

## In the Shadows of Apartheid: Social Malady and Poetry Therapy in Ndlovu's Poetry

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### Abstract

Malika Lueen Ndlovu, a South African woman poet, has demonstrated a determined sense of commitment to confront the social absurdities of her society through her literary creations. Her works illustrate the philosophy of arts for life's sake. Her creative motto is "creativity for healing". It is in this light that this paper conceives social disorders as malady and poetry as therapy in relation to the wellbeing of the society. Two of Ndlovu's poetry anthologies of poems were purposively selected to because of their thematic and aesthetic relevance to the study. They are *Born in Africa But* (2000) and *Truth is Both Spirit and Flesh* (2008). These texts present a corpus of poetry that portrays the society as a sick body whose illness is diagnosed by the poet's stethoscopic pen to unveil unhealthy practices and restore sanity to the sick society. The texts also present the poet as a "social physician". Through these texts, Ndlovu diagnosed gender and psychological maladies of post-Apartheid South Africa while exposing this putrefaction to mobilise social actions for its correction.

**Key words:** Social disorders; Poetry therapy; Malika Lueen Ndlovu; Literature and commitment; Writers as social physicians

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### INTRODUCTION

The literary history of South Africa has consistently embedded a reflection of the social maladies that sickened the country, especially as occasioned by the brutal apartheid regime. This makes the country inconducive for some citizens, non-whites most especially. The negative landmarks of South Africa's apartheid regime have left a lingering shadow on both the country's socioeconomic and socio-political space. Post-Apartheid South African literature reflects effects and fragments of realities that are offshoots of the past apartheid regime. For example, the Apartheid literary texts portray the prevalence of social injustices and the inhumane social system. By Apartheid texts, this study means literary texts written during the era of apartheid in the country, such as the popular *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* by Athol Fugard. This suggests that even though Apartheid has been overthrown in South Africa, its injuries on the psyche of the nation are yet to be completely cured. Certainly, this may take some time. That is why this paper highlights and establishes a link between the diagnosed social maladies of the country as portrayed in the anthologies under study with the defunct Apartheid regime that has left obvious scars on the nation as a corpus. From the time of apartheid to the present post-Apartheid period, South African committed writers have not ceased to bear witness against the social evils in the country. The literary works of popular South African writers like John Maxwell Coetzee, Lewis Nkosi, Nadine Gordimer, Bessie Head, Njabulo Ndebele, Damon Galgut, Athol Fugard and Dennis Brutus, amongst others, have eloquently expressed commitment to literature with significant results.

Gaither Stewart (2002) notes that for literature to keep its autonomy and resist subjugation to the political power of the moment, creative writers must shun compromise. He avers that creative writers should be knowledgeable of the politics that conditions their societies. He warned that being ignorant of this would be deadly to creative writers.

He appealed that writers should insist on being themselves in a conformist society. He warned that this may get them labelled as sick as if their commitment to literature is a disease. He emphasized the fact that compromised writers will present false and misleading images of the society to sustain and maintain the status quo for pecuniary gains. They don't call attention to the 'dis-eases' in their societies in their story lines and literary portrayals.

Jose Maria Sison (2009) agrees with Stewart on the subject of literature and commitment. He urged writers to create works that will reflect the social functions of literature. He believes that literature ought to illustrate social and cultural significance in its commitment to the cause of freedom and reflections on the social conditions of its society. He admonishes writers to be committed to the struggle for freedom. He advises writers to reflect, enrich and inspire the struggle of the common masses for national freedom and democracy in their creative works. He notes further that writers can push the cause of freedom forward by dealing with the decline of social systems and engaging the growth of the people's revolutionary struggle for freedom.

