Inside the Creaking Baobab in Sindiwe Magona's *When the Village Sleeps* (2021)

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Abstract

Bookended by the life of Busisiwe Mhkonto, *When the Village Sleeps* can be read as an "unfinished symphony". The musicological analogy is bolstered by the harmonisation of the polyphonic voice register, coupled with the "unachieved" or the "yet to be achieved" implied in Sindiwe Magona's wake-up call towards education for life. This article is predicated on Milan Kundera's three categories of the art of the novel—the art of radical divestment, the art of novelistic counterpoint, and the art of the specifically novelistic essay—which, in turn, determine the progression of my argument. This is no dystopian novel— Magona looks beyond the precarity that she depicts in this metatext for uplifting instances that epitomise the central tropes of *ubuntu* and self-sufficiency. Ultimately, this is a story about youth advocacy that culminates in a programme to teach self-help through a broad-based notion of education for living in South Africa. Magona's proposed reparation seeks to define a new cultural nationhood through an awakened imaginary.

Keywords: education for life, Milan Kundera, Sindiwe Magona, *The Art of the Novel*, *ubuntu*, *When the Village Sleeps*, youth advocacy

Introduction

The back-cover blurb bills Sindiwe Magona's *When the Village Sleeps* (2021) as "a visionary novel about what the loss of identity and dignity [can] do to a people afflicted by decades of brokenness". Premised on a real-life story and bookended by the life of Busisiwe[1] (Busi) Mhkonto, who falls prey to the pitfalls of society, the narrative is fleshed out by a worm's-eye view into the lives of four generations of amaTolo women. *When the Village Sleeps* traces the dissolving structure of individual lives. Here, after decades of physical and spiritual brokenness, brought about by dire poverty and exacerbated by the impact of sudden deaths through rampant diseases such as the coronavirus pandemic and endemic violence, life is experienced as lacking any semblance of recognisable order. Although not a trailblazer against disease, the (dis)ease in this novel's South African context is fictively redeemed by the linear thread that ties the multicultural, intergenerational lives together, for which I use the metonymic creaking baobab tree. However, as with the archetypal Tree of Life—represented by the huge trunk of the baobab, its broadly spreading branches, and its life-saving water-retaining properties—there is a linear thread that prevents the multifaceted sociopolitical aspects of the novel from falling apart. This thread is the *Bildungsroman*

growth of Busi's malformed baby daughter, Mandlakazi,[2] enabled by her great-grandmother Khulu, who is a traditional healer.

Magona's strength as an author lies in revealing the complexities of the human condition to unlock underlying potential for reparational growth. This has been demonstrated in Magona's earlier books, such as *Mother to Mother* (1998), the story of the death of American human rights student Amy Biehl, as told through an imagined letter to the dead girl's mother from the mother of one of the young murderers, condemned to hang; *Forced to Grow* ([1992] 2013), the biography of a twenty-three-year-old mother's struggle to fend for herself and provide for her three small children; and *Chasing the Tails of my Father's Cattle* (2015), a counter-patriarchal story of a single migrant miner's love for his daughter. Whether fictionalised reality couched in the epistolary mode, thinly masked autobiography, a womanist view of the strictures imposed by twentieth-century traditional society, or a sociopolitical overview of current communal issues, all four books feature a "re-membering" of life marked by the legacy of the intolerable oppression of apartheid, exacerbated by the injustice of unmitigated poverty. This thrust is highlighted too in the dedication in this newest novel: "To the community of Woodside Special Care Centre, who show what is possible when every person is cared for, and supported to allow them to realise their potential."

In this novel, everything is under scrutiny. For Magona, however, precarity is seen through an ameliorative lens underpinned by the implied question: What can be done to mitigate injustice? And, as advocated in Harper Lee's justly acclaimed *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), this writer consistently attempts to understand life and to imagine solutions by walking around in someone else's shoes.

