

The Psychology of Oppression and Liberation in Mongane Serote's *To Every Birth Its Blood*

by

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Abstract

This paper provides an examination of the psychology of oppression in *To Every Birth Its Blood* by Mongane Serote, and thus, it looks at the novel's bipartite structure as portraiture of the psychologies of oppression and liberation respectively. Also, the paper works to deconstruct the seemingly binarist/structuralist orientation of the novel.

Introduction

Drawing from Carl Ratner's (2009) brilliant essay, the psychology of oppression is the psychological effect of social oppression and the system that sustains it. It is demonstrated in the ways a society is oppressive towards its people and how the people's psychology is implicated in that oppression. The psychology of oppression is not only predicated on the victim's psyche, it also involves the psychology of the oppressor and how they are both yoked in a Manichaeian view of things. Ratner opines that the oppressor does not recognise the oppressed as a social being, he rids him (the oppressed) of all that is needed to understand and fulfil himself, thereby 'stunting (his) panoply of psychological processes such as cognition, perception, emotions, motivations, sensibility, imagination, morals, aesthetics and self-concept'(2). He also notes that the psychology of oppression can be objectively demonstrated to diminish the subject's socio-psychological frame and to subjugate him to economic and political interest of a ruling social elite. The main purpose of psychology of oppression is to adjust the oppressed to social and material oppression and to distort their understanding of social reality so that they are blind to its oppressive character or so that they are incapacitated to reverse it. The oppressor promotes the psychology of oppression through the institutions, artifacts and conceptual apparatuses he controls—think tanks, advertising, news outlets, entertainment, institutions, university research institutes, religious institutions, political parties and government agencies.

Bulhan(1985) also asserts that the psychology of oppression is maintained through various means which include police brutality, surveillance, incarceration, power, privilege. He notes that in an oppressive society, the law, media, education, work relations, environment and the whole ensemble of cultural and material arrangement of the society remain infused with violence. Hence, the effect of oppression on the oppressed may include psycho-social phenomena such as ‘craving, impulsively buying, consumer habit, identifying with consumer product, conforming to restrictive, punitive, theological dogma; enjoying vile, vapid entertainment programs, crude, superficial sensational taste, feeling insecure, irrationality, short-sightedness (quick return on investment)’(56). This structure of oppression usually makes it flourish unnoticed. As a result, victims are oblivious of their oppression and become unwittingly complicit in their own oppression (Ratner, 2009). This gives rise to the need to educate people about oppression and the need to eradicate oppression through a democratic society.

Frantz Fanon (1961) explores the historical and structural oppression of the colonised people as he uses the phrase ‘traumatised for life’ to explain the postcolonial condition- a nervous condition. Hussein Bulhan(1985) builds on Fanon’s work in order to investigate the psyche of the victimised and oppressed people in the Third World. He explains that all situations of oppression violate one’s space, time, energy, mobility and identity. He also notes that the oppressed finds his or her physical and psychological space unacknowledged, intruded into and curtailed, resulting in a collective, everyday forms of traumatising violence. Therefore, ‘a situation of oppression is a cauldron of violence’(131). This everyday kind of violence is what Maria P. Root (1992) refers to as an ‘insidious trauma- a traumatogenetic effect of oppression’ (234), Kai Erikson also calls it a ‘gradual process of psychic erosion’ (1994: 238). Sindiwe Magona, in her essay, ‘It is in the Blood’ (2012) also explains how apartheid’s oppression is inevitably implanted ‘in the blood’ of South Africans, ‘in the very cells of (their) deformed bodies’ (93). Speaking of apartheid, this paper is an attempt at examining the psychology of oppression and liberation in apartheid South Africa, as portrayed in Mongane Serote’s *To Every Birth Its Blood*. This paper also attempts to study how Serote’s concerns still resonate in the so called ‘liberated’ South Africa and how this challenges the transparent distinction between the psychologies of oppression and liberation.

Having established himself as a poet, Serote debuted as a novelist with *To Every Birth Its Blood*. This novel chronicles the events before and after June 1976 in South Africa. It is a story about all levels of oppression (legal, social, economic, political, historical, structural, psychological) meted out on the Black people in apartheid South Africa. It is also an urban narrative about lives in a township and a city. *To Every Birth Its Blood* has attracted quite a lot of critical attention even though critics tend to be divided over its subject matter. This is due to the novel’s bipartite structure. Because the novel does not follow a chronological structure, many have labelled it as two novels in one. However, Kelwyn Sole (1991) reads this disjointedness as a ‘double logic’ because the first part began in 1975, interrupted by the student uprising of June 1976, and the other a subsequent response to this event.