Niyi Osundare (2007) opines that real writers do not have a choice than to be in constant conflict with oppression. He explains that the writer is the guilty conscience of the king by revealing the king's secret evil and malpractices against the masses. He cautions writers to abstain from gifts coming from politicians to avoid compromise. Osundare touches on the healing role of the writers in the society. He notes that they possess powers over social ills both for the purposes of prevention and cure. This makes writers to function as social physicians. Russell (1973, p.75) notes that "a society is healthy when there is equal opportunity for all and access by all to the goods and services essential to full functioning as a citizen". Orderliness in a society will surely contribute to and promote individual sanity of members of that society. Russell lists the existence of the rule of law, equality in the distribution of wealth, public accessibility of the decision-making process and the level of social capital as determinants of the health status of a society. These are issues of contentions in most developing countries. They are spheres that literary writers can adequately address. To shy away from such matters will be a disservice to the society and the world in general.

Because this study explores how poetry serves as medicine to the society, it becomes important to reference James Pennbaker (Pennebaker, 1997a; Pennebaker, 1997b; Pennebaker, 2004), and a host of other scholars who have investigated and established the fact that writing can serve therapeutic purposes (Bodil & Elin, 2012; Bolton & Wright, 2004; Brewster, 2007; Brown, 1975). They have succeeded in pointing out the fact that reflective writing is both medicinal to writers and readers it enhances self-expression and self-understanding.

Mayaki and Omobowale (2019) subsumed all forms

of writing therapies into "scriptotherapy" which they describe as "the therapeutic effect of the process or product of writing" (109). They argue that whether it is called writing therapy, bibliotherapy, reading therapy, book therapy or poetry therapy, these nomenclatures still refer to the therapeutic effects of the process or product of writing. Their emphasis on "product" is pivotal to this study as it appropriates the product of Ndlovu's writing (in this case, poetry) to tackling social 'dis-eases' in the South African enclave.

Ndlovu's poetry perfectly fits into the canon of "committed South African writers" in her unique ways. Even though she negotiates issues of general concern in South Africa and African society at large, her simplistic mode of literary presentation carves out a distinct niche for her in the broad tradition of modern African poetry. As a writer committed to the African enclave, she negotiates subject matters that concern the generality of South Africans, cutting across class, gender, race, religion and politics for the social wellbeing of the state. If a society is socially healthy, its inhabitants are more likely to be at lower risk to death in general, heart attack, high blood pressure and other mental and environmental related health issues.

This paper explores selected poems of Ndlovu to point out how as a writer, she functions as a social physician to the South African Society by diagnosing social maladies and proffering a cure through poetry. The idea is to establish a nexus between the job of medical doctors as healers and that of writers as community physicians. Like medical practitioners, writers diagnose abnormalities in the society, expose them in their writings and impress them on the consciousness of the reading audience so that logical steps can be taken to rectify it, which can be synonymous to diagnosing a disease in a patient to make him aware of the delicateness of his or her health condition, prescriptions are further made to enhance the patient's recovery. The South African society is metaphorically conceived as a patient and Ndlovu as its social physician that diagnoses its dis-eases and attempts a cure. To achieve this objective, relevant poems shall be analysed from Ndlovu's *Born in Africa But* (2000) and *Truth is both Spirit and Flesh* (2008).

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## GENDERED SOCIAL MALADIES IN BORN IN AFRICA BUT

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The poetry anthology *Born in Africa But* appears like it has been deliberately structured to represent the voices of despised and oppressed women. The social maladies this section of the study explores are the abnormal social conditions of women as depicted in the selected poems of the anthology. The typical South African woman suffers multiple oppressions as a result of the ripple effects of apartheid laws, coupled with the biased traditional

conceptualisation of who a woman is. Although the apartheid regime is over, its shadow lingers. Historically, the black woman has been despised for being woman and for being black. This leaves her to depend on the preferred masculine personality of her husband or father, putting her at the mercy of the male folks. This collection indicates that women are being stigmatized by the society. A society that does not guarantee equal treatment and opportunities for the sexes cannot be truly said to be healthy. In essence, it needs to be taken care of. In her characteristic manner, Ndlovu exposes this dis-ease in its different shades for rationality to act on it so that the nation's social health in terms of gender relations can be as whole as it should be.

"Next door" is a two stanza poem that presents an abnormal situation in which a woman is sexually exploited by a man. From the title of the poem, one may guess that the poetic persona is an observer and a concerned neighbour of the characters the narrative poem presents. It is also possible that the woman is legally married to the man but it is clear that their sexual relationship is not healthy as it appears to be a show for the man and only for his selfish satisfaction.

