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## **Fictionalization, conscientization and the trope of exile in *Amandla* and *Third Generation***

### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this article is to examine *Amandla* (by Miriam Tlali) and *Third Generation* (by Sipho Sepamla) as anti-apartheid novels of resistance which are faced by a number of serious contradictions. The article is an attempt to analyse the ways in which these texts seek to cope, on the one hand, with what seems to be a lost cause, a struggle without an end, and on the other hand with their own status as fictional texts which attempt to change precisely that which seems to deny all possibilities of subversion.*

*Both texts attempt to make sense of a reality which is perceived to be so horrifyingly real as to be fictional (in the sense of the fictive, unreal, ethereal). On the one hand the power of the apartheid state is seen to be insurmountable, and on the other hand, that state has to be subverted and destroyed.*

*The resulting dialectic, posited in the texts, of the state of affairs in reality and the state of affairs that is desired, can only be solved by the use of the trope of exile as an imaginary resolution to a very real contradiction in order to achieve at least some measure of conscientization in the readership.*

### **1. Introduction: the politics of conscientization**

#### **1.1 The debates**

In this article "exile" is read as an ironic trope by means of which the contradictions inherent in the struggle against apartheid may be dealt with in fictional terms. As such, the article inevitably will be seen as entering the debate on the broader relation between politics and culture in South Africa, even though this is not its purpose.

It is stating the obvious to say that the distinction between culture and politics is problematic. Since the publication of Albie Sachs's by now famous paper "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom" (1990:19-29), the debate has flared up with burning intensity in South African cultural (and, in this case, literary) circles. The debate has recently been lent urgency by the clash between the National Arts Initiative (NAI) and the ANC's Department of Arts and Culture (DAC).<sup>1</sup> This article does not seek explicitly to intervene in any of these debates, which deal with issues like the following: whether 'art' has to be seen in aesthetic terms; whether art is 'good' because of the *experience* of the person writing it, or because of the writing itself (in an immanent fashion) – which would have important consequences in terms of 'shared experience', and the 'right' of a critic writing on texts by authors whose experience is not shared by the critic in question (may/can white critics write on black novels?); and whether culture *has* to serve a specific political agenda, for instance that of liberation (the question of control). Another important problem raised by the Sachs paper pertains to the way in which it seems to "licence dissent" as Cornwall notes in an interview (Brown & Van Dyk, 1991:17; cf. Kistner, 1991).

This article engages with two specifically South African texts which deal quite explicitly with issues in a contemporary South African world, and as such evince certain 'traits' of what might be called resistance literature – such as angry rhetoric, stereotyping, depictions of violence or struggle, and so on. In terms of Sachs's paper they might be accused of being instances of artefacts "trapped in the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination" (1990:19), of that type of "art and literature [which would make you] think we were living in the greyest and most sombre worlds, completely shut in by apartheid" (1990:21). In short, it would seem as if the texts which form the subject of this article might illustrate Sachs's controversial statement that apartheid is perpetuated by the very texts which would attack it:

It is as though our rulers stalk every page and haunt every picture; everything is obsessed by the oppressors and the trauma they have imposed, nothing is about us and the new consciousness we are developing ... if only they [our writers and painters] could shake off the gravity of their anguish

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<sup>1</sup> The controversy, specifically with regard to artistic control, has recently bubbled to the surface again and become very public, with critical reporting subsequent to the ANC Culture and Development Conference in *The Weekly Mail* (cf. Gevisser, 1993:24). Mtutuzeli Matshoba, media spokesman of the DAC, responded (1993:24) to an open letter addressed to the DAC (and specifically to Wally Scroto and Mewa Ramgobin) by Mike van Graan, the general secretary of the NAI, in *The Weekly Mail* (Van Graan, 1993:15). This was followed by the SABC news programme *Agenda* hosting a (fairly acrimonious) debate between, among others, Ramgobin from the DAC and Njabulo Ndebele from the NAI.

and break free from the solemn formulas that people (like myself) have tried for so many years to impose upon them (Sachs, 1990:21).

This contradictory state of affairs has been acknowledged by various critics, many of them writing long before Sachs.<sup>2</sup> While Michael Chapman adamantly denies that there are "ghettoes of apartheid imagination" (Brown & Van Dyk, 1991:11), Cornwall states that the "political gains made by the culture of liberation" (Brown & Van Dyk, 1991:16) must be qualified by the recognition that

... the voices which it has empowered to speak were after all empowered to speak only in the way they have. And from the perspective of literary value this is precisely the problem. As a (necessarily) authoritarian sort of culture, the culture of liberation has deformed as much as it has formed ... (Brown & Van Dyk, 1991:17).

This contradiction, I would like to indicate, also haunts these two novels. Both texts would seem to aspire towards subverting and resisting the political status quo of apartheid. The texts in question here can both be said to attempt, moreover, to *enact* resistance – not only are they *about* the struggle against apartheid; they (seek to) form *part* of that struggle.