Interestingly, N. Visser (1987) justifies this ‘double logic’ as a ‘fragmented ontology of the oppressed’ but more than this, the actual events which Serote attempts to capture in *To Every Birth Its Blood* unfolded in a fragmentary- rather than a complete or methodical- manner. Tlhalo Sam Raditlhalo (2013) also reads *To Every Birth Its Blood* as a ‘trauma fiction’ and validates the fragmented style of narration as an anticipated way of writing trauma. Despite these various critical bearings on the novel, it is evident that the novel is a protest novel-an indictment on the oppressive nature of apartheid. Jane Watts (1989) refers the novel to a ‘literature of combat’ while Dyer T.U. (2015) opines that a ‘revolutionary consciousness’ runs through it.

This paper reads the novel’s bipartite structure (the shift from first to third person point of view, principal character to multiple voices, mood of melancholy to activism, and tone of loss to defiance/resistance among others) as portraiture of the psychologies of oppression and liberation respectively. While the first part details how characters are tortured, exploited and traumatised because of an oppressive system, the second part of the novel records a season of awareness and struggle against that oppression. I go further to deconstruct this seemingly binarist/structuralist orientation. I begin with an examination of the psychology of oppression in *To Every Birth Its Blood*.

Psychology of Oppression in *To Every Birth Its Blood*

In the first chapter of the novel is an atmosphere of melancholy and a description of characters with wearied bodies and faces. These wearied bodies move about with a sense of crushing defeat. The old man Zola tells Tsi; ‘we have been defeated... to be defeated is a painful thing’(17). Zola’s statement paints the picture of an oppressed psyche. Through Zola, Serote cautions the readers not to underestimate the damage brought on the Black people of South Africa by the settlers. This damage, in all its ramifications, is so immense that the characters feel estranged and unwelcome in their own land. Tsi laments while he reveals the extent of this damage and defeat:

you know that it is only in our memory that this is our land. We imagine we have a home, we know that in reality, if there was a quick way that these settlers could wipe us out, they would, and if they did not need our labour they would. All these things live with us every minute of every day. (*To Every Birth Its Blood*, 78).

As if the confiscation of land is not enough, the apartheid government tyrannises Black people in town, on farm, on street. This tyranny drags the Black subjects to a place of alienation. The melancholic narrator in the novel draws attention to the non-phenomenal life that the oppressive system has left him. He says: ‘most things about this earth want you to run, want to make you weary, want you to faint’ (*TEBIB*,1). In another part of the novel, Tsi speaks of the alienated condition that apartheid brought on South Africans. He says:

What is it that we don't know? Despair? Fear? Crying? Laughing? Maybe we know too much of everything. Maybe. And maybe that is why, that is why we have never lived? (*TEBIB*, 38).

Frantz Fanon (1961) claims that alienation is central to the situation of oppression. He reveals how, in the psychology of oppression, the oppressed is disturbed by a feeling of self-estrangement to an extent that he gets no intrinsic satisfaction from life. He is alienated from his body, cognition and affect. In other words, he is alienated from himself, his corporality and personal identity. Tsi, an archetypal character, walks aimlessly at night because he could not come to terms with his self-estrangement. He says:

I was not really sober. But I was not drunk either. I fear this feeling. It knocks me down. It puts the light out of me. I do, I fear this strange feeling....not knowing where to go... lost. Big man I am Lost. Lost, yet aware I had someone who loves and cares, wishes to be with me. Yet here I was, lost in the streets' (*TEBIB*,45).

As Tsi has shown in the statement above, he is not only alienated from himself but also from others who love him. This crushing sense of disaffection turns him to a wanderer. This is not just a peculiar case of Tsi, the oppressive system throws many people to a life on the street. This street life and its alienating effect is portrayed in Nina Simone's song which was referred to in the novel.

... street full of people all alone, road full of houses,
never home(105).

To Every Birth Its Blood presents 'streetism' or street life as inextricably linked with homelessness. Although homelessness is not necessarily the lack of a physical building, it is a feeling of being unwelcome in one's own country. The oppressive government achieved this with the Bantu Homelands Citizenship act of 1970 which was a way of stripping Black people of all rights to citizenship in South Africa. However, almost always accompanied with street life is drunkenness. In *To Every Birth Its Blood*, many of the characters, mostly men, are given to alcoholism. These characters don't just drink for its sake. Drinking, for them, is a way of escaping the harsh realities surrounding them. Tsi blames his inability to stand up and fight for his people to his 'drunken escapism'(*TEBIB*, 345). Bulhan (1985:45) avers that alcohol is a potent instrument of oppression in situations of oppression. He specifically notes that the apartheid South African government 'uses alcohol for social control and subjugation' (1985: 45).

