breaking an implicit united front with black brothers. Mutloatse also describes the birth of a child and initiates creativity through psycho-social development linked to literary form:

From: Ngwana wa Azania: a poemdra for oral delivery

- From ages two to four he shall ponder over whiteness and its intrigue. From ages five to eight he shall prise open his jacket-like ears and eyes to the stark realisation of his proud skin of ebony. From ages nine to fifteen he shall harden into an aggressive victim of brainbashing and yet prevail. From ages sixteen to twenty-one he shall eventually graduate from a wavering township candle into a flickering life-prisoner of hate and revenge and hate in endless fury. This motherchild shall be crippled mentally and physically for experimental purposes by concerned quack statesmen parading as philanthropists.

[...]

- This marathon child shall trudge barefooted, thousands of kilometres through icy and windy and stormy and rainy days and nights to and from rickety church-cum-stable-cum-classrooms with bloated tummy to strengthen him for urban work and toil in the goldmines, the diamond mines, the coal mines, the platinum mines, the uranium mines so that he should survive countless weekly rock falls, pipe bursts, and traditional faction fights over a meal of maize that has been recommended for family planning.

- This child of raw indecision and experimentation shall sell newspapers from street corners and between fast moving cars for a dear living breadwinning instead of learning about life in free and compulsory school, and shall provide the capitalistic country with the cheapest form of slavery the labourglobe has ever known and the governor of the reserve bank shall reward him with a thanks-for-nothing-thanks-for-enriching-the-rich kick in the arse for having flattened inflation alone hands-down.

[...]

- This child shall breastfeed her first baby before her seventeenth birthday and be highly pleased with motherhood lacking essential fatherhood. This child of uneasiness shall trust nobody, believe in no one, even himself, except perhaps when he's sober. This ghettochild shall excel in the pipi-olympics with gold and bronze medals in raping grannies with every wayward erection and eviction from home resulting from ntate's chronic unemployment and inability to pay the hovel rent.

[...] This nkgonochild shall recall seasons of greed and injustice to her war-triumphant and liberated Azachilds. This mkhuluchild shall pipesmoke in the peace and tranquillity of libertarion, and this landchild of the earth shall never be carved up ravenously again and the free and the wild and the proud shall but live together in their original own unrestricted domain without fear of one another, and this waterchild shall gaily bear its load without a fuss like any other happy mother after many suns and moons of fruitlessness in diabolical inhumanity.

[...]- This growing child of the kindergarten shall psychologically avoid a school uniform admired telegraphically by uniformed gunfighters of maintenance of chaos and supremacy. He shall smother moderation goodbye and throttle reason in one hell of a fell swoop, and the whole scheming world shall cheer him up to the winning post with its courage in the mud and its heart in its pink arse. This child of dissipation shall loiter in the shebeen in earnest search for its parents and shall be battered and abused to hell and gone by its roving parents when reunited in frustration in an alleyway.

- This child of bastardised society and bastard people-in-high-office and colour-obsession of paranoid of communism and humanism, shall break through and snap the chain of repression with its bare hands, and this child with its rotten background and slightly bleak future shall however liberate this nuclear crazy world with Nkulunkulu's [God's] greatest gift to man: ubuntu [humanity].

Mothobi Mutloatse in Chapman and Dangor (eds.) 1982: 178-180

Nothing could be further from Mhlophe's individually generated creativity than the poetry and theatre of black brothers like Mothobi Mutloatse in the townships. For Mhlophe, Mutloatse's revolutionary anti-white anarchism has to change. Only when the New South Africa arrives does she confront the failure of the black government and black men (Perkins 1998 *op.cit*). By then it is too late. Mutloatse's delinquent children are now the criminals in the tsunami of crime with which the new South African government has to deal.¹⁴

“Struggle” literature during apartheid in the late 1970's and 1980's

The political praise-poets of the Soweto group in the anti-apartheid struggle of the later 70's and 80's were, by and large, men who fought the state by word of mouth, through magazines like *Staffrider* and *The Classic* (often banned) and by poetry made available in hand-outs and up against the guns,

¹⁴ See the crime blogs in Helen Zille's Democratic Alliance newsletter available on the internet in 2008-2009 and entries in R.W.Johnson (2009) on crime and corruption in post-apartheid South Africa.

hippos and Saracens in the streets and through their novels published by Ravan Press and Ad. Donker also subjected to state censorship. In the townships radical theatre groups like Workshop '71 were prosecuted or banned.¹⁵ The state was actually or indirectly supported by “white-rags” (*witdoeke* – their headgear signifying their allegiance to tribal groupings, often Zulu or Xhosa rural men) and opposing them but befitting from anarchy were street thugs or psychopathic activists hiding behind or working with or intimidating the comrades of the UDF and the BCM. Militants conducted executions (“necklacing”) of “sell-outs” (Coetzee 1990: 39,49) concerning which respectable working class parents remained grimly silent, giving assent (*ibid*). Activists, whether criminals or artists, promoted civil war involving the comrades of the United Democratic Front and the Black Consciousness Movement versus black nationalists / traditionalists / the state. Chaos ensued in some townships as, in the confusion, criminal gangs benefited from state repression and the people’s counter-repression. But resistance to P.W. Botha’s hopelessly anachronistic reforms of the mid-1980’s led into the eventual victory of the New South Africa – for good or ill – much of it still bearing the horrific traces of bloody chaos, lawlessness and anarchy (Theroux 2008). Perhaps anticipating the ungovernability of resistant black South Africa much of the victory was the result of a negotiated exit by the white regime (Sparks 1990: 256-267, Thompson, 1999:228-230, Hadland and Rantao 1999: 57-76). In some intuitive way the whole tone and tenor of *Zandile* seems to foresee this on-coming settlement – pre-figuring pacification at least at the top of the system in the process of reform and a transfer of power. *Zandile* seems as Goodman puts it

¹⁵ See Orkin (1991): 171-182

(1993:174-175) a piece of partly-comic feminist story telling. It is that, but it can also be re-defined contextually as a feel-good comforter for very hard times.

Ideologically it goes further than that.

Earlier resistance theatre culture

Mhlophe is different from the intellectual, liberal white middle-class academic or artist, different from the radical, fully politicised, black intellectual class who played such a large role in the Sophiatown “bohemia” of the late 1950’s – people like Lewis Nkosi, Bloke Modisane, Todd Matshikiza, Can Themba, Nat Nakasa. These were all men, although guiding forces included Nadine Gordimer and the *King Kong* group. These were all part of a very articulate African cultural grouping. They responded to Athol Fugard’s theatre and a world literary and musical canon. Their writing and the later theatre and literature of “middle apartheid” was written within American and European literary and theatrical paradigms as well as from South African cultural models. A later generation were highly influenced by them and by their sources which included Brecht, Beckett, Artaud, Peter Brook, Joan Littlewood, Jerzy Grotowski, and what Fugard himself and Barney Simon were doing at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg and what Fugard, Brian Aston, Yvonne Bryceland and Robert Amato were doing at the People’s Space Theatre in Cape Town. These men and Yvonne Bryceland indigenised such theatre in terms of the South African liberal or radical struggle against apartheid and involving brilliant actor/workshop co-initiators like John Kani and Winston Ntshona.¹⁶

¹⁶ See Gray ed. 1982: 40-51,57-62, 190-197, 202-223, Vandenbroucke 1986:156-203,Walder 1984: 75-95.

New resistance theatre of women and men in the 80's

However there were also, later, other women writers, directors and actors like Clare Stopford (1985), Reza De Wet (1985/6), Phyllis Klotz and actor/workshop participants in the Sibikwe Players such as Thobeka Maqutyana, Poppy Tsira, Nomvula Qosha (1986), Aletta Bezuidenhout (1989) and Susan Pam-Grant (1989).¹⁷ Another equally important later stream of South African theatre was black theatre per se – the original drama-writing of someone like Zakes Mda who includes in this genre the work of black consciousness writers like Maponya, Matsamela and Manaka (Mda:1990, Solberg 1999) and Miriam Tlali (1979) in the field of the novel and reportage. As I have tried to show in Chapter One Fatima Dike crosses genres and writes literary theatre and populist theatre which is both anti-apartheid and post-apartheid in its scope and style.¹⁸

¹⁷ See Bibliography for these actor/director/writer/workshop participants' plays and see details of the researchers interviews with them in 1989-1990.

¹⁸ See Chapter One. Dike is widely published (e.g. *So What's New?* in Kathy A. Perkins ed.1998: 23-46 and *Glasshouse* in Martin Banham et al 2002: 132-153.). It is worth reiterating our summation of her work in this context. Her second play *The First South African* (1979) is structurally and thematically far richer, complex and more involving than Mhlophe's second play *Somdaka* (1989). Unlike Mhlophe Dike deconstructs the writing beneath the writing of apartheid identities: "African", "Coloured", and "White" which is the writing inscribed in her own life growing up as the relative of shopkeepers in and around Langa township and educated at a Catholic boarding school – perhaps "catholic" in its intake or ethos as well as involving a classical education. She posits an anti-hero, an abjected and then abject man (Kristeva 1982: 1-31). Zwelinzima (called significantly by his peer group "Rooi"= "red-haired" which associates with "red"= "pagan,blanketed, circumcised") is the original Adam (*adama*= "red earth" in *Hebrew*) who produces Cain who along a genealogical line produces Noah who produces Ham – but a different Ham – Ham the outsider, a white appearance of a genetically brown man. Beneath his white "looks" Rooi speaks Xhosa and lives with his Xhosa speaking African mother in an urban township before and after his initiation ceremony. He develops into a kind of holy (mad) fool. He and only he is the first South African (see p.1of Dike *op.cit.*cf. the closing scene).

By contrast *Somdaka* which means "proud to be dark" is a simpleton and remains one neither holy or mad surrounded by his beloved birds and butterflies making trendy clothes for cool guys who have been migrant workers. *Somdaka* is unable to understand what a bomb is yet he is surrounded by newspapers with photographs, transistor radios and even TV sets even in the rural Transkei which broadcast the censored news from the SABC in the African languages – news which would still have wanted to give out information about the dreaded ANC and other terrorists. See p. 149 ff, below. Perhaps the author is fixated by a childhood dream in a genre

The anti-sexism of a new artistic class

However women in the bohemian Sophiatown culture of the 1950's tended to be patronised as sexual objects, as chicks, though perhaps less so in the growing Congress/UDF and Black Consciousness movements of the 1970's and 1980's of which Workshop '71 (see Kavanagh 1985) and Miriam Tlali are admired examples. Women like Mhlophe, Dike and the white feminist playwrights of the '80's never deny their female-ness, but assert it as having equal status to male-ness – something one would not have heard in the offices of the magazine *Drum*, during rehearsals for the famous 1959 musical *King Kong* and even perhaps in Fugard's makeshift theatre workshop in Dorkay House in Jo'burg. Kavanagh gives the impression that there and in Sophiatown the leading intellectuals and theatre entrepreneurs of the day referred to “their” women as dolly-birds (women like Dolly Rathebe and Miriam Makeba perhaps). The late Bloke Modisane hated his wife, the grand-daughter of Sol Plaatje who was one of the founders of the ANC, and detested his cultural roots which included “half-naked women with breasts as hard as green mangoes” (*Blame Me on History*:178; quoted in Kavanagh 1985: 61 and see Kavanagh op.cit pp 59-112 for the “maleness” of this period of South African theatre

which cannot handle adult violence, politics, social change *per se* except at a very simplified personal level which almost avoids what Bernstein (op. cit.) calls an elaborated code. One might speculate psychoanalytically: the presence of Mtshali and Van Renen in the *Zandile* workshop group may have held Mhlophe to a reality from which perhaps she tried in *Somdaka* to escape in a possibly regressive or manic denial of the depression that may have scarred her own experience of the Transkei. *Somdaka* was written, she told the researcher, after a period of mourning for her mother. This mother whom she and her siblings found difficult (see Kathy A. Perkins 1998 op cit: 81) had perhaps so damaged her childhood by the kidnapping or collusive relocation in which her father and step-mother must have been complicit (see the final scene of *Zandile* where a neighbour admits that the extended family wouldn't tell the beloved grandmother where *Zandile* had been placed) – that regression and denial would be natural mechanisms of defence against the breaking of basic trust.

history).