The question is whether, and to what extent, these texts can – and do – further the struggle against apartheid.

## 1.2 Conscientization and the recording of history

The issue of conscientization is crucial in answering this question. Alvarez-Pereyre (1988:114), Sole (1988:69ff.) and Watts (1989:3-5, 25-37) have all discussed the importance of conscientization within a South African culture of liberation. Watts (1989:3) notes that, where earlier black literary expressions of the South African situation "[are] looking back at situations rather than indicating a way forward", Black Consciousness writers have

... turned from white-directed protest to black-directed conscientisation. ... After 1976 the poets and writers were possessed by the need to record, to seize history as it passed and render it back to those who had made it serve

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2 Among these, see for instance Ndebele (1988; 1989a; 1989b). As Ndebele notes in an interview, this merely "indicates that it's important *where* you say something. Most of my pronouncements came out in academic journals – with a fairly restricted circulation" (Brown & Van Dyk, 1991:49). Meintjies (1990:33-34) mentions Ndebele, Nadine Gordimer, Chris van Wyk, Mzwakwe Mbuli, Mi Hlatwayo and others as having enunciated various concerns before Sachs. As Olivier (1990:48) says, "Sachs is nie 'n nuwe ewangelie nie" ['Sachs is not a new gospel'].

as ammunition in the struggle, and to point the way forward (Watson, 1989: 4-5).

But what is especially important is the emphasis put on this issue – as well as on the concomitant need to record what is happening and make it one's own as a people – by Tlali and Sepamla themselves.

One of the reasons why she writes in English and not in her native Sotho, Tlali says, is because "I'm trying to reach as many people as possible" (Ludman, 1989:28; cf. Tlali, 1984:24). Tlali is said to be "known for her pen which always shouts slogans and bleeds with anger" (Anon., 1986:13), and she has been quoted as saying

... I always feel that our history must be recorded. The future generation has the right to know what happened during our time. ... The role of the writer is to conscientise the people, so that they can be able to wriggle out of this oppression (Anon., 1986:13).<sup>3</sup>

And Sepamla does not see his role "to be the provider of entertainment, but to spread hope for the future and sympathy for the present" (Douglas, 1981:6). In an interview with Gray (1977:257), Sepamla states that the South African writer "has a duty to be a witness ... to record what transpired while he was around". History is seized and shaped, it becomes a history of "experience":

... the novelists' concern is more that of presenting a sense of the authentic experience of blacks in Soweto at the time through several individual characters, rather than a superficial parroting of events (Sole, 1988:83).

It should be clear that Sepamla and Tlali are deeply committed to the principles of recording and writing "history from the inside", as Clingman (1986) calls it in his work on Gordimer, to "a process of the fictionalizing of history" (Sole, 1988:83). This writing of history is executed for the benefit of a future generation – and is therefore geared towards the shaping of a future and emergent culture – and, at the same time, for the benefit of the present generation – and is therefore geared towards conscientization and action for liberation now.

It is this process of the recording of history by means of fictionalization for the sake of conscientization in *Amandla* and in *Third Generation*, which forms the subject of this article. Plot construction and narrative form are examined in terms of exile as the trope by means of which the texts as romance narratives become imaginary resolutions to certain real contradictions to which they thus constitute

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. also the interview with Tlali by Lockett (1989:69-85; cf. esp. 76-77).

an active response (cf. Jameson, 1985:77; 118) in order to have, after all, a conscientizing effect on their readership.<sup>4</sup>

But the process of recording history through fictionalization appears to be an essentially ambiguous project (at least in the case of the texts being read in this article). There is an important dialectic involving a reality (a state of affairs) and a telos, an object of desire (a non-actualized state of affairs which comes to seem fictional<sup>5</sup>). This dialectic as constructed in the texts must be connected with the structural disjointedness of the texts commented upon by various critics (cf. Sole, 1988:69; Watts, 1989:223-224). The dialectic becomes symptomatic of a confusion punctuating not only the implied disjointedness of the times, but also of the novelistic form itself as a means of escape into the exile of the private imagination as against the collectivity of mass struggle. This is despite the stated intention of using this private form – the novel – of fantasy and fictionalization in another, transgressive form as a means of resistance. According to Watts (1989:5) this trend can be characterised as a movement away from an

... angst-ridden search [for identity], the introspective nihilism of the existentialist [to] the purposeful quest of a people who have had to emerge from conscious and subconscious subjugation [and] rescue their psyche from alienation and near obliteration and forge a collective will to carry out the task allotted to them by history.

The novel would then no longer be something private – it would become collective (and thus transgressive – the novel is traditionally a private form) in its recording, its seizing of history.

However, rather than offering new cultural possibilities through a refashioning of the novel into a form both new and collectively supra-novelistic, these texts (the ones being read here) confirm their fictional status through the traces of what they *themselves* deem private flights of fictional fantasy – as expressed in writing (rather than action) – which cannot but lead to what is represented as the end. This end is the end of writing in exile because of the way writing is self-reflexively represented as *merely* being able to represent. Writing is represented as representation – it is not the *real* thing.