The author's latest novel is thus vintage Magona: a fast-paced, often confrontational contemporary tale that takes the reader to the heart of the troubles in South African society, as its writer exposes a sociopolitical milieu that has, during almost three decades of corruption, graft, and violence, lost its way. Here, this internationally acclaimed novelist, poet, motivational speaker, playwright, and actor tackles the dilemmas like a lock forward in a soccer game, determined to foot manoeuvre the ball and score a goal. The analogy may seem out of place for one of our leading female writers but, alluding to one of South Africa's favourite sports, it serves to capture Magona's zeal and determination to reflect upon an authentic local story and to envisage the way forward through a meta-fictionalised retelling. Furthermore, while the extended family and friends in the novel watch their favourite sport—the first indication of real narrative time, that of the 2010 FIFA World Cup hosted by South Africa—the men marvel that little Mandla "knows all the teams" and "could predict what would happen in the flow of the games" (Magona 2021, 182). Embedded within the anecdote, Mandla's ancestral voices intrude to cry: "2010—the world plays; 2020—the world dies", an allusion to the current global Covid-19 pandemic. The ancestral voices intervene, in chorus, with: "Ten years from now: no trophies, only caskets; the ground will not be able to swallow all the dead" (182–83).

Another example akin to head-butting in a rugby scrum is a courageous rhetorical indictment of governmental misdirection (306–307):

> All these people the government purports to help are out on the streets, poor as poor can be! What has happened to all the help they have been getting? Has it improved their lot, even a jot? No, what government help does for the poor is cement them in poverty. Ask yourself, "Why?"

> “The answer is staring you in the eyes: as long as people stay poor, they will not bite the hand that feeds them. Government largesse ensures votes—and the poor are nothing but voter fodder!”

Shocking as this thinly masked awkward truth-telling is, Magona poses as quasi-sangoma, having the ancestors put their finger on what, in essence, has gone wrong. Not surprisingly, it is the “*Old*” who speak to Khulu from the hereafter or the therebefore, first asking, “*What shall we say about earthly matters?*”, for they see “*no relief for her … / Only growing sorrow; growing hardship*” before declaring that “*All sprung from the death of ubuntu*” (19; original emphasis).

In this polyphonic “her”-story that gives voice to the living, the dead, and the yet-to-be-born, the shift in social ground rules has so shattered the sense of self that it is difficult to look beyond the decay and poverty that define the lives of the keenly portrayed characters.

Yet, this is no dystopian novel. I maintain that Magona looks beyond the precarity that she depicts for uplifting instances that epitomise the central tropes of *ubuntu* (I am, because you are) and what Alvin Toffler (1980, 37–45) calls “prosumer” market gardening, where one produces for self-consumption rather than for profit. Judith Butler (2009, 25) presciently defines “precarity” as the “politically induced condition of precariousness”, which Liani Lochner (2014, 37) later qualifies by adding “whereby certain groups in society are exposed to, and others are protected from, violence”. Magona depicts this differential exposure to violence in society not only through the violence endemic to Kwanele, but also through fictionalising the article she encountered that outlined the true story of a young mother imbibing drugs and alcohol, thus wilfully damaging the foetus she was carrying—a defenceless human life—in order to live off government largesse. Critics have also explored social and psychological precarity, which reflects “a deeply ingrained and often unconscious ontological insecurity at the heart of the neoliberal psyche” (Jacobs 2014, 49).

For Magona, precarity is a signifier of a society on the verge of cultural collapse, in which especially the physically challenged struggle to attain self-worth. She writes: “One thing about life in Kwanele that Kulu found hard to stomach was anyone making fun of her Mandlakazi. Especially as she had made a point not to fight the girl’s battles for her. Instead, she encouraged her, goaded her, into self-defence mode. No, not physically, but mentally” (2021, 203). By way of illustration—and there are many such lighthearted retorts in the book—she adds (203):

> One day Mandla had come to her great-grandmother wailing:
>
> “The other children say I have frog eyes!” “ Go ask them to bring you the frog.”
>
> “Wha-at?”
>
> “Tell them you want to give the frog its eyes and take yours back. Inoba kaloka lona lithathe awakho. It must have taken yours.” That so surprised the child, she immediately stopped crying.

