

**RHETORICISING NOSTALGIA AND INTIMACY IN NJABULO S. NDEBELE'S  
*THE CRY OF WINNIE MANDELA.***

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**ABSTRACT**

This article aims to shed light on South African women who waited for their absent husbands during the apartheid years, and in some cases, after apartheid as well. Even in the absence of husbands, Njabulo S. Ndebele's depicts four fictional women in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, with the rhetorical nostalgia and intimacy. Behind the narrative voice, waiting is a story of the restoration of homes. Ndebele is sensitive to the social positioning of women waiting in homes while experiencing intimacy cluster largely waxed in their lives. This study argues that Ndebele's female protagonist, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela is nostalgic through her experience of waiting. The overall approach of this study unveils the intimate and private re-constructions, without subsuming women in the home and barring them from the civic and political sphere. This paper focuses on the concepts nostalgia and intimacy in order to examine discourses of the re-making of nationhood and the positioning of the 'Mother of the Nation' who indefinitely waited for her absent husband in both apartheid and post-apartheid resistance space.

**Key words:** apartheid, home, intimacy, nostalgia, restoration, uncanny, waiting.

**RÉSUMÉ**

Cet article a pour but de faire la lumière sur les femmes sud-africaines qui ont attendu leurs époux absents pendant les années d'apartheid et, dans certains cas, après l'apartheid également. Indépendamment de l'éloignement des époux, Njabulo S. Ndebele décrit quatre femmes fictives dans *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, avec la rhétorique de la nostalgie et de l'intimité. Derrière la voie narrative, attendre est une histoire de restitution des foyers. Ndebele est sensible au positionnement social des femmes qui attendent dans les foyers tout en ressentant les besoins d'intimité qui, en grande partie, embellit leur vie. Cette étude soutient que la protagoniste féminine de Ndebele, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela est nostalgique à travers son expérience de l'attente. L'approche globale de cette étude lève un coin du voile sur les reconstructions intimes et privées, sans enclorre les femmes au foyer, ni les exclure du cadre civique et politique. Cet article se base sur les concepts de la nostalgie et de l'intimité pour analyser les discours sur la refonte de la nation et le positionnement de la « Mère de la Nation » qui a indéfiniment attendu son époux absent dans l'espace de résistance de l'apartheid et du post-apartheid.

**Mots-clés :** apartheid, attente, foyer, intimité, nostalgie, restitution.

**INTRODUCTION**

Literary attempts to address the multidimensional aspects of colonialism on South Africa represent a refreshing approach to the different facets of colonialism that have been presented by past African writers as one dimensional. Undoubtedly, the most remarkable contribution one of South Africa's literary icons makes to the literary world is describing poignantly and vividly the political 'widows facing the dislocation of the homes and the shattering of homely lives.

Born in 1948, Njabulo Simakahle Ndebele has authored *Fools and Other Stories* (1986), *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (1991), *Fine Lines from the Box: Further Thoughts about Our Country* (2007). Ndebele has received worldwide acclaim for his political fiction *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003). Through this narrative, he refers to the dislocating apartheid experiences of forced removals and demolitions, banishments and detentions, which destroyed homes and threatened the intimate lives nurtured therein. The text wrestles with the questions of how national homes can be re-constructed in both apartheid and post-apartheid resistance spaces without consigning women to a state of domesticity. To what extent Ndebele's political 'widow' feels longing for restoring this unhomely condition, and recreating the homes that had been shattered. Can the restoration of the lost homes be achieved without fixing women in the private sphere or calling on them to embody Home?

In this study, I draw on the concepts of nostalgia and intimacy to harpoon Ndebele's Winnie as [un]homely woman overwhelmed by memories and feelings of her family's dislocation. I focus on the rhetoric of nostalgia to delve into the trope of home restoration. My discussion ponders about Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's responses to homelessness overlapping with her failure to re-make the home and restore intimacy.