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4 Sepamla and Tlali have stated explicitly that they write for a black audience. Cf. the interview by Scroce (1988:305-307).

5 I use the terms *fiction* and *fictional* in a very broad sense. In this article the terms are sometimes meant to signify the conventional, everyday connotation of something secondary, fictive, unreal, ethereal, illusory, a lie. Sometimes the term is used in a more technical sense, but always with the added – and prejudicial – sense mentioned above.

The end of writing in exile is, then, not so much the physical end of writing, but a punctuation of what would seem to be the only way *out*. The fiction of exile starts where fictionalization ends, something which thematises the paradoxical movement of novels which on one level seem to doubt the heroic nature of the struggle and the inevitability of its outcome, and yet also have to affirm the heroic nature of that struggle, and the inevitability of its outcome.

### 1.3 Fictionalization and irony

Fiction, it is one of the contentions of this article, is *used* in the texts in question in order firstly to record history, and thus to conscientize an audience, and secondly to deal with certain social contradictions, among which the perceived impotence of what seems like an everlasting struggle against injustice is especially significant. As noted above, though, the texts themselves get caught up in contradiction because of the way in which writing (fiction) is represented as being merely writing (as opposed to action).

The concept 'world' is important in any understanding of fictionalization. 'World' implies the notion of 'border' – fictionalizing is crossing borders (cf. Iser, 1990:939) – which in turns implies a certain (ironic) doubling, as the process of fictionalization entails crossing borders from one world to another.

In this regard, fiction is closely linked to the dream, the lie, to identity. Fiction is very often, like representation, deemed to be something secondary, ethereal, unreal, illusory, a lie.

Fiction pretends, like the dream and the lie, that its world (which oversteps the world) contains that world, and thus shares with the dream a structure of double meaning. Fiction is a wearing of masks, a becoming different from oneself; it is a "veiled unveiling", a disclosing concealment, being ecstatically beside itself, as Iser (1990:945) puts it. Whereas a dream entails entering other worlds, dream worlds, fiction entails the generating of meaning through the difference implicit in the *tension* between different worlds – the real world is left behind in entering a fictional world, and yet one is *aware* that this fictional world both oversteps and contains, and is therefore, unlike the dream world, a *conscious version* of the 'real' world.

We may therefore describe literary fictionality as a conspicuous modification of consciousness which makes accessible what merely happens in the dream. The dreamer is inextricably bound up in the world he or she creates, but fictionalizing in literature permits a loosening of these very bonds (Iser, 1990:948).

The 'as if' is repressed in the dream, and made self-consciously explicit in fiction, even if it is questioned. Fiction, as Iser notes (1990:939), refers to both "the story-telling branch of literature", and to lies. To this the important qualification has to be added that it refers to that which is neither true nor false, but both – it is neither the real world, nor a non-existent, unreal world, but a *fictional* world. This would imply that fiction is inevitably ambivalent, and would stress the central role of irony in fiction.<sup>6</sup> Irony is a condition of fiction, of the equal validity of mutually exclusive possibilities, but as such fiction is also the victim of (often unintended) irony. As Ndebele (1989b:47) notes,

The artist ... although desiring action, often with as much passion as the propagandist, can never be entirely free from the rules of irony. Irony is the literary manifestation of the principle of contradiction. Its fundamental law, for the literary arts in particular, is that everything involving human society is in a constant state of flux; that the dialectic between appearance and reality in the conduct of human affairs is always operative and constantly problematic, and that consequently, in the representation of human reality, nothing can be taken for granted ... .

In the context of the present article, then, it should be noted that fiction is always a two-edged sword, because it is always to some extent bound to irony and contradiction.

\* Fiction is a way out; but it is at the same time a way in.

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6 Irony is here defined as *aporia*, rather than as a rhetorical term to indicate a mere stylistic figure available to be used in order to express the opposite of what is said. This definition is obviously indebted both to the work of Paul de Man (particularly on the principle of non-contradiction and *aporia* with regard to Nietzsche). Another important influence is that of Friedrich Schlegel, the German Romantic, and theoretician of Romanticism (cf. 1967, 1973). The dialectic nature of irony (cf. Burke, 1952:511-517), or at least of Romantic irony, comes to the fore strongly in Schlegel's writings. According to Schlegel, (1973:294) to quote an example,

Die wahre Ironie, – da es doch auch eine falsche gibt, [...] ist die Ironie der Liebe. Sie entsteht aus dem Gefühle der Endlichkeit und der eignen Beschränkung, und dem scheinbaren Widerspruche dieses Gefühls mit der in jeder wahren Liebe mit eingeschlossenen Idee eines Unendlichen

[True irony – as there is, after all, also a false one – ... is the irony of love. It originates from the feeling of finiteness and one's own limitation, and the seeming contradiction of this feeling with the idea of infinity inherent in any true love.]

