



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Landscapes of Violence, Galleries of Crime: Gender Violence in Selected Post-Apartheid Crime
Novels Written by Women

Tafirenyika Madziyauswa

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Literature in English in the Faculty of Humanities.

University of Pretoria
2022

Supervisor: Prof. David Medalie
Co-Supervisor: Dr Colette Guldemann

Declaration

Name: Tafirenyika Madziyauswa

Student Number: 19391972

Degree / Qualification:

D.Litt. in English

Title of Thesis:

LANDSCAPES OF VIOLENCE, GALLERIES OF CRIME: GENDER VIOLENCE IN SELECTED POST-APARTHEID CRIME NOVELS WRITTEN BY WOMEN

I declare that this thesis is my own original work. Where secondary material is used, this has been carefully acknowledged and referenced in accordance with university requirements.

I understand what plagiarism is and am aware of the university policy and implications in this regard.



SIGNATURE

20/10/2022

DATE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first thank my supervisor, Prof. David Medalie, and my co-supervisor, Dr Colette Guldemann, for believing in this project and in me. Your patience, commitment, kindness and guidance have meant more to me than words can say. I would also like to express my profound gratitude to Dr Williamson, who painstakingly read through two of my draft chapters and provided me with incisive comments that shaped my chapters.

A further thank you must go to the University of Pretoria English Department led by Prof. Molly Brown and the entire team for being so welcoming to me and for their assistance in helping me to get the UP Bursary scheme and UP Doctoral Scholarship which made my studies a lot easier. My gratitude is also extended to the UP library staff, particularly Ms Adrienne Warricker. I would like to thank Dr Edwin Mhandu and Dr Terrence Musanga who read through some of the chapters of this thesis and provided priceless advice as well as Dr Juliet Pasi who edited this thesis as well as Dr Nelson Mlambo and Dr Collen Sabao.

Also, I want to thank my wife, Anatoria Muvuti-Madziyauswa, my two sons, Jean-Claude and Wyclef-Jean, as well as my father, Mr Langton Tamayi Mutema Bvumahoreyadonha Madziyauswa and my entire family for the love, support and encouragement during the strangest circumstances that we now live under.

Finally, this thesis is for the memories of my late mother and heroine, Mrs Emily Ndlovu-Madziyauswa, who fought tooth and nail to ensure that I get an education; mother, wherever you are I am proud to call myself your son. I also dedicate this thesis to the memories of my late brothers Takawira, Osbert and Colleen and my late sisters, Muchaneta, Vivian and Marble: all who departed too soon from this world.

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to interrogate the ways in which gender violence is portrayed in selected crime novels written by South African women writers. This thesis contends that the fictional texts written by South African female writers a vista into how female characters disrupt the discourses that continue to treat them as victims of gender violence. This thesis explores how South African women writers' engage genre fiction to create a space to converse or dialogue on gender violence that has turned into a war mostly waged against and on the female body. What makes this study new is bringing together of crime novels written by both black and white women to converse on the unspeakable subject of gender violence which traverses markers of difference such as race, class or sexual orientation. In each chapter, both black and white female writers are made to engage with a specific response to gender violence (notwithstanding that two texts covered in this study were written by one black female writer). Gender violence is presented as an undercurrent that runs through the entire thesis, hence the need to break it down into different themes that constitute each chapter. In order to streamline the debate, each given chapter creates a space where two texts enter into a dialogue about the envisioned responses to gender violence. In this regard, the study shows that identities of the female characters in the selected texts are complex. Despite being considered victims of gender violence, these women neither share and experience violence in the same way nor do they react to this violence in a similar manner.

This study thus demonstrates how the selected texts complicate the overarching theory of gender performativity. Chapter 2 focuses on Margie Orford's *Like Clockwork* and Makholwa's *Red Ink* by interrogating how the female bodies disrupt the narratives that are written on them by male perpetrators of violence. The female characters use their vulnerability as a mechanism to move beyond their victimhood status. The study contests the disparities that have been and continue to be etched on the female bodies by illustrating how the living and dead bodies of women break the silence that contributes to female victimhood. Chapter 3 analyses the female

coping mechanisms in Jassy Mackenzie's *Random Violence* and Angela Makholwa's *Black Widow Society*. The discussion centres on individual and collective female coping strategies that are evident in the notion of female killers. This chapter problematises the notion of collective female strategy by demonstrating that, though the female characters' actions towards gender violence are collectively implemented, their lived experiences still remain different. Chapter 4 interrogates the notion of gender power relations as represented in Sarah Lotz's *Exhibit A* and Hawa Jande Golakai's *The Lazarus Effect*. The interrogation delves into how the uneven gender power relations are responsible for gender violence that is perpetrated against women. This chapter reveals that men mostly use power to suppress women's voices so that they remain unheard, particularly, through the crimes of rape and murder. Chapter 5 is the conclusion of the thesis which provides a reflection on gender violence as well as further extending the theoretical framework on gender. This chapter highlights that crime fiction challenges the gender binaries that are implicated in the chapters of this study.