The continuing prevalence of sexism in theatre

So it is clear that the leading politicised intellectuals, journalists, media personalities, politicians, and academic critics who joined in the early anti-apartheid theatre projects were often recorded as male in identification rather than black people speaking with black women. Fatima Dike and Phyllis Klotz (a white woman) and her group of black performers the Sibikwa Players who produced *When You Strike a Woman You Strike a Rock* (1986) were exceptions even in the 1970s' and '80s'. In the 1950s' and until this latter period black and white men influenced the part that Fugard's work would play politically – whether or not there would be a cultural anti-apartheid boycott of South African theatre and music, when it should be reversed and why, how and through what genre there should be a politicised theatre in South Africa and overseas.¹⁹ John Kani and the *Staffrider* group were typical of a hard line on the cultural struggle that ignored the views of Mhlophe and Dike (Oliphant 1988: 54-61 cf. what Mhlophe and Dike were saying 10 years later in interviews with Perkins 1998 *op. cit.* and Blumberg 1999 *op. cit.*).

¹⁹. The black men would probably include ANC cultural officials in exile in Europe and Africa, people like John Kani in Port Elizabeth and the pro-Congress and Black Consciousness Movement writers and intellectuals in South Africa, white men such as leading Actor's Equity members in England and the USA, Barney Simon of the Market Theatre and Robert Amato and Brian Astbury of the People's Space. His wife Sheila, Mary Benson in London and at a distance actors like Vanessa Redgrave seem to be the women involved at the heart of Fugard's dilemma – Ella Fitzgerald's music was already being electronically used by the SA state propaganda machine and films written by John Osborne and Robert Bolt – playwrights supportive of the cultural boycott - were already playing in cinemas. At one point Fugard thought that "subversive plays" from Europe might do more good than the harm caused by compromising with the apartheid regime, that is, by bolstering opposition. See Athol Fugard *Notebooks 1960/1977* (ed. Mary Benson) 1983: 158-179.

The autobiographical background of Mhlophe and the political context

The essence of the researcher's writing about Mhlophe's life as an avowedly autobiographical author²⁰ is this: despite the cultural acceptability in African society of adoption and fostering of children by the extended family, the following psychological events probably occurred: they are part of the unwritten writing beneath the writing of the *naif* play:

(1) it must have been traumatic to be suddenly separated from her biological mother as a small child which she recounts after a recorded interview although the play says nothing about the exact age as to when this happened (Picardie 9/03/90 in Appendix). This separation she recounts was followed by a train journey from Durban to Hammarsdale, then a freehold largely African township near Durban. On the train others in the carriage thought her accompanying father had abducted her – such were her violent protests.

(2a) Then again at about 10-12 she was separated from her second destination(s), her stepmother and father nearby and above all

(2b) her grandmother's direct care – all of them living in the township of Hammarsdale. Even more traumatic, this separation (2b and 2a), was probably experienced as sudden and violent by Mhlophe whether

²⁰ As suggested by Perlman's interviews and Pobrey's review – see Bibliography and Goodman's review as well as the subtitle of the play in Perkins (1998) edition: "A Play Originated by Geina Mhlophe and Based on her Childhood" But often we seem to be dealing with what Tomasevskij calls "an ideal biographical legend" [to be differentiated from the writer's CV or the investigator's account of her life]. See Tomasevskij "Literature and Biography", *Readings in Russian Poetics: Formalist and Structuralist Views*:55 quoted in Susan Gardner and Patricia Scott (1986):5 in relation to Bessie Head's real and fictional life.

negotiated by all the collusive adults or whether it was an abduction as in *Zandile* and because it separated her from a known environment

(3) to a totally unknown environment and

(4) conducted by a virtual stranger - her biological mother in the form of a negotiated but secretly complicit and collusive removal or as a result of an abduction, or both. Whatever it was it may have broken her sense of basic trust.

We know from psychological research that the effect of four such losses of attachments to totally alien environments carried out even by relatives who have become virtual strangers *can* but do not *always* affect personality – sometimes creating a state of not-being-able-to-believe-in-other-people – in extreme cases “affectionlessness” – or at least anxiety and depression – (Bowlby 1971, 1981 and Rutter 1981 *passim*).

To pose an obvious question: is all this to be laid at the feet not of individuals and families but at the door of apartheid and the system of extreme deprivation to be found in colonial and post-colonial Africa? Or, a new question, tragically, do some “individuals” become “the system” and the post-colonial system so that responsibility for atrocious behaviour can never be allocated because the whole idea of the individual is forever altered, shifted, evaded, hidden behind what becomes corrupted ideology and discourse as in the New South Africa where the liberators become the new corrupt and incompetent elite

and can get away with it by playing the race or the class card indefinitely whilst enriching or aggrandizing themselves^{21 22}? To reiterate: in one vital scene Zandile's mother justifies herself but keeps shifting the blame onto circumstances when we know that she is cruel and actually stupidly cruel – and only becomes cleverly cruel when she realises she can get more out of an educated daughter than one she exploits for bride-price.

Mhlophe does not evade responsibility for depicting her mother's (short-sighted) cruelty. The author fights for individual responsibility but on the whole does not condemn anybody in quite the way that a researcher into the autobiography of an abused child, freely abused, might want to do. Her life-story as perceived by Mhlophe is a search for the self-confidence of which her history robbed her but concerning which her writing re-compensates her (Perkins *op. cit.* 81).

²¹ RW Johnson “Zuma almost home and dry: despite a long list of corruption charges Zuma's future presidency is a near certainty” guardian.co.uk August 04 2008 21.30 BST: “[... But] Zuma is not more corrupt than a whole raft of ANC politicians. Yesterday the Sunday Times (Johannesburg) published allegations that President Mbeki received a R30m (£2m) bribe from the arms deal. Mbeki's office denies this but there is no suggestion of a presidential libel writ. Second, the wild threats of Zuma's supporters essentially reflect the fact that they all assume that provided their man becomes president they will all gain greater power, nice jobs and a chance to get their hand in the till. They feel they have earned this by successfully defeating Mbeki at last year's ANC conference in Polokwane and any threat to a Zuma presidency is therefore seen as a belated and illegitimate attempt to prevent them from joining the gravy train. They are not really making points about the rule of law or the judicial system so much as declaring their sincere determination to become rich.”

²² RW Johnson “An ugly situation is developing on South Africa's university campuses where a witch hunt is threatened, with white academics as its likely victims...To appreciate the situation one must begin with the huge drop in national morale caused first by the election of Jacob Zuma - a semi-literate on trial for corruption - as president of the ruling ANC, ” guardian.co.uk Tuesday March 18th 2008. This is from Helen Zille, leader of the Democratic Alliance's newsletter *South Africa Today* 16th September 2008: “[Zuma] is facing allegations of 783 counts of bribery over 10 years involving R4,2-million.. Zuma has done everything to avoid his day in court in order to gain the power of the Presidency. If he does become President, it is likely that he – more so than Thabo Mbeki – will abuse the office to protect and enrich himself and his clique. Cadre deployment is one of the key tools of abuse.” See also Alex Duval-Smith

Whether autobiographical or not what is remarkable is that so theatrically successful a play is not fully corroborated as living truth despite the very active presence in it of political discourse especially in one vital scene between Zandile and her mother, embodying the central issue of modernisation versus African traditionalism as corrupted by apartheid. (See Tomasevskij quoted in Susan Gardner and Patricia Scott 1986: 5 on the “biographical legend”.)

Perhaps the gaps in the writing were not clearly perceived initially because the play was not initially written at all but improvised in a workshop situation by a group of three including its co-actor Thembi Mtshali and its director Maralin Van Renen. What might be experienced aesthetically as sentimental and melodramatic effects were apparent to some critics (e.g. Venables 1987) but not to other adult audiences who saw it world-wide and awarded it or its main author the prizes it won²³. Those very virtues of sweetness and charm and *implicit* political discourse commended themselves to those overseas and local audiences who were by 1986 sated with the “clichés” (but also uncomfortable half-truths) of South African political theatre – bad whites who cause suffering and good blacks who endure it. Here at least was a black woman prepared to try to change the men’s scenarios. The men’s scenarios were also sentimental and melodramatic but hugely relevant politicised scenarios. Her scenario was another one – the individualisation of

²³ The author and the play won three awards: one in Chicago, one for the BBC African radio drama production and one at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. See Mhlophe et al 1987 for the original performance history of the play.

female African identity through a *naïf* genre.

The improbabilities of the plot and the fairy-story aspects of its style are probably all the more appealing to the children and adolescents for whom the play seems to be revived now – according to publicity about it and about Mhlophe’s other current children’s writing (see Mhlophe’s works in the Bibliography).

However Mhlophe’s earlier prose and poetry contains a harshness of realism and a lyric feeling experienced by a young woman in transition. Further – and this is the main theme in the present analysis - this other writing is subliminally - semi-consciously or unconsciously present in the play – or such is the researcher’s contention.

The theme of *Have You Seen Zandile?*

Making the play more dramatic, starker, more like a folk-story in accordance with Mhlophe’s chosen *naïf* style²⁴ is perhaps the motive for transforming Mhlophe’s “relocation”²⁵ into an abduction by the biological mother in the play *Zandile*. In either case, in life, and in the play, there is only an implicit exploration of the family’s responsibility – hence the uncertainty as to whether it was an abduction or a relocation with which the father and stepmother may have colluded. At the end of the play after the death of the grandmother we are told that “they” (the rest of the family) wouldn’t tell the grandmother where

²⁴ Again see her publications as a writer and performer of children’s stories fns. 6, 8 and 14.

²⁵ Noted in the autobiographical note on the opening page of her second volume of work *Lovechild* Mhlophe 2002b

Zandile was, so she couldn't go and find her and bring her back (Mhlophe 2002a: 61). This has the advantage of being like the *naïf* motivational structure of a folk- or fairy-story where bad things just happen, can't be avoided, but it ends happily. Zandile has been to high school, obtained her matriculation and is determined to be a praise-poet/writer thus fulfilling the grandmother's aspirations for her. Yet the grandmother didn't resort to the police or a social welfare agency to find the kidnapped child. The play deliberately avoids this kind of social realism. Instead the aggression of the kidnapping mother is dramatically but *naïf*-ly explicit and the passivity of the good grandmother dramatically but *naïf*-ly implicit. And yet despite the simplicity of motivation and the way in which attention is directed away from the complexity of individuals we are forced to think about the exigencies of family breakdown which required this "relocation" under the impact of the mother's rural poverty and the system of migrant labour in South Africa. She stole her child back to get bride-price from the family of a rich but ugly bridegroom by means of a commercialised corruption of arranged traditional marriage. But the mother's poverty is suddenly realistically intruded to implicitly destroy or erode the responsibility of adults for a stable environment guaranteeing children's welfare and happiness. This does provide a realistic theatrical clash between the good (grand)mother and the bad (biological) mother. An exemplary avoidance of open polemic about this very issue forces one to "fill in" in the absence of fully self-conscious narrative writing. This absence is perhaps also an example of the "de-familiarisation" we come across in the gothic horror of the folk-story – what Freud called "the uncanny" – in this case the strange and horrible disappearance of the familiar environment under the spell of a witch-like figure who displaces

the loving (grand)mother-figure and holds the child spiritually and actually captive. This turn in the plot is the aggressive *chora*, the death-wish of the mother to exploit the child and even allow the child to be psychologically “killed” in an arranged marriage soon after puberty with which Zandile is threatened in return for good bride-wealth (*lobola*) and the security of a traditional marriage supported by the village community.