Torture is another way of keeping the oppressed in perpetual subjection. Many characters in the novel are severely tortured and 'beaten into submission' (*TEBIB*, 78). Zola tells of his 13 months solitary confinement and how he becomes so traumatised that he could not give words to his experiences. Political detainees are put in jail- a place of inconceivable torture for Black people. Many of them end up falling from stairs, jumping out of the windows, committing suicide '(*TEBIB*,37) when they can no longer bear the torture.

On a fateful evening, Tsi and his friend, Boykie were arrested without charges, they were beaten black and blue until their bodies distended. Just after they were released, they were re-arrested by traffic police. By that time, Boykie's swollen face had lost all resemblance with the picture on his driver's license. For this reason, Boykie and Tsi suffered another round of intense torture for seven days. Tsi laments on why he is the 'issue of the drama, of the vicious hatred white people have managed to have against black people' (*TEBIB*, 84). This experience of torture ingrained the fear of white people in Tsi. He describes how he trembled in a café full of white faces. He writes: 'I saw white faces. I feared them. I felt myself tremble (*TEBIB*, 92). Apparently, Tsi is not the only character that suffered police brutality. He describes how this feeling of vulnerability is instilled in almost all Black people, especially whenever they come in contact with the police. In this regard, Tsi talks about his sister-in-law, Nomsisi, whose husband, Fix, was in jail:

I realised how vulnerable she was. That is why when she was told someone had been looking for her, she had thought it was the police. There was something shameful in all this. We waited to be fetched.

In the novel, Serote presents men as mostly the victims of police brutality and torture. In most cases, the men are left silenced, wounded and irreparably broken after the torture. Tsi describes how he was tortured by the police. He says:

I felt hands touch my leg and rise to my thighs, almost between my buttocks. I tried to lift my head, but my forehead was banged against the wooden counter, so hard it was like the bone in it was melting, giving in to the anger that now filled the room. The huge hand, with vicious flexibility and an unnerving agility, got hold of my balls. I felt a grip tighten, hold, squeeze and pull...(TEBIB, 87)

The torture of Tsi, and others, is not only to inflict pain on them but to leave them subdued. In the process, the police intentionally render them broken and emasculated by 'rupturing their balls', a symbol of their masculinity. Tsi remembers being electrocuted from his balls and peeing in his pants like a baby.

Because of this dehumanisation, many Black men are left impotent while others live with a ravaging sense of shame and fragile masculinity. This is carried on to their daily lives as they depend on their women to survive. In the novel, Tsi waits on Lily, his wife, to buy alcohol; he also depends on her to pay for his permit. After the torture at the police custody, Tsi describes how he became incapable of making love with Tshidi. He says:

I thought about the floor of shame and the eyes that had pierced me, pushing me into accepting that I belong to shame, by pulling my balls, almost tearing them out. That took me face to face with the past night I had spent with Tshidi, when, for whatever reason, I failed to have an erection...when Tshidi began to realise how hollow a man I was, her first reaction was to retreat, take a look at my face, in silence, and demand that I be a man. But I could not... shame pushed me into being brutal with myself. I felt I deserved to be ashamed, I deserved to be told that I was not a man... (*TEBIB*, 112-3).

While the oppressive system leaves the men with a fragile masculinity, the women are left to 'cry with a desperate pain, a pain so desperate, even the tears refused to swallow it' (*TEBIB*, 22). Nomsisi is left to mourn the absence of her husband, Fix. Lily is left to wear the trousers in her marriage because her husband is 'always quitting' as oppression deprives of him of having long-term goals. Mink, a prostitute at the beer parlour smiles 'with the wound that Alexandra leaves on young faces... she was smiling with the wound of becoming a woman when you are still a girl, the wound of becoming a mother, sister and almost a whore, when you are still wondering about things, completely unaware of the danger around you' (*TEBIB*, 47). Also, the system leaves Mary battling with teenage pregnancy without support from anyone. This hardship makes many Black families dysfunctional. For instance, Tsi is left to wonder 'who the man he calls his father is' (*TEBIB*, 59), Ramono's first son is left roaming on the street like a fatherless child, Oupa grows up without knowing who his father is. Also, many Black people lose their family members to the cold hand of death. Nomsisi's two siblings die like dogs on the farm for unknown illnesses. This high mortality rate and low life expectancy among Black people is the reason why 'there were always people at the cemetery... children, women, men, families, widows, widowers...' (*TEBIB*, 51). Tsi notes that for Black people, death maintains a constant presence and somehow, people have got to terms with it. However, this death is not just death by termination of life but also emotional, psychological and social deaths.

Mongane Serote reveals the extent to which Black lives don't matter in apartheid South Africa. They are deprived of any claim to human dignity or right. For instance, when Boykie refuses to open his car, the police man tells him that he has no right to defend himself (*TEBIB*, 85). This same (white) police man challenges Boykie for talking to him disrespectfully. The media also supports in perpetuating this dehumanisation of Black lives.