Key Terms:

Coping strategy, Female bodies, Femininity, Gender, Gender performativity, Gender violence, Hegemonic masculinity, Golakai, Lotz, Makholwa, Orford, Mackenzie, Power, Post-apartheid.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
Chapter 2.....	38
Owning the Story of Gender Violence mapped on their Bodies in Margie Orford’s <i>Like Clockwork</i> and Angela Makholwa’s <i>Red Ink</i>	38
Female Bodies mapped with Violence in <i>Like Clockwork</i>	39
Female Bodies as Landscapes of Gender Violence in <i>Red Ink</i>	62
Conclusion.....	84
Chapter 3.....	86
Their Life is Murder? Representations of Gender Violence in <i>Random Violence</i> and <i>Black Widow Society</i>	86
Their life is murder: A secret society of murderous women in ‘Black Widow Society’	111
Conclusion.....	133
Chapter 4.....	135
Speaking the Unspeakable of Gender Violence in ‘ <i>Exhibit A</i> ’ and ‘ <i>The Lazarus Effect</i> ’	135
Undoing Gendered Power Inequalities in <i>The Lazarus Effect</i>	169
Conclusion.....	194
Chapter 5.....	195
Conclusion.....	195
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	203

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This study examines a range of post-apartheid crime fiction novels by South African female writers whose works are underpinned by explorations of gender violence which as a violent crime that is committed on women (and children). Throughout, the study unpacks complex questions relating to the process through which the experience of gender violence is transformed into a narrative of women's resistance, from the vantage points of Butler's (1990) notion of performativity and Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity as well as Grosz's (1994) notion of corporeal feminism. This study explores six crime novels written by women, namely Margie Orford's *Like Clockwork* (2006), Sarah Lotz's *Exhibit A* (2009), Jassy Mackenzie's *Random Violence* (2008), Hawa Jande Golakai's *The Lazarus Effect* (2011), and Angela Makholwa's *Red Ink* (2007) and *Black Widow Society* (2013). I have chosen these primary texts because they open ways of interrogating how some of the female characters subvert their victimised status to play the role of perpetrators in response to the ubiquity of gender violence. Specifically, I intend to establish how these fictional works represent the identities and subjectivities of women as female-predators/victims. Thus, fictionalised female characters (in the selected works for this study) seem to speak a language that reveals the pervasiveness and/or normalisation of violence through crime in post-apartheid South African society. Noteworthy is the observation that "South African crime fiction constantly excavates the past" (Naidu 2013, 129). This implies that violent crime in post-apartheid South Africa has its roots in the racist apartheid era.

The choice of the primary texts and their compartmentalisation into distinct chapters is premised on their conceptual representativeness and the thematic concerns of each text. Put differently, the underlying presumption is that the chosen primary texts are specifically representative of the broad concepts in which the trope of gender violence is framed. More so such an arrangement creates a platform where the selected texts can effectively contribute to the conversations around gender violence which is replete with taboos. In that case, I concur

with Murray's (2017, 24) conclusion that "[such conversations are] often unspoken, gendered attitudes that render women vulnerable to the silencing and violence in the first place." Hence, this introductory chapter foregrounds the study by outlining the background material to and exploring the depictions of gender violence in post-apartheid crime fiction. In this regard, it also highlights how the selected texts depict gender violence regardless of the obvious differences, and can thus be placed in dialogue with one another. Indeed, as Murray (ibid,23) argues "uncomfortable conversations about the persistence of misogynistic constructions of gender and sexuality can take place in a way that both recognizes the differences among female characters, and identifies points of commonality as potential sources of strength and resistance." In its examination of post-apartheid crime fiction, the chapter also provides the background to the way female writers flout the generic conventions of crime fiction through their female protagonists and social commentary on gender violence. A close scrutiny of this background demonstrates that the depiction of gender violence in genre fiction has proven to be momentous to the evolution of the body of work which constitutes post-apartheid crime fiction.