### **1. Returning to the Home: Nostalgia as a Literary Trope**

In *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, Ndebele explores women's experiences of widowhood during the *longue durée* of colonialism and apartheid that despicably co-operated in the destruction of homes and the break-up of families. Ndebele departs from standard definitions of widowhood. In his novel, widowhood is essentially a state of waiting. Widows guard the home left vacant by wandering men, their stasis thrown into relief by male mobility. Identifying the experience of waiting as a significant one in the lives of South African women, Ndebele depicts with sensitivity the uncertainties and agonies, the 'endurance without consolation' (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.6), of this state of 'limbo' (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.14). The horror that

Ndebele's novel speaks through Winnie is that the home is *unheimlich*, rather than 'domestic' (S. Freud, 1955, p.222) or 'native' (S. Freud, 1955, p.220); the 'inner sanctum' (P. Chatterjee, 1990, p.239) has been violated, the 'world-in-the home' (H. K. Bhabha, 1994, p.11; emphasis in original). With reference to Winnie, Ndebele also traces the haunting presence of the past in the present. Noting that apartheid security police relied on 'the disruptiveness of disorder on a mind structured into order' to 'make you desire more order', Winnie embraces disruption (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.89). Internalising the disruptions foisted on her by the apartheid state, she embodies the uncanny reiteration of violence in the post-apartheid present. Among other traumatic recursions the novel points to is the 'jackroller' – or gang-rape – phenomenon of post-apartheid South Africa, which, it suggests, sprang fully formed from Winnie's household, with its perverted ethos of hospitality (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.98). The monstrous mother is the uncanny shape taken by the return of the repressed.

The catalogue of tenderness and terror that Ndebele presents in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, attests to the extent to which post-apartheid South Africa remains a space of extremes, a space of the 'spectacle', in his theoretical lexicon. Ndebele locates in the 'rebuilding of homes' the potential of 'sustain[ing] our nationhood' and preventing 'our democracy from being an event in which extremes of behaviour can dangerously ossify into spectacles of superficiality' (N.S. Ndebele, 1996, p.29). This focus renders visible the operations of what Svetlana Boym terms 'restorative nostalgia' in the text. 'Restorative nostalgia' expresses a nation-orientated memory that 'tends to make a teleological plot' by suturing the 'gaps and discontinuities' of memory with 'a coherent and inspiring tale of recovered identity' (S. Boym, 2001, p.53). The narrative nostalgia for homes lost and un-recovered dovetails with the project of 'rediscovering the ordinary'.

*The Cry of Winnie Mandela* articulates a form of 'restorative nostalgia'. In Svetlana Boym's terms, 'Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition (S. Boym, 2001, p. xviii). Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's image is associated with one the most significant men in the national narrative of sacrificial liberation and reconciliation, Nelson Mandela, the 'founding father' of the 'new' South Africa (P. Ahluwalia and C. McEachern, 1997, p.83 and R. A. Wilson, 2001, p.115). Separated from Mandela by detention, Winnie- Madikizela occupies and subverts the category of 'political widow' (M. Ramphele, 1996, p.111), which in turn disrupts the imaginary construction of the nation as a Home for all. The figure of the 'political widow' provides an illuminating lens

through which to review ideologies of Home and their repercussions in the construction of both nation and gender.

Ramphela's definition of 'political widowhood', in her article of that title, is central to her self-presentation in *A Life*. According to Ramphela, 'political widows' enter the public – 'political' – realm as 'stand-ins' for fallen or incarcerated men. Their entry into the public sphere is thus founded on a private, homely relationship (M. Ramphela, 1996, p.112). 'Political widowhood' locates the subject in a 'liminal' zone between the social dichotomies of male and female, public and private, and entails 'both an acknowledgement and a denial of women as social and political actors in their own rights' (M. Ramphela, 1996, p.99 & pp.101–102). Shifting in and out of private and public, 'political widowhood' is a fundamentally [un]homely category that throws into relief the social division between private and public – 'home and the world' – and the points at which it dissolves.