For instance, when Boykie and Tsi are assaulted by the police, the newspaper casually reports it as ‘two black reporters assault by the police’ (*TEBIB*, 124) as if they do not have names. In another instance, Dikeledi fights hard that news reporters stop using the word ‘non-white’ whenever they are writing about Black people. This reveals the extent at which the media is complicit in this dehumanisation of Black lives and bodies as they relegate them to what Lewis Gordon(2006)calls the ‘zone of nonbeing’.

There is a lot of Black exploitation going on in *To Every Birth Its Blood*. The old man Zola wonders why the government keeps encroaching into the black space by ‘building bridges, hostels, beerhalls in our (their) place without even asking us(them)’(*TEBIB*,17). The novel shows how the aim of the apartheid government is to own and control Black bodies and spaces. The narrator notes that every morning, Black men and women rush out ‘to get in time, to trains in time, to taxes in time. And this haste was to satisfy those who have decided that they own everything, the stones in the gut of the land, the land itself and everything above the land, including the women, men and children, controlling everything right down to decision about where Black people will make a shit’(*TEBIB*, 112).

Bulhan(1985) exposes the rationale behind oppression as he states that ‘migratory labour system, pass laws, influx control, police, prison, educational system, forced removal...the institutions and laws are designed to uproot Black people, subject them to absolute control, and turn them into insecure, obedient, underpaid labourers. Tsi explains how the influx law would have prevented his mother and father from getting married, he says: ‘I am a dangerous combination if we are to take Voerword’s dream of South Africa seriously’ (*TEBIB*, 29). In other words, the influx law is meant to prevent ‘impossible’ breeds like Tsi because his father (a Mosotho, born in Lesotho) and mother (umZulu, born in Natal) were not meant to marry in the first place.

Another way of oppressing, controlling and instilling fear in the Black minds is through unjust incarceration. Fix was detained without bail while his family was deprived of any information on his detention because he was arrested under the Terrorism Act of 1969. Other characters like Zola, Romana and Mr Molohe were also incarcerated at one point or the other. Even Mongane Serote himself spent 9 months in solitary confinement under Terrorism Act in 1969 before he was later exiled into Botswana.

Tsi talks about how people were forcefully removed from their homes, especially in Sophiatown, Lady Selborne and Sharpeville. He also recounts how his family suffered from these forced removals and how many people died or were injured as a result. His family moved to Alexandria after being cruelly uprooted from their home in Sophiatown. He states:

many townships have gone down and many people have gone down with them. Sophiatown, lady Selborne and many others. All went, and with all of them all sorts of methods were used to destroy them. We even terminated Sharpeville. I remember how, every night, after Sharpeville, we used to sit, my brothers, my father, my mother, all of us reading what happened in Sharpeville, and looking, wanting to know if we could recognise names from the long list of the dead and the injured. Every night we did that. *TEBIB*, 61.

The State also oppressed and controlled the people using migratory labour system. People were forcefully separated from their homes, families and loved ones, to end up as underpaid labourers in far way places, mostly in the mines. In the novel, *Ma-Maria*, an old woman who does not know her age, tells of how her husband was forcefully taken away as a labourer never to return.

In most cases, a situation of oppression is clearly revealed in the differences in the living conditions of the oppressor and the oppressed. *To Every Birth Its Blood* is a tale of two cities, one is dark(Alexandria), the other is golden(Johannesburg). The golden city 'belongs to white people of South Africa and the dark city to the black people'(*TEBIB*, 28). These two cities are only nine miles away from each other but the difference between them is like day and night. 'Everything that says anything about the progress of man, the distance which man has made in terms of technology, efficiency and comfort: the golden city says it well; the dark city by contrast, is dirty and deathly' (*TEBIB* ,28).

Tsi reveals that 'Alexandria is a creation of schizophrenics like Jan Smuts'(137). He also notes that 'Alexandria, having succumbed to Voerword's Group Areas Acts, was a wide, vast space of ruins and dongas, semi-broken houses, empty patches, tall weeds in the middle of anywhere'(137). Tsi's statement implies that Alexandria did not turn out to be a prison without walls suddenly; it was a creation of the oppressor, a way to put the kaffirs in their place. Tsi also remembers seeing people live in broken cars while 'frightening houses of mud and corrugated zinc' spring up everywhere. In contrast, Johannesburg has beautiful houses with gardens and yards. Tsi describes what a typical week end looks like in these two cities:

The Saturdays and Sundays of Alexandria roar, groan and rumble, like a troubled stomach. The same day in Johannesburg are as silent as the stomach of a dead person.