It is interesting to note that crime fiction written by women is frequently focalised through a female protagonist who, unlike her male counterpart, is attached to family and friends (Paque 2015, Redmond 2014, Decure 1999). Also worth noting is that female sleuths encounter romantic problems and are physically vulnerable to violence, yet they are able to empathise with victims of crime. In this light, Kinsman (2010, 152) asserts that "unlike the male detective who is detached from society, the female investigator isolates and distances herself not from society, but from what society dictates is a woman's place." The female investigators in the texts selected for this study deviate from what is traditionally regarded as 'a woman's place.' Similarly, it should be underscored that "feminist crime fiction locates the job of the investigator as one of the previously male-dominated occupations to which women demand equal access and in which they can demonstrate equal efficiency and achieve equal success" (Worthington 2011, 113). This is an apt description of Clare Hart (*Like Clockwork*) and Jade de Jong (*Random Violence*), who do not display the 'domestic' type of womanhood. Even the likes of Lucy (*Red Ink*) and Voinjama

(*The Lazarus Effect*) are not the typical domestic type as they are career women who have significantly moved from the women's traditional place in society.

Crime fiction written by women tackles feminist thematic concerns such as gender violence that breeds crime. Though female writers bend the masculinist genre to suit their social visions, they still use a generic formula to investigate crimes committed against women as well as "more general offenses in which the patriarchal power structure of contemporary society itself is potentially incriminated" (Walton and Jones 1999, 4). It is in this context that "extensive male chauvinist traditions of description, attitude and behaviour, as well as the complacent acceptance of a patriarchal social order, all seem contrary to the tenets of late twentieth-century feminism" (Knight 2004, 163). In this study, I argue that crime fiction allows female writers to do two things: firstly, crime fiction offers women writers a space to demonstrate that women can thrive in a masculinist genre, and, secondly, fictional female investigators are shown to be as good, if not better, than their male counterparts, at crime detection. However, most important is that female characters, both the investigators and the victims, move out of their traditionally assigned places to positions of power even if they have to use unethical means to get there. Thus, I argue that female crime writers have re-envisioned the genre of crime fiction as well as the positions of women in such fiction. As Cixous (1976, 880) puts it "[b]y writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her."

My argument to this point has been that gender is largely a component of crime fiction as much as crime and violence are. Of importance is Higginson's (2008, 7) conclusion that "[i]f race has been a preoccupation of crime fiction since its inception, gender has as well. Just as the ethnic or racial other is one of the privileged perpetrators of criminality deviant behaviour, women remain the archetypal victims of the genre's violence." It is in this context that the selected writers, in their different ways, do not only deal with the subject of gender violence, but go on to debunk the claims that women are the typical victims of violence. As such, this study analyses how the selected female writers represent and situate gender violence within the context of crime fiction. Further, the study specifically examines how these writers' perceptions of different types

of violent crimes are portrayed to show how crime affects women and children from the position of the gendered Other. Thus, crime fiction creates a platform for women writers to contest narratives that present women as powerless victims of gender violence.

As noted earlier, crime fiction and the representation of gender violence show the growing concern with how violent crimes against the female body perpetuate gender inequalities regardless of the global advancements in the conditions of women. It is this context that O'Toole et al. conclude that "[g]ender relations are a complicated mix of congeniality and control; yet in either case, they are almost always imbued with an asymmetrical distribution of power" (O'Toole et al. 2007, xii). The source of gender violence lies, in part, in how gender relations are conceptualised and configured when men and women interact. Besides, gender relations are concerned with the unequal allocation of power between men and women as well as how that power is utilised, abused and maintained. Hence, this study explores the extent to which male characters in the focal texts employ violent crimes as a means to control, possess, dispose of and subdue the female body as a way to express their hegemonic masculinities.

In post-apartheid South Africa, there was a sudden surge in the writing of crime fiction.¹ Some women such as Margie Orford, Jassy Mackenzie, Sarah Lotz, Angela Makholwa and Lauren Beukes decided to turn to writing crime fiction so as to undo the power structures that constrained women by 'othering' them. The traditional 'othering' of women implies that men matter more than women as they have privileges that women have to fight for. Thus, central to this study, is the argument that some women in the selected texts use their disadvantaged position to amass whatever little power they can.

In the introduction to *Diversity and Detective Fiction* (1999, 2), Klein argues that "much contemporary detective fiction explores issues of cultural interaction—race, class, gender, ethnicity, age, and more—as it moves through the investigation of serious crime." However, such issues of cultural interaction combine to expose women to all forms of gender violence as

¹ Some of the frontrunners in post-apartheid South Africa crime fiction include Deon Meyer, Mike Nicol, Roger Smith, Margie Orford, Jassy Mackenzie, Sarah Lotz, Angela Makholwa and Lauren Beukes.