Winnie Mandela is portrayed as the archetypal 'political widow', the 'ultimate public symbol of women-in-waiting' (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.61): 'You stood in for him [...] You held onto your husband by absorbing his political image into yourself' (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.60). Ndebele places her story at the heart of a narrative that includes four 'ordinary' women who encircle Winnie's 'spectacular' experience of 'widowhood' with their quotidian experiences. The novel moves between the 'ordinary' lives of *four unknown women* and *that of South Africa's most famous woman* (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.1; italics in original), as it responds to the challenge it sets itself: 'to build a bridge between the public clamour in [Winnie's] life and the intimate secrets deep inside [her]' (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.52). In search of Winnie's 'intimate secrets', *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* hones in on the point at which the homely becomes unhomely.

Rita Felski's feminist reading of the philosophical history of the 'everyday' is instructive regarding Ndebele's notion of the 'ordinary'. According to Felski, women are considered 'the quintessential representatives and victims of the quotidian' and are associated with the home (R. Felski, 1999 - 2000, p.17). Like Ndebele, Felski contests the 'negative view of the quotidian' as 'something to be transcended' (R. Felski, 1999 - 2000, p.17). She suggests, moreover, that the notion 'that women represent daily life' problematically presents 'a romantic view of both everyday life and women by associating them with the natural, authentic and primitive. This nostalgia feeds into a long chain of dichotomies – society versus community, modernity versus tradition, public versus private – which do not help us to understand the social organisation of gender and which deny women's contemporaneity, self-consciousness and agency' (R. Felski, 1999 - 2000, p.31). Women's contemporaneity is expressly denied in the

temporal structures of Janus-faced nationalism, which nostalgically renders them as custodians of tradition (A. McClintock, 1995, pp.358-359; M. Ogunjide-Leslie, 1987, p.7).

*The Cry of Winnie Mandela* declares itself to be ‘a great South African story not yet told’ about women who have ‘endured the uncertainties of waiting’ (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.1; italics in original). At the same time, it fulfils a mandate set forth in ‘A Home for Intimacy’ in which the ‘greatest of South African stories yet to be told’ are those of the ‘loss of homes [and the] demise of intimacy’ (N. S. Ndebele, 1996, p.29). While exploring the effects of the same historical conditions – the brutal modernities of colonialism and apartheid – the two ‘great South African stories’ pull in different directions. One aims to free women from the burden of waiting in the home, and the other longs for a home that, it seems, only women can provide. The narrative is thus explicitly impaled upon the ‘contradictions of modernity’ (S. Boym, 2001, p. xviii); to its credit, it works through, rather than smoothes over, such contradictions.

The ‘ultimate death of home’ preceded even Nelson’s release as, in Winnie’s Orlando residence, children were ‘[l]oved to perdition’ (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.74). The narrative pauses to quote from Nelson Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom* (N. Mandela, 1994, pp.431-432). Mandela relates a recurring nightmare he had in the wake of the 1976 Soweto uprising, when children defied parental authority to take the lead in the struggle, egged on by his wife, the champion of the youth. Dreaming of his unexpected release from prison, he finds that ‘[t]here was no one to meet him’; proceeding to the family house, he observes that it is ‘empty, a ghost house’ (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.74). The haunted house conveys the unhomely affect produced by the unhomely woman. The overtones of Ndebele’s own return home appear to be mirrored in and mediated through Mandela’s return, hence the narrative reticence in directing critique at Mandela and the textual longing for Winnie to render the home homely.

Nonetheless, this regressive desire is mitigated by the novel’s willingness to face the terrifying abyss of unhomeliness. Boym suggests that the distinction between ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ nostalgics is evident in their different responses to the uncanny: ‘Restorative nostalgics don’t acknowledge the uncanny and terrifying aspects of what was once homely. Reflective nostalgics see everywhere the imperfect mirror images of home, and try to cohabit with doubles and ghosts’ (S. Boym, 2001, p.251). Confronting, instead of shying away from, uncanny affects, Ndebele’s novel self-consciously dramatises, rather than conceals, its own contradictory desires. In Ndebele’s *Winnie*, the reader recognises, within the ‘familiar’ (S. Freud, 1955, p.222), beloved black Mother and icon of the anti-apartheid struggle, the unfamiliar violence of the apartheid state. *Winnie*’s black breast, the novel proposes, houses what Ndebele elsewhere terms a ‘heart of whiteness’ (N. S. Ndebele, 2000). The reader is