The narrator uses scatological images to portray the ecological disaster in Alexandria. In Alexandria, 'there was smoke coming out of the hundreds and hundreds of chimneys of Alexandria... Smell of dirty water in the street- the water full of shit and all imaginable rubbish (*TEBIB*, 32). Also, while every corner of Johannesburg is adorned with street lights, people walk about in semi-darkness in Alexandria.

Despite the fallen condition of living in Alexandria, the state ensures that people's movements are restricted. The police are always on patrol with their guns and other technologies of death. There are always raids- beer raids, pass raids and other raids. Tsi, who has spent almost all his life in Alexandria, is required to have a permit to be able to live there. He becomes frustrated as he laments:

But what is this shit, what is this thing called Alexandria?
Seven streets. Twenty-two avenues. Houses. Tin houses.
Brick houses. Torn streets. Smell. Dongas. Dirty water in
street. Dark city. The devil's kitchen. Township. Alex.
What is this mess? Our home. Our country. Our world.
Aexandra. Permits. Passes. Police. Security police. Permit
police. CID. South African police. Pass police. Murder
and robbery squad. Paying water accounts. Toilet
accounts. House permit. Resident permit. Tax. Rent. Bus
fare. Taxi fare. What is Alexandra?.

Tsi's lament stems from the fact that despite keeping the 'wretched of the earth' in the most horrendous living conditions, the apartheid government ensures that that living is controlled and regimented. It is therefore not surprising that Alexandria always erupts in violence and gangsterism- the by-products of oppression. A situation of oppression is essentially a cauldron of violence. Oppression is brought into existence and maintained by dint of violence (Bulhan, 131). Tsi himself was in a gang as a teenager. He witnessed the death of Lekeleke, a member of the gang. Moipone, Tsi's friend, was later killed by Lucky, another gang member known to Tsi. There are also the Spoilers and Msomis who always cause violence on the streets. Tsi says about them:

there were the Spoilers who made sleeping a terrible
inconvenience... they broke doors, steal everything:
wardrobes and the clothes in them, tables, money and even
lives...there were also the Msomis, equally brutal, more
efficient and better organised. The Msomis and Spoilers
brought the movies out of the movie houses into the streets
of Alexandria, for real, guns, blood and all... the thriller
was right on the street of Alexandria (*TEBIB*, 30).

In the statement above is a picture of black on black violence on the street of Alexandria. Fanon(1961) traces this kind of violence back to the ideology of colonialism and the institutionalisation of racism. A victim of the systemic and structural violence of racism and colonialism identifies with the aggressor as he transfers his aggression and directs his anger against himself and his own people. Fanon's stance resonates with Wole Soyinka(2000)'s statement that 'when a people have been continuously brutalised, when the language of rulers is recognised only in the snarl of marauding beasts of prey and scavengers, the people begin to question, mistrust and then shed their own humanity and, for, sheer survival, themselves become predators of their own kind'(80). Fanon, Soyinka and Serote make important statements on the not-often-discussed root of xenophobia, tribalism and ethnic wars that plague the Black world. Here, we see how black-on-black violence becomes a mental conditioning traceable to centuries of colonial and racial violence.

In view of this, Bulhan(1985:135) notes that violence is not just an isolated physical act or discrete random event. It is a relation, process and condition undermining, exploiting and curtailing the well-being of the victim. It is a physical, social and psychological violation- not just moral or ethical. Such expressions of violence are also pronounced in imposed national anthem, alienating history lesson, enforced language, police brutality and even racist glances. The characters, victims of apartheid, in *To Every Birth Its Blood* experience violence at personal, institutional and structural levels. Oupa wonders why 'the employers, the police all of them work together against the ordinary man (*TEBIB*, 192) as John answers him by putting the blames on the oppressive structure. This structural violence becomes deeply ingrained in and dominates everyday living of Black people in South Africa.

Structural and institutional violence spans individuals and generations(Bulhan,136). In *To Every Birth Its Blood*, we see how children inherit the traumatising violence of their parents as a result of an oppressive structure that remains unchanged. While Mr Molope suffers from incarceration and is rendered traumatised for life, his grandson, Oupa is also tortured severely because of his involvement with the Movement. Dikeledi also experiences this structural violence in her place of work while her father suffers in jail for speaking against the government.