the chosen texts for this study amply demonstrate. Furthermore, in *The Woman Detective: Gender and Genre* (1995), Klein concludes that “[w]omen might be successful amateur detectives as long as they employed the more stereotypically feminine talents of gossip and intuition, but they were barred from detective careers” (Klein 1995, 3). Klein argues that the use of intuition as a form of detection is predominantly ‘feminine’, thereby making it a lesser or more inferior attribute when weighed against intellectual investigation as practised by male detectives. Contrary to the claims made by Klein, this study shows that female investigators employ investigative skills rather than their feminine intuition to solve crimes. The likes of Jade de Jong, Clare Hart and Voinjama Johnson fulfill important roles in investigating crimes committed against women and children in ways that disrupt the generic norms which Klein sees as constraining the female detectives in levelling the playing field. However, Klein makes an important point, namely that “the victim – or [...] ‘the body’ in the library – is, despite biology, always female” (Klein 1995, 173). However, this thesis argues that such bodies are far from being silent even in death as they can provide signs that lead to the arrest of male perpetrators. Besides, the female detectives/investigators in the focal texts seek to make the female bodies visible by exhuming their stories from the grave. As already mentioned, these novels show that female investigators can be as good as their male counterparts, if not better, at solving crimes.

The disruption of the masculinist slant of crime fiction is important in understanding how female crime fiction is used to represent women’s issues. On this note, Plain remarks that “[w]hether the detective is male or female, straight or gay, she or he always exists in negotiations with a series of long-established masculine codes” (2001, 11). She observes that the advent of the lesbian detective is a threat to the principles of the hegemony. With the emergence of lesbian investigators such as Chloe Bishop, who works as Voinjama’s assistant in *The Lazarus Effect*, I argue that genre fiction is being rewritten. It appears that female authors seek to expose not only the gender prejudice but also the heteronormative sexuality bias in genre literature. In addition, Munt (1994, 33) argues that crime novels by women “attempt to vocalize the liberal feminist idea of the liberated woman, who is equal to the male role but still retains femininity—strong *within* her gender” (original emphasis). To some extent, I find Munt’s (1994) feminist

interpretation of the state of crime novels authored by female writers in contemporary times relevant to the theme of this study, which is pivoted on how female characters represent gender roles. However, I argue that female characters represent gender in disruptive or transgressive ways as they counter different forms of gender violence.

The study focuses on crime fiction written after 1994, starting with the year 2006 which is just over a decade after the country attained its independence. The period under coverage comes after “the ‘transition’ period [which] morphed into something researchers have variously come to call ‘post-transition’ (Frenkel and MacKenzie 1–2), ‘post-anti-apartheid’ (Kruger 35), or post-post-apartheid (Chapman 15)” (De Kock 2015, 56). However, for the purposes of this study, ‘post-apartheid’ is the preferred period of analysis. Whilst the preceding nomenclatures seem to be contentious, the prefix ‘post’ is used in its generic form to mean ‘after’ or ‘coming after’ apartheid since this study’s scope does not include the period that came before the new democracy in South Africa. However, in this study, the past illuminates the present in as far as gender violence and crime are concerned. In fact, Attwell and Harlow argue that:

A great deal has been said about the so-called “miracle” of the South African transition. The corollary to the notion of miracle is the continuing legacy and discomfort of compromise: the effort to rebuild a society whose underlying social relations and even attitudes remain substantially unchanged (Attwell and Harlow 2000, 2).

Thus, in this study gender power relations in the post-apartheid era centre on gender violence as a violent crime. In this case, De Kock (2015, 9) concludes that:

For writers in the postapartheid period, the older and perhaps easier-to-define moral economy of anti-apartheid or struggle literature has disappeared for good. Now, they feel compelled to work out a new way of seeing things. In this newer social and moral economy, the boundaries of right and wrong, of good and bad, have shifted decisively, and need to be pinpointed afresh. Disorder and criminal violence have become epidemic and must be addressed. Of course, this is never going to be an easy task. The postapartheid fictional terrain, I will argue, dramatizes a reconfigured contest over law and order in which the borderlines of legitimate and illegitimate, now far less clear or identifiable are under erasure. “Crime” is so rife that neither the state nor any particular civil grouping, it

would appear, has a monopoly over either violence or legitimacy. Moral ambiguity—the loss of stable political and ethical compass points—proves to be a ubiquitous new terrain in which “difference” plays out in these fictions, often revealing, in addition to misgovernment and criminal citizenship, a gory inversion of the rule of law.