The fictional mother who abducts the child justifies herself with a rationalisation: wanting back her flesh and blood, and, partly, because of the deprivations of apartheid and her failure in the city, arguing that getting the child married to the richest boy in the village at the price of an education and further education or training in the city even at the painful cost of the destruction of the child’s main maternal attachment to her grandmother – *is in the child’s own interest*. This dishonesty and greed in the mother must have something to do with the reactionary nature of a decayed traditionalism which exploits love for possessiveness and money. We don’t know if apartheid destroyed a more equitable state of affairs in pre-colonial Africa when this didn’t happen since the ethic of gender equality was unknown. But because we do live in a gender-sensitive world the unconscious and the pre-conscious are drawn in to make up one’s mind as to what is really happening. Throughout the ages the folk- and the fairy-story at least in Western Europe by which Mhlophe is obviously influenced, dwells on the romantic and lasting nature of maternal or paternal or sibling or erotic love as compared with exploitative, fearful or greedy emotional possession and slavery. There are overtones of Hansel and Gretel and Cinderella in the theme which are in turn strongly evocative of the struggle of the ego to

survive the depredations of the id projected out into the bad-mother/witch compared unfavourably with the fairy-godmother in Cinderella and the mother in Ashputtel (see Bettelheim 1991 *passim*).

A *naïf*, cunning, ignoring or repressing silence on the link between the personal and the political/historical characterises some of Mhlophe's work – at least in her group-devised theatre-piece *Zandile* and even more so in her individually-authored *Somdaka* also premiered at the Market (1989).

The plot and the story as *chora* and symbolic interaction

In the first scene (Mhlophe 2002a: 1-5) Zandile aged 8 has two mirror-images: the “real” but unseen and purely reflective Nomusa her friend with whom she comes home from school in Hammarsdale, near Durban, on her way home to her grandmother. Nomusa and Zandile gossip about a boy who was beaten by the teacher for being naughty in class. Zandile imitates the sound of the cane on his backside and the sound of the other children laughing. Then when Nomusa goes Zandile becomes sad and then plays hop-scotch with pretty stones and sings about the mothers coming to bring rice, cake and sweets to their children. She imagines her grandmother bringing her sweets and pops a stone into her mouth. Another mirror image, Bonggi, an entirely imaginary companion laughs at her for mistaking a stone for a sweet. Zandile in an unconscious witticism wonders if Bonggi lives in Zandile's house, why she hasn't seen her before? But the imaginary companion may be what Winnicott (1974: 126) called a transitional object in the potential space between the longed-for narcissistically needed mother and hard reality. Lacoue-Labarthe (1977) and Lyotard (1974,

1983) have described this theatrical de-realised space in related terms. The plunge into pre-conscious or unconscious space in the “mind-theatre”, they suggest, brings about a pulsation of the *chora*, a reverberation.

The angry *chora*: a pulsation of hate born of pain.

As well, the imaginary companion as mirror image may be a reflection of self in the eyes of the desiring and desired mother-figure which guarantees the reality of the self. But eventually the mirror self gives way to awareness of a broken and separated self ripped away from the mother, requiring language to heal this “castration” in the Name of the Father as Lacan puts it (1977a 1-7; 156 discussed in Wright 1998: 101-103). Mhlophe was separated from her mother at an early age and if we look ahead in the story (Mhlophe 2002a: 33) we will see that the unknown and threatening mother has made a visit to check out if her daughter Zandile would come back with her to the rural Transkei voluntarily, and found that she was too happy with her grandmother to do that. Mhlophe has been told that it was her black father who agonizingly separated her from her mother via a traumatic train journey. But she has no conscious memory of this. As a servant she experiences white women as the aggressive ones. Yet early on in the play, pretending that the imaginary companion is going to grow up to be a white lady, there is a funny displacement from the symbolization of what a white lady would normally be: a threatening figure for Mhlophe when she worked as a domestic servant. This is definitely suggested by her stories.²⁶ Psychoanalytically in this innocent “unconscious” witticism the stereotype of the white woman as aggressive is countered by fusing this image with that of

²⁶ “My Dear madam” and “The Toilet” in Mhlophe 2002b

any woman going shopping – humorous denial – the joke working by paradox and contradiction. Every drop of Gogo’s sweetness and love, every song, playground game, gesture of violent abuse and threat from Lulama the biological mother - all these throb in the *chora* as Eros and Thanatos, pointing up the symbolic chain of events in the story.

Gogo’s sweetness eventually split off into the black mother as cruel witch and the unknowing part perpetrator of the system which sells children into marital slavery and thus controls women.

We meet Thembi Mtshali playing Zandile’s grandmother Gogo (Mhlophe 2002a: 6-7). She is unpacking shopping and a favourite doll which Zandile thinks shouldn’t be pink but brown. Consumerism and the political correctness of the on-coming New South Africa are definitely on the agenda. Gogo tells us the back-story: again, as in *TFSA* but now in regard to the black *daughter* having urban troubles: Zandile is her son Tom’s child. Zandile has been living with Tom and his wife nearby in Hammersdale which is near Durban. But Tom has his own children and Zandile’s mother lives in the Transkei and can’t have her. So Gogo has taken over responsibility for Zandile. Gogo says she knows that Zandile’s education would be neglected by her father in favour of his sons and Gogo is determined to keep Zandile at school. She is devoted to the child, stimulates her at home intellectually and nurtures her emotionally. She is the idealised good mother-substitute. By contrast the harsh of not downright evil real mother awaits her. The mechanism of splitting, characteristic of the fairy-story appears to be at work (Bettleheim 1991:67). The *chora* itself, whilst in itself unnameable, can pulsate in two, many, innumerable directions. It can only be known in its symbolic effects but we can take this

pulse bodily and emotionally in our own physical reception of the play.

The displacement and sublimation of joy in retrospective dramatic/theatre time out of the later trauma against which there is a reaction-formation: the smashing of the flowers and the fear of the spying mother – a dramatic irony.

Zandile and Gogo interact playfully and joyously (Mhlophe 2002a: 8-14). In a later scene (Mhlophe 2002a: 15-18) Zandile acts out in a disturbed and angry way as if displacing and projecting from something traumatic that has happened elsewhere or in the past. We can surmise that the separations from her biological mother and later her social family (Tom, his wife and Zandile's half-siblings) were or would be traumatic and the child is insecure also because she has intimations that the biological mother is on the horizon spying her out. She accuses the flowers in Gogo's garden of not being able to sing the song she has set them and hits and breaks them and threatens that they will be taken away as a punishment, in uncanny circumstances, in a white car (- like an ambulance – anticipating the vehicle the mother will use). Gogo reproves Zandile, but adds to our tension as the transcendental knowers who want her to avoid the crisis on the horizon. Innocently, she doesn't seek to understand what might be going on (Mhlophe 2002a: 19-22). Still later (Mhlophe 2002a: 23-24) Zandile is tempted by someone in a white car with sweets and is terrified of the stranger. She is seized and taken away. Gogo arrives to find that Zandile has gone, is horrified, asks the audience (Mhlophe 2002a :25-26). "Have you seen Zandile?" and is frightened of what Tom her son will say. We hear an emergency announcement on the radio about a child who has disappeared.

The appearance of benign natural forces in the folk/fairy tale: the helpful birds

We then see Zandile trying to write a letter in the sand to Gogo hoping the birds will read it and will tell Gogo to come and fetch her from her mother in the Transkei (Mhlophe 2002a: 28-30).

Whereas in normal circumstances a child has only to experience short periods of separation, loss and grief and needs a limited fantasy expressing a concrete but poetic / *choral* conception of her pain and isolation, a long traumatic separation will produce a whole stream of pre-symbolic thinking and feeling. Adults and children will respond to the fairy-story and its images addressing these needs. The growing personality needs nourishment and support and the concrete, poetic symbolism in the story will be satisfying projections of shattered parts of the id, ego and super-ego (Bettleheim 1991:3-19). Creatures such as birds, who fly like angels and belong to the heavens will have a special meaning in delivering messages or bringing a message of hope (for the super-ego, the agency of moral conscience which rights wrongs). This happens in *Zandile* and to Ashputtel (Grimm 1906/1945: 81-86).

The mother Lulama, (also Thembi Mtshali), was the one who evidently kidnapped her and is now tearing up her letters to Gogo. Lulama bullies Zandile about working harder. These are peasants in the countryside where the child has to cut grass to thatch a hut.

Setting up the foil

In a later scene (Mhlophe 2002a:30-35) when she is still only 12 her mother demands that Zandile give up her ambition of staying on at school to finish her education and get ready to marry a boy whose family is the richest in the district. She doesn't love this boy who is ugly with tribal scars on his face.

Getting to know her mother Zandile reproaches Lulama for stealing her from Gogo. Lulama admits that she planned it after she visited Gogo (presumably in a white car or in a vehicle symbolised by the dreaded white car/ambulance). Lulama saw how happy Zandile was and that she wouldn't come voluntarily. But she needed her child, her flesh and blood.

As fully discussed already, we wonder who might have colluded in all this and why no one took action against the kidnapper even if Lulama as the biological mother had *prima facie* rights. The interests of the child are evidently and obviously severely damaged because of the emotional traumata - being forcibly taken (a crime in itself) to a backward rural area by a mother possibly motivated by desire for *lobola* (bride-price).

Lulama explains through the most explicit political discourse in the play why one *cannot have hope* under apartheid, due to influx control, the pass laws, rural poverty, traditional marriage, male chauvinism and the migrant labour system although she puts these issues in everyday terms. The following passage is reproduced since it is the central passage, the pivot around which the play and indeed the whole "writing" of apartheid / traditionalism / colonialism / and the

barriers faced by women occur in Africa. In its bluntness, crudity, ferocity, we hear the death-wish of the *chora*, but also a life-wish - a wild animal in agony, temporarily relieved from her trap.

ZANDILE: But he [Lulama's husband] left you.

LULAMA: It's easy for men to go.

ZANDILE: And you also left me all those years.

LULAMA: I left you because I had to. Do you think my husband would have accepted you? He would have killed me if I had come to his home with another man's child. My going to find work in Durban was bad enough - even though he knew I was forced to because he was not bringing in any money. He would beat me if I asked for money. My mother said I must go and find work while she was still able to look after my children. So I went to Durban and because my papers were not in order it was hard to find work. And when I did get work they could pay me anything they liked. I got two pounds a month. Even in those days it was nothing.

ZANDILE: Was that before I was born?

LULAMA: Yes, 1958 ... (pause) That was a difficult year for me. Then something happened, I bumped into an old friend that I grew up with here. Dudu looked so happy and beautiful and I could see that she had a good job.

Mhlophe (2002a):34

The peer-group buddy in modern adolescence

Now, perhaps at about 14, Zandile and a friend Lindiwe (Thembi Mtshali) swim in a river and talk playfully quoting extensively from girls and women's magazines as genuine sources of health education – consumerists par excellence - about the puzzling relationship between menstrual periods, pregnancy, babies, the size of their breasts, fatness, and whether babies are made in hospitals or come from aeroplanes (Mhlophe 2002a: 36-42). Eros pulsates in the water. The water-snake famous in Xhosa, Zulu and /Xam legend and cave-paintings is linking to menstruation and fertility (Dowson 1998: 73-89 *passim*, Jolly 247-267 *passim*). But there is absolutely no link made with traditional or

modern sex education. Again as with the Gogo's implausible collusion or duping as regards the abduction (material for a social realist genre) there is absolute silence – the silence of the genre and silence of the ethnographic context erasing any authorial voice here. With up to a third of any given Southern African population HIV+ and often then fated for an early and painful death what sort of folkloric imagination is this?

Sympathy for the enslaved mother; hatred for the way she tries to enslave her daughter

As if to justify herself Lulama tells Zandile the sad story of the affair she had with Tom with whom she was evidently in love, by comparison with the arranged marriage with a man who left her and who would have killed Lulama and Zandile if she, Lulama, his wife, had returned from Durban (where she was a domestic worker) with her “illegitimate” love-child (Mhlophe 2002a:33-46). The humanity and quietness of the scene is a gentle heartbeat in the *chora*.