According to Heimrich (1968: 63), irony is a function of this contradiction. In fact, irony may be said to be that which contradicts the principle of non-contradiction in logic (De Man, 1987).

- \* Fiction is a means, but it is also an end, and a beginning.
- \* Fiction is something which may be used in various ways (to record history, and to conscientize, for instance), but it is also something which exacts a price.

In a fictional game, like a novel, we pretend that we participate. One is inside and outside the text, which makes one's position ambiguous (cf. Pavel, 1986: 54ff.). The question, then, would be – how does one struggle ambiguously?

## 2. *Amandla* and the question of writing (fiction)

The novel *Amandla* (1986)<sup>7</sup> by Miriam Tlali documents the history of the 1976 Soweto rebellion and its culmination in detention and exile. It portrays, rather than mass action, more or less individual pockets of resistance. The text presents action which is defeated rather than victorious, and yet it presents itself explicitly as a novel of struggle against apartheid.

This message is conveyed explicitly enough through codes not usually taken to be part of the text itself. The cover of *Amandla* has been commented upon by Alvarez-Pereyre (1988:115-116):

Before even opening the book the reader is confronted with the theme of power – and with the attempt to instal an alternative power. 'Amandla', the title proclaims across the top of the red cover, while beneath it a black fist is shown raised against barbed wire. In Zulu the word 'amandla' means 'power', and it is the first of two terms chanted by demonstrators against white power, 'Amandla Ngawethu!' – 'Power is ours!' or, 'Power belongs to us!' A title therefore which is at once a programme and a challenge.

At the same time, *Amandla* presents itself as a fictionalization (the subtitle is 'A Novel by Miriam Tlali') of history (the text is dedicated not only to Tlali's husband and children, but "to the courageous children of Soweto who laid down their lives during June 1976 so that a free Azania may be realised"). *Amandla* records this attempt at *realising* 'a free Azania'. It does not portray success as much as the dialectic of desire and defeat between an ideal and a reality. This dialectic is manifested in a significant way within the text as something which is itself perceived not to be physical, objective reality.

The first chapter of the text (*Amandla*:1-8) functions as a kind of prologue to the novel. The beginning of the novel is situated before the start of Soweto 1976: it

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<sup>7</sup> The novel was first published in 1980, but was banned on publication until 1985.



is "Monday the 29th of April, 1975" (*Amandla*:1), more than a year before Soweto 1976. The protagonist of the novel, Pholoso, and his girlfriend, Felleng, are in the Starlite Cinema watching a film. In this ambience of the fictionalization of history – they are on the point of watching Cecil B. de Mille's *The Ten Commandments* (*Amandla*:4) – they are told that "Die 'terrorists' is hier!" ["The 'terrorists' are here!"] (*Amandla*:1).<sup>8</sup> However, Pholoso is sceptical:

It could be a hoax; a false alarm. Maybe an armed black man had suddenly run amok and started shooting at random. Perhaps he had actually wounded a few whites, and, as usual, it had become a 'white' national disaster. He tried to reason it out, alone in his mind, in the complete darkness of the cinema. How could the poor so-called terrorists pierce the armour of the South African Defence Force – the invincible Goliath armed to the teeth; the mighty 'white' navy; the powerful 'white' air force, *how?* (*Amandla*:3).

The illusory falseness and hopelessness of it all is intimated by references to the film: the SADF is "the invincible Goliath", the "terrorists" could never succeed in piercing its armour. David is helpless against Goliath. Miracles do not happen in South Africa.

Throughout the first chapter there are references to the improbability, the hopelessness of what is said to have happened. This is indicated by the repeated use of conditionals when referring to the 'terrorists'. Furthermore, Pholoso thinks of "the absurdity of such an occurrence" (*Amandla*:3), while apartheid is described – in terms of the vainglorious ideas of its propagators that it is the god-given nature of reality – as a "million commandments" (*Amandla*:7) and is thus metaphorically linked to the film as well. It is no accident that it is the Israeli embassy which is the focus of the attack.

Apartheid, and thus the Afrikaner State, is linked metaphorically to ancient Israel, which, in turn, is linked to the film Pholoso and Felleng are watching in the Starlite Cinema.

And the 'terrorist' attack was, as Pholoso feared, "a hoax; a false alarm" (*Amandla*:3) in that it had nothing to do with that struggle. The promising prelude to what is to happen in the novel – the June 1976 insurrection – amounts to nothing. And at the end of the novel Soweto 1976 itself seems to have been "a hoax; a false alarm". The dialectic of fiction and reality, expectation and action, becomes grounded in the very structure of the novel. The view postulated here is that this dialectic is the result of the uncertainty of the text (as fictional writing) about itself with regard to its *real* contribution to the struggle, and that it is this

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<sup>8</sup> This is a reference to the Fox Street siege in 1975, when the Israeli embassy in Johannesburg was occupied for a period of time.

dialectic which results in the disjointedness and confusion<sup>9</sup> critics have found in *Amandla*.