Apartheid is a structural violence in its cruellest form (Bulhan, 1985). It leaves the people with a bleak future, not knowing what will happen next and being weary of the present. Tsi ponders on the need to have children and grandchildren in a system that does not guarantee a future, he says:

you ask me if you will have grandchildren. What for?
Where is the future they will take in their hands? (*TEBIB*,
59)

With a mastery of authorial intrusion, Serote accentuates how apartheid rids Black people of a hope or future. Many young, vibrant Black people with a lot of potentials die untimely because the system will not allow them to flourish. Oupa, a young, intelligent and revolutionary poet, dies from police brutality. Also, Nolizwe, a very brilliant law student, is killed by the police during a protest. The death of these young minds speaks of a dream deferred and a hope tarnished by a vicious and oppressive system. While the system gets rid of those who embrace education, it also ensures that many young people do not aspire to be educated. For instance, aunty Miriam jokes about not being interested in dating educated people because they always end up on Robben Island. Tsi also notes that apartheid curtails educational achievements for Black people because ‘there were always strikes at Black colleges, during which many were expelled and the college shut’ (*TEBIB*,167). In fact, the Bantu Education Act of 1953 was primarily designed to entrench apartheid’s ideological framework and give an inferior education to Black students.

A Manichean Psychology

To Every Birth Its Blood tells of a well-plotted binary between the oppressor and the oppressed. This binary and distance is what Boykie refers to as the oppressor and the oppressed game. Boykie says:

... understand the name of the game, it is called ‘them and us’. No shit, the rules are fuck them up, kill, destroy, ride on their backs, rape their women, get hold of the men’s balls, pull and tear; anyone disobeying this is unpatriotic, is against the traditional way of life and will be punished (*TEBIB*, 97).

This game of ‘them and us’ – the principle of ‘othering’- is what Fanon refers to a Manichean psychology. It is rooted in racism and is used to justify oppression and rationalise institutional and structural violence (Bulhan, 1985). A Manichaeian psychology divides the world into compartments and people into different species- good/evil, white/black, human/subhuman.

In situations of oppression, the Manichaeian psychology permeates every sector of the society. The environment and how it is structured reflects it (Ghetto/mansion). It is replicated in values and beliefs (the white sees himself as an epitome of beauty while black equals ugliness). In preserving a Manichaeian psychology, the oppressor secures himself and his destiny by exploiting and dehumanising the oppressed. Thus, the oppressed is left with self-doubt, feelings of inferiority as his confidence (and bond with others) is broken (Bulhan 1985:142). Apartheid South Africa is a case of ‘calculated fortification of a Manichaeian psychology’ (Bulhan 1985:166). *To Every Birth Its Blood* depicts this Manichean psychology endemic in the South African psyche.

In the Manichaean psychology, the oppressed assumes the role thrust upon him but he does so with much ambivalence and smouldering rage (Bulhan 1985:141). He defines the oppressor as the 'other' who personifies everything he despises and envies. He begins to dispute the labels given to him by the oppressor as he is ready to reverse the Manichaean order. Tsi talks about how a white lift man at his place of work always reminds him that he is a kaffir. He says: 'the lift man, his job is to remind me that I am a kaffir and my job is to remind him that he is a settler'(105). The psychology of liberation is therefore initiated at that moment when the oppressed determines to reverse the Manichaean psychology.

Psychology of Liberation in *To Every Birth Its Blood*

The second part of the novel is set after the 'days of Power'. The 'days of Power' signals to the unfolding events around June 1976 when students of SOWETO undertook an organised peaceful march against the state's requirement that public schools use Afrikaans as the medium of instruction from 1974. The 'Movement' equally occupies a huge presence in the second part of *To Every Birth Its Blood*, signalling an apparent change of mood from a crushing sense of defeat to an atmosphere of defiance and resilience. Therefore, while the first part of the novel is a portraiture of the psychology of oppression, the second part is where the characters begin to fight for their emancipation.

One thing that stands out in the second part of *To Every Birth Its Blood* is the abrupt shift from the first-person narrator to the third-person omniscient narrator. The shift from first person to third person point of view is not inadvertent. Consequently, the readers no longer see the unfolding events through the eyes of Tsi; rather, Serote journeys through the mind of a community of characters. Instead of one Black character, we come across several Black major characters with a strong sense of unity and community. This communal spirit and solidarity is rooted in the psychology of liberation. Watts (1989) argues that this focus on relationships between families and friends within the liberation struggle in the novel shows a deliberate move from a western style novel that focuses on 'social inter-relationships for its own sake'(7). In the second part of *To Every Birth Its Blood*, the focus on 'social inter-relationships' reveals how Black people relied on each other for strength during the days of Power. In the struggle for liberation, the whole community, including both gangsters and church women, came together to fight for freedom. John observes that in the days of Power, "for the first time, we were one; school children, father, mother, teacher, shopkeeper, rich and poor, we stood as one and fought, and helped each other....you know what surprises me is that even the boys joined in. it was safe to walk the streets then, no one was robbed; the police were the most dangerous people out there in the street..."(*TEBIB*, 193). Hence, for a group of people to become emancipated from oppression, they have to eliminate the difference within in order to fight a common enemy.