But then we realise Lulama's double purpose, her shallowness, her sentimentality. So she is vindictively inflicting a similar punishment on Zandile – forcing her to be unhappy – the very punishment she has suffered during her own forcible and unhappy marriage. Again the unasked and unanswered questions create a sense of “empty writing”²⁷: why no teacher at Zandile's school or social worker or lawyer or the police were approached by the Durban

²⁷ This is not necessarily a perjorative. This is found in understated irony, in the *aporia* and *lacunae* to which Derrida (1977, 1978 *passim*) refers, in the political unconscious, the central concept in Jameson's writing. It is true also that shallow populist or children's writing can purposely keep the readership distracted by the surface of the plot and its unanswered questions from looking at the why's and wherefore's of the hidden writing in the story. Mhlophe's hidden writing comes from her journalistic autobiographical stories as I will argue below.

family to get involved in this crime which on the face of it is a moral atrocity – or is it normal in a society where the extended family has broken down and is corrupt anyway?

Then, Lulama says retrospectively, she left domestic work and was a singer in a band in Durban and evidently hoped to escape poverty and rural misery in the Transkei through a career in show business. Lulama portrays Tom as a two-fisted hero who saved her from gangsters on the stage who took over her performance one night at a concert. But she got pregnant with Zandile for which she partly blames Tom – as if she couldn't obtain contraception and he, like most men (African men? the AIDS epidemic was very well known in 1986 when the play was performed)) couldn't be bothered even though he was married and had numerous children with his wife. All this is implied but just dropped in and never explored. Then more issues: Lulama was fired from the band because "they" (the men who ran the band?) couldn't have a pregnant ("unsexy"?) woman singer.

This is by no means improbable by any standards. But Lulama seems to be asking for sympathy and inducing guilt in Zandile by presenting an innocent child with an impossible dilemma for which irresponsible adults, including herself, and the race-class system seem to be responsible.

This woman (Mhlophe speaks in interviews about her feelings about her mother as deeply ambivalent – e.g. in the Perkins interview *op.cit.*) is somehow allowed to justify herself. We will see how Mhlophe has it both ways: critical of

her emotionally tyrannical and some would argue criminally responsible mother (who is at the same time driven by the additionally criminal apartheid system which promotes divided families in the interests of cheap labour) and yet adoring her in a poem celebrating this woman as a lovely “wedding-dancer”.

Perhaps this is and certainly was the truth, the typical reality in South Africa, but how are we to be convinced of it in a play that the author suggests is autobiographical when a humane remedy in a country, despite apartheid, was perhaps just possibly there? It had some sort of legal and social welfare infrastructure potentially there. Instead this issue is obviously ignored. Why are we not allowed a glimpse of how the family may have colluded in the mother’s tyranny?

The absent writing of the *naïf* play – adding to its childlike appeal?

Thus we are left with a dilemma: does this absent writing, this ignoring of the nature of psychological conflict and its corrosive effect on personality set up a black and white situation of little depth and confirm that the play is not only *naïf* in style but shallow in import? Do we, white “liberal” critics have the right to define reality for black Africans under apartheid and what is aesthetically deep and aesthetically shallow? The play has great appeal to the child-self in the adult and simple and stark enough in detailing the exigencies of apartheid and migrant labour and the necessity for educational and artistic achievement amongst African girls and women as to be “good theatre” for children, white and black.

Incredible plot but credible story of family collusion? Letting father and step-mother off the hook? Poetic fairy-story licence or the brutalities of apartheid creating amnesia?

Lindiwe and Zandile are now about 17+ and have got through their matriculation examinations. Purely by chance Lindiwe has come across a boy in Johannesburg with whom she is infatuated whose name is Paul Zwide. Zandile father's name and her surname is Zwide. It turns out that Paul is her half-brother about whom Zandile knew nothing till this moment – at least for the 10 years she has been away from Durban!

But surely an 8-10 year old would have carried some memory forward into adolescence that she had such a family near Durban given her intense ties of love to her grandmother – might have written a letter once she had got away from her mother's immediate grasp in an adolescence – actually in real life spent in a boarding school - even have made a journey there, might have been given some help by the Hammersdale family to reach them? Is the amnesia created by – ? the “spell” common in fairy-stories – created by the evil witch-like mother? The trauma itself? The loss of trust inflicted by the eventually discovered collusion of the father Tom Zwide and his wife, Zandile's originally caring step-mother? This involves not telling the grandmother where Zandile was? The underlying disintegration of families because of the migrant labour system and sheer poverty, lack of awareness in the authorities and in the community of how to enforce child welfare law – especially in the context of apartheid? Fears of how Lulama – a dragon in reality - would react? Poetic licence to dramatise the suddenness of the rediscovery? Far from producing disinterest because of the authorial “naivete” of the clever adolescent's

“amnesia” *this* forgetfulness is like a negative enchantment resonating in the unconscious mind, the *chora*. Not all the play’s “amnesia” is like this.

Tearful or tragic denouement? Clothes as metaphor for the growing girl

Gogo is presented as saving up presents for Zandile’s birthdays. We have to “read in” her torment as she is reported *post mortem* by the Old Woman telling Zandile how her grandmother asked her son and daughter-in-law how she might contact her “illegitimate” daughter-in-law and find her beloved grandchild in the Transkei? Her son, we are told at the end, *won’t tell* his own mother what the mother of his child has done and where she lives.

Thus we “read in” that Gogo is so misled by Tom *that she cannot confront him about this*. For the sake of the fairy-story moment of theatre the feasible reality of this genuinely touching situation is so unexplored in “absent writing” that the unconscious of the critic or audience has to “fill in”. Kristeva’s semiotic goes further than Bettelheim’s orthodox Freudian unconscious. But Zandile is **not** altogether dislocated, **is** to some extent **a** young woman, does **not** have a paradoxically non-transcendent identity defying location. Would Kristeva, a psychoanalyst and a critic in the classical and avant-garde French tradition be at all relevant when we don’t have an African woman deconstructing identity? At least Freda and Thembi in *TFSA* can *suspend* identity in relation to the white/Coloured/African son/boy friend *having found it in themselves*. Zandile just finds it.

Finally, now that (so we are told) she knows for the first time where her Gogo lived, she is given the presents – age-related sets of dresses - that the Gogo saved up for her all the years she was away. So compelling is this theatrical moment that, for the sake of the moving and tragic – or at least tearful - denouement, we are prepared to put aside the flimsiness of the supportive framework of realistic writing “poking through” the *lacunae* or *aporia* of the (necessarily?) *naïf* text. Is this biography or biographical legend? (See Tomasevskij in Gardner and Scott *op. cit.* p.5).

Mhlophe in South African context.

Some of the facts mentioned in the above summary of a critical context for the plot, story and aesthetics of *Zandile* will be mentioned again here as we seek to analyse more deeply what it is in and about Gcina Mhlophe which is important as regards her various roles in South African media, entertainment and education. She is has an important role in the drive for literacy in South Africa and is an international celebrity in the arena of African literature and oral performance^{28 29}. She is the writer of autobiographical stories such as “My Dear Madam”(1983a/2002b), “Nokulunga’s Wedding” (1983b/2002b), and “The Toilet” (1987/2002b), and illustrated children’s stories.

²⁸ See her biographical details in the OUP website Oxford University Press: www.oxford.co.za “Info on two of our authors Sindiwe Magona and Gcina Mhlophe” and in Kathy A. Perkins (ed.1998.) *Black South African Women: An Anthology of Plays*. See her other citations on websites such as the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston Mass dated 2003, and as writer-in-residence “Time of the Writer Festival 2004” KwaZulu/Natal University

²⁹ Mhlophe’s performance-poems from the period 1983-1988 are published in Lockett’s (ed.) *Breaking the Silence* 1990, pp. 349-353 and in Mhlophe’s *Love Child*. These range from *izimbonga* modern polemical African feminist praise poems to a lyric for her mother which crosses over from the personal to the political and interfuses the two realms to great effect and in which the signifier becomes a space in discourse, an icon escaping foreclosure (see Kristeva in Moi ed.1986 pp 214-219).

Looking at the huge amount of largely admiring journalism her career has generated there can be little doubt that her progress on the stage and in writing began to create a cognitive map, a psychological and social space for a post-apartheid individualism for secondary-school educated women seeing beyond the roles of housemaid, migrant worker and factory hand into which she and others were and are cast.³⁰ But the partly autobiographical play *Have You Seen Zandile?* was written with a workshop group including Maralin Van Renen the director and Thembi Mtshali. As already mentioned in the above summary Mtshali took the opposite parts of Gogo (the grandmother), Lulama (the mother) and Lindiwe (the friend). What is crucial for our understanding is that in 1985-1986 the play replaced what was to have been a dramatisation of the story “Nokulunga’s Wedding”, a fact to which Mhlophe refers frequently in many interviews (see Appendix) including those with the researcher in 1990 in Johannesburg.

This and the other early stories can be seen as the partly hidden writing beneath the writing, part of the whole story of Zandile which obscures and is obscured by these other highly dramatic and more literary texts in the course of a plot deriving from its *naïf* genre – children and naïve adolescents’ autobiographical writing.

In the absence of an implicit elaborated code Walker’s *The Color Purple* compared with *Somdaka* .

It is to a societal and Mhlophe’s own life-setting that one should direct

³⁰ See APPENDIX: P R E S S I N T E R V I E W S, R E V I E W S A N D R E P O R T S O N G C I N A M H L O P H E, T H E M B I M S H A L I A N D M A R A L I N V A N R E N E N, (I N C H R O N O L O G I C A L O R D E R O F P U B L I C A T I O N) 1983-1997

attention so as to understand a partly ideologically constructed aesthetic of depth and experience. Unfortunately although the depth that potentially exists when reading *Zandile* through her autobiographical stories, that still leaves a gap in actual practice in her playwriting such as in *Somdaka* (1989) which like *Zandile* never rises above the *naïf* genre. We have to remember that this is not Matisse or Modigliani or Henri Rousseau – *naïf* in a more self-conscious ideologically purposeful sense. She is not concerned with design and a dream-world but the folk-world as it bears on common-or-garden reality. Zandile is potentially a Miss Celie but does not reach that far. Walker writes in a *quasi-naïf but highly political highly “womanist” genre: letters to God about abduction, rape, abuse. In “Somdaka” murder by terrorist bombing is dealt with by an unintentional simpleton made to represent “the rural masses”!* No doubt Mhlophe justifies his existence by saying the “person ... I want the person”.

Zandile’s politically correct silence

The child belongs to no one, as the grandmother says ironically in *HYSZ?* And what about children today tormented by their traditionalist rural mothers and fathers with the prospect of marital rape facing them as Zandile and Nokulunga were fictionally and Mhlophe and her half-sister may have been actually? What remedy in law or social welfare action or political legislation does the author advocate?³¹ These are issues all over neo-colonial and post-

³¹ There are further unanswered questions that apparently don’t appear now on the South African stage. Such as was it because the child’s mother and father were unmarried in terms of both traditional custom and in terms of modern civil society that a “love child” would have such custody problems? Should this issue not have been pinpointed as an issue in child care law then and there, and now in the play itself or a campaign? All my enquiries as late as 2007 of university departments of law in Johannesburg and Pretoria revealed that no one was prepared to comment on any of Zandile’s issues in child care law. It seems clear from a judgement of the Constitutional Court of 2000 by Justice Richard Goldstone (Case CCT 08/00) that the Child

colonial Africa. In the play and in the current a-political atmosphere of theatrical correctness (apart from the work of Pieter-Dirk Uys) there are no answers to these questions. The unwritten writing beneath the writing is there to see and the author sees it but such is the power of the patriarchy that no one can write it in the theatre fully, deconstructively and subversively. There is an *aporia* an “unpassable path” (Norris 1982:49)

Fantasy and reality and facing ambiguity.