De Kock remarks that post-apartheid fiction (especially crime fiction) deals with pertinent issues such as crime which is so rampant that it has spiraled beyond the control of the state and the civil society. De Kock’s contention that there is ‘moral ambiguity’ in post-apartheid South Africa is pertinent to my study as it points to a high rate of crime and violence (including gender violence) which are a result of the loss of stable political and ethical reference points. It is against this background that post-apartheid South African crime narratives seek to deal with the endemic nature of criminal violence, especially in an environment where “boundaries between right and wrong, of good and bad” (De Kock 2015, 9) are anything but constant. Thus, the South African situation attests to the growing popularity of crime fiction (De Kock 2011, Naidu 2013; and Le Roux 2014). On a different note, De Kock (2011, 6) argues that:

In a diseased social body, illness is analogous to an act of ‘crime’. Crime is the cancer that routs the healthy order of things. And the crime thriller genre is the most convenient form, with which to write about the diseased social body because its narrative quest involves a protagonist ‘solving the crime’ – that is going to the heart of the sickness in the social body and staring it down.

The novels in this study aptly demonstrate how women writers in South Africa have taken crime fiction as a space in which to launch their battles against the masculinist traditions of hard-boiled crime fiction. The very bold act of mixing different subgenres (police procedural, crime thriller, murder mystery and ‘whodunit’) and the creation of independent and strong female protagonists who are able to challenge gender violence head-on, are, in the least, subversive and transgressive. For the women writers chosen for my study, crime fiction allows women characters to attain social justice otherwise denied or absent in statist institutions.

In the works of fiction chosen for this study, the female protagonists reclaim their own power, which debunks the essentialised female-victimisation condition of womanhood. This thesis

further extends the debates about crime fiction by demonstrating the significant ways in which female characters complicate the notion of what women become after being subjected to gender violence in private and public spaces. It is for this reason that “the best of the current crime novels can be treated as serious literature, offering social commentary” (Warnes 2012, 581). I have in mind characters such as Whitney, Constance, Natalie and Theresa in *Like Clockwork* who, despite having their bodies scripted with violence, become transformed to actively break the victim-perpetrator bond. Added to this list are the various women in *Black Widow Society*, Voinjama, Chloe and Rosie in *The Lazarus effect*, and Nina Jacobs in *Exhibit A*, who, one way or the other, break the taboos that constrain them. In this thesis, I argue that the selected writers do more than just challenge the current interpretive assumptions. By drawing on the perilous situation of post-apartheid gender relations, they consciously try to develop new kinds of engagement, broaden conceptual frameworks, and create counter-narratives. The chosen works serve as examples of how gender-based violence can be properly recognised, rejected, understood and negotiated. In the context of this study, I share Decure’s observation that “[w]omen’s [crime] novels deal more particularly with issues related to women’s oppression: abuse, rape, pornography, prostitution, abortion, etc.” (Decure 1999, 2). These crime novels provide a social critique or commentary on current problems in South African society such as gender violence and crime. I argue in my study that gender violence is a type of social control that can take on a variety of shapes, including but not limited to sexual, emotional, psychological, ideological, economic, political and physical elements. Finally, I employ the idea of gender as an analytical tool to comprehend the power dynamics and interpersonal relationships that foster gender-based violence.

A feminist social agenda is explicitly expressed in the selected crime fiction written by female writers from South Africa. Based on the depictions of their female characters, these female crime fiction writers challenge, subvert and transgress traditional understandings of gender violence using their ‘dissident’ female characters. The female writers covered in this study use crime fiction as a vehicle to demonstrate both the vulnerability and resilience of women as they experience untold violence in a world that is crime-ridden. As result, the act of writing crime

becomes a space for women to express their individual and/or collective coping strategy. As such, this thesis argues that the representation of female investigators in crime novels written by South African women subverts the patriarchal notion that women are not allowed to venture into male-dominated areas such as the commission of violent crimes. It also emphasizes that the female investigator in female-authored crime fiction seeks social justice for women who are usually vulnerable to gender violence.

In the introduction to the *Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (2003, 1), Priestman contends that “[s]ince the 1960s... the presumed barriers between ‘high’ and ‘low’ literature have been progressively dismantled” and that “crime texts were increasingly seen as worthy of close analysis, and by now there are thousands of carefully argued, well-researched, elegantly written studies of the crime genre available and awaiting further comment.” Priestman’s use of ‘high’ and ‘low’ is crucial here since it defines the type of debate that centres around the cultural space that crime fiction should occupy in post-apartheid South Africa. Put precisely, while on a global level, the barriers between ‘high’ and ‘low’ have in certain contexts been dismantled, Naidu, in her essay ‘Crime Fiction, South Africa: A Critical Introduction’ (2013), contends that the binary between “‘high’ and ‘low’ has turned into “the ‘genre snob’ debate concerning the cultural status of South African crime fiction: is it ‘high-brow’ or ‘low-brow’; is it credibly representative of a turbulent and crime-ridden society, or is it just sensationalist, escapist, marketable entertainment limited by generic conventions?” (126). Furthermore, Naidu argues that:

[T]here have been arguments for South African crime fiction to be considered as bona fide South African literature, some even claiming for it the status of the new ‘political novel’² in post-apartheid South Africa. There have been celebrations of its propensity for socio-political analysis, its offers of catharsis and vicarious justice in an unremitting social landscape, its power to delight and its potential to instruct. Conversely, commentators have warned against the precarious ideological positioning of a literary category which is aimed at high-sales volumes and easy consumption while, at the same time, attempting

² It is in this light that De Kock (2012, 3) argues that “the crime thrillers may have to stand in for what used to be seen as ‘political’ or engaged fiction.” The writers who fall into this latter group include “redoubtable names like Gordimer, Leroux, Mphahlele, Brink, Matshoba, Coetzee, Hope, Ndebele, Vladislavic, Mda, Serote, Breytenbach, Langa, Van Niekerk, Van Heerden” (De Kock 2014, 2-3). (See also Naidu and Le Roux 2015; Warnes 2012).

socio-political analysis of the gravest issues facing the nation. Detractors see crime fiction as straddling the imperatives of artistic merit and commercial success, and their trenchant question is: how can a literary category which relies on voyeurism, graphic violence and hyperbole be afforded the status of an academic object of enquiry alongside 'great' literature, or a sociological tool in a context in which crime is a scourge? Contained in these questions and debates is a compelling thrust to investigate the emerging and evolving subject, to open up debate and foster rigorous scholarship (2013, 126).

Naidu highlights some of the views that have emerged around the social landscape that crime fiction occupies in contemporary South Africa. Firstly, crime fiction occupies a contentious position as the 'new political novel' capable of offering a socio-political analysis of post-apartheid South Africa. Secondly, crime fiction is an escapist literature with the 'power to delight', yet it is instructive. My view is that, regardless of the concerns of detractors who are dismissive of this genre fiction, it is undeniable that crime fiction has become a force to be reckoned with in literary and academic fields with its capacity to 'foster rigorous scholarship.' Similarly, De Kock (2012, n.p) contends that "the dividing line between 'crime fiction' and 'serious' so-called SA Lit is becoming increasingly blurry." Added to that, Naidu and Le Roux conclude that:

Crime fiction's form (simultaneously formulaic and protean), its content (simultaneously sensationalist and realist), and its ambiguous ideological positioning, afford it a unique triadic capacity for interpretation: (1) socio-political analysis on the part of the author; (2) the 'solving' of a crime on the part of the detective; (3) and the active engagement of the reader in both of these hermeneutic processes (2014, 286).

In light of the foregoing observations, Naidu and le Roux (2014, 292) assert that crime fiction works address a number of socio-political issues which include "reconciliation and the apartheid past, gender violence, political corruption and climate change." In addition, "[c]rime' has also become a way to talk about race and class, xenophobia, and otherness, poverty, even service delivery, in a time when the instruments of modernity have failed the masses" (Amid and De Kock 2011, 60). In the current study, I interrogate the connections between gender violence and crime in female-authored crime fiction written from 2006 onwards. As the title of my thesis

suggests, the central concern within these focal texts and, subsequently, the study as a whole, is the depictions of gender violence that results in violent crimes committed against women.

As indicated above, the current study focuses on the issues that constitute the lived experiences of women in South Africa. In their essay, Amid and De Kock contend that “[r]ather than being ‘accidental’ in its socio-political evaluations, the genre is in fact buttressed by its engagement with real-world issues” (Amid and De Kock 2011, 60). Throughout my study I consider the real-world issues of gender violence and crime from the vantage point of performativity, hegemonic masculinity and theories of gender violence. Thus, I explore the way crime and violence intertwine with gender as a point of departure which informs my analysis of the selected South African post-apartheid crime fiction. Crime in the post-apartheid period emerges from and is shaped by high levels of crime that extend way back to the apartheid past, and which pose serious threats to women and children. It is clear that at the centre of the debate is the role that crime fiction has to play in a post-apartheid cultural matrix.