On the psychology of liberation, Bulhan avows that attention is given to the empowerment of the oppressed through organised and socialised activity with the aim of restoring individual biographies and a collective history that has been derailed, stunted and made appendage of those of others.

To transform a situation of oppression requires at once a relentless confrontation of the oppressors. For the oppressed in *To Every Birth Its Blood*, the struggle for liberation begins with the realisation of the need for social activism as oppression cannot be resolved through inaction. Dikeledi comes to the realisation that 'there was only one way left - people had to fight..... she understood that there was no such thing as freedom being asked for, that freedom must be fetched, must be won, must be fought for' (*TEBIB*, 232). Oni, another member of the Movement sees apartheid as a holocaust from which the people must learn to defend themselves. Oni says: 'if they come back with guns, it should not be as if they have not been to us with guns before. They must know that we learnt our lessons, and we mean to change the system they carry guns for' (*TEBIB*, 182).

In the face of tyranny, the people become more resilient and undaunted, they are ready to fight 'in blood and tears at the expense of our(their) lives' (29). The music changed from a pessimistic resignation to defeat to a resolve to fight. This is an attitude of liberation, an internal development that issues from oppression and transforms it (Ratner, 2009). Despite being threatened and humiliated, Ramono gives a brave speech on the liberation of the African people during his trial which would later result in fifteen years imprisonment. Grace, Ramono's wife, is also resilient in the face of this turbulence. When people try to comfort her on her husband's incarceration, she says to them: 'our country needs to be healed. It will be our children, our husbands, our loved ones who will have to die or go to jail to save us all, it will have to be us' (*TEBIB*,239) . Having been inspired by her father's speech, Dikeledi determines to fight and not to be defeated (*TEBIB*, 232). The more the oppression, the more people come to the knowledge and determination to fight. Even while the death toll rises, the people remain unshaken. This tenacity is echoed in many of Oupa's statements. At some point, he tells John and Dikeledi that 'when one man falls, another must pick up the gun' (*TEBIB*, 247). At another point, he says: 'the boers are fighting us, as simple as that. We have to pitch up a battle, fight back, that is all... we have to fight and win our country' (*TEBIB*,246).

This 'fighting back', in the language of Claude McKay is what Fanon terms 'redemptive violence'¹. Fanon, in *The Wretched Of The Earth*, explains that colonialism is violence in its natural state and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence. This counter/redemptive violence is committed by the oppressed, organised and educated by its leaders which make it possible for the masses to understand social truths (Fanon, 1961). Fanon also makes it known that those who profit on violence can be made to change only through greater violence. Therefore, the oppressed regain their identity, reclaim their history, reconstitute their bonding and forge their future through a redemptive violence (Bulhan 1985). Through this revolutionary violence, the oppressed can remove the primary banner to their humanity, rehabilitate themselves and restore the integrity of the people and their values. Serote, in the second part of his novel, presents a canvas of characters whose strength is in their hope. Despite the threats from the oppressor, the people hold onto hope. Oupa explains the spirit of this hope when he says: 'the hope we have is that what we stand for must win....we stand for the destruction of oppression and exploitation' (*TEBIB*, 260). Ma-Maria, an old woman whose children 'Alexandria has swept away' also 'kept the faith and made certain that the struggle is forever assured of its victory' (*TEBIB*, 284). Even those imprisoned, like fix, 'make you feel ignorant being outside' because of their unwavering hope that victory is certain.

Serote makes copious reference to music, especially jazz and blue, in *To Every Birth Its Blood*. Tsi recurrently refers to the music of revolutionary and legendary Black singers like Nina Simone, Max Roach, Miriam Makeba, Miles Davies among others. The infusion of these kinds of music into the narration is a deliberate attempt to reveal the influence of music in the anti-apartheid struggle. Songs like ‘to be young gifted and black’ and ‘members don’t get weary’ speak to the situation of oppression and the need to be encouraged in the fight for justice. Dyer T. U.(2015) rightly asserts that music in Serote’s *To Every Birth Its Blood* is an ‘instrument of combative struggle’(20). Besides, music also contributes to the mood of the story in *To Every Birth Its Blood*. Music in this novel is what chorus is to Shakespeare’s plays because each song referred to in each passage provides insight into the unfolding events. Since music is a product of culture, with *To Every Birth Its Blood*, Serote establishes that culture can be a form of liberation in a situation of oppression. Amil Cabral (1973) emphasises the value of culture as a resistance in situations of oppression. He states that ‘domination is maintained through an organised repression of the cultural life of the people concerned’. He also notes that the ‘practice of apartheid takes the form of unrestrained exploitation’ of the cultural life of the African masses (21). This is what Serote tries to show with *To Every Birth Its Blood* that liberation is not only a political or economic combat but also a struggle against socio-cultural hegemony.