As this excerpt illustrates, precarity is invoked but is treated sardonically, coupled as it is with restorative self-help.

In the non-fictional *The Third Wave* (1980), Toffler contrasts the pre-industrial agricultural era—what he terms the Second Wave—with the industrial era or Third Wave wrought by technological advances. Although neither Toffler nor Magona advocates a return to the Middle Ages, both recognise the centrality of self-sufficiency in the context of the current post-industrial Fourth Industrial Revolution. The latter has, paradoxically, at once fragmented and united both workers and ordinary citizens, be they young or old, and its effects have been exacerbated as the world has attempted to contain the coronavirus pandemic and mutations of the virus.

Arguably influenced by the memoir of seventeen-year-old Nobel laureate Malala,[3] who put her life at risk agitating for education for young girls in poverty-stricken Pakistan, Magona's novel too is based on a true story, but a tragic one about deliberate foetal impairment for social support by a young South African girl child, as already intimated. Both, however, are stories about *youth advocacy. When the Village Sleeps* is didactic in that it culminates in a programme to teach women and girls self-sufficiency through the metaphor of home-grown food production—that is, life skills amid dire poverty aggravated by widespread corruption, graft, and lawlessness. The novel climaxes in the random shooting of Mandla by a police officer as mother, daughter, and great-grandmother run a make-shift soup kitchen, born of proactive backyard vegetable production, for an unruly mob of the desperately hungry. In like manner, an agent for change, Malala too was shot; however, she survived and went on to found an international movement for education for women that led to the passing of Pakistan's Rights to Education Bill in 2013 (*National Geographic* 2015, 109). The implication in both stories is that there is still a great deal to be done.

Magona's metafictional novel can be read as a Wagnerian "unfinished symphony". The musicological analogy accrues from the harmonisation of the polyphonic voice register in the narrative and is bolstered by the "unachieved" or the "yet to be achieved" in the context of Magona's wake-up call to the sleeping village that is our country, a wake-up call towards education for life via the Amandla Trust, a market gardening project (2021, 308). As Milan Kundera (1988, 71; emphasis added) asserts, "all great works (precisely because they are great) contain something *unachieved*". To quote Duncan Brown, from the dust cover of the novel, "Sindiwe Magona leads us from destruction, despair and tragedy to the possibility of renewal, healing and wholeness through ancient wisdom and the generosity of the human spirit".

Theoretical Underpinning

This article draws on Kundera's three categories of the new art of the novel: the art of radical divestment, the art of novelistic counterpoint, and the art of the specifically novelistic essay. As these categories determine the progression of my argument, some justification of my choice of theorist seems necessary.

While conscious of Theodore Adorno's (1974, 119) claim that "[t]heory must needs deal with cross-grained, opaque, unassimilated material" and Kundera's (1988, n. p.) wry concession, in the light of each novelist's inherent conception of "what a novel is", that *The Art of the Novel* is not theory but "simply a practitioner's confession", it is perhaps necessary to look more closely at the rationale for my choice of theoretical strategy and to elaborate on some of the terminology before analysing *When the Village Sleeps* in terms of Kundera's categorisation of the novel.

Kundera is a novelist whose writings, like Magona's, are lucid, severe, ironical, and concentrated. Both authors are Westernised non-Europeans. As a native-born black South African, Magona worked for UNESCO in New York for more than twenty years. Czechoslovakian Kundera was forced to seek asylum in France when the country of his birth was erased from the world map and ceased to exist.