As a result of the foregoing, crime fiction has developed to reflect Amid and De Kock’s (2011, 60) notion of the genre as offering an “engagement with real-issues” which, in this case, are gender violence and violent crime. In addition, Kristeva (1982, 4) observes that the lens of abjection may be used to read the crime scene since “[a]ny crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law, is abject, but premeditated crime, cunning murder, hypocritical revenge is even more because they heighten the display of such fragility.” Arguably, crime breeds fragility, precarity and vulnerability in the lives of the women who feature in the primary texts chosen for this study, yet most of these women are imbued with survival skills and resilience or coping strategies that make them withstand gender violence. Crucially, violence in these works of crime fiction is a recurring feature which reflects the gendered power relations that are present within the social and cultural context of the texts. Hence, writing crime fiction permits women writers to confront some of these social problems that affect women. In this study, I contend that crime fiction highlights the importance of women-related themes that show an interface between violent crime and gender violence, and which offer a way of discussing the notion of gender

violence. In fact, the interplay between gender and criminal violence constitutes the most crucial influence on my own way of reading the selected crime novels.

The above-mentioned undercurrent in my discussion is the contention that women are usually the victims of murder, rape, sexual trafficking, and assault among other crimes. Crime novels, I argue, help us comprehend how inescapable the legacy of the past is and how the past is linked to the present-day ubiquity of gender violence that crime in post-apartheid South Africa. On this note, De Villiers Graaff (2017, 72) concludes that:

The process of militarisation which occurred in the SADF, MK, APLA, SDUs and SPUs contributed to the development of militarised and hypermasculinities among large segments of the population, and these are still evident today. Along with this, the violence carried out by both the state and resistance groups led to a situation where the use of violence became accepted and normalised in a wide range of situations.

De Villiers Graaff's claim is important to this study as it illuminates and helps to frame the gender violence which is depicted in the primary texts. This claim or argument resonates with Gqola's view that "given the patriarchal structure of both Black and white societies in South Africa, this high militarization [of masculinities] could only take on gendered forms and play itself out along sharply gendered lines" (Gqola 2007, 113). Furthermore, though this study invariably examines the workings of gender violence as it is depicted in literature within the post-apartheid period, the discussion is informed by social, economic, political and ideological structures of colonial and apartheid South Africa.

The current debate about gender violence in contemporary South Africa illustrates its epidemic nature as seen in the way it afflicts many women and children. This explains why women and children are treated as victims of gender violence and why a female killer is seen as provoking ethical questions. As Moffett boldly states, "[b]y now, we are all too familiar with the sobering realities of gender-based violence, which is increasingly described as having reached epidemic proportions" (Moffett 2006, 129). To contextualise this epidemic, the 2016/17 South African Police Service Crime Statistics reveal that:

80% of the reported sexual offences were rape, together with Statistics South Africa's estimate that 68,5% of the sexual offences victims were women, we obtain a crude estimate of the number of women raped per 100 000 as 138. This figure is among the highest in the world. For this reason, some have labelled South Africa as the "rape capital of the world" (Crime against Women in South Africa 2018, 8).

The validity of the above quotation is hinged on the recognition that gender violence needs to be framed within its historical context which was both gendered and racialised. In addition, the high incidence of sexual violence in South Africa "suggest[s] an unacknowledged gender civil war" (Moffett 2006, 130) — something that is attested to in Orford's *Like Clockwork* where the lead character wrote a doctoral thesis on the subject of gender war. This gender war has its roots in slavery and apartheid eras where men competed to possess and regulate women's bodies. This scenario perpetuates itself in post-apartheid South Africa where men, believing that they own female bodies, act as if it is normal to inscribe violence on such bodies.

As discussed earlier, it is this belief by men and patriarchy that female bodies are their possessions that leads to the ubiquity of gender violence. Gqola (2007, 40) argues that rape was part of the "architecture of the slave-ordered Cape Colony," hence the genealogy of rape is "the history of slavery and sexual subjection" (Gqola 2007, 42-43). Germane to Gqola's contention is that South Africa was founded on the "trauma of slavery" (Gqola 2007, 42-43) which in this study is viewed as the trauma of gender violence. However, as I explain further below, men and women in two of the texts (*Like Clockwork* and *Red Ink*) respond differently to the trauma of gender violence. The trauma suffered in childhood turns mostly male victims into psychopaths in their adult lives whilst women overcome such trauma by seeking retributive justice.

One of the common forms of gender violence is sexual violence. For this reason, Gqola (2015, 21) argues that rape is "a global phenomenon that exists across vast periods in human history [and] has survived as long as it has because it works to keep patriarchy intact." Given this contention, in South Africa, race, gender and violence are intractably linked since they function as forms of oppression and subjugation of women. This entanglement is one that women find

themselves in as they strive to extricate themselves from such conditions by eking out their own vocabulary of emancipation. Thus, the violence performed on the woman's body is a result of the interplay of factors such as crime and gender. Some women end up performing their gender roles in ways that provoke ethical questions such as the veneration of murder as encapsulated by the black widow archetype. It is, therefore, crucial to explore how the intersection of gender, violence and crime in the selected texts culminates in gender violence committed against women and children and how such an intersection may produce a new breed of women. It is in this context that Gqola concludes that:

discourses of gender in the South African public sphere are very conservative in the main: they speak of "women's empowerment" in ways that are not transformative, and as a consequence, they exist very comfortably alongside overwhelming evidence that South African women are not empowered: the rape and other gender based violence statistics, the rampant sexual harassment at work and public spaces, the siege on Black lesbians and raging homophobia, the very public and relentless circulation of misogynist imagery, metaphors and language (2007, 115-116).