He enters  
She falls  
He circles  
She murmurs  
He invades  
She whimpers  
He flexes  
She aches  
He threatens  
She resists  
He abuses  
She obeys (Ndlovu, 2000, p.42)

The poem seems to describe different steps and processes involved in the act of love making of this pair as observed by the poet persona. It is obvious that it is not an enjoyable experience for the woman. She is like an object for the man to exploit sexually. She is helplessly put in a subservient position. She needed to avail and surrender herself for the man's enjoyment. This is wrong; it is an anomaly that needs to be corrected. The poet persona points out an anomaly that forces women into an enduring position during coitus with their men and that thoughtlessly centres on the happiness of the men during sexual relations. The second stanza further paints the unhealthy sexual interaction thus:

He triumphs  
She burns  
He sighs  
She cries  
He whispers  
She knows  
He exits  
She unfolds  
He tries  
She forgives  
She dies  
He lives (Ndlovu, 2000, p.42)

The end of the story is saddening, as the woman dies while the man lives on, probably to grab another woman for his sexual gratification. This is unfair. It is injustice to the female folks. A society whose gender relation in sexual matters goes thus, is definitely ill socially and needs reorientation for rehabilitation. This poem puts this negative social condition on the consciousness of readers for evaluative steps to be taken with therapeutic effects on the sex life of the society.

"Confirmation in Crimson" is another poem that presents the social dilemma of the female folks against the negligence and careless attitude of the male-dominated society. The poem relays the experience of a girl child who has just experienced menarche, her first experience of menstruation and the stressful psychological repercussions of the experience. The poetic persona narrates it thus:

Sudden wet whisper on her thighs  
Is that mine  
Her innocence cries  
Before she can grasp  
The miracle  
It's passed  
Granny recommends sugar for the shock  
Cynical aunties pretend not to mock  
Mother sighs  
Childhood good-byes  
Her box of remedies now applies (Ndlovu, 2000, p.45)

The experience can be shocking to a child, especially one that has not been pre-informed about menstrual cycle. This is the experience that further announces the initiation of the girl child into womanhood. This flow indicates the peak of puberty for a girl child. It is important to note that the social malady here is not the experience of menarche but the unconcerned disposition of the patriarchal society. This is better succinctly captured in the stanza that follows:

No vigorous celebration  
No uniting of the clan  
Not a joyous evolution  
From girl to woman  
For she who is not man (Ndlovu, 2000, p.45)

Traditionally in Africa, the initiation of a male child into adulthood is well celebrated but that of a girl child that comes with menstrual pains is not socially acknowledged. The society even discriminates against her by seeing her as being "unclean" and, therefore, only fit to be set apart or isolated for a period of time. This idea is suggested in the stanza below:

It's a secret  
Take a tablet  
They can smell it  
Wear a long skirt  
Feeling faint  
Call the nurse  
Every woman's curse  
They convincingly say  
The pain of your life  
Till its very last day (Ndlovu, 2000, p.45)

It is partial to celebrate the transition of a male child into adulthood and to ignore that of a female child with all the burdens it brings on her. Biologically, this transition costs the female folks more than it costs the males. If at all, one is to be socially acknowledged over the other, arguably, it should be that of the girl child. This poem presents this social injustice for societal rectitude.

The poem, "Woman Being", highlights the social absurdity in seeing women as "women", socially connoting a form of inferiority, rather than just acknowledging their humanity. The poem suggests that when the "femininity" of a woman is over emphasised, it tends to underplay her humanity; unjustly restricting her access to certain rights and privileges accruable to members of a society. In the first stanza, the poet persona celebrates the identity of the female sex through the creation of a group of women thus:

Hierarchy lacks a habitat here  
This is circle  
Territory of balance  
Where moon tempers womb  
Root of generations  
This is woman being (Ndlovu, 2000, p.53)

Ndlovu is a founding member of Cape Town based writers' association WEAVE. She co-edits their multi-genra anthology *WEAVE's Ink@BoilingPoint: A Selection of 21st Century Black Women's Writing from the Southern Tip of Africa*. It is logical to infer that this is the circle she refers to when she says "hierarchy lacks a habitat here". Women are able to relate with one another in the group without any feeling of belittlement. It is important to mention that this social malady of an assumed inadequacy on the part of a woman is not restricted to South Africa. It is still a universal issue but most pronounced in Africa. Apartheid represented discrimination and inferiorisation to all points. Even though that regime has been abolished, its shadow still lingers in the gender perceptions and relations in South Africa. To feel safer and more visible, the women in the stanza above, had to form a group identity.