In order not to be apprehended, and if apprehended, then to hide his true identity, Pholoso "is using another name and not his real name. He did not have any identifying papers so they do not know who he is" (*Amandla*:107). While in detention, Pholoso's "mind [is] a complete blank" (*Amandla*:146). He cannot remember who he is, what his name is:

The fact that his mind dissolved into a complete blank when he tried to think – to remember what his name was and where he came from – was not, he decided, something that would concern him now. That would come in its own time ... As Providence would have it, the very state of partial delirium and loss of memory was itself a blessing in disguise. All attempts by his assailants to establish Pholoso's true identity and get a confession from him had been unsuccessful. They were only able to identify him by the dirty, crushed papers in his trouser pockets, which had the name Moses Masuku written on them (*Amandla*:148).

In order to survive, Pholoso has to stop being 'Pholoso'. He has to mask himself by rewriting himself. This is why the elaborate scene with the codes in Chapter 12 (*Amandla*:81-93) is not merely "a naïve discussion of codes [and] invisible inks" (Watts, 1989:223) – this scene may be said to be a fictional enactment of the novel, just as the novel is a fictional enactment of the struggle. The activists have to hide their being by means of language; language must act as a mask, and the revolutionaries are forced to carry out their programme, as it were, in a fictional world. The novel presents the true nature of the programme as something which is being denied *in order to* carry the programme through, in the same way that Pholoso has to mask his true identity *in order to* protect his revolutionary programme. Pholoso's survival depends upon Pholoso becoming Moses. Pholoso has to disguise himself, and the final disguise, the final denial of identity is located in Pholoso's going into exile.

The novel ends with Pholoso's going into exile. This is an important move as it is presented, if not triumphantly, then at least inspirationally. Despite the defeat inherent in retreating into exile –

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9 An anonymous reviewer of *Amandla* (Anon., 1981:15) states that "[b]y any customary definition of literary quality, *Amandla* falls a long way off making records. The interweaving of themes, the complicated saga of an extended family, and Tlali's somewhat rambling style, do not make for the crispest reading".

Cf. also Watts (1989:222-225).

"I never wanted to flee, Felleng. I have to go because the student leaders think it is the best thing, better than rotting in jail. The police dragnet is closing in on us. All known leaders are in jail" (*Amanda*:288).

– the movement into exile is presented as a continuation of the fight. Despite everything's being lost, everything is portrayed as not being lost:

"You see, Felleng, in order to fight we must be armed, not only physically but also mentally. We are up against a formidable, highly-sophisticated enemy whom we must<sup>[?]<sup>10</sup></sup> face on equal ground. That our task is a momentous one cannot be denied. The roots of this evil have penetrated deeper than we can speculate. But we dare not give up. If we forget those who laid down their lives, then they will have done so in vain. We the oppressed cannot be expected to think we can go on living as if nothing has ever happened" (*Amanda*:289).

The irony is that *it is* in 1980, or in 1985, as if Soweto 1976 has never happened (just as the novel has intimated right from the start). It was – in the context of Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood* – an abortive birth. A people's defeat and subjection – by a system of dehumanization, and by their rejection of this system through violent rebellion – is and must be denied in the novel. This is inevitable. The reality of it all is too unreal even to contemplate. An imaginary resolution (the flight into exile) to a real contradiction (represented by the conflict between reality and fiction postulated by the novel) is the very condition for continued existence – and continued struggle – after defeat. Without this no hope, and no conscientization is possible. With this hope present, at least some degree of conscientization and the creation and filling of a cultural space seems to be a possibility. The final act in the novel – Pholoso's going into exile – is ironically a sign of defeat as much as of victory. Exile is a necessity, a rhetorical move to persuade a readership to struggle. Exile, thus, is a necessity made a virtue. It is the only way out for the text, the only way left to conscientize, to give hope.

### 3. *Third Generation* and the question of writing (fiction)

A similar process may be identified in *Third Generation*. The novel documents the disintegration of the Third Generation group and, by implication, that of the struggle. The front cover of *Third Generation* firmly situates the novel within a particular context of struggle against apartheid. It consists of, at the top, the author's name (Sipho Sepamla) in relatively small type. Then, some way down, we find the title (*Third Generation*) in black and white capitals with a black border. The 'THIRD' of THIRD GENERATION consists of huge white letters with

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<sup>10</sup> The typescript in my copy of the novel is at this point illegible.

black borders; GENERATION is black in its entirety. The bottom part of the cover consists of a photo of black men, some with fists raised in the air, holding banners proclaiming revolution. The effect of this lies in the implication of a new (third) generation<sup>11</sup> of black South Africans which will rise up and attain dignity and freedom through struggle from the grassroots. The message of the success of this struggle is carried by the novel, with the following dedication:

For Emma Satheke,  
15 years old,  
and Thabo Sibeko,  
6 years old,  
undying victims  
of apartheid

The back cover states that "*Third Generation* celebrates the courage and commitment of Black women in the liberation struggle".