The scope of these female-based and female-directed movements is severely limited to women's professional lives or women in the public spaces; hence they are not transformative. For transformation to work, it should holistically cover a broader section that includes domestic/private spaces as well as male subjects. It is in these spaces that crimes are committed against women in ways that result in gender violence. For this reason, Makholwa's *Black Widow Society* may be seen as a text that seeks to unearth the untold stories of domestic abuse that exist within the institution of marriage. Also, it is in the seemingly serene environs of domestic spaces that women have been driven to a point where they fight back with all they have. Thus, the private and public spaces have created renegades out of women as well as women who will not hesitate to kill if need be.

As suggested by the title of this thesis, the main argument invoked by the selected texts and, subsequently my study as a whole, is the literary representation of gender violence and the way it transforms women. In examining the processes through which gender violence occurs, Orford,

in her essay “The Grammar of Violence, Writing Crime as Fiction” (2013), argues that her motivation for writing crime fiction emanates from her attempts “to interpret the ‘grammar’ of violence, in particular violence against the female body, and in so doing, inscribe a ‘grammar’ of [violence] through the writing of crime fiction” (220). Also, Orford (ibid) argues that her novels focus on the intimate effects of the emotional and physical aspects of pain, both individual and social, which are a result of moral failure and violence. Violence against women, therefore, has a numbing effect, which mutes the voice of its victims, preventing them from speaking out, and it pervades both the intimate space and public space. Orford further contends that violence is both intimate and painful as it speaks of a dysfunctional moral system. On this note, Orford argues that:

Violence exists beyond language. Violence is infused with pain, shame and fear, feelings that silence the victim, binding the victim’s future to that of the perpetrator with an unbearable intimacy. I was increasingly fascinated by violence and its ripple effects on the victim and society – fear at first, and later resilience. I was slowly learning how to interpret the grammar of the language of violence as it ‘speaks’ us, as much as it speaks to us, in South Africa (Orford 2013, 221).

In *Like Clockwork*, the perpetrator and victim are bound together through the permanent scars inscribed on the body of the victim, whilst in *Exhibit A* rape leaves an enduring emotional and psychological effect on the victim, which is a reminder of the perpetrator who remains the violator. However, this study problematises this victim-victimiser bond as something that does not inevitably entangle the lives of the two as the victim is sometimes able to disentangle her/himself from such a configuration. For example, in *The Lazarus Effect*, the protagonist suffers from panic attacks due to the repressed trauma which connects her to the missing girl.

To further understand the victim-victimiser configuration, it is crucial to comprehend the effect of violence on its victim. In another article, Orford (2010, 187) observes that the “battered, punctured corpse that surfaces in the newspapers, in our public minds, in our fearful collective unconscious, is usually a woman’s body.” It is these vulnerable female bodies that my thesis focuses on as I try to illustrate the ubiquitous nature of gender violence on the female body and

how this shapes and informs the women's responses to such violence. This study, therefore, relies on the theories of construction of gender in tandem with the notions of hegemonic masculinity to analyse the texts in each chapter.

The primary texts deal with various ways in which explicit forms of gendered violent crimes are perpetrated on women (and children) as well as how they respond to the abuse and develop coping mechanisms. As such, notions of 'female bodies', 'female coping strategies' and 'gender power relations' are imbricated in my discussion of gender violence. In this study, I challenge the observation that "the-woman-as-victim narrative situates African women as powerless, inviting intervention on their behalf" (Cornwall, 2005, 1). I argue that narratives about women could also include 'the-women-as-perpetrators,' a configuration which contests the notion of the-women-as-victims. The notion of 'female-perpetrators' gives power to women and puts them in a position where they use violence to deal with violence as illustrated in this study.

Additionally, I contend that some female characters exhibit capacities that allow them to attain a sense of social justice outside the statist justice system. These female characters subvert or transgress gender power relations that are seen, for instance, in the way alcoholic females who fall victim to sexual violence assert their power but daring to seek social justice. Such women disrupt traditional female victimhood, thus gaining the authority to speak against gender violence. In addition, I interrogate how the notion of coping mechanisms in the form of killing criminals and male abusers serves as a response to violence