informed that Major Swanepoel, Winnie's torturer, found 'for himself a permanent home in the inner recesses' of his victim (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.100). Winnie's 'intimate secrets' (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.52) reveal a horror that cannot be contained within the idealised notion of Home. The pervasive reach of colonial violence – into the 'inner recesses' – that restorative nostalgia represses, returns, terrifyingly, in the figure of the national Mother. The novel's nostalgia for homes – for loyal wives and nurturing mothers – thus gives way to one that acknowledges the uncanny quality of the nation as Home and which recognises that the traumatic effects and disorder affects of the past will not easily be exorcised.

Ndebele's narrative sees the *ibandla* women, along with Winnie, taking up the leisure prospects of the new South Africa. They hire a Caravelle, a Venter trailer and a driver, eschewing the home – and thus their roles as waiting widows – in favour of a newfound mobility. At the start of their journey, the women break into song, singing '*Iphi 'ndlela*' (Where is the way?), a phrase used by Ndebele in the title of his Steve Biko Memorial Lecture in 2000, which was subtitled 'Finding Our Way Into the Future'. The novel's conclusion, then, can be read as an attempt to map out future social and cultural directions. It does so by re-mapping physical space, and reclaiming the country as home, but a home that neither demands the domestication of women, nor premises its interior intimacies on exclusions, beginning with disavowals of aspects of the self (N. S. Ndebele, 1996, p.28 & 2003, pp.68-69). Through the figure of Winnie Mandela, Ndebele considers the costs of what he elsewhere calls 'spectacular' culture, while offering a nuanced response to this woman who is writ large on the South African symbolic canvas. He measures the agonies of waiting and articulates a desire for a restoration of home by engaging with Madikizela-Mandela's historical predicament as a 'political widow'.

In 1996 Ndebele published a short article titled 'A Home for Intimacy', parts of which are repeated verbatim in the novel (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, pp.68-70). There he speaks of returning from exile in a frustrated search for a home. The lack of home – unhomeliness, in one sense of the word – he finds on his return to South Africa is ascribed, in the novel, to the dissolution of the Mandela marriage, which had encapsulated the dream of a national family Home. Ndebele is sensitive to the social positioning of women as waiting widows, as those who maintain the home while their mobile men traverse the world. Yet, at the same time, he locates his hope for the future in the restoration of homes. He mediates his own nostalgic longing on his return to a liberated South Africa through the character of Winnie. But his choice of such a patently unhomey figure through whom to articulate this desire disrupts it, and the novel avoids the psychic repression that would permit it to continue naming Madikizela-Mandela, in the face of all odds, 'Mother of the Nation'.

*The Cry of Winnie Mandela* remains keenly aware of the dangers of women in Africa being co-opted by a global feminist movement. Ndebele's women take such risks and, in risking all, open themselves to new encounters that speak to their experiences of womanhood and widowhood. Speaking from within and across the national border, Ndebele's women provisionally evoke the category of 'woman' as they take Penelope into their midst. The happenstance of their meeting emphasises the contingency of the grouping they form and avoids the foundational fictions that may suggest an essential and ahistorical shared female identity.

This Winnie obeys the critical injunction to re-create homes: 'Thinking about it now, I shouldn't have walked out with him. I should have waited outside the prison gates for him to walk back into my waiting arms' (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.87). She still flaunts the 'revolutionary appeal' of bringing her waiting to an end by 'walk[ing] into prison to fetch her man', showing the world that 'Winnie does not wait. She goes and gets what she wants' (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.87). But, in her 'quiet moments', the reflective mode Ndebele prioritises, she contemplates an alternative scenario: 'I, Winnie Mandela, waiting at the prison gates for my man to come out to me' (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.88). Had she had played the role of waiting woman, suggests the novel, she and Nelson would have 'insert[ed their] interrupted intimacy into the public drama and so reaffirm[ed their] private lives' (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.88). Any attempt to restore the 'ordinary', private lives subsumed by the public drama requires, then, that Winnie retreat into the private, that she embody Home, her waiting arms 'wide open' (R. M. George, 1996, p.18) to welcome Nelson.