But the back cover also identifies the text as a 'novel', stating – in typical adventure and spy thriller vein – that "[i]n this novel, a life-and-death game goes on right under the nose of the forces of repression ...". Although *Third Generation* does present itself as a novel of struggle against apartheid and injustice, it also presents itself as an adventure story. This does not mean to imply that the novel could not be both a novel against apartheid and an adventure story. On the contrary, the novel sets out to document a particular phase of the struggle in such a way that readers will find it engaging. To Johnson (1986:2), in fact, the strength of the novel is its "fairly simple story ... *Third Generation* should be read for the sake of its story".

This "fairly simple story" is, however, narrated in a fairly complex way – numerous flashbacks interrupt the progression of the narrative. These interruptions are mostly mnemonic. The novel starts with Lifa's recollection of Soweto 1976. In what amounts to an invocation of that turbulent time, Lifa presents Soweto 1976 from the perspective of his mother, Sis Vi. In a later flashback to Soweto 1976 (*Third Generation*:12-13), we read that Sis Vi's

job exposed her to sights unknown in any other experience: often she had to attend to victims of the knife, men with intestines rolling out of the stomach; casualties of the motor-car, the brains smashed into portions similar to the cauliflower. She could live with these spectacles bearing their pain fortuitously. But the year 1976 was the turning point for her. The sight of mutilated young bodies, innocent victims of ruthless, trigger-happy

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<sup>11</sup> The novel itself comments on the significance of the title (*Third Generation*:22, 26, 31, 46, 81, 149, 158, 160).

sharp-shooters crowded on cement floors bleeding and helplessly begging for attention left her own heart bleeding endlessly. It was a sight which turned around her code of conduct so that in the quietness of her heart she swore to do something about it.

Sis Vi is a nurse who decides that real nursing will amount to nothing less than a radical change in the socio-economic situation. In order to stop the flood of maimed bodies which have to be treated at hospitals like Baragwanath, the root cause of injury – the disease of apartheid – has to be destroyed. While in detention Sis Vi reflects that

... [s]he had seen all kinds of disease; she had seen how its slow process ravaged the body and how vulnerable the body was. Causes of diseases were just as bad as the disease and were to be tackled with the same vigour for their elimination. When she agreed to join the Third Generation, it was with this conviction in mind. She saw the group as a unit bent on eliminating the causes of disease ... (*Third Generation*:51-52).

The *victims* of the disease of apartheid must be cured by destroying apartheid. Sis Vi's spell in detention and the psychological torture which she undergoes are portrayed in vivid terms. The vivid quality of this portrayal is emphasised by means of the frequent interiorization of Sis Vi's action. By means of the juxtaposing of, for instance, dreams (*Third Generation*:52), almost Gothic visions induced by dreadful memories and fears (*Third Generation*:56,58,91-92), the writing of imaginary letters (*Third Generation*:89-91) and the naked reality of torture and interrogation, the terrorism perpetrated by the police is highlighted. An opposition between reality and fiction is constructed. This opposition fulfils a number of important functions within the novel, especially because it is linked explicitly with the task not only of the Third Generation group, but also with the task of *Third Generation* itself. Sis Vi's visions while in detention (*Third Generation*:56,58,91-92) are comparable to Pholoso's nightmarish visions of the angry mob killing the white man (*Amandla*:12-14, 147). These *visions* strengthen the fictionalized nature of reality, and fulfil the function of implicating everybody in the defeat of the struggle by means of the strength of the system.

The question of writing in times like those represented in the novel is posed by means of the structural device of organizing an opposition, as in *Amandla*, between reality and fiction. The Third Generation group, according to Lifa, "was a receding dream" (*Third Generation*:68). *Third Generation* documents the receding of this dream. The thematics of writing as fictionality is introduced most forcefully in the compulsion Sis Vi experiences to write. As in *Amandla*, language is tied up closely with identity.

Sis Vi has to write a 'confession' of her activities as a member of Third Generation. Major Brink forces her to provide a representation of her mission to Port

Elizabeth to organise the transportation of recruits to Johannesburg. This confession must meet the expectations of Brink – Sis Vi may not write her truth, but has to write that of Major Brink.

The whole of the ninth chapter (*Third Generation*:50-61) is devoted to Sis Vi's writing and rewriting the story of her mission to Port Elizabeth. This chapter becomes an allegorical representation of the black person's plight to redefine herself in terms of what the white person demands. Sis Vi's forced writing is self-reflexively a graphic illustration of the forced reduction to writing suffered by black people at the hands of white conquerors. And this *graphic* illustration (Chapter 9 of *Third Generation*, but also the novel as such) is subject just as much to colonialist coercion as is that of Sis Vi. It is writing as a residue of the dominant culture – and *Third Generation* itself as such a residue which seems forever doomed to replicate the very system it opposes by confirming the status of black people as foreigners in their own country – which unsettles the novel. Moreover, the novel seems aware of the contradiction inherent in its own being. Instead of making black people more real by consciously writing their own history, it cannot but confirm its status as a foreign and Western object. Sis Vi's words that "pen and paper had become the elements of her survival" (*Third Generation*:61) are reminiscent of Ndebele's statement (1989a:21) that

... the written word ... which itself perhaps represents a form of strategic marginalization, may be the only viable bearer of witness, the one last act that would provide proof of existence.