Good things may happen out of an *aporia*. Even out of unasked and unanswered questions good may emerge albeit in a fantasy of hallucinatory power. This is what Julia Kristeva’s editor Toril Moi and Jacques Lacan call something happening in the Real-True which is not foreclosed, which slips out, an irruption into discourse which is Real because it obliterates the difference between the referents and the signifiers (Lacan 1977: 65, Moi 1986:214-216). However as a fantasy it is not real in the ordinary sense and children love it for that because it is there that they still live, something unforgettable like Cinderella. Zandile / Mhlophe becomes an icon, a symbolic object, valuable in herself and for herself, a biographical legend not an autobiography. She is the concealed writing beneath the writing – something that keeps coming back to the same place – the same question and the same lack of ultimate answer. It is also happening in the True, which is the interaction between the Real, and the

Welfare Society of South Africa had powers under previous legislation to intervene in the best interests of the child, now enshrined in the constitution of South Africa under the section entitled the rights of the child. The biological parents in the plural and others may be referred to as key movers in deciding where and with whom the child best interests are served. The fictional and the real Gogo and the fictional and real “Mr Zwide” need not have been passive in the face of the biological mother. No doubt Tomasevskij’s biographical legend is needed here to [over?]-dramatise the situation, to dehumanise it as a matter of personal responsibility for reasons of plot

Symbolic significations of the narrative in rhetorical figures, and the Imaginary – what is signified not only as meaning but meaning as modified by fantasy.

Unconscious fantasy unfettered in the children's folkstory

In Mhlophe's folk stories for children such as *The Snake With Seven Heads* (1989) one might get a deeper insight into the Truth and the Real of the returning unconscious fantasy, of all that would frustrate Cinderella or Hansel and Gretel. If one adds up the four limbs, the one double-tongued head, and the two dreadful flashing eyes – seven - one has a picture of what the imagined Zandile if not the real Mhlophe must felt like when she was held fast in the arms, legs, eyes and double-talking tongue -when she was abducted by her mother arriving in the symbolically frightening white car described in *HYSZ?* – an ambulance for a child who was going to made very unhappy by this outrageous, uncalled for and practically unremedied fate.^{32 33}

³² The archetypal good father – “Tom” in Zandile and the hunter in Snake is transformed into the bad father / but heroic hunter “Tom”. He separates from or leaves the mother and the child(ren). He has been unfairly “cursed” by another “witch” who could Imaginatively stand for the *marital* (matriarchal) polygamy system – the one who should stay at home with *her* children but conducts her own sort of “hunting”. Patriarchal marital systems have broken down in the cities and in the impoverished rural areas. So the polygamous Tom suffers the systematic “curse” of the strange “outsider” – the decayed social system where *lobolo*- bridegroom's dowry or bride-price cannot be properly paid any more. The father is not there in Mount Frere to receive it but in Hammarsdale, near Durban 350 miles away. The step-father is not there to receive it because he has separated from the biological mother or has died and he does not know about or is murderous about his wife's polyandry or serial monogamy or affair in Durban which has produced Zandile

³³ The loving reflective eyes of the good Gogo have turned reflectively malignant although Gogo as a “whole object” – a transcendental ego is- eventually transfigured from death AND collusion with the separation of Zandile / Mhlophe. The bad witch character could Imaginatively be the bad witch step-mother who allowed Tom Zwide to take Zandile from her in a traumatic separation in early childhood. The unscrupulous biological mother called Lulama who abducts may unconsciously equal (=) strange old woman who curses the wedding dancer / wife of the hunter in The Snake who may unconsciously equal (=) Zandile's mother named in a poem “The Wedding Dancer”- (*op.cit*) who actually was Mhlophe's mother. Mhlophe becomes her mother in herself in an Imaginary way

The icon conforms in the interests of providing a good role model for children

As frequently mentioned, Mhlophe is an icon herself in the New South Africa, the subject of adulation, and, though, without overtly saying so, she seems deeply committed to a form of Alice Walker's "womanism" in exposing rape and sexual violence against women and children and a renaissance in African folk-story-telling whilst understanding the bind black men are in - how they displace their own de-rogation onto black women and black girls. She is not a political, legal or child welfare activist in the fullest sense – more a facilitator of such action.³⁴ What she writes may be shaped for the innocent, "unpolitical" hearts and minds of children in the New South Africa who should not be stirred too controversially now that the "liberation struggle" has been "won" (for some people) and Alice Walker's "womanist" dissent would be seen as disloyal to the ruling parties and authorities. Should this be regarded as extraordinary when in Europe children are, in theory, taught about the Holocaust and African slavery in rather less ambiguous terms? Why should the marital slavery of pubertal girls not be dealt with in depth in a supposed democracy guaranteed by an egalitarian constitution and an as yet not altogether corrupted legal system and a relatively free press? What is it about South Africa that makes it difficult or impossible for indigenous women dramatists to deconstruct and subvert what black men do and what black women do to keep the patriarchal system of female child-adolescent-marital-slavery intact? One reason

³⁴ See Mhlophe's comments on sexual crime in the New South Africa in Kathy A.Perkins ed. 1998:81-82

must be quite simply quoted from Mhlophe's own mouth: "I'm not an Alice Walker. I wouldn't have the time to write a novel..." [like *The Color Purple* – i.e she has too much to do writing and performing folk stories so as to earn a living - being the implication].

Why there is an Alice Walker in the USA and not in South Africa is part of the problem of Africa: uneven development. It goes without saying that colonialism and apartheid were two of the causes in the educational deprivation of black Africans but these co-exist with uneven development as between Europe and Africa existing historically before colonialism and apartheid arrived.

The trauma created by colonialist and white-settler brutality can be measured by the moral outrage of perhaps the greatest exemplar of the European Enlightenment which was a dark age for Africans (quoted in Mwakikagile 2000: 218):

"The Negro lands... the Cape of Good Hope etc. on being discovered, were treated as countries that belonged to nobody" Immanuel Kant
Eternal Peace and Other Essays (1914:38)

The folk-genres are plural: the prehistoric San story of the moon (God) and death – an eternal theme - is repressed or ignored in the process of urban Zulu Christianisation.

Mhlophe is fascinated by the folk genre which actually is linked historically to a hopelessly corrupted traditionalism (in the example of Nokulunga's "wedding") and further she is unable to escape romanticisation of other African stories. Actually the African story told to her by her grandmother

which forms a set-piece in *Zandile* may be linked to a commercialised and Christianised corruption of the Cape San (Bushman) story about the moon, death/hallowed time, disobedience, domestic dog, wild hare and baby/eternal life (Bleek and Lloyd 1968/1911 extracted by ed. Annemarie Van Niekerk 1990: 29-31; see fn 3 above). The dog in *Zandile* is actually coloured like a Toys 'R Us dog although called in Zulu Baxile. The moon in *Zandile* is not God but a place of Christian banishment, death, hell or limbo. Disobedience in *Zandile* is not disbelieving God, but oversleeping and not being able to keep the Christian Sabbath. A woman breaks it to do her duty – collecting firewood after dawn to boil water to feed and clean her baby and the family. For that she is damned to the hell of a dead moon. There is no suggestion then or later that the banished girl story is regarded ironically as the affecting absurdity of an old lady. There is never any confrontation with the Gogo's unawareness of the origin of a colonial myth. In the original San story moon/God banishes *death* not a really innocent human being. Hare's mother whom moon/God says is only sleeping is believed "stupidly" (and wisely – profanely not sacredly) – by her son to be dead. Before that the world is Edenic. There is no exile or extinction. Only when Hare disbelieves moon/God's reassurance of eternal life is Hare's lip beaten with a stick. Hare is cursed further: he is to be afflicted with fleas, and made to run zig-zag to avoid being chased to death by dogs all his life. Moon/God remains God whose sliver of light at New Moon heralds a fatter fuller moon who will aid the hunter so that all will become fat to whom the San pray. In *Zandile* the fairy-story does not disinter or transcend its own foundations. An author speaking through the Gogo drawing on the whole South African heritage, not ignoring the amnesia about the San genocide could have

drawn the San story into the ritualistic Christian story³⁵.

***Somdaka* and any implicit narrator's lack of Bernstein's elaborated code**

Mhlophe and her workshop group were perhaps over-reacting in the direction of the purely enjoyable so as to get away from the sternly militant proletarian dramas she acted in herself. She may have been appalled at some of the behaviour of the “necklacing” white-hating “comrades” right up to 1989 when her next play went on at the Market Theatre. The folkloric obsession, perhaps a fixation entailing a removal from reality in what one critic called a rural Shangri-La characterised Mhlophe's second play *Somdaka* about a country tailor who could not tell his grandmother that his father, her son, has been killed by a bomb in Johannesburg. *Somdaka* cannot grasp what a bomb is – as if radios did not exist in the Transkei and the semi-schooled and returned migrant workers could not have brought *Somdaka* into the modern world. Critics were divided as to how the folk genre stood up as a pretty story and as to whether it was really theatre (Daniel: 1989, MacLiam 1989, Rosen 1989, Van Rooyen

³⁵ W.H.I.Bleek and L.C.Lloyd (1911) pp.57-69. Compare “The origin of death” [the moon ends immortality and curses the hare for doubting eternal life] and “The moon not to be looked at when the game is shot” with Gogo's story of the impious girl banished to the moon with her dog for collecting wood at dawn on the Christian Sunday and cursed there with an eternity of exile (Mhlophe 2002a: 12-14). In San religion the dead are subsequently contained in the crescent of the moon and the moon had sacred powers sustaining the lives of hunted animals. In Christianity dead and living creatures are not contained in the pagan moon but in invisible heaven at large as long as creatures are Godly not pagan: the one story is the obverse of the other. What is sought for is not authentic African folklore but moral, Christian folklore: – “nothing wrong with that” a Christian might say, but see Mhlophe's claim that she is reclaiming folklore previously thought to be barbaric (in Kathy A.Perkins 1998 *op.cit* p 82-83). The San tale is apparently less punishing on humans than its Christian “reclaimed” version which supports a missionary-inspired custom no longer observed by most people. In the San religion all people even Hare (who was a man originally) went to the moon when they died, not to be banished into exile, but to rejoin the community in the unseen curve of the New Moon. That is, they came and went monthly.

1989, Coetzee 1989, Minervini 1989, De Waal 1989, Leshoai 1989).³⁶

Biographical legend has parted company with viable autobiography in Tomashevskij's terms (*op.cit.*)

The centre, the transcendental subject /ego of Zandile, its *Dasein*, its *en-soir/ pour-soir* interplay – its reflexiveness on its own writing, in African terms its full *ubuntu*³⁷ looking at its *ubuntu*, is missing in terms of an aesthetic – a constructively integrated theme and narrative or a constructively disintegrated theme and narrative. That is, it lacks deconstructive, subversive and redemptive-kathartic irony, satire, aggression and depth. Its central character and even an implicit narrator lacks Bernstein's elaborated code.

This is as understood by a classical and post-modernist aesthetic perhaps entirely foreign to the whole culture of the play and its writing. But reading Harold Scheub's recordings of Ms Zenani's and other Xhosa *iinstomi* it is difficult to believe that a story such as "A Boy Drinks Some Medicine [prescribed by a doctor - an *ugqira* - for infertility] and Becomes Pregnant" (Zenani /Scheub 2006:21-26) cannot be told in such a way as not only to *satirise* the pretensions of traditional medicine but to *parody* the placebo effect – that is, to link it to modern hysteria!

If it has a transcendental ego / subject it is this: a sense of Zandile / Mhlophe/Mtshali/Vanrenen being an hypothetical individual or as Mhlophe puts it in her interview with me in March 1990, "the person". But "person",

³⁶ See p.144ff for an introductory mention of *Somdaka*.

³⁷ *Ubuntu* is a philosophical doctrine meaning humanity

etymologically comes from *persona*, the mask in Greek and Roman drama. There is, many would argue, philosophically, no such thing as an individual. Additionally, we have too much in common biologically, psychologically, socially, economically. In any event the *Zandile* workshop cannot speak as a group of Eves for all mankind. They interpret a young woman coming from a decayed traditional culture in the midst of modernisation. Here a role-model embodies that which a modern and post-modern inegalitarian African society does *not* achieve: a synthesis of old and new, rural and urban. The myth of a feminist Cinderella of which *Zandile* is a variation *could* reveal “the structure of reality [...] exemplary models for human behaviour; [...] true stories, concern[ing] themselves with [mythological] realities” (Eliade 1968: 17).