## **2. Breaking Intimacy Promises: Rekindling the Home?**

The political change from apartheid to post-apartheid eras has caused radical changes in all spheres of life, and home continues to be a fragile notion, as I discuss in *The cry of Winnie Mandela*. The narrative contains the fictional accounts of four women, each of them looking back on her early years of marriage and the separation which occurred for different reasons in each case, but always because of the lack of constancy of the man who left her for apparently important practical reasons. Such reasons include political exile in order to participate in the struggle, or being given a scholarship to train overseas as a doctor – though one of the husbands depicted seems to have *priapism* as his only reason for abandoning his wife in favour of numerous other women. Each woman interrogates her own history by telling her story while addressing and questioning Winnie Mandela in her role as another abandoned wife. The accounts are by no means uncritical of Winnie Mandela, but a sense is conveyed of how dauntingly difficult her personal life has been. Each woman tries to make sense of her own

memories and comes to terms with her pain of abandonment, but the feelings are so intense that none of them can find closure. However, the text implicitly illustrates the positive function of memory discussed by Constantina Papoulias as follows:

Indeed, for some cultural historians, memory is a process of self-making: it names ‘the ways in which people shape and transform’ not only their past but crucially ‘each other through collectively authored stories’ (C. Papoulias, 2003, p.117).

The women’s stories are strongly intertextual and provide a transformational dynamic, though in this text the pain of the past is not relieved until the end – and even then the crucial problem of how power differentials between the genders might be adjusted in order to prevent such injustices is not really addressed. Ndebele’s novel shows the emotional and financial deprivation of four women who are, finally able to speak about and make patterns – always incomplete – of their experiences. These experiences are personal, yet the forces that created them are, indubitably, the laws and customs which, in many cases, still limit the power and mobility of black women in particular.

Ndebele uses Greek myth to provide a universal frame for events in South Africa, giving the reader some distance from the South African chronotope by invoking the story of Penelope, Odysseus’ wife, as the woman who stayed faithful to her husband, despite many difficulties and a long separation from him. The hardships experienced by Penelope reflect and highlight the price that black nuclear families paid for the fight against apartheid, focusing the reader on the strength and courage which black women displayed in the face of loss as well as the social demands for absolute propriety: these women were required by their communities to remain faithful to their errant and erring husbands as Penelope was to hers.

Throughout the history of interpersonal relationships, the qualities of closeness and depth in the experience of human attachment have been associated with intimacy. The theoretical definition for intimacy is this: a quality of a relationship in which the individuals must have reciprocal feelings of trust and emotional closeness toward each other and are able to openly communicate thoughts and feelings with each other. The conditions that must be met for intimacy to occur include reciprocity of trust, emotional closeness, and self-disclosure. Intimacy is of significance to the extent it plays a developmental role in identity formation, through the consensual validation of personal worth by providing individuals with the opportunity to feel understood and accepted as they are, within the relationship. One has only to allude to the variety of individual, familial, fraternal, extrafamilial, and sexual intimacies to realise the complex dimension of the concept. As Myron H. Levenson (1974) has pointed out, intimacy “is a venerable word with a long history of changing meaning” (p.360). The search



for a place of intimacy and familiarity as well as the need to redefine home is a crucial concern of Ndebele's protagonist. The ambiguously presented figure of Winnie-Mandela unifies the text, in that all four of the other women write putative letters to her, which both praise and question her stance, gaining strength from who she was while sympathising with what she had to endure in the long absence of her husband. Nelson Mandela's role in what Winnie became is also implicitly questioned, though the text does quote from the letter he wrote her from prison in which he shows a deep awareness of the burden imposed on her:

Your love and support, the raw warmth of your body, the charming children you have given the family ... the hope of enjoying that love again, is what life and happiness mean to me. I have somebody I love who is worthy to be loved and trusted, one whose own love and patient support have given me so much strength and hope ... Yet there have been moments when ... I have wondered whether any kind of commitment can ever be sufficient excuse for abandoning a young and inexperienced woman in a pitiless desert, literally throwing her into the hands of highwaymen ... (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, pp.108-109)