The aesthetics of silence is intricately woven into the novel. Silence plays many roles in the novel. In fact, silence is like a character appearing almost on every page of the novel. The novel presents us with different shades of silence- graceful silence, stubborn silence, humiliating silence, comfortable silence, silence as knowing, silence as a heavy weight and such like. A casual reader will easily spot silence as a way of saying the unsayable or the traumatic. In other words, silence can be read as a product of oppression in the novel. However, in the second segment of the novel, silence takes on a new form. It becomes an instrument of resistance, a code of the oppressed and a way of ‘othering’ the oppressor. Dyer T.U.(2015) notes that silence in *To Every Birth Its Blood* ‘can be broached as a paradox(iii). It is used as oppressive, protective, metaphoric and as apparatuses of the discipline that is necessary for creativity, articulation and resistance’.

Education also serves a gateway to liberation. Tsi’s involvement in a correspondence school for South Africa’s drop outs makes him realise the importance of education in the struggle for freedom. The ‘walls of ignorance’ (*TEBIB*, 149) crumbled before his eyes as students meaningfully engaged with Afro-American, Afro-Caribbean and African literatures. Even though education is very important in the psychology of liberation, Tsi notes that the whole system of oppression, which reflects in the teaching curriculum, needs to collapse. He says:

Education is a socialising agency; in south Africa, black children are subjected to an education which is instrumental in imparting the dominant ideology of apartheid or separate development, a system which the black people in general abhor... history taught, in both white and black schools, to distort the reality of south Africa; enforced segregation in schools entrenches the segregation system as a whole...the root cause of these problems was the system created by the government (*TEBIB*, 159).

From the lines above, Tsi reveals the need for Black people to fight epistemic violence by being self-reliant and self-aware. There must be an awakening. This awakening is what transpires in the second segment of *To Every Birth Its Blood*. Oupa reveals: 'South Africa will never be the same again, you know why? People have realised, have discovered who they are and what they can do....people have come to discover that they have some power (*TEBIB*, 193).

This awakening, discovery or self-awareness spreads like wildfire. In protest against oppression, Rose Ramono changes her name to Dikeledi Ramono which is what the narrator implies when he states that 'in those days, a new, a brand new black woman and man had been created' (*TEBIB*, 235) as Black Consciousness became the order of the day. History was being reclaimed. This resonates with Amil Cabral (1973)'s point that national liberation struggles are always preceded by attempt to affirm the cultural personality of the dominated people, as a means of negating the oppressor's culture. In the same vein, T.H. Ngwenya (2011) notes that Black Consciousness is a philosophy of redemption that helps breakdown the structure of violence and humanise blackness. In the novel, this philosophy of redemption soon inspired the Movement (which is symbolic of the principles of the African National Congress). Tsi (who returns as a first person narrator at the end of the story) notes that 'the Movement is an idea in the mind of the people; a resolve that it will never accept the process of defeat. The movement, like the sea, is deep, is vast, is reflective. It can be calm. It can be rough and tough. Like the wind, it moves and moves and moves (*TEBIB*, 359). Even while in exile, Tsi can feel the Movement as he reads and hears about how people protested in schools all over the country. Though the story does not offer a resolved ending on the struggle, there is a flicker of optimism on the collapse of apartheid. The birth of a baby at the end of *To Every Birth Its Blood* is symbolic of this new dawn.

Conclusion

The bipartite structure of *To Every Birth Its Blood* enhances our understanding of the psychologies of oppression and liberation. However, is it always easy to draw the line between oppression and resistance in a Manichaean order of things? Perhaps, it would be too simplistic to conclude that the archaeology of oppression and liberation in the apartheid days can be coherently and unequivocally charted. While attempting to present the distinction between these psychologies, *To Every Birth Its Blood* unsuspectingly complicates the imbrication of these two psychologies. While the first part largely focuses on the psychology of oppression, it is also replete with microaggressions and snippets of cultural resistance from the oppressed. In the second part where the psychology of liberation is foregrounded, we still find instances of the persistence of oppression. Tsi's return as the frustrated but hopeful narrator signifies the near impossibility of simply extricating situations of oppression from liberation. More importantly, despite the atmosphere of optimism at the end of the novel, Serote leaves the situation open-ended which, in turn, provokes further questions. Is apartheid really dead? Has democracy put an end to the oppression of Black people? Has there been a reverse of the Manichean psychology that informed apartheid? In response to these critical questions, Julian Kunnie (2000), in her observation of the political economy of post-apartheid South Africa, suggests that the struggle for liberation of the Black people continues because oppression persists. Therefore, in using the novel's bipartite structure to offer a cinematographic portrait of oppression and liberation, Serote also foregrounds their hazy boundary.

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ⁱ From Claude McKay's poem 'If we must die'