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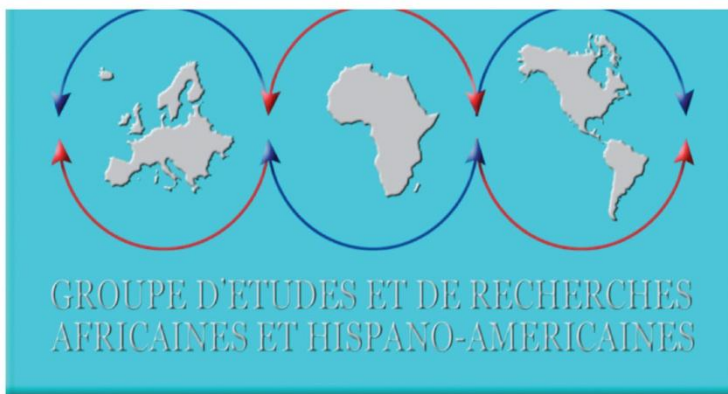


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## Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother*: The Unspoken of a Text

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### Abstract

*Mother to Mother* by South-African writer Sindiwe Magona evokes, in an epistolary style, the murder of a white female student by a group of angry black youth in a township. The story is an opportunity for the narrator, the mother of one of the killers, to soothe and ask the white girl's mother for forgiveness. In doing so, it revisits the painful and dramatic incidents that punctuate the lives of discriminated communities in South African townships and interracial violence.

Through a reading of *Mother to Mother*, this paper argues that the representation of the events that have led to the tragic death of the girl implicitly raises issues that explain the violent actions and reactions of those who are at the receiving end of racist policies. Drawing on Pierre Macherey's postulate in his theory of literary production – "the explicit requires the implicit: for in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said" – I uncover the unspoken elements in Magona's novel, encoded in the time sequences, tropes and other forms of narrative strategies, to demonstrate that these aesthetic options are not only eloquent allusions to the reasons behind the violent assault on the white girl, but also a tacit denunciation of gender oppression and maternal sufferings of South-African women, torn between

political violence and patriarchy. The analysis of these silences, buried in the discourse of lament and repentance of the main character, allows us to assess what the text does not say explicitly, and finally show that *Mother to Mother* offers glimpses of interracial reconciliation in South Africa.

**Keywords:** Violence, gender, race, Magona, unspoken Macherey.

*Mother to Mother* de Sindiwe Magona relate l'histoire du meurtre d'une jeune étudiante blanche par de jeunes noirs. Dans un style épistolaire, l'histoire évoque les événements dramatiques marquant la vie quotidienne des communautés marginalisées dans les ghettos sud-africains et la violence interraciale.

Par une analyse de la texture thématique et esthétique de *Mother to Mother*, je démontre que la représentation des facteurs exogènes derrière la mort de la jeune femme suggère, en réalité, des maux beaucoup plus profonds dont résultent les actions et réactions des victimes de l'apartheid. En nous appuyant sur le postulat de Pierre Macherey, dans sa théorie de la production littéraire, selon lequel – “the explicit requires the implicit: for in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said” – j'expose les non-dits du discours de Magona, non-dits encodés dans la structure temporelle, les figures de rhétorique et autres stratégies narratives, pour démontrer que de tels choix esthétiques sont, plus qu'une allusion à la violence interraciale, une dénonciation implicite d'une oppression basée sur le genre dont sont victimes les femmes sud-africaines. L'analyse des silences dans le discours de lamentation et de repentir dans l'histoire va permettre d'apprécier et de saisir ce que le texte ne dit pas explicitement pour affirmer, en dernière analyse, que *Mother to Mother* renferme des lueurs d'espoir pour une

réconciliation entre les différentes catégories raciales de l'Afrique du Sud.

**Mots clé :** Violence, genre, race, Magona, non-dits, Macherey.

## Introduction

*Mother to Mother*<sup>15</sup>, Sindiwe Magona's debut novel, is an exhaustive story on violence in South Africa, in the transitional period between Apartheid and post-Apartheid. The story is a beautifully schemed epistle, based on a real event; it is "a haunting elegy of the seething rage and bitterness which led to Amy Biehl's murder while South Africa was yet on the brink of transformation."<sup>16</sup> In this novel, followed by a series of autobiographies, Magona revisits, through hints and allusions, the painful events of her country's history.