Turning to terminology, I have referred to Magona's novel as a Wagnerian "unfinished symphony". The allusion is, first, to her sombre tone, which resonates with Wagner's dissonant minor key musical operas. Secondly, I am alluding to Beethoven's acclaimed Unfinished Fifth Symphony—in deference to accomplished pianist Kundera, and to the lyrical quality of Magona's prose—as seemed apposite to the novel's as yet "unachieved" visionary reparation that is largely limited to self-help via food production and a non-prescriptive, if implicit, plea for *ubuntu.* Whereas the late Edward Said's (1999) formulation of "late style" has been used as an apology for the unachieved, this article also deploys the concept of the unachieved in relation to Kundera's three articulations of novelistic possibility beyond the tired (Western) dichotomy of realist or modernist fiction, as pointed out by an unknown peer reviewer. It can also be argued that although the narrative voices are presented as those of individual characters, the harmonised voice register is, in essence, that of the author's inapprehensible unvoiced theme of humankind facing a disintegration of values. The words of Said (1999, n. p.) pertain: "With so many dissonances in my life I have learned to prefer being not quite right and out of place."

The Art of Radical Divestment

Kundera's (1988, 71; original emphasis) "art of *radical divestment* (which can encompass the complexity of existence in the modern world without losing architectonic clarity) … demands the technique of ellipsis, of condensation". He elucidates: "Encompassing the complexity of existence in the modern world demands a technique of ellipsis, of condensation." Such economy of telling, he suggests, is to avoid "the trap of endless length". As already intimated, the title of Magona's novel is a poetic compression not of Western rationality but of an African worldview where the sleeping village is a metaphor for the South African sociopolitical landscape, or what I have dubbed "the creaking baobab". Mimicking Magona's invigoratingly suggestive title, the preposition "inside" in the article's subtitle foregrounds the cerebral: "the landscape within" (cf. Okri 1981). To quote Simon Scharma (1995, 61), "landscapes [for the African] are culture before they are nature"; they are "constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock" and, by extension, I argue, onto paper, epitomising the art of "radical divestment".[4] As Kundera (1988, 5) asserts, "[t]he soul *raison être* of the novel is to discover what only the novel can discover", and Magona shines a spotlight on a multiplicity of sociocultural and political issues, embedding them seamlessly in an uplifting story about disfigurement.

For a writer such as Magona, existence in the contemporary world—with global poverty and the coronavirus pandemic—can best be understood through her juxtaposition of literary representations of an imaginary and a real landscape. Here, these landscapes are the urban squalor of Kwanele, an overcrowded, fictive subdivision of Khayelitsha (Magona 2021, 21), on the one hand, and the Arcadian rural setting of Sidwadweni, Khulu and Sindiwe's "home village not far from Mthatha and near Tsolo in the Eastern Cape" (13),[5] on the other. According to Kundera (1988, 72), "harsh juxtapositions instead of transitions" are integral to the art of ellipsis, and the settings in this novel swing back and forth from urban to rural like the pendulous pods on the indigenous baobab tree.

Additional examples of the art of ellipsis manifest as "going directly to the heart of things" and "repetition instead of variation" (Kundera 1988, 72). Illustrative of the former, the narrative begins *in medias res* with the pre-teen, Busi, invading her aunt's bedroom to watch television instead of doing the family's laundry while the adults are out at work. This is followed by a litany of other examples that intimate self-gratification. For example, Busi's younger boy cousins, in whose home she and her drunken loose-living mother live, spend Saturdays gate-crashing funerals for "food galore" because "Nobody would turn people away from a funeral … What host would dare appear graceless before the ancestors and God, and demand an invitation card?" (Magona 2021, 4). The mythic conjunction of the ancestors and God, endemic to our African worldview, is perhaps another harsh collocation in the eyes of the non-African or fundamentalist. Filled with resentment—"being unable to benefit from the funeral bonanzas" and feeling "always out of step" at the Model C school that she attends—Busi "even resented the fact that her grandmother's former employer, Mrs Bird, paid her school fees" so that she could have "what grown-ups called a 'decent education'" (5). Reluctant to follow her friend Thandi's choice of a "sugar daddy" for financial independence, and annoyed that her mother obtains a child support grant for herself and her illegitimate brothers from which she does not benefit, Busi conceives of a way out of her precarious penury after viewing a programme on social grants. "For a disabled child, the grant must be huge: a thousand … *at least*" (12; original emphasis), she surmises, as she determines to produce such a one.