Other African writers have used the myth of the alienated outsider and fused it with reality. Tlali in *Miriam at Metropolitan* invents a character who, she says, can't write, only report, which is disingenuous. In so doing she writes very powerfully, inviting us into a world seen differently from the black African outside narrator compared to the white and African inside view using imagination and stripped-down reportage (Nfah-Abbenyi 1997: 123-136). Bessie Head describing her heroine's breakdown in *A Question of Power* (Head 1974) also has sufficient *ekstasis*, being-in-herself and standing outside of herself, to lay bare the writing beneath this writing: her perception of herself as needing hallucinatory guardian spirits in the absence of a transcendental ego. These spirits enable her to see herself through being a refugee in Botswana, being not fully “legitimate” (she was “illegitimate”), perhaps the unwanted product of an affair between a white woman Elizabeth Emery and a black stable

groom, born in a mental hospital, probably because her mother was not only recurrently psychotic but “mad” enough to have intercourse with an African worker. She was brought up by a Coloured foster mother who later ran a shebeen where soldiers brought prostitutes, then by nuns, then she was in a failed marriage in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. A refugee in Botswana she was desperate to be accepted in a black country but she was unable to speak fluent Setswana. She was stigmatised as a “Coloured”, belonging nowhere so retreating into illuminating psychosis and perhaps alcoholism and then emerging recurrently to produce literature of depth, power and biographical integrity. Stigmatised identity comes through again in her novel *Maru* about a San person brought up by a white missionary (Mackenzie 1989, Rose 1994, Nfah-Abbenyi 1997: 136-147).

Stitching in the writing beneath the writing: depth and experience in the interstices: is this the unconscious? Wit in *Zandile* as displaced, condensed, symbolised and aestheticised anger coming from “The Toilet” and “My Dear Madam”: autobiography as sublimated truth.

I have already described the opening of *Zandile*. *Zandile* has an imaginary companion with whom she exchanges jokes and produces (for us) unconscious and touching witticisms. On one occasion she says to “Bongile” who wants to grow up to be a white lady, that that is all right – they can still be friends – i.e. although *Zandile* is black and this is South Africa in 1986 or 1966 (when the author was 8 in real time and when apartheid was even more rigid).

And again in the opening scene *Zandile* says to her imaginary companion she will be a tall school-teacher on high heels and they will have a

car and go shopping and people will admire them – a white lady and a black teacher. One might say an African transition or emergent class is indeed appearing despite apartheid (see Kavanagh 1985: 31-32).

The stories “The Toilet” and “My Dear Madam” written in the early 1980’s when Mhlophe was living at first in a migrant women’s hostel near a township and later in the increasingly “less-white” suburbs of Yeoville or Orange Grove, but still in the servant-class despite her matriculation from high school in the Transkei, express the repressed or suppressed “symptoms” underlying *Zandile*. Jokes across the racial barrier in *Zandile* cover the suppression of the misery, fear and insecurity of life in the servant-class before Mhlophe found her feet as a journalist, broadcaster, actor and theatre-writer after temporary jobs unemployed, as a factory worker and as a domestic worker.

In “The Toilet” she is confronted by her [half-]sister’s “madam” outside the servants’ quarters where she is staying “illegally” or without the “madam’s” permission next to the swimming pool of the whites’ house in Orange Grove and is confronted by the dogs:

'Please Madam, the dogs will bite me,' I pleaded, not moving my eyes from them.

'No, they won't bite-you.' Then she spoke to them nicely, 'Get away now - go on,' and they went off.

She was like a doll, her hair almost orange in colour, all curls round her made-up face. Her eyelashes fluttered like a doll's. Her thin lips were bright red, like her long nails, and she wore very high-heeled shoes. She was still smiling; I wondered if it didn't hurt after a while. When her friends came for a swim, I could always hear her forever laughing at something or other.

She scared me - I couldn't understand how she could smile like that but not want me to stay in her house.

Mhlophe *Lovechild* (2002b): 15-16 “The Toilet”

This white woman is the opposite reality behind the childlike fantasy of what good white friends (like her later friend Muff Anderson) might be, giving the joke about Bongile growing up to be a white lady, an ironical point. This white woman is a grotesque, racist doll, smiling automatically, programmed into a caricature of the gender stereotype.

Other white women and white men are even more furiously racist. In “My Dear Madam” the realities of whites in the early ‘80’s emerge. A black girl growing up to become white is not a natural development. It would be a damnation. It’s only a joke inside the “bohemian” and non-racist journalistic and theatre circles which encouraged her. Enraged by clever debating points delivered by a mere servant girl called to appear before the madam’s friends for a “chat” which turns into an interrogation this is how some, perhaps average, white people in Johannesburg behave. Someone mentions [Northern?!] Ireland [in the late 70’s / early ‘80’s!]:

I sat there looking from speaker to speaker and smiling from time to time. I was not given the chance to say anything and so I pushed my speech in anywhere I felt like it.

'How are things up there?' I asked Black Beard.

'In Ireland? Dear God! Things are just fine there ... I mean everybody respects each other. People are kind and sensible. It's not like this mad country.'

'That's true, people are mad in this country, I'm telling you.' That was Granny. I remember at my home we would leave windows wide open and no one would come in to steal our things, [*in Britain depressed areas in the 1930's? - not mentioned!*], ' she went on.

And this made my madam remember something too. 'That's true, look what Shaka and other fools like him did to the people.'

'That's true, and look what Hitler and other fools like him did to the people.' I simply had to say this, even if my opinion was not asked for. The effect was tremendous.

'This girl is mad. By God she is!' the quiet guy shouted, standing up and sitting down again almost immediately.

He was not the quiet guy anymore. I learned later that he was German.

'I'm sorry, I did not mean to be mad.' I had to make my apologies, seeing the cloudy expression on his face.

'My dear girl, if I were you I would thank God that I had lovely clothes like these and a necklace like the one you have on.' (My madam had no overall for me so I was working in my clothes.)

'Her belly is full and there is a roof over her head, that's all that counts,' Granny said. Black Beard felt that I didn't know life yet - that I had never suffered.

'Yes, she cannot believe it when I say I came from a very poor family. I remember once when we lived on potatoes day in and day out for a whole month, when my father fell sick. [*in a generally developed society which eventually introduced welfare state measures to combat poverty on a scale impossible in colonially exploited Africa!*]' That was my madam, her eyes distant. I suppose she could even see herself in those sad days and this made everybody look back into their childhood.

'I also came from a poor family. My cousins would give me their clothes if they did not like them anymore. I never wore anything from the shop.'*[in a generally developed society which eventually introduced welfare state measures to combat poverty on a scale impossible in colonially exploited Africa!]* That was Granny, looking really sad. 'Yesterday, she said she would never call anybody Baas,' my poor madam said helplessly.

'Why do I have to call anybody Baas?' I wanted to know. 'To show respect to those superior to you,' Granny said indignantly. [*ignoring the motive of relatively poor British immigrants to S.A. who wished to compensate for their loss of status in a class society by enjoying the benefits of a race society*]

I laughed lightly and this annoyed everybody in the house.

'These blacks have too much to say, I'm afraid,' Black Beard said.

'You called me for a talk on life in general, not for a lecture on how a black servant should behave.'

[...]

[She] called me to follow her into the shop. She produced the money, which was only R36.00 [*for the month – about £4.00! even given the lower cost of living in S.A.*] and, in explanation, said that I had to pay for the vase I had broken. She said I would pay R2.00 for that, and that the other R2.00 was for everything she had given me, like the two files and the occasional bus fare.

I did not feel too bad about it. All I wanted was to vamoose.

'You must always remember that I will remain the boss and you will remain the slave class. Actually, you will die with a broom in your hand. You will never be anything in your life, because you are black and so is your mind. Blacks will never rule this country, because they have no brains. Do you understand?'

Those were the final parting shots from my dear madam. 'Yes, madam.' I simply had to call her that for the very last time. Then I turned my back, never to show my face again in that part of the world.

Lovechild: 2002b: 36-37, 44 "My Dear Madam" [researcher's interpellations]

It is worth quoting verbatim from *Zandile* to show how this reality of the average white employer is denied and idealised by means of a child-like fantasy of the good Other, the needed transitional object, the reflective phallic extrusion of the semiotic into the symbolic experienced by the audience as

witticism (see Moi 1985: 161-162 op.cit. p.83 above on Kristeva).

Look at my feet, let's stand like this - you see, I am taller! One day, I'm going to be a tall teacher, like Miss Dlamini, and walk like this ... (demonstrates) *hee ngiqhenye habe* ... (and I will show off) What will you become when you grow up? (Pause) Jo! A white lady! That is nice Bongi, we can still be friends. I'll be a tall teacher and you will be a white lady with long hair like that, and you will have nice clothes and nice shoes with high heels ... and, and you can put rouge on your lips *njengalomlungu waka Webber* ... (like the white lady from Webber shopping centre) but I don't like it so much ... And Bongi, we can speak English Ismasdat lapetelez for you? (these are made up words, they have no meaning at all) And I can say was da meta be you? (Stops and thinks) Bongi, you can also have a car! *Unginike ilift sihambe sobabili sigqoke kahle abantu basibuke bathi ... hish Mame, qhaks Baby*. (You'll give me a lift - we'll be so well dressed everyone will look at us and go 'hish Mame, qhaks Baby!') We can go anywhere together! Come Bongi, let's sing.

*Nabaya omame, bethwel' imithwalo Nabaya omame, bethwel' imithwalo
Ngingci bo, ngingci bo, nabaya omame Sabona ngoricey, sabona
ngonyama Sabona ngokhekhe, sabona ngoswitie*
(There come our mothers, bringing us presents Yay! Yummy, yippy! There
come our mothers We can see rice and meat
We can see cakes and sweeties)
Carried away by the excitement of the moment, Bongi and Zandile sing their
way off the stage.

HYSZ? (2002a): 4-5

Events in *Zandile* personalise and humanise the wider, structural cruelty evident in Mhlophe's journalistic stories. There is an account of how what ideally in the 19th century there may have been a merely ritual abduction preceded by genuine courtship and family agreement, by contrast with what occurred to Mhlophe's half-sister in the Transkei – called fictitiously Nokulunga. The Rev. Tiyo Soga (1931/1932) in his description of the marital customs of the Xhosa suggests that lovers might escape forced marriage to a detestable partner by means of elopement before the dreaded event. Marriage was anyway enacted after an agreed *lobola* by a voluntary ritual of the carrying away of the bride by the bridegroom not a real abduction. We can conclude that now, however, enclosed by a relentless cash economy, male suitors, themselves previously humiliated and brutalised as migrant workers in the crime-ridden

cities, have girls sold to them as brides by cash-starved families. There is no hint from friends to Nokulunga that eloping with her lover would be timely nor does her lover in the city come and rescue her as Zandile/Mhlophe's father tried to rescue her mother from her loveless arranged marriage.

“Nokulunga Wedding” as the “undertext” for the abduction of Zandile and the symbolisation of the humiliation of men in the migrant labour system displaced by them onto the female.

First we have the cruel abduction by the mother – also partly determined structurally – the migrant labour system which divides families – a particularly embittered and artistically frustrated mother who abandons responsibility and human sympathy for “her” (otherwise-attached) child whom she feels she owns. However traumatic this is, it is much less violent, tragic and irreversible as a “symptom” in the text of a real-life event than the trauma suffered by Mhlophe's half-sister in the Transkei and with which Mhlophe was threatened at the age of 12 onwards “every day” according to the researcher's interview with her in March 1990. In *Zandile* the abduction is dramatically preceded by a happy song devoid of sinister meaning, but is “uncannily” predicted by the “white car” with which Zandile threatens the “bad” flowers in Gogo's garden who have sung out of tune:

Gogo's ululation can still be heard in the background. Zandile enters, singing happily on her way back from school. It's the last day and she has passed her exams. She knows that Gogo will give her a present.