In stanza two, the poetic persona highlights various humiliating conditions women have been subjected to by the male dominated society while stanza three touches on the challenging situations women are naturally predisposed to. This foregrounds the injustice in pushing women to the margin because they are women. The stanzas read thus:

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## INCARCERATED BY MALE-SPAWNED IDEALS BRUTALISED

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D e t e r r e d f r o m c o n s c i o u s n e s s  
Mocked at our re-awakening

Here, where thigh-bred gratification is no zenith  
This is woman being (Ndlovu, 2000, p.53)

In the bid to celebrate the strength of women against

the biased projected image of the woman in a male dominated society, the last stanza focuses on the inherent valuable qualities in women. Their soft spoken-ness and calm diplomatic disposition that equal those of the male folk is thus presented:

Soft receptions  
Words before weapons  
Male equivalent  
Twin power on the planet  
Shorn of apathy  
Dormancy  
  
This is woman being  
Woman being  
Re-ascending (Ndlovu, 2000, p.53)

The therapeutic relevance of this poem is buttressed in its amplification of this gender relation social disorder in which a woman's "femininity" is being emphasised over her humanity which as a result, deprives her of valuable opportunities in the society.

In the poem "That Time has Passed", the poetic persona grapples with the ordeal of what can be described as "unclaimable justice", even though it is a justice she is entitled to. Due to the fact that apartheid has been abolished and due to the requirement in the process of reconciliation for the nation to heal, she is expected and "compelled" to forgive and forget. However, this "forgive-and-forget ideal" does not happen without some psychological torture. The first two stanzas of the three stanzas poem are thus rendered:

They tell me that the time for rage has passed  
They tell me that this is not the place  
This is not the stage for rage  
That this is not the time  
They tell me that time has passed

So I have to bring up the wounds  
And take them to the grave  
Or I remind them of the number  
And the names I remember  
The ones I could never forget  
But they tell me that this is not the place for rage  
This is not the time for grieving  
They tell me that the time of sacrifice has passed (Ndlovu, 2000, p.67)

The poetic persona finds herself in a psychological state in which she struggles to accept the society's expectation. Apartheid is over but the scars and the injuries it inflicted on its victims remain. As a victim, she cannot retaliate and yet she is not expected to be bothered by that harsh past, despite the scars she lives with. She is just supposed to embrace the present peace and move on, something she finds difficult to do. The society does not seem to care about the effect of the past on her present but rather goes ahead to proclaim that this is the post apartheid era and therefore, the evil of apartheid has to be forgotten. The poetic persona's struggle to live with this resolution that is compelled on all is reflected in the last stanza. She

admits that it is supposed to be a time for convalescing and emphasises that this acceptance comes with further sacrifices. The issue now is, how do victims in her shoes get placated? What will they have to show as evidence of justice for the wrongs done to them in the past as a result of apartheid, especially, as they are expected to just forget the past? The therapeutic relevance of this poem is in the space it has provided for the poetic persona, a victim of the dilemma, to air her opinion and to release her inner tension which eventually results in some forms of relief. The writing exercise provided a listening companion for her to relate her concerns freely, without feeling ashamed or being criticised.