This "strategic marginalization" itself is already limited, a denial of the very type of existence it seeks to confirm, as Nethersole (1991:245) notes:

'the pen, paper and ink' are themselves objects associated with the conquerors. The proof of existence mediated by the pen is, therefore, not a 'last act' but a new form of existence ...

Resistance in such a situation of total coercion (with the implication that such a system is not transcendable) does not seem to be possible, and *Third Generation* presents the system of apartheid and oppression, at least from the perspective of Lifa, as being well-nigh monolithic. The system is portrayed as having the power to turn the struggle into an illusion, and to make ordinary, everyday life seem unreal and fictional. After Sis Vi has been arrested Lifa goes to Potlako. It is late at night:

I walked the streets of Wattville on this Friday night oblivious of the dangers lurking along dark shadows of houses; my head was in a spin; eyes cat-like; I couldn't tell how much of the surroundings registered on my mind. At times I met the lone night-creature too pissed out to let it worry me. There were strange sights of young couples glued to each other in the

middle of the street or hugging hedges on the sidewalk. Dammit, I thought to myself, who said we slaughter one another in the night? (*Third Generation*:39).

Township life is portrayed in almost apocalyptic terms in this eerily poetic passage. There is a strange inversion of what is expected – Buda B has warned Lifa about the dangers of going out at this time:

"Thugs in the streets will not look at it that way; cops pounding on the door any minute now will not look at it that way. I know these things! Believe me, I know what I am talking about" (*Third Generation*:31).

Life becomes like a weird dream, and the reality of oppression and seemingly monolithic power seems to make any opposition not only irrelevant but fictional: "I did not want to continue the lie of a struggle when it was a mere illusion – just another product of my fantasy" (*Third Generation*:155). In a situation where Lifa can compare himself to a rabbit being ferreted out – "I can't take this rabbit's life in the country of my birth ... I am postponing a decent life by the day" (*Third Generation*:158) – exile seems to be only way out.

Writing seems to have no effect on Lifa as the narrator of a novel *about* the struggle which seeks to become *part* of the struggle. *Third Generation* is a weapon, an example of the type of text which "fir[es] with the pen" (Ndebele, 1989a: 21). But this weapon does not seem to be effective. The time for talking and arguing has, for Lifa, passed, because "[w]ords were strewn all over our path of history achieving nothing but an improvement of our condition as Buda B had put it earlier" (*Third Generation*:163). The novel ends when its "story had come to an end" (*Third Generation*:154), when the only viable option seems to be to stop writing and to start shooting and to go into exile.

Within this context it is useful to note the depiction of the one poet in the novel. Stompie Lukala is a journalist. He has also established himself as a poet "on the strength of one poem published in *Staffrider*" (*Third Generation*:144). However, "[w]hat the public didn't know, was that Stompie Lukala was on numerous cases Mr X in political cases" (*Third Generation*:145). Stompie's poem is, significantly, like his life an illustration of what happens when art is separated from politics. This separation is masked by the poet's insistence that art does have a political role:

He wrote on the power of the poet's pen: how a poet was an important instrument of the revolution although not a revolutionary himself, how necessary he was to bring to the attention of men their role in a changing society and the need to understand that the poet must stand aloof from the day-to-day activities to help the leaders – a kind of conscience to their doings (*Third Generation*:144).

Through the figure of Stompie this kind of writing is rejected. *Third Generation* insists that writing must be political by being part of the struggle itself. The novel refuses to accept the type of divide between writing and political action advocated by Stompie's poem. But in the end it cannot continue. It cannot but be a conscience to the doings of the people. It cannot overcome the posited contradiction between reality and fiction.

Lifa, who becomes sceptical towards on the one hand the struggle as it is waged internally (in South Africa) and, on the other hand, towards the very idea of struggle *for* something, very often makes it clear that he is opposed to exile. That Lifa can, eventually, leave the country into exile despite the clear intimations of defeat inherent in exile is significant. Initially the members of Third Generation

... were all against skipping the country [but, i]f the trail behind each one seemed to hot up, the position was to be reviewed on an individual basis (*Third Generation*:41).

Potlako, one of Lifa's best friends and one of his comrades in Third Generation, is the first member of the group to opt for exile. He decides, relatively early in the novel, to flee the country, but is shown to have been seduced by a latter day Delilah (the white woman Sue).<sup>12</sup> Despite Potlako's enthusiastic utterances of "Never! Never!" (*Third Generation*:47) and "Amandla!" (*Third Generation*:45), he gives up and leaves the country, disappearing from the novel. Indeed, his exile signals the end of the novel:

His escape symbolised the defeat of the Third Generation. Its image lay shattered on the ground like many pieces of glass. The struggle? How was it that it seemed endless so that even the number of casualties was countless? (*Third Generation*:94).