Zandile: *Khilikithi*
Khilikithi khilikithi,
Zandile uphasile Uzohamba noGogo
Baye ePort Shepstone
Khilikithi khilikithi
Zandile uphasile
Uzothol' ipresenti
Khilikithi khilikithi
 (Khilikithi,

Khilikithi khilikithi
 Zandile has passed ,
 She will travel with Gogo,
 To Port Shepstone,
 Khilikithi khilikithi,
 Zandile has passed
 She will get a present,
 Khilikithi khilikithi)

She sings until she gets home, where she leaves her books and goes out to play. She notices a white car idling towards her. She stops singing abruptly. As if somebody has come out of the car and is advancing towards her, she retreats accordingly.

Zandile: Bongi, stay next to me. It's the white car. I'm scared.

Sawubona ... No, I've got my own sweets from Gogo ... No! I don't want to go with you. Gogo's taking me on holiday to Port Shepstone. Gogo wouldn't want me to go with people I don't know. (Pause) No, you're not! (She is trapped against the back wall) Bongi, go and tell my grandmother the white car has come for me, go tell my brother Paul, please Bongi, run! (She screams)

Then, as if she is being pulled into the car, she lunges forward, screaming as she reaches the end of the stage. She is screaming for help, but her voice is drowned by the car noise as it speeds away.

HYSZ?:(2002a); 23-24

Then later:

Lulama: This is not Durban, this is the Transkei. Here you must stop arguing with me. You must shut up when I speak. Zandile, listen to me. I was talking to Matshezi the other day. Do you know her son?

Zandile: Ewe (Yes) Mama.

Lulama : His family wants you.

Zandile: But I don't want him.

Lulama: What do you mean you don't want him? His uncle has the richest family in this village. He could have any girl in the village and he chose you. That's how I got married as well. You must have your own house.

Zandile: But I don't like him. He's got all these ugly scars on his face.

Lulama: But that's our tradition! (She notices Zandile scratching her back)What's wrong with you now?

Zandile: My back is so sore from the bending.

Lulalama: Why are you so lazy? First your hands get cut by grass and then your legs are itchy - now it's your back! How do you think you will build your own house if you don't let your hands get used to it? Look at mine. I've been cutting grass every winter -

ever since I was your age. I cut the grass for every roof in this house.

Zandile: I don't like thatch roofs anyway. I like the roof my grandmother has in Durban.

Lulama: Life is different here. No time for rest - just work. If you learn that then you will make a good wife for Matshezi's son.

Zandile: I don't know why you took me from Gogo, if you are just going to give me away to Matshezi's son.

Lulama: Zandile I took you because you are my child.

Zandile: But you don't even let me visit my grandmother.

Lulama: I can't, because if I let you go there, you will never come back again. I know you were happy there, I saw you that night.

Zandile: You saw me Mama?

Lulama: Yes, when I went to visit your grandmother in Durban. (Sits) I wanted to take you then, but I knew Gogo would never let you go, after all those years you had become her child.

Zandile: But you shouldn't have stolen me.

Lulama: How else was I going to get you? Wait till you have a child, you'll know what I've been going through all these years. How do you think it feels, to know that your child doesn't even know you exist?

Zandile: But Ma, I'm only 12, why are you in such a hurry to give me away, if you missed me so much?

Lulama: But it's our tradition. It was the same when I got married. By the time I was 22, I already had four children.

Zandile: But I don't even like him.

Lulama: You don't have to like him, he has to like you. Do you think I was happy with my husband? But he chose me. I had to stay married to him.

Zandile: But he left you.

Lulama: It's easy for men to go.

Zandile: And you also left me all those years.

Lulama: I left you because I had to. Do you think my husband would have accepted you? He would have killed me if I had come to his home with another man's child. My going to find work in Durban was bad enough - even though he knew I was forced to because he was not bringing- us any money. He would beat me if I asked for money. My mother said I must go and find work while she was still able to look after my children. So I went to Durban and because my papers were not in order, it was hard to find work. And then I did get work they could pay me anything they liked. I got two pounds a month. Even in those days it was nothing.

Zandile: Was that before I was born?

Lulama: Yes, 1958 ... (pause) That was a difficult year for me. Then something happened, I bumped into an old friend that I grew up with here. Dudu looked so happy and beautiful and I could see that she had a good job.

Zandile: She was a teacher?

Lulama: No, she was a singer with a successful group called 'Mtateni Queens', and one of their singers had just left the band, so Dudu asked me if I would like to join, so I joined the group.

Zandile: (Holding back laughter) *Haai bo wena?*

Lulama: Yes. Before Dudu left here we used to sing together for all the weddings, we were quite famous around here. There would never be a wedding without us singing. (Does a bit of a wedding song: *Lakhuphula mafu Dali* ... [A storm is rising my Darling])

HYSZ?(2002a): 32-34

Exactly how apartheid and the post-apartheid class system *can actually* breed at the marital level is given vivid detail in the “everyday” wedding customs of degraded *lobola* and forced marriage in “Nokulunga’s Wedding.” This is the “wedding dance” of a less fortunate Xhosa bride. This is “a storm [that] is rising my Darling” (see “The Dancer” at the end of this chapter). This terrifying rape which Mhlophe asserts happened to her half-sister and with which she was threatened every day by her mother, co-opts black male power in the subjugation of women and the perpetuation of a cheap labour system. If the husband doesn’t impregnate her immediately to ensure her slavery his brothers and friends will add to the pool of semen ejaculated into her vulva and their sperm will do “the job” for him. Xolani her husband has failed to force himself on Nokulunga on their “first night” because she has fought back physically. But the *lobola* cattle from Xolani’s father to be given to her family are groomed and waiting only for the breaking of her hymen which will, together with a subsequent feast and dancing complete the marriage to be followed by a life of

near-slavery. Mocked and goaded by his father and grandfather Xolani and a whole band of men enter the bridal hut:

Hands pulled her down. Her streaming eyes could not see which man it was who shouted at her that she should lie like a woman. She wiped her eyes and saw Xolani approaching her. She jumped up and pushed him away, grabbing her clothes, but the group of men was onto her like a mob in no time at all. They roughly pulled her back onto the bed and Xolani was placed on top of her. Each of her legs was pulled apart by a man. Other men held her arms. Xolani's friends were cheering and clapping their hands while he jumped high, now enjoying the rape. One man joked that he had had enough of holding the leg and wanted a share of his work. Things were said too about her bloody thighs, amidst roars of laughter, before she fainted.

'The bride is ours The bride is ours
 Mother [the mother-in-law] will never go to sleep
 without food
 without food.

Lovechild: (2002b): 70 "Nokulunga's Wedding"

Perhaps – over-romantically - Mhlophe contrasts this rape with a love match between Nokulunga and Vuyo, a migrant worker from her village employed in Germiston on the Witwatersrand – in Mhlophe's autobiography the urban tends to be equated with the more rational and the more enlightened. How many African love matches survive the fragmentation brought about by migrant labour? Researchers highlight the way this system spreads social and medical pathologies because of the search for new local sexual, social and economic partners and ignorance about contraception and protected sex even in urban areas amongst originally rural people. None of these facts generally known amongst the educated (like Mhlophe) are written into the drama of Nokulunga let alone *Zandile* – only the theatrical moment – although that very effectively done in the former in its denouement:

The dreaded day came. Nokulunga walked slowly by Xolani's side. All around her, people were singing and laughing and ululating and clapping their hands. She did

not smile, for when she tried, tears came rolling down her cheeks to make her ashamed. For Xolani, it was the day of his life. Such a beautiful wife and such a big wedding! He was smiling at her and squeezing her hand; that was the moment when Nokulunga saw Vuyo. He must have left everything and rushed back home as soon as he heard that his own love had been stolen from him. Vuyo was looking at Xolani with loathing, his fists very tight and his lips pressed together in a hard line. Nokulunga pulled her hand from Xolani's and took a few steps towards Vuyo. She began to cry, wanting so much for him to come and take her hand and run away with her, to some place very far from here; leaving all these mad-happy people to enjoy their meat and beer and celebration without her. Xolani noticed her tears and tried to comfort her. A lot of people saw this; they stood watching, some sympathising, others wondering ...

Months passed. Nokulunga was sitting by the fire. In her arms was a five-day-old baby boy, sleeping so peacefully that she smiled at him. Her father-in-law had named the child Vuyo. How thankful she had been for that! She would always remember her Vuyo of old, whom she had loved. She had by now accepted that Xolani was her lifetime partner and that there was nothing she could do about it. Once, she saw Vuyo in town and they had briefly kissed. It had been clear to both of them, however, that since Nokulunga was already pregnant, she was indeed Xolani's wife. Vuyo knew he would have to pay a lot of cattle if he took Nokulunga with her unborn baby. There was truly nothing to be done.

Lovechild: (2002b: 72) "Nokulunga's Wedding"

Mhlophe makes clear in a story referring to a later time in her life that she knows that as migrant workers in Johannesburg the Vuyo's and the Xolani's are themselves humiliated. In "My Dear Madam" (*op.cit.* p.39) the coal delivery men, defiantly blacker than black because of the coal dust, hurl obscene insults at her. They deliver fuel to the "madam" but cannot refer to her since she is still the inaccessible "madam" protected by apartheid laws and the racist police and the death penalty for rape. They displace hatred onto their black sister's genitals of which because of their station they feel themselves deprived. This indeed lies at the bottom of condom-less sex in Southern Africa and the HIV/AIDS epidemic according to the expert investigator Jonny Steinberg (*op.cit.*). Perhaps African men feel they have their naked penises as sources of masculine status. Alarming current rape statistics suggest this.

Paradoxical therapy.

Mhlophe's realistic pessimism underlying the failure of romantic passion to change the situation in the decaying countryside itself – might drive us by “paradoxical” therapy to increase our awareness of the real problems of women in South Africa and other corrupted traditional rural societies like parts of India. By saying there is nothing to be done at the very end of “Nokulunga's Wedding” Mhlophe drives us to argue with her, to conscientize ourselves shocked as we are by her pessimism. At least this is the sadder, rural, adult version of the adolescent fantasy of urban romance which as we have claimed throughout is implausible although theoretically and ethically preferable and what Mhlophe is in a way “selling” to juvenile audiences as “True Romance” in *Zandile*. The sophisticated but adolescent urban ego-ideal of the buddies Lindiwe and Zandile are compared with the reality of the barely pubertal rural Nokulunga:

Together: And you got me wanting you! (They laugh and exclaim in Xhosa: 'We'll show them!')

Zandile: I like this, but is this all your Paul does? He doesn't work, he just sings sugar sugar to you all day long? That's marriage material!

Lindiwe: Suka! He does work.

Zandile: What does he do?

Lindiwe: He plays drums.

Zandile: You call that work?

Lindiwe: It's hard work drumming.

Zandile: What does his family say, a grown-up man playing drums? (She imitates a drummer)

Lindiwe: They like it. His sisters always come to watch him, Thandi and Phumzile.

Zandile: Are they our age?

Lindiwe: No, they are old, about 27 and 28, and they like me!

Zandile: Did you see his parents?

Lindiwe: No, the parents are in Durban, but Paul says he has already told them about me.

Zandile: Mmmm! It looks quite serious Lindiwe.

Lindiwe: Yes. Mrs Zwide any day now!

Zandile: Zwide?

Lindiwe: Yes.

Zandile: You say Paul has two sisters, Thandi and Phumzile? And that they are older than him and that the family is in Durban and that their surname is Zwide? Please give me your Paul's address.

Lindiwe: But why? (all suspicious)

Zandile: Because I need to write to him. It's very important.

Lindiwe: But what's the connection? (Stands up getting suspicious and jealous)

Zandile: Because Zwide, that's my family name.

Lindiwe: Sigwili?

Zandile: Is my mother's name. Zwide is my real name. Zwide is my father's name.