“Imprints”, another poem, further grapples with the social malady of gender inequality. The poetic persona, speaking for herself and other women, emphasises that the female child has inherent rights like every human being. She asserts that the beasts that violate women’s rights are fellow citizens (men). She points out that women have decided to reconstruct their lives, protect their dreams and fight for their freedom. These are expressed in stanzas one and two of the poem:

Our spirit guide has spoken  
Found voice through artists’ hands  
Crafted truth in black and white  
Echo - birth from dark to light  
Each child’s inherent right

Violation is no foreign beast  
Within this house it hides  
By choice we reconstruct our lives  
Protect the dream  
Demand our soul’s release (Ndlovu, 2000, p.37)

As part of the process of correcting this social malady of gender inequality, the poet persona points out that concerned individuals have decided to form a united front against it. A woman should be treated as a human being and not belittled because she is not a man. She states that domination has to give way to equality, just like degradation must also give way to dignity.

The poem is a therapeutic adjunct to the psychological pains that gender discrimination against women inflicts. It is relieving to victims of this social disorder that someone is talking about it. It will comfort them that someone is championing a cause that can increase their visibility, audibility and prospects in the society. Even though the society is not completely practically at that phase yet, the poem gives a flicker of hope that one day; such a malady will only be something that occurred in history, just like the defunct apartheid government.

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## **PSYCHOSOCIAL MALADIES IN TRUTH IS BOTH SPIRIT AND FLESH**

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This section focuses on the negative mental, emotional, social, and spiritual effects of the social ills of South

Africa as reflected in the examined poems. Some of the psychosocial effects of these social ills orchestrate unconventional ways of thinking which influence the feelings, moods, beliefs, ways of coping and relationship of the victims with family and friends. This section reflects these psychosocial anomalies and how poetry therapy is employed as a psychosocial support. Psychological maladies are forms of behaviour of psychological symptoms that are capable of affecting different aspects of the life of a person’s behaviour and relationship to the world around him or her. This experience puts its victims in distress. The level and seriousness of this malady differs from one person to another, depending on their individual peculiarity and circumstances.

The psychoanalytical theory and procedure of mental treatment has revealed that literature has a way of reflecting the psychological states of both its author and characters. Understanding that, to a large extent, writers flesh up the ideas for their literary products with influences from the society, makes it logical to suggest that the characters they sometimes project are possible caricatures of real life characters within their social enclaves. It is in this light that this section examines psychosocial maladies as a social illness in Ndlovu’s anthology, *Truth is both Spirit and Flesh*.

In the poem, “I write”, the poet reveals that writing serves as the therapeutic support by which she attains visibility, audibility, “mental sanity” and other wellness related benefits. The poem is a moderately long narrative, relayed in simple language as typical of Ndlovu. She assets:

I write to re-discover lost territory in me  
To uncover the power  
Flowing  
Stirring  
Boiling Beneath my shell  
I write for my well-being  
I write to cleanse my inner space  
To quiet the traffic in my head  
I write so I can actually sleep when I fall into bed (Ndlovu, 2008, p.11)

In essence, the poet appears to find herself in a psychological state that requires or compels her to engage in the writing exercises for self expression, reflection, understanding and wellness. This idea is presupposed in the poem’s most repeated refrain “I write”, which connotes a consistent habit. She openly admits that she writes for her well-being, suggesting that she might not be able to maintain sound health without the therapeutic support of the writing exercise. The remaining part of the poem further unveils how the psychological condition of the poet conditions her to depend on writing to cure herself of different psychological ailments:

I write to remember the reasons I am here  
To see the lessons  
In the choices I’ve made

I write to offer the best of myself  
My truth  
My creativity  
The music in me  
I write to express my love  
My meaning  
To navigate into the unknown (Ndlovu, 2008, p.11)

From the extract above, poetry enables the poet “to remember, to see, to offer, to express and to navigate” (11). It is therefore logical to infer that creative writing serves as a tool of reflection and a means of exploring latent potentials as evidenced in the case of this poet. She is able to best relate with herself and others through the instrumentality of writing. Ndlovu sheds more light on the psychosocial benefits she gets from the process of writing:

I write to be honest  
With myself  
And with you  
Which if I say out loud  
I am sometimes unable to do  
I write in answer to a longing  
That lives with me each day  
A yearning for balance  
For equilibrium  
For re-union  
I write to feel my way along the path  
I write to free the language of my heart (Ndlovu, 2008, p.11)