The dilemma of Soweto 1976 is addressed in the wider context of struggle and the success of struggle. Soweto 1976 is, for instance, seen by Buda B in *Third Generation* as having been an exercise in futility because the struggle has merely been accommodated by the system:

"We've all made our positions within the system comfortable. That's what we've done. Change? Not a thing! Don't let anyone fool you my son. There's been no change because no one really knows what's to be changed. Replacing an old car on the road with a new one does not change one's

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<sup>12</sup> This article does not attempt to deal with stereotyping and sexism in the texts under discussion. Both texts do make themselves guilty of sexism while attempting to celebrate the courage of people regardless of sex in the struggle. *Third Generation* specifically seeks to celebrate the courage of women in the struggle for liberation.



mode of travel. Think that one through and you'll see what I mean. I've travelled the road, remember" (*Third Generation*:160).

Buda B is like an alter-ego, a chorus, forever deflating what he believes are Lifa's idealistic views of struggle and 'causes', because Buda B has 'travelled the road'. He has been to Robben Island; he has been betrayed by his comrades in the struggle; he has seen his wife locked up in jail and his son bent upon leaving the country with the idea of coming back to be killed in the name of justice and liberation.

Lifa sees what his father means. However, he still feels that his generation, the new generation, the third generation – and especially as manifested in a grouping of young people who present themselves as the Third Generation – can make a difference. But Lifa attempts to smooth over the contradictions of a system which in reality is harsh but which at the same time forces people to limit themselves to questions of survival and therefore deludes them into thinking that once they are able merely to survive, then change has taken place. This line of thought persuades Lifa that

... nothing short of a revolution in the lives of the people would create a better climate for people to see the truth about their lives. And for me it meant military training (*Third Generation*:161).

Lifa leaves, but on a profoundly ambiguous note. The imaginary resolution of this novel of struggle – and of others, like *Amandla* – is coming apart. Lifa knows that the contradictions against which he wants to fight will not be resolved as easily as going into exile and coming back "armed to the teeth" (*Amandla*:3).<sup>13</sup> The last lines of *Third Generation* capture the profound ambivalence of Lifa's leaving for exile:

I left the house like one going to the toilet in the backyard. There never was a better way to leave home for a freedom fighter. There were no farewells, there were no trumpets blaring the last note.

Africa I come! (*Third Generation*:163).

*Third Generation* can thus be seen as a novel of exile, as it is a novel which leads towards an inevitable exile. Exile seems to be an object which is at once feared

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<sup>13</sup> Thamsanqa, the brother of Solly (one of the members of the Third Generation group) "skipped the country in the aftermath of Sharpeville" (*Third Generation*:41). One might reason that this price might still have been worthwhile had Thamsanqa's exile resulted in something other than his violent death at the hands of his enemies before he could strike at them (*Third Generation*:110-117).

and desired. The novel, like *Amandla*, has to end in exile in order to make sense of a situation of endless struggle.

Lifa, like Pholoso, does in the end opt for exile. And one has to ask whether Lifa and Pholoso have 'come to some sort of insight', or whether the novels are faced with contradictions which can only be resolved (or seem to be resolved) by means of exile as an imaginary resolution to real contradictions.

#### 4. Conclusion: the trope of exile

- \* Defeat is sought to be turned into victory.
- \* An end must become a beginning.
- \* Writing must become acting.
- \* Exile must become return.

Both *Amandla* and *Third Generation* undermine themselves and their messages of hope in certain key areas regarding the way in which they represent themselves. They announce, paradoxically, the end of struggle through their culminating in exile. Because exile is crossing borders; it is entering another world. Not only do these texts end in exile; they enact exile. Instead of doing, they write; like Pholoso and Lifa, they are not (in) the real world, but (in) fictional worlds. And yet the sceptical view of language, writing and fictionality emanating from these texts is sought to be denied in them, and turned into a rhetorical gesture, a trope, which would ironically deny the denial of the outcome of the struggle.

This is the way in which *Amandla* and *Third Generation* seem to confirm their ultimate impotence as 'mere' artifacts, as cultural texts. They themselves harbour doubts as to their own efficacy, and try to resolve those doubts in imaginary ways. Hopes become dreams and dreams become fantasies and illusions. Both novels can be characterised by Lifa's statement that "ours was a receding dream" (*Third Generation*:68).

The call 'Amandla!', in both *Amandla* and *Third Generation*, does not become more than a speech act doomed not to be performative. The crowds chant 'Amandla!' during the revolt, but the revolt itself seems to be doomed right from the start. Power is only to be found in "'Power' stoves", "'Power' children" and "'Power' canvas shoes" (*Amandla*:105; 141). Power, these texts seem to say, is not real if it is verbal; and thus they judge themselves as impotent, as fictions.

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