Although her objective in writing is mostly to "consciously set out to *reveal* rather than conceal the communal and cultural destruction which is the direct result of the political dispensation of the time"<sup>17</sup>, the act of revealing itself bears silences or unsaid structures, particularly eloquent of the traumatic experiences she and her fictional elements live through. These silences or "absences" in the discourse "implicitly" address issues that can

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<sup>15</sup> Sindiwe Magona, *Mother to Mother*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1998. Title will be hereafter abbreviated into "*Mother*."

<sup>16</sup> Kai Easton, "*Mother to Mother* by Sindiwe Magona", a Review. *World Literature Today*, Vol. 76, n°1. Winter, 2002, pp.124-5

<sup>17</sup> Sindiwe Magona, Shiphokazi Koyana, & Rosemary Gray, "An Electronic Interview with Sindiwe Magona". ([www.jstor.org/stable/40238944](http://www.jstor.org/stable/40238944))



justify interracial violence. In his interesting analysis of the speech, Pierre Macherey, in *A Theory of Literary Production*, posits: “either around or in its wake the explicit requires the implicit; or in order to say anything, there are other things which must not be said (...) This moment of absence founds the speech of the work. Silences shape all speech”<sup>18</sup>. In the framework of post structuralism, Macherey argues that the act of reading is a form of production: the reader should go beyond the author’s image or intention and build meaning from the “unsaid” or “absences” of the text. The characters’ discourse, in Magona’s novel, are particularly marked by silences, which constitute an expressive connotation of arbitrariness and injustice. These lacks and lapses in the novel’s discourse are at the basis of the representation of political injustice and socio-cultural contradictions undertaken by the narrative voices.

This paper uncovers the unspoken elements that shape the discourse in *Mother to Mother*, to demonstrate, in a final analysis, that they are “outspoken” and resounding expressions of violence, individual/collective guilt but also hope for a better future in South Africa. Leaning on Macherey’s postulates, this analysis digs out the “unconscious” of the story, through an exploration of such aesthetic turns as the paratext, time sequences, language, space, etc. At the center of Magona’s use of these narrative techniques is a dogged will to draw a beautified picture of the

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<sup>18</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978, p. 85.

disintegration of human life and, more, to loudly suggest interracial reconciliation, through the silences in her text.

### 1. The Paratextual Design: a Platform for Lamenting Mothers

*Mother to Mother* represents violence and social traumas, born and bred by the Apartheid regime. It is the fictional image of the murder, by a group of black youth, of Fulbright scholar, Amy Elizabeth Biehl, a real event that happened in South Africa in 1993. The story exposes the outpouring of grief, outrage and support for the Biehl family, the circumstances preceding and somehow explaining the reasons behind such a terrible event.

Magona's story opens with paratextual elements – the author's preface and the short part entitled "Mandisa's Lament" – which can be regarded as a platform setting the tone of the story. In the preface, Magona clearly alludes to the (historical) backdrop that has triggered her decision to weave the story, to scorn at Apartheid's discriminating laws and point out at individual/collective guilt.

Actually, in the preface – which is, according to Genette, that *pre-text* at the borderland of the story, the meaning or symbolism of which is to be decoded by the reader in his dialogue with the text – Magona expresses her avowed opposition to racial segregation, "a system repressive and brutal, that bred senseless inter-and intra-racial violence as well as other nefarious happenings;..." (*Mother*) From this rejection of Apartheid, we can read a

rejection of any ideology of race superiority, from whatever side. Indeed, “By speech, silence becomes the centre and principle of expression, its vanishing point. Speech eventually has nothing more to tell us: we investigate the silence, for it is the silence that is doing the speaking.”<sup>19</sup> The silences underpinning Magona’s discourse in the passage above are a strong affirmation of what the reader cannot read or hear from the structure of the text: an indictment of the multifarious injustices that are exogenous factors behind the violent murder of the white girl. From the preface up to the opening chapter, “Mandisa’s Lament”, Magona is implicitly demonstrating that racial discrimination is “a system that promoted a twisted sense of right and wrong” (*Mother*). Even though *Mother to Mother* is part of the literature of transition (marking a shift between a debunking of racism and the representation of hope in the new South Africa), the author’s main objective in the novel is to make obvious allusions to the reason why the South African “earth is full of skeletons”<sup>20</sup>. She seems to suggest in her story, through the sequencing of events, temporal architecture and the overall techniques of wrapped discourse, that the upsurge of violence from both Whites and Non-Whites worsens the already tense inter/intra-racial relationships in her country.