The depth of affection and empathy displayed here contrasts with Nelson Mandela's eventual divorce from his wife, and Ndebele highlights some of the faultlines which led to this in Winnie Mandela's lament for their loss of intimacy (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, pp.88-90). The words she uses trace the process of alienation, beginning with "Waiting" and "the systematic invasion of whatever dreams we had of family life" (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.88). In what follows Winnie's repetitious use of words such as "home" and "order" develops this idea until it is overwhelmed by other frequently occurring words such as "disorder" and "disruption". Her litany culminates in phrases such as "shattered intimacy" and the conclusion that "You had to go away to smash something to restore the order of love between us" (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.90). This final sentence, with its precarious positioning of violence and love in the same frame, highlights the disjunction between the political demands of a South Africa under siege by apartheid on the one hand, and the conditions necessary for a stable family life on the other. Equally telling lamentations by Winnie, centred around numerous repetitions of the word "home", occur at other points in this text (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, pp.66-77; 80-82; 88-90), giving the effect of a mourner whose loss is so great that it fills her consciousness and seems, at this point, all she is able to think about or articulate.

Yet, paradoxically, when Winnie was forcibly removed from her home and sent into exile in Brandfort (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.102), the process (as depicted in this text) involved empowerment as much as loss: "Brandfort was my first real taste of power; something close to absolute power. It came from my sense of having the ability to change things in a place that had

no notion of change” (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.102). Winnie’s ability to transmute disempowerment into engagement, even at times triumph, is one of the reasons she has become such an inspiring figure, and her achievements in restoring some dignity to the black population of Brandfort are well known (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.103). Yet Ndebele’s text raises the issue of Winnie’s abuses of power, with one of the putative letters written to her as follows “So much ugliness was ascribed to you: kidnapping children; gruesome beatings and torture of children; disappearances and deaths, assassinations; defamations and denunciations; intimidation and terror” (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.62). By the way he sets out Winnie’s story, which repeatedly undermines any easy conclusions about her, Ndebele encourages the reader to wrestle with these conflicting depictions of Winnie, a provisional stance which may be the closest we can come to solving the riddle of her life. Through the technique of fictionalisation, Ndebele manages to represent Winnie as someone both empowered and disempowered, by the structures of apartheid – empowered in that she is shown as finding new strengths in response to official harassment, but disempowered in that the limitations imposed on her life, especially her experience in prison, eventually created unbearable tensions which destroyed her moral stability. Winnie Mandela was held for 13 months in solitary confinement in a tiny concrete cell in Pretoria Central prison, during which she was brutally tortured for “Forty days and forty nights” (N.S. Ndebele, 2003, p.100). A systematic and complete account of Winnie’s suffering during this period is not available, as Anné Mariè du Preez Bezdrob indicates when she speaks of “the lack of empirical evidence” about this time in Winnie Mandela’s life:

I trust that readers will indulge my use of poetic licence to share the pictures that unwittingly come to mind as I try to place myself in another woman’s shoes. Some of the interpretations are mine alone, while others are based on pointers to Winnie’s thoughts, observations and perceptions, as recorded in various publications and paraphrased here (A. M. P. Bezdrob, 2003, p.143).

Bezdrob relates how Winnie’s interrogators, led by Swanepoel, subjected Winnie to continuous interrogation over long periods, sleep deprivation, threats, humiliation and extreme verbal bullying, causing extensive physical and emotional suffering which, at times, made it difficult for her to remain conscious and caused her to pass blood in her urine. Whereas a conventional biographer such as Bezdrob relates that the security police did not dare to physically assault someone of Winnie’s standing, Ndebele’s mixture of fact and fiction seems to suggest that she may in fact have been assaulted in that way too (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.99). However, Ndebele and Bezdrob are unanimous about the catastrophic effects these events had on Winnie’s personality. Bezdrob speaks of how researchers have linked trauma and victimisation to

psychosocial dysfunction, often manifesting itself as post-traumatic stress disorder in the victims. Bezdrob adds that “A disturbing finding of the research was that people who have suffered trauma, victimisation or violence ... are ... at high risk of becoming perpetrators of violence, including torture and rape ...” (A. M. P. Bezdrob, 2003, p.217)