Lindiwe: Zandi, are you trying to tell me that Paul might be your brother?

Zandile: He could be my half-brother from Durban. Your Paul plays drums? I remember I was about seven years old, my half-brother in Durban, Paul, used to take the old cake tins, put them down, play drums with them, and my father could never stop him. And the sisters' names connect with my half-sisters in Durban. I want to know where my grandmother is. Gogo.

Lindiwe: (Thinks) Zandile, there is an old woman living there where Paul stays with his uncle. It could be your grandmother.

Zandile: Oh, Gogo. *Nkosi yami!* (My God)

Let me go now. I will run home to get Paul's number and then go straight to the Post Office to phone him.

Zandile: I am coming with you.

Lindiwe: No, I'm phoning Paul at work. Even if it is your grandmother, you won't be able to talk to her!

Zandile: Lindiwe, just run and come straight back, okay?

On the other hand in “Nokulunga’s Wedding” her sisters and half-sister Mhlophe herself can do nothing to help the abducted girl. She is enslaved and raped. Zandile and Lindiwe are in and have internalised a protected, Christianising environment – a previously missionary, now a Bantu Education high school which tries to maintain its partly secular and modern traditions.

The conflict of genres but transcendence through the archetype of the folkstory?

At all costs the atmosphere of the fairy-story in *Zandile* must be maintained despite the mother’s cruel abduction and the undertext of Nokulunga’s and Zandile’s potential forced marriage and rape. A good if simple woman is passionate about education and is cheated by a scoundrel who happens to be the biological mother of her granddaughter to whom she is deeply attached. She takes it all lying down. Are these perhaps stereotypes taken out of an African tale such as to be found in Brer Rabbit or the Anansi cycle or the Xhosa *iinstomi* (Scheub 1975)? This *naïf* genre goes on being nurtured until a sad and sweet end. Zandile discovers that her Gogo is dead and all the presents she saved have been carefully packed and left behind in the sure faith that God will bring the grandchild back eventually.

A very different back-story shows through in respect of the far from naïve father and step-mother who we are told, at the end of the play, had her collusively “relocated” in a way which in retrospect makes the epilogue misleading in its disappointing revelation about “human nature for kids”. Something is buried in hidden writing which the research interrogates, and asks

further: what is there behind the hidden writing, behind the merely conveniently *naïf* evasion, behind the pretence of a magic world of make-believe – behind the folk-tale? The harsh discourse of Lulama on apartheid (2002 a: 33-35 quoted above) certainly conflicts in terms of genre, aesthetics and morality? Why morality against apartheid, but not against the collusive family? We say this in terms of dramatic writing, of story, of text-ure – that is of depth of text.

In terms of theatre something is attempted which is apparently affecting at the level of the *naïf*: the dignity and diplomacy of the Old Woman. But she is sheer theatrical presence, not a full displacement of the archetypal absent unconscious writing concerning Gogo. Gogo is now present in an unsophisticated form on the stage as simplified stereotype in speech, movement, the accoutrements of the old – a Bible and a stick and no doubt a shawl. In terms of Propp's, Souriau's and Greimas' actants and text-grammar the final message to the Subject/Receiver from the Sender/Helper in the face of her Opponent now ending her vicissitudes is at hand (Ubersfeld 1999: 32-71) – the apparent Coming-Of-Age story. But all the really hard writing is suppressed and the end suffused in a style close to the girls' and young women's magazines consumed by Zandile and Mhlophe and represented in the play and in the stories (Mhlophe 2002a, 2002b "The Toilet"):

An old woman enters carrying a Bible and leaning on a walking stick.

Zandile: *Nkgo! Nkgo! Nkgo!* (Zandile is knocking offstage)

Old Woman: *Ubani?* Who is it?

Zandile: *Yimina uZandile. Gogo sengibuyile.* I've come back

Old Woman: *Ngena* (Zandile enters and sees the Old Woman and for a split second thinks it's her grandmother)

Zandile: *Gogo, yimina uZandile.* (It's me Zandile) (She stops) *Sanibonani.*

Old Woman: *Sawubona* Zandile.

Zandile : Is my grandmother here?

Old Woman: *Hlala phansi Mntanomntanami.* (Sit down child of my child) You don't know me but you know Uncle Phillip's wife - I'm her mother.

Zandile: Old Woman: Has Gogo gone to fetch me from the station?

Old Woman: No *Mntanomntanami* - she has left us.

Zandile: Has she gone ... has she moved?

Old Woman: No, no - she always knew you would come back. She told me so many stories about you. Oh, she wanted to see you ... right until the end she was asking for you.

Zandile: But where is she?

Old Woman: Oh, *Mntanomntanami* ... she passed away.

Zandile: Aw, no, not my grandmother.

Old Woman: I'm so sorry. *UGogo Mthwalo*, she was visiting here with us when she got sick. We were great friends. Uncle Phillip organised doctors. They did everything they could. We did our best to make her comfortable.

Zandile: I wish I could have been here.

Old Woman: Zandile, it was her time to go.

Zandile: Did she ever know what happened to me, that I went to the Transkei?

Old Woman: Yes, and she knew that your mother took you and that it was not your will to go.

Zandile: But why didn't she come and fetch me? I waited for her.

Old Woman: She did try but they would never tell her exactly where you were.

Zandile: I wish she had waited for me.

Old Woman: She must have known you'd find her. She said to me - if ever my child comes back or if they trace her, give her this photo. (She takes a photograph out of her Bible) And she left a suitcase for you. She said I must give it to you. (She goes to fetch it)

Zandile: Oh, *uGogo - Nkosi yami!*

Old Woman: She would have been proud to see you, so tall and beautiful. How old are you now *Mntanomntanami*?

Zandile: Eighteen.

Old Woman: Eighteen!

Zandile: Did she say I must take the suitcase?

Old Woman: (Nods) She said it was yours, and she asked me to give you the key ... here. I will leave you now. (Exits)

Zandile is on her own in a pool of light, very quiet, very separated from her surroundings. She opens the suitcase and takes out all the little parcels her grandmother had been putting away for her through all the years. Zandile holds each of them for a moment before laying them gently to one side. At the bottom of the suitcase she finds a dress, takes it out and holds it up against herself. It is a little girl's dress which barely reaches beyond her waist. She puts it down reaches for a second dress and repeats the action. She picks up a third dress and also holds it against her body. She then holds all three dresses closely to her., hugging them and sobbing. The lights slowly fade to black.

Not an insightful politics of writing but public relations?

The consumer society, the “people’s” capitalism of the new South Africa has well and truly arrived – in the midst of the discourse of revolutionary ferment – would-be people’s socialism: feel-good entertainment of post-apartheid anticipated. The thread of memory partially hidden in Gcina in interviews and revealed in her radical journalism is erased as hidden writing in *Zandile*. All the serious questions are unanswered: rather than confront Zandile’s father Tom, Gogo’s collusively compromised son, with the heroine’s return and with any angry feelings about her “true” mothering figure – portrayed in only one early scene as we have already suggested - some anonymous “good uncle” Philip is dragged in – very conveniently to care for the dying woman. On the other hand perhaps this is indeed how the extended African family works.

What is really at issue is the denial of the reality of the ideology of Zandile’s personal advancement *as ideology*. At the same time Mhlophe recognises “the people’s struggle for national liberation” but is unsure of how to

resolve these issues. For her it is a “natural attitude” that the individual person exists, that the Market Theatre actually broadcast news to the whole of South Africa in the mid-1980’s about how individuals were suffering when state television was silent about the state of emergency, about detentions without trial, about brutal clashes between the forces of the state/vigilantes and the comrades of the UDF (and criminals hiding behind them also committing crimes such as necklacing). She suggests as much retrospectively (Perkins 1998 *op. cit.*)

Actually newspapers within South Africa such as the *Weekly Mail* and even the English press such as *The Star* and radical journals and books were at times able to report events and certainly foreign correspondents overseas reported what was going on which would be available on the BBC World Service. The ANC’s illegal broadcasts to South Africa from Lusaka were available on shortwave.

What was going on was also obvious to people in the townships who would often transmit to white employers what was going on (Coetzee 1990 *passim*).

Whites whose minds were closed certainly did not go to the Market Theatre to see *Born in the RSA* and *Black Dog* by Barney Simon and The Company to which Mhlophe refers (see interview with her in the Appendix. She maintains in this interview with me an extraordinary but “natural” attitude - extraordinary for an educated writer if one without an examined university degree, “natural” for the man or woman in the street) that the individual is not also partly ideology even when the person maintains complete silence about ideology as such.

Mhlophe’s theatrical style in the interview with Perkins (1998) and myself in 1990 carries the researcher away with her rhetoric about the individual – quite besides misrepresenting the context: in both the black press (e.g “The

Sowetan”) and the English daily and weekly press read by the more liberal whites there was awareness of the state of emergency and therefore, *a priori*, detentions without trial. Mhlophe is aware of this and yet she has to adopt some sort of “party-line” held by the “comrades” whom she also criticises from the standpoint of “the masses” in the Perkins interview! The Market Theatre was not the only breach in a totalitarian police state. There was not absolutely complete censorship – as the anti-apartheid left hoped to convey to overseas audiences. What was new was a way of actually breaking down, deconstructing the solidarity play into a “human story” about “an individual” – instead of one actually represented in the English-speaking and black press as yet another black or brown victim. So perhaps what Mhlophe means by “the person” is a way of bringing writing about individual history into the literary and theatrical moment.

The authenticity of Mhlophe’s natural attitude: the ideology of the person can also be real and true historical writing

In my interview with Mhlophe in March 1990 the transcript goes on to refer to Mhlophe’s concern at the time with the shocking case of a Mrs De Bruin who was accused of being collusive with murder and thus subject to the appalling nature of South African criminal law during apartheid when she could have faced the death penalty. The dilemma for Mhlophe remains: how can Mrs De Bruin be regarded as “herself” when she was arrested solely on the grounds that she was in the crowd when political murders may have been committed – although there was absolutely no evidence that she was in any way involved in violence? She was *herself* and she was also a *black or brown woman* perceived as supporting what the law at the time regarded as an illegal gathering which

could have led to murder! Mrs De Bruin was for a time on death row!

Mhlophe's distress can be described as frantic. My reading of this is not only because of the sheer injustice of the case. There is another level to it: the whole meaning of ideology as something that penetrates through the *persona* and enters into a socio-political-economic system was not available to Mhlophe. Abuse of ideology by both the apartheid state and the comrades of anti-apartheid against whose polemical male-oriented drama she was reacting, was, in my assessment, responsible for this.

However it is in another project (Mhlophe 2002b: 90-91) that Mhlophe achieves what throughout this dissertation I have called redemption – paradoxically through forgiving and honouring her abusive mother and transcending her mother in herself. Here the polemic drops away. Historically true writing is immanent in the evocation of the theatrical moment of the person (*persona*) – perhaps the whole theme of her project:

The Dancer

Mama,
they tell me you were a dancer they tell me you had long
beautiful legs to carry your graceful body they tell me you were a dancer

Mama,
they tell me you sang beautiful solos they tell me you closed your eyes always when
the feeling of the song
was right, and lifted your face up to the sky they tell me you were an enchanting dancer

Mama
they tell me you were always so gentle they talk of a willow tree
swaying lovingly over clear running water in early Spring when they talk of you
they tell me you were a slow dancer

Mama
they tell me you were a wedding dancer
they tell me you smiled and closed your eyes your arms curving outward just a
little
and your feet shuffling in the sand;
tshi tshi tshitshitshitha, tshitshi tshitshitshitha o hee! how I wish I was there to see

you
they tell me you were a pleasure to watch

Mama
they tell me I am a dancer too but I don't know ...
I don't know for sure what a wedding dancer is there are no more weddings
but many, many funerals
where we sing and dance
running fast with the coffin
of a would-be bride or would-be groom strange smiles have replaced our
tears our eyes are full of vengeance, Mama

Dear, dear Mama,
they tell me I am a funeral dancer.