When Mandisa, the main fictional element of Magona and mother of one of the murderers of Biehl, says this to the mourning white mother: “Let me say out plain, I was not surprised that my son killed your daughter” (*Mother*, 1),

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<sup>19</sup> Pierre Macherey. *Op.cit*, p. 86

<sup>20</sup> Breyten Breytenbach. *Dogheart: A Memoir*. New York, San Diego and London: Harcour Brace & Company, 1999, p. 21

she clearly points at some exogenous factors behind the crime and at the collective guilt of communities at loggerheads. This strong statement, opening the long letter that forms the story addressed to Biehl's anonymous mother, acts as an "unconscious" aspect of Mandisa's narration because it is tightly determined by or "related to ideology and ...the material conditions of production in the society in which the text is produced and consumed."<sup>21</sup> In other words, the unspoken in Mandisa's averment to the white mother is that the whole society, both the upholders and those at the receiving end of the arbitrary regime are to be blamed for the moral and physical disintegration of her killer-son and the youth in the ghetto. She further insists on the idea in this passage: "It's been a long, hard road, my son has travelled. Now, your daughter has paid for the sins of the fathers and mothers who did not do their share of seeing that my son had a life worth living." (*Mother*, 3) By revisiting the childhood world of her son, Mandisa provides reasons for the violence of the other roaming youth, embittered by a chaotic social environment on which they have no control.

Therefore, it is these silent or tacit elements in her discourse that give meaning to the utterance; "it is this silence which tells us (...) the precise conditions for the appearance" of the character's words. What is not said and which resounds in the mind's ear of the reader is this: "what happens when your own history comes back to haunt you, when the structures you have put

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<sup>21</sup> Dennis Walder, *Literature in the Modern World*. Oxford, OUP, 2003.

in place for your own protection are shown to be the source of your own destruction?”<sup>22</sup>

In a final analysis, the narrator hints at the fact that Whites’ and Blacks’ racial pride and egotism have entrapped the youth into a spiral of violence. Although, echoing Arendt, under some conditions, rage and violence are justified, Magona denounces the use of violence, in whatever circumstances. This is all the more true because such a stance of the author is suggested through the structural aspect of the opening sequence of the story: the text is italicized and the voice of Mandisa, the intradiegetic narrator, is clearly felt by the reader. Such an aesthetic turn should be taken more as an expression of the *intentio auctoris*<sup>23</sup> – to make a realistic representation of the stressful social conditions in which the marginalized were forced to grow – than a simple address to the white mother. This first movement of the story, through the aesthetic framing and the message it unfolds, constitutes an explicit insinuation of the one objective of Magona, here stated: “It was not difficult to write about my experiences as an individual precisely because I perceived even those individual experiences as being more communal rather than personal (...) where the collective, effectively silenced, made the personal all the more important and pertinent.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sue Kossew, “Something Terrible Happened : Nadine Gordimer’s *The House Gun* and the Politics of Violence and Recovery in Post-Apartheid South Africa”( [motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP1300sk.html](http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP1300sk.html)).

<sup>23</sup> Umberto Eco, *Lector in Fabula*. Paris: Grasset, 1985.

<sup>24</sup> Koyana & Gray. *Op.cit.* p, 104.

That collective “effectively silenced” in facts – “all violence harbors within itself an element of arbitrariness ...”<sup>25</sup> – and in the text of *Magona* should be analyzed to better grasp the thematic clothing and the structural visage of *Mother to Mother*, in the view to getting the gist of what the text does not say. This will be carried out by “measuring silences, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged”<sup>26</sup>, silences around the temporal framing, the characters’ physical surroundings, but also around language and other narrative devices used by the narrator to wrap her discourse of suffering and hope.