“Girl Child” is another poem in this anthology that gives voice to the existence of psychosocial maladies in South Africa. The poem dwells on the abuse of the rights of female children. However, the interest of this study here is the psychosocial sides of this abuse, both from the sides of its perpetrators and its victims. The behavioural attitude that victimises a girl child is considered here as a psychosocial malady which has an unwholesome effect on the relationship of the child with the society

The poem, the toughness of the South African girl child as well as some psychosocial anomalies behind some of the maltreatments she suffers in the society. “Wild virgin flower” (14) is a symbolic metaphor for her resilience, innocence and beauty. It is however saddening that her society is a place where “innocence and youth is harvested with brutality” (14), a place where “she suffers the scorching of the dominant sun more than are brothers” (14). The use of language here conjures rape, discrimination and violence against the girl child. Rape is a psychosocial malady. The prevailing attitude towards a girl in this society, as portrayed in these lines, is one that preys upon and which despises the girl child. The moral decadence of this society is very clear in this poem.

For the poet, as exemplified in the poem, psychosocial malady is reflected in the way the girl child is educated and brought up to believe that she is inferior to her male counterpart. The result of this is a programming of thoughts and mindset to a position that makes the girl child feel she is below a man and to be dependent on others. The psyche of the educators of these girls reflects

a psychosocial anomaly that makes them recycle the old myths that objectifies women. To teach and believe this is also a psychosocial malady. In the second stanza the poet empathises with the girl child for her confiscated identity, enforced voicelessness and artificial impotence through rhetorical questions. The poet, leverages on the unhealthy psychosocial realities of her clime for the creation of this poem. A woman who lives in a society where she is victimised has the tendency to have sustained one psychological bruise or another. The process of writing this poem is an opportunity for her to heal as she vents and unburdens her disgust through pen and paper in the creative process. The created product also serves as a representation and a mirroring platform for oppressed female children and concerned women. It will help them to express their dilemma and create an awareness that can necessitate its correction, to rid the society of such malady.

The poem “Full Circle” relays the psychosocial malady of discrimination on the ground of skin colour, religion and gender. One would expect that a post apartheid South Africa should have been over social issues of discrimination. Unfortunately, it does exist, despite the acclaimed post apartheid status of the country.

Black  
Muslim  
Woman  
Fatal combination  
See the separation  
Float to surface  
Slip out from within  
Feel the cracks  
Of sudden conclusions  
The thud of dead frames  
Falling into place  
Diminishing all that I am  
All that we are  
To one another  
A definite outsider (Ndlovu, 2008, p.35)

A society where one is unaccepted for a natural condition s/he has no control over definitely poses some level of concern to reasonable logic. Why should one be at disadvantage for being black, Muslim and a woman? The poet's position is that it is a social misnomer for anyone to relate to another person this way in this age and time. The situation of the victim is compounded in the eyes of her assailants as the poet combines three belittled and despised qualities being black (p.35), Muslim (p.35) and being a woman (p.35). The psychological trauma this malady causes its victim, the poet, forces her into a mental flight and perhaps, a physical one in search of safety or a logical reason for her unfortunate lot. Her psychological burden can only be imagined. She must have struggled in vain with thoughts of the true definition of her identity and personhood.

The poet realises that her identity (for instance, black, Muslim and woman) is only a uniqueness she does not

have to shy away from but accept and embrace heartily. She attributes it to being divinely orchestrated while resiliently affirming her deliberate celebration of this unique identity. Interestingly, this is done through poetry. Poetry becomes a sacred and safe place; a place safer than her discriminating environment. Poetry gives her a voice, acceptance, personhood and a listening hear. In the final part of the conclusion, she consciously and meticulously re-states her acceptance of her identity- black, Muslim, and woman, foregrounding her resistance of and her triumph over the humiliating label the psycho-manic social tendencies of a deranged society attempts to impose on her.