Judith Lewis Herman speaks of how prisoners may be damaged by prolonged trauma, especially if they had broken under interrogation and divulged information. Such a prisoner would be left with “a burden of unexpressed rage against all those who ... failed to help her ... Thus former prisoners carry their captor’s hatred with them ... and sometimes they continue to carry out their captor’s destructive purposes ...” (J. L. Herman, 1992, p.95). For Ndebele, the essence of Winnie’s prison experience is evoked by the name of Major Theunis Swanepoel, “The terror of all detainees” (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.60), a security policeman who was her chief torturer whom *The cry of Winnie Mandela* invokes no fewer than five times, at significant points in the text. Our introduction to Swanepoel suggests, bitterly, that his acts were Winnie’s “apprenticeship to power”, and that he taught her “how to thrive on fear and terror” (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.61). The policemen who had sown disruption in Winnie’s life by means of dawn raids on her home are called “Children of Major Theunis Swanepoel, the master torturer” (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.89). Winnie is depicted as speaking to her “alter ego” (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.101), her description of the notoriously violent Nelson Mandela Football Club which she founded (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.98) is immediately juxtaposed with a long account of her own imprisonment and torture. She asks telling questions of herself, such as “Did I become your daughter, Major Swanepoel?” (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.99) and “Why do I think about him so often, Major Theunis Swanepoel? It must be because I saw something frighteningly intriguing about him ... An unquenchable desire to be cruel. Deeply demanding without being fulfilling” (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.100). Winnie ends this section as follows:

There can be no deeper experience of loneliness than exposure to unending pain and cruelty in the absence of those you love, who cannot be there to give you comfort and protection ... So when Major Theunis Swanepoel was finally tired of being cruel, and let us leave his citadel of torture, I carried inside of me like a pregnancy, the terrible weight of loneliness and the embers of rage.  
‘Oh, Nelson!’ (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.100).

And yet, whether in love or friendship, there is a lack of consensus concerning the precisely essential character of intimacy. Another paragraph, soon after this, repeats these sentiments (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.104), and the final reference to her torturer refers to her evasive testimony at the Truth and Reconciliation hearings:

But you've got to hand it to me, I was magnificent at the TRC hearings!  
I, the child of Major Theunis Swanepoel, Queen of Brandfort, and terror  
of Soweto, who mastered to perfection the art of technical denial ... The  
hearing was my heaven and my hell (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.111).

Ndebele's narrative suggests that there is an intimate link between the damage inflicted on Winnie by Major Theunis Swanepoel and the scandal surrounding victims of the Nelson Mandela Football Club. As Nogwaja Shadrack Zulu points out, several authoritative biographies of Winnie Mandela "adopt the view that she was taught to hate by the apartheid state. The biographies become compelling evidence of this ..." (N. S. Zulu, 2005, p.5).

One way of describing what Ndebele's text does is to say that it depicts Winnie Mandela, despite her transgressions, as a fully human being, encouraging a greater understanding of her life and actions, and discouraging over-simplified judgements about her. The title of Ndebele's text speaks not of Winnie's story but of her cry, perhaps because a cry can be a very intense form of narrative employed by those wrestling with the inarticulacy induced by trauma. The plight of black women in general is highlighted by Ndebele from the start, with each of the four abandoned wives having to reinvent a coherent narrative of their lives as they struggle to live without their husbands. The tale of Winnie herself is presented by Ndebele as a paradigmatic struggle to find herself, as a woman of power, within the restrictive framework imposed on women by a male-dominated apartheid society. Deprived of both personal relationship and a legitimate sphere in which to exercise her powers of political and social leadership, Winnie is shown as destroying herself in her frantic bid for freedom.