## **2. Dredging the Memory: Narrative Time in *Mother to Mother***

In a narrative, the transformation of the external or human time into a narrative or text time is both an aesthetic device and another means for the author to suggest the gallery of themes developed. In *Mother to Mother*, the time of the story constitutes a crucial element that has been re-shaped by the narrators to have a new temporal line (the time of text) in the representation of events. *Magona*, through the intradiegetic narrator (Mandisa) and the fleeting heterodiegetic voice, unfolds sequences of the story in a relatively short span of time. At this level, it would be enthralling a task to pinpoint the relationship between the time of the story – Apartheid and its aftermath – and

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<sup>25</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Reflections on Violence*, February 1969 Issue. (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1969/feb/27/a-special-supplement-reflections-on-violence/>)

<sup>26</sup> Pierre Macherey. *Op.cit.* p, 87.

the time of the text, the transformation and representation of these parts of South African history in the narrative.

As the objective of Mandisa's epistle is to make the mourning white mother aware of the hard circumstances that have indirectly fostered the murderous act, the reader is not surprised that the story be fraught with anachronies, mostly flashbacks or analepses, as Genette would call them. An anachrony consists of an alteration or discordance in the sequences of the story and their representation in the text. In Magona's novel, the recurrence of narrative maneuvers, altering the two temporal orders, constitutes a way for the character-narrator to abandon the first narrative and dig out some past event that could give the gen on the motives behind characters' brutal reactions.

In her narration, Mandisa sometimes gives precise time indications, (Mowbray – Wednesday 25 August 1993). Following her lament, Mandisa is shown rushing back to hers, gripped with fear and doubt about the possible participation of her son, Mxolisi, in the group murder of the white girl. The time indication implicitly touches the drama gnawing at Mandisa, a mother desperately caring for her children, yet wishing to find the rebellious old son at home. The option to draw a clear reference to time, is an encoded expression of the trauma daily born by Mandisa and all the mothers of roaming children in the ghetto.

Actually, in her determination to show the anonymous white mother the exogenous causes of the violence of black youth, Mandisa unveils a bit her past life and that of her community. Sequence five of the narration

corresponds to a long flashback, first suggested by the topographical blank separating narration at level one and the anachronic structure. It opens with a series of questions which are another way for the black mother to wonder what could have brought the white girl into the jungle-like environment of the townships. She says:

Guguletu? Who would choose to come to this accursed, Godforsaken place? This is what I want to know. What I can't begin to comprehend. I keep asking myself the same question, over and over again. What was she doing here, your daughter? What made her come to this, of all places? Not an army of mad elephants would drag me here, I were her. (*Mother* 48)

The set of questions, combined with the use of the present tense as temporal marker shows that this is a direct address to the white mother but also a resounding allusion to the dangerous nature of the area and the naivety of Amy Biehl who, *naturally*, proposed to drive her fellow black students home, after a farewell get-together. The passage is also a transition to a flash back, with a wide reach and extent, a platform disclosing one by one the remote reasons that have stirred in the black youth a blind violence toward Biehl.

Under the perspective of Mandisa, the white mother and the reader can measure the multifarious impacts of Blacks being forced to move from their native lands to arid and cursed areas, from a communal and stable life to individualistic spirit, from peace to a spiral violence. Indeed, geographic segregation totally breaches the ties of a “well-knit community” (*Mother* 33) in Blouville. We read this from Mandisa’s remembrance:



The government would not listen to anyone's appeals. The government had long made up his mind. Long, long ago. On the issue of black removal. Sure, once or twice there were postponements. (...) In the final analysis, move we did. As the government had said we would. (*Mother* 63)

The passage's overall structure is expressive of the fragility of the oppressed community faced with the iron policies of the nationalist regime. The use of the anaphoric structure "the government... the government..." and the inversion "move, we did", combined with the veiled reference to the decision of the authorities, expressed by the hyperbolic time adverb, "long, long ago", are loudly hinting at Whites' legal domination over Blacks but also the latter's inability to withstand land confiscation. The sideswipe in this discourse of the character lies also in the lexical elements which, along with the rhythm of sentences, touch upon the dispirited people who, in the end, don't have any other choice but to yield to the officers' repressive power. This other part of Mandisa's recalling offers more room for interpretation:

Hastily, to beat the eager demolishers and salvage what little they could of their shacks, our parents pulled down the houses themselves. With eyes bright with suppressed tears, our parents pulled down their homes, (...). Dejected and dispirited, but determined to build anew, they made the long journey through the flats. Government vehicles hounding them, bayonets prodding their backs. Leaving their lives flattened to nothing behind them (...) to be their new home. (*Mother* 66)

The unsaid in the dysphoric adjectives "dejected...dispirited", and in other images in the passage, shows that the character-narrator unfolds the heart-

wrenching conditions of the local populations, forever cut from their cultural home – “our parents pulled down their homes”. Indeed, what is implied here are the violent conditions evoked in the narration at level one and which bring the character to remember a range of painful events punctuating the life of the oppressed.

To home in on the circumstances that explain the disenchantment and criminal reactions of her son and the other youth lounging about the streets in the ghetto, Mandisa’s mind, relentlessly, travels into the troublesome past of her bedfellows, to further demonstrate that the young, be they black or white, are all victims of the contradictions and violence of the system. She revisits, in the next flashback, events in her childhood:

When I was in school, by the year’s end one had not yet learnt the names of all the children in the class. (...) With the passage of time, our school only grew worse. In 1976, students in revolt and, before long, Bantu education had completely collapsed. It had become education in name only. (...) Our children have paid the price. (*Mother* 70)

This large window into the past of Mandisa and her community conveys much knowledge about the youth and education in South African ghetto. One major reason explaining the delinquency of the latter is discrimination in education in the badly-run schools for Non-Whites. The passage not only hints at the realistic style of the author – through the reference to a “real” historical event, the shooting in Soweto – but it is an encoded way to mean that the violence of youth is the outgrowth bitterness generated by a long-established racial discrimination.

Thus, in a two-day span of time, Magona aesthetically weaves a painstaking story about the disrupted and browbeaten life of racial groups in her country. The unsaid in the temporal organization in *Mother to Mother* is this: all characters are entrapped by an arbitrary system, a system that has rendered them all guilty victims. This feeling of guilt is all the more effective because if we read between the lines of the following thought of the character, directly narrated by the fleeting anonymous he-narrator, we realize that both oppressors and oppressed cannot do but succumb to race-based violence:

Look now. Look what the children have done! Poor, poor child – the one who is dead. Poor child. And her parents. I feel for her parents. For the parents of this poor child, killed by our children. My heart sorrows for them. For her mother. (*Mother* 73)

Therefore, what the work of Magona *cannot say* is important because “there the elaboration of the utterance is acted out, in a sort of journey to silence”<sup>27</sup>, a journey to silence so much eloquent of the despair, bitterness and destitution of a marginalized group in the name of race superiority. The anachronic structures reflect “a mother’s own journey and her son’s downfall”<sup>28</sup>; they act as the historical and personal backdrop for Mandisa, the mother/narrator, to implicitly unveil the range of disastrous events resulting in physical and moral downfall of a whole community.

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<sup>27</sup> Pierre Macherey. *Op.cit*, p, 87.

<sup>28</sup> Kai Easton. *Op.cit*, p,125.

### 3. The Space of Poverty and the Poverty of the Space

The disintegration of human life displayed through temporal discordance is also disclosed by another aspect of Magona's style in *Mother to Mother*: the representation of space.

Her text is fraught with descriptions of the characters' physical surrounding, undertaken by the subjective voice of Mandisa and that of the anonymous narrator. The "unconscious" or "unspoken" of such descriptive discourse is also suggested through a detailed exposition of Non-Whites surviving in the space of poverty (the shantytown), generated by geographical segregation but also in the poverty of the space, where violence outgrows. The character-narrator relentlessly describes the stinking and rotten environment in the shantytowns to demonstrate that the planned pauperization of Blacks is part of geographical separation. And what is implied here is an environmental determinism: the stifling conditions of life in the ghetto badly impact on the psyche on the dwellers, who resort to violence to outpour their frustrations. Mandisa rightly affirms that her son and the other young people are the perfect host of the demons of bitterness and frustrations of a whole community. An eloquent example comes next:

We came here and were confronted and confounded by all these terrible conditions: the loss of our friends, the distance our parents had to travel to and from work, (...) And then there were the deadening uniformity of Guguletu houses. Had it not been for the strength of human spirit we would all have perished. The very houses – an unrelieved monotony of drabness; harsh and uncaring in the manner of allocation, administration and maintenance – could not but kill the soul of those

who inhabited them. For some, though, the aridity was to be further aggravated: for some reason, the small, inadequate, ugly concrete house seemed to loosen ties among those who dwelled in them. (*Mother*, 34)

In her imagined letter and memoir to Biehl's mother, Mandisa insists much on the environment in which she and her community are forced to live. This representation constitutes another innuendo touching upon the inhuman conditions of Non-Whites in Apartheid-run South Africa. In this extract of the letter, the enumerative visage of sentences and the lexical fabric tacitly highlight the dreadfully similarity of shacks in the shanty-town, where life is almost impossible. This is further alluded to in the depreciative adjectives in the passage, "harsh...uncaring..." which are another expression of the silences, particularly eloquent of social traumas. This is more showcased in these other lines from Mandisa:

Guguletu is both big and small. The place sprawls as far as eye can see. It is vast. (...) But even as you look you suddenly realize that it will be hard for you to find any place where you can put your foot down. Congested. (...) Hundreds and hundreds of houses. Rows and rows, ceaselessly breathing on each other. Tiny houses huddled close together. Leaning against each other, pushing at each other. Sad small houses crowned with gray and flat unsmiling roofs. Low as though trained never to dream high dreams. (*Mother*, 27)

If, according to Macherey, by "... speech silence becomes the centre and principle of expression"<sup>29</sup>, then this representation of the shantytown,

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<sup>29</sup> Pierre Macherey. *Op.cit*, p. 86.

under the perspective of Mandisa, is suggestive of what it seemingly does not say. The passage is pregnant with figurative language (hyperbolic and metaphoric contour) disclosing the inhabitants' depravation and dejection stemming from a jungle-like environment. Indeed, the backshifting in the tense system (the use of the present tense) is another underhand exposition of the disheartening life: the tense suggests that this is not only the case in South Africa, but also in all the marginalized areas. The short-cut aspect of nominal sentences juxtaposed one another and the progressive regime of the verbs are another unsaid way for the narrator to show that the shacks in Guguletu are like the sentences in the passage, packed up one upon the other, lacking space and suffocating.

In a final analysis, the stifling environment offered to the dwellers is further delineated by the personification in the depiction of the place: as tiny houses huddled and leaned against each other, the dispirited try to survive. The figure homes in on the impossibility for the discriminated people to just "live" because "confounded by all these terrible conditions", and violence is just the end product of such situation. The destitution in the ghetto makes the populations loathe Whites, even the "innocent" ones as Biehl, who are "the imperfect atonement of (their) race" (*Mother*, 201). "Thus, in her violent death, Amy is figured as having paid the debt of "the sins of the fathers and mothers who did not do their share of seeing that (the youth) had a life worth living" and thereby opens up new spaces in which mothers can

“speak across race.”<sup>30</sup> (*Mother* 3) Such violence is much more felt by women who are the victims of rape and doubly oppressed through the patriarchal overtones in male/female relationships.

Magona's story bears feminist contours alluding to the double oppression of women, both inside and outside wedlock. In her treatment of endogenous and exogenous factors of violence, she puts into the limelight gender inequalities and male chauvinism in South African traditional society. Her text is gorged with silences and clues buried in the narrative and which are a sideswipe of women's plight in girlhood and motherhood. This is a hackneyed issue in feminist discourse and Sindiwe Magona's *oeuvre* is no exception. Witness this eloquent excerpt:

The next morning, like all good *makotis*, I jumped out of bed at four, my day had begun. Half an hour later, took in coffee to Tooksie's parents and China's father, in the two bedrooms. (...) Too tired. Just simply too tired. All that work they made me do as a new wife, *umakoti*, just killed me. (*Mother*, 138)

These lines are much suggestive of the terrible lot of women in Africa, women who silently endure the domination and exploitation from both patriarchy and apartheid. Through this flashback in the past life of Mandisa, the painful joys of motherhood are delineated, with women toiling to death in the household. A trace of feminism in the passage is the denunciation of the sad and unjust lot awaiting young pregnant girls, who are compelled to leave school and to

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<sup>30</sup> Meg Samuelson, "Reading the Maternal Voice in Sindiwe Magona's *To My Children's Children* and *Mother to Mother*". *Modern Fiction Studies*, Volume 46, number 1, Spring 2000, pp. 227-245.

embark too early in complex marital relationships. Young Mandisa, Riba and the others are “forced to grow”<sup>31</sup> into women in wedlock, hardly bearing the heap of house chores imposed to them. In this wise, in *Mother to Mother*, along with Magona’s autobiographies, the South African writer “systematically reflects on (...) women’s roles within their families and societies at large, to foreground the ideologies that serve to mystify women’s experiences as wives and mothers and the hierarchical divisions that generates conflict and struggles with families.”<sup>32</sup>

Magona displays gender conflicts, both in the private and public spheres, and demonstrates that space is socially constructed and is an oppressive agent to South African women. The representation of the home as a space of oppression alienating the young spouses, Mandisa and China, is part and parcel of the author’s feminist aesthetic writing, which is again another unspoken way to denounce gender-based discrimination and violence.

However, in spite of the despair that seemingly wafts from the violence of the text in *Mother to Mother*, there are glimpses of hope for races meeting and gender equality. The following address of Mandisa to her “Sister-White-Mother” sets the tone for an interracial dialogue and reconciliation:

My Sister-Mother, we are bound at this sorrow. You,  
as I, have not chosen this coat that you wear. It is  
heavy on our shoulders, I should know (...) let it  
console you some, (...) be console, however. Be

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<sup>31</sup> In reference to the title of Magona’s autobiography, *Forced to Grow*.

<sup>32</sup> Siphokazi Koyana, “Womanism and Nation Building in Sindiwe Magona’s Autobiographies”. *Agenda*, n°50, African Feminisms One (2001).



consoled, for with your loss comes no shame.  
(*Mother*, 201-2)

The emotional overtones in these lines suggest sisterhood, solidarity, which are blueprint principles in womanism, and which advocate a society free of class/race-based discrimination. Mandisa and the anonymous Sister-mother are all victims of a blind violence born from a distorted mindset which has it that a race or class is less important than others. In *Mother to Mother*, the author uses what Meg Samuelson takes as a “maternal voice in order to cross the all-intrusive racial barrier that saturated the consciousness of South Africa, as Mandisa, mother of Mxolisi, "speaks directly to" Linda Biehl, (...) Rather than retreat into her separate world of pain, Mandisa turns to the grieving Biehl mother and evokes their deep connection as mothers: "My Sister-Mother, we are bound in this sorrow"<sup>33</sup>. In other words, Magona echoes Cherryl Walker's suggestion that "the social identity of motherhood has the potential of crosscutting other more narrow, ethnic and 'racial' identities".<sup>34</sup> Like her bedfellow writers, Magona takes at heart the building of a new and more humane society, free from any extremist or biased ideology, where the self and the other can meet and commune with each other.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the silences or unspoken of the discourse in *Mother to Mother* has revealed a caustic indictment of interracial violence, stirred by

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<sup>33</sup> Meg Samuelson, op.cit.

<sup>34</sup> Cherryl Walker, "Conceptualising Motherhood in Twentieth Century South Africa." *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21.3 (1995), pp. 417–37.

Apartheid bigotry. The techniques of wrapped discourses elaborated by the narrative voices loudly allude to the multifarious causes of the upsurge of violence in the ghetto. The message encoded in the narrative devices used by the intradiegetic and the anonymous narrators is this: an ideology upholding race superiority and discrimination, a culture backing gender inequality, cannot but smother any breath of life. Yet, Sindiwe Magona's fiction reflects her vision of a race-free and transethnic society.

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