“Pieces of a Dream” is a poem that mirrors the lingering effects of the evils of apartheid in the post apartheid era. Victims and perpetrators of apartheid are hunted by its memory. Its victims are angry and dissatisfied about the past and the perpetrators are confronted with their evil past. The country appears to be in the quagmire of fear and hatred. Fear and hatred becomes the controlling forces in the land. This is a social misnomer. As the title projects, the poem is replete with cases of shattered dreams. The first part narrates the story of a woman who has been sexually assaulted as a result of the psychosocial malady that was apartheid:

Pieces  
Pieces  
Pieces of a dream  
In Pieces  
A dream  
In pieces  
My body remembers everything  
Their gluttonous hands  
Eighteen or twenty  
What difference does it make?  
I want to move  
But where’s the roof over my head?  
(Ndlovu, 2008, p.19)

It is important to note that the poetic persona remembers the rape ordeal because of the scars it left on her. The sight of these scars triggers hunting memories of the past. She foregrounds this memory by the resonating line, “my body remembers everything” (19). She lived in a society where she is sexually abused by eighteen to twenty men because she has no place to go. This helplessness is conveyed in her desire thus “I want to move, but where is the roof on my head? (19)” Shelter is a basic need. Most people believe that the abolition of the apartheid regime would usher South Africans into a Promised Land, which is the post apartheid period believed to bring in justice and equity. The poetic persona is happy to have survived the harsh conditions of apartheid and for making it into the long awaited post apartheid South Africa where she no longer needs a file number or an officially stamped document to be visible. However, the eradication of the psychosocial maladies of injustice, oppression and deprivation orchestrated by apartheid seems questionable,

considering the poetic persona’s statement: “I am alive/ Standing/ Right next to you/ Waiting to be welcomed” (19). This can be interpreted to mean that she is yet to be integrated into the mainstream of the post apartheid life. In another part of the poem the poetic persona references the disillusionment in post apartheid South Africa:

I sing this new anthem  
Only some of the words make sense  
Bold letters spell out  
Our needs  
Our pain  
A sea of protest placards  
Swells in the city  
Again  
Reminding me of days far worse than this  
I call on the ancestors  
To wash this slate of fear and hatred clean  
They take their time to answer  
Nothing here is as simple as it seems  
Pieces of a dream  
Pieces of a dream  
A dream  
In pieces  
A dream (Ndlovu, 2008, p.20)

The South African society is hunted by thoughts of shattered dreams, dreams that now only exist in pieces. The poetic persona struggles with detaching the present from the past. It is however pathetic to see that even in the so called post apartheid era, the shadows of apartheid lingers on. Her participation in the anti government protest excavates her memory of the hardship of apartheid. The memory is possibly such a harrowing experience for her that she has to pray to be able to forget the past. This prayer however proves ineffective as she complains that the ancestors take their time to answer, meaning she is still being hunted by the gory details of these memories. She keeps trying in vain to forget the past. It is obvious from the foregoing that the poetic persona is traumatised by the burden of the past, a past she did not choose; a past that deprived her of life; a past to which she never existed and yet existed. The same past is the same thing that is not allowing her to live peacefully in the present.

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## CONCLUSION

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The analyses depict representations of gendered and psychosocial maladies in South Africa through Ndlovu’s *Born in Africa But*, as well as, *Truth is both Spirit and Flesh*. This is an indication that even though South Africa has made significant progress after the abolition of apartheid, it still has some social maladies to contend with, as diagnosed in the poems considered in this segment. Functioning as a social physician to the society, Ndlovu diagnoses social abnormalities plaguing the health of the nation ranging from sexual exploitation, to oppression of women, dehumanization of women, inferiorisation of women, social injustice, gender inequality, violence

against women and various forms of abnormal social behaviours. A realisation of the existence of such social maladies has the propensity to stir a mobilisation for the correction and cure of these social illnesses. Hence, the poet through poetry serves as a physician that seeks the wellness of her society. The likely actions this awareness can stir are a potential therapy for these maladies. It is clear that Ndlovu's personal grief experience and the social abnormalities of her society are instrumental to informing her creative psyche, thematic concerns and the aesthetic form of her poetry. Through her committed writings as evident in *Born in Africa But and Truth is Both Spirit and Flesh*, she functions as a social physician for the South African society.

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