Yet Ndebele's text is not just about Winnie Mandela and, through the interaction between the women portrayed here, it points to the tensions between societal norms during apartheid and the flesh-and-blood feelings that are evoked by situations of abandonment and loss of relationship. How is it possible to reconcile the enforcement of traditional values regarding the behaviour of women with the deep suffering felt by so many women as their basic sources of support, love and companionship are removed? This is the nub of the problem: the women are expected by their communities to conform to the Penelope paradigm, but this expectation is clearly an idealised one – the archetype of the abandoned woman who remains faithful to her absent and often erring husband is a narrative imposed by patriarchal societies, for the benefit of men only. And, in this text, Penelope herself – in a radical rewriting of the original myth – leaves her husband after he has returned: she relates how, when Odysseus returns, he leaves her after their first night together "to perform cleansing rituals to forestall possible civil strife following his brutal slaying of my shameless suitors" (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, pp.119-120). But, she says,

... it has never been told that when he returned, I was gone. I went on my own cleansing pilgrimage. Odysseus should not have left me like that on that special morning while I was still learning to savour his return. He should have shown more sensitivity (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.120).

The text ends on an optimistic note, with the five women travelling through South Africa in a minibus together, celebrating their self-awareness and strength and asserting their right to equality by exercising the social, emotional and geographical mobility traditionally denied women. On their way, they give a lift to a white hitch-hiker, who turns out to be Penelope. She says that Odysseus was unaware that he had to reconcile with her, as well, and she is now on “a pilgrimage of reconciliation” related to what she calls the unfolding of consciousness in the world, but related specifically to herself,

... as the world learns to become more aware of me not as Odysseus’s moral ornament, but as an essential ingredient in the definition of human freedom. I travel around the world ... attempting to free [women] from the burden of unconditionally I placed on their shoulders (N. S. Ndebele, 2003, p.120).

By implication, this unfolding of consciousness, together with the camaraderie experienced by the women exchanging stories, waiting is essential for the transmission of these stories. Ndebele’s women are linked through their experiences of waiting, but by unanchoring the women in time during their monologues and apostrophes to Winnie Mandela, the narrative re-enacts a suspension of time that recalls the temporal experience of waiting as well.

The novel concludes with the group together in a car, encountering Homer’s Penelope as a hitchhiker on the road to Durban. The allusion to Penelope – the figure from *The Odyssey* who becomes a character in the novel’s final section, “The Stranger” – draws attention to the ways that women have been expected to wait indefinitely, and chastely, for their male counterparts. In the Penelope tradition of waiting, waiting is moralised and gendered as passive and feminine, and the novel’s dialogue with this history suggests that these expectations have become “timeless”: inherited, transnational, and trans-temporal. The four waiting women, as well as the character Winnie, describe and revise the assumptions of this gendered history of waiting. Sometimes waiting is not rewarded, sometimes the women cultivate opportunities for themselves while waiting, and other times the women refuse to wait at all – but in each case, the waiting is grounded and contextualised in the specific, ordinary circumstances in which the women live.

## CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, I have read *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and its inscription of ‘political widowhood’ and of home restoration through Ndebele’s literary techniques to figure Winnie Mandela as (un)homely woman. My concern in this paper has been to offer an account of the unfolding post-apartheid condition within which contemporary South African writing takes place. I have positioned ‘political widows’ beyond the space opened up by Njabulo Ndebele referring to the dying apartheid years. I conclude the discussion by considering Winnie’s uncanny longing for homely life. Ndebele searches for ways of imagining the rebuilding of a post-traumatic South Africa that do not entail the nostalgia of women cognisant that some of the hidden sides of apartheid are home dislocation stemming from political leaders’ jailing.

My exploration of the narrative has drawn attention to the women traumatised by these devilish projects that consisted in shattering the homes of political icons whose wives broke intimacy by dint of desperately waiting. Waiting is not a static signifier in Ndebele’s narrative, rather, it encompasses temporal impulses that are at odds with Winnie’s reminiscence. The concepts of nostalgia and intimacy overlap with Ndebele’s use of temporality of waiting and gesturing toward socio-political conditions that restrain Winnie’s waiting for Nelson Mandela who spent more than two decades in Robben Island. Likewise, Ndebele’s unhomely women depiction suggests that women wait differently – not only in ways that may be different from men, but also a single way that is rekindling the home.

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