Retaining the architectonic clarity of the narrative thread, the storyline embraces social pitfalls such as wilful unprotected sex, pre-teen pregnancy, and the imbibing of alcohol and drugs, all following in quick succession and, predictably, resulting in a disabled newborn baby daughter. An intrusive authorial voice explains Busi's philosophical thought process: "[I]f she had any money, she wouldn't be doing what she was doing. Wouldn't be making the plans she was making for, well … a special baby" (71). In a startling shift in voice register to a poetic monologue, the yet-to-be-born first addresses her twelve-year-old soon-to-become mother with: "your baby is crying." Then, the foetus delineates the narrative thrust of the three-part story for the reader, saying: "this is my story / it is also my mother's story / what we will go through, my mother and I?" (28). *In utero*, the squeaky voice elaborates: "a long and winding road shall we travel / here and there, straight as the bridge on your nose— / at other places, hilly like a mountain range / curved as a harvesting sickle / expert in the art of gathering Earth's rich green grass / take a good look at me / look! See?" (28). This muted ecological fugue is later repeated almost verbatim (238; original emphasis):

> *What have we not gone through, my mother and I?*
>
> *It has been a long and winding road we have come*
>
> *here and there*
>
> *straight as the bridge on your nose at other places*
>
> *hilly like a mountain range*
>
> *and curved as serf's busy sickle and it is a road that has no end.*

This is just one example of "repetition instead of variation", although there are many instances of the technique in the novel.

The initial description concludes, in a counterpointed or contrasting truth to male power, with: “Oh, the profligacy of men of power; men in the moment / men who forget the oneness, timelessness, the total / interrelatedness / of all” (29). This compressed allusion to the reluctant father’s lack of interest in and abandonment of his progeny brings the discussion to the second of Kundera’s categories of the new art of the novel, that of counterpoint.

The Art of Novelistic Counterpoint

The art of novelistic counterpoint, as intimated above, “can blend philosophy, narrative and dream into one music”, says Kundera (1988, 71). There are multiple instances of novelistic counterpoint in *When the Village Sleeps*, and I begin with Khulu’s dreams and the cross-over between this world and the next, when her “beloved” (Magona 2021, 13) late husband Hlombe, who could “tell of the stars, say which portended what” (65) comes to Khulu “in an unsettling dream” (3)—in fact in no fewer than three dream sequences. But, he is ominously silent, seeming to warn his widow of the impending birth of her malformed great-granddaughter. Fretting about the “evil [that] was stalking her [family]” (68), her heart flies to her two daughters, Phyllis (Busi’s mother) and Aunt Lily, before soliciting her former employer and close friend, Mrs Bird, to find out what was amiss.

What is crucial for Kundera’s concept of counterpoint is its interlacertine blending of all these elements; they conjoin to adumbrate the focal issue—the birth of the deformed great-granddaughter, Mandlakazi, for this is essentially her story and that of her young mother. Despite the redemptive quality of the narrative, it is overcast with a melancholy born of human profligacy and the dramatic irony of the reader’s pre-knowledge of the inevitability of what is to happen (cf. Kundera 1988, 77–82).

In a narrative ploy to reflect the nine-month gestation period, Magona keeps her readers in suspense with several contrasting episodes. These include anecdotes that switch from the mundanities of Busi’s weight gain and cravings to an education into the traditional ways of her Xhosa heritage during a school holiday in idyllic Sidwadweni, where grandma Khulu was “living her dream of gardening” (Magona 2021, 15) to teach her granddaughter about the importance of self-reliance.

Prefaced by a drug-induced nightmare, such indigenous knowledge climaxes in triangulated revelations: the thirteen-year-old’s realisation of the enormity of her actions; the revelation of the news of her pregnancy by her aunt to her family; and Mrs Bird calling Khulu on her cellular phone to come quickly to Kwanele for the impending birth. In this way, the art of counterpointing serves to unify the different, but interrelated, aspects of the tale, be these of a philosophical, narratological, or oneiric nature.

Other examples of counterpointing are arguably less unusual, such as code-switching, which is endemic in the multicultural, multilingual country of South Africa, with its eleven official languages. In her evaluation of the “unexpected twists and turns that challenge us to look beyond common assumptions to see the complexity of the human condition”, Mamphela Ramphele, in her comments printed on the dust cover of the book, unwittingly foregrounds the art of counterpoint. She also highlights the novel’s deployment of linguistic counterpoint, stating, “Sindiwe Magona has outdone herself in using the power of language—her unique brand of isiXhosinglish [or code switching]— to explore the healing that is made possible by enhancing our culture and heritage as spiritual anchors in a country that has yet to find peace

in its soul." This latter comment coincidentally endorses my reference to the book *When the Village Sleeps* as an "unfinished story".

The lives of three of the main characters also reflect the counterpointing technique. First, there is Busi's transformation, from a typically self-centred pre-teen desperately believing that she is "daddy's little darling" as she waits, in vain, for a thirteenth birthday call from her estranged father (who surely cannot forget because he shares her birth date), to responsible motherhood with a university degree in the social sciences. Despite her dismay that her father has moved on with a new family, and guilt about her orchestrated pregnancy, Busi manages to complete all three stages of her formal education, from Foundation Phase through to Further Education and Training. Then, there is Busi's mother, Phyllis, who transitions from a loose-living layabout to care-giver for her own mother's (Khulu's) former employer. There is, too, Mrs Bird's deep friendship with her former domestic worker, with whom she shares both a marriage date and the untimely deaths of each of their husbands. Magona alludes to the fact that the benefactress to Khulu's granddaughter, Mrs Bird, will be leaving her Bishopscourt home to her former employee in her will. Here, too, the white widow's natural empathy is counterpointed with the overt racism of her late husband. Finally, and pivotally, there is Mandlakazi's gradual transformation, not only from damaged babyhood to successful scholar, wise beyond her years, but also, in counterpoint, to her role as a prescient seer or medium. Assuming the voice of sociocultural wisdom, Mandla effectively takes over her great-grandmother's role, becoming the mouthpiece for the author herself in Kundera's third new art of the novel. In her dust-cover overview of the book, Ramphele at once underlines counterpointing, as noted, and prefigures the art of the specifically novelistic essay with the summation that "Ubuntu is brilliantly presented here asthe healing balm dispensed by an unlikely combination of a makhulu [literally "mother", as in the prefix *ma-*, and "great"; thus "grandmother"] and a differently abled great-granddaughter".

The Art of the Specifically Novelistic Essay

The third new art that this "unfinished symphony" deploys—one that "does claim to bear an apodictic [clearly demonstrated] message but remains hypothetical, playful and ironic" (Kundera 1988, 71)—is the novelistic essay. The central tropes of *ubuntu* and market gardening within a broad-based frame of education for living in South Africa are juxtaposed with the exploration of other key abstract concepts, such as political corruption and violence, on the one hand, and kindness and social solidarity, on the other. The implication is that, unlike her young mother, and having undergone the traditional initiation into womanhood, orchestrated at home by child-mother and great-grandmother, Mandla can begin to redeem a lost society. Both *ubuntu* and market gardening are, thus, denotative as well as connotative—both are metaphors for redress against the prevailing, subtly unstated, question of that which has been lost.

The novel's essay on "lostness" incorporates a cascade of losses. One of the key ameliorators (Mandla), for example, is shot in the prime of her life (at thirteen), while the beloved husband of the other (Khulu) is prematurely called to join the ancestors. Mandla's mother, Busi, loses her childlike innocence together with her virginity; Busi's mother (Phyllis), abandoned by her husband, neglects her maternal role in favour of sex and alcohol. Traditional mores are lost; beneficiaries of government grants lose their independence; and small children lose their way via drugs and the theft of food and alcohol from the bereaved.

In a seamless shift into stream of consciousness, the "*Old*"—that is, the ancestors— declare that "*All sprung from the death of ubuntu*" (Magona 2021, 19; original emphasis). In Khayelitsha, "more than enough squalor, crime and disease" (21) prevail, indicative of a loss of self-worth, and in Sidwadweni, superstition and the danger of kangaroo justice ultimately force the great-grandmother—alerted to false rumours of witchcraft—to tell a white lie in a church meeting and to flee from her ancestral home, with Mandla, back to Kwanele.

Although the novelistic essay covers a multitude of sociopolitical issues that form a strong undercurrent to the tale, miraculously—and testifying to the skill of the author— the burning issues in our society never appropriate the narrative thread. In the words of Antjie Krog on the novel's dust cover: "Poetry mixes with tradition, anger with criticism, and guts with beauty in the deep-seated urge to resurrect values and build resilience."

Conclusion

In conclusion, this is a story about youth advocacy that culminates in the resus of the *ubuntu* ethic and a prosumer gardening programme to teach self-sufficiency as education for living in South Africa, manifested as the Amandla Trust. The novel thus closes on a high note, with Part 3 of this three-part novel being devoted to Mandla's demonstration of best-practice *ubuntu*, such as kindness, capacity-building, self-worth, teamwork, upliftment, and social solidarity, yoked with sardonic humour in the form of amusing self-effacements as a coping mechanism for dealing with societal "othering". For instance, as quoted earlier, when a fellow learner reduces Mandla to tears, mocking her "frog eyes" (Magona 2021, 203), Khulu teaches her to respond by saying that they had better look for the poor frog so as to return its eyes and retrieve her own!

Viewed in terms of the three categories articulated by Kundera (1988) in *The Art of the Novel*, *When the Village Sleeps* epitomises the polyphonic mode, synthesising narrative, dream, poetry, song, intuition, philosophy, and vision with past, present, and future. Moreover, the narrative sequence blends the four key voices in an imaginative quartet, with no one voice dominating the narratological harmony. All four voices are central to the story throughout.[6]

Magona's proposed fictive reparation seeks to define a new cultural nationhood through an awakened imaginary (cf. Boehmer 2018, 8–10). Kundera (1988, 163) points out that "the spirit of an age cannot be judged exclusively by its ideas, its theoretical concepts, without considering its art, and particularly the novel". A consideration of *When the Village Sleeps* as an "unfinished symphony" should therefore include the idea of intangibility—that it is a novel full of possibilities, giving the reader a chance either to discover him- or herself or to discover aspects of lived life for him- or herself. That is, it offers the reader the opportunity to discover what potential lies within "the creaking baobab" of contemporary South Africa, and hopefully, perhaps, to reflect on where we have gone wrong.

Notes

1 "She who is graced" (Magona 2021, 23).

2 "Coming from strength, with strength" (Magona 2021, 153).

3 The memoir is entitled *I Am Malala* (Yousafzai 2013). Yousafzai Malala won the Nobel Peace prize in 2014 for her advocacy for women's right to education in Pakistan, for which she was shot in the head.

4 See Gray (2016, 79). I acknowledge practising "radical divestment" by "taking away" insights—as opposed to money—from where I had already invested them!

5 Magona (2021, pers. comm.) informed me that "Sidwadweni is real"—the village "where my parents got married, in 1939; Miss SA (immediate past) lives there".

6 See Gray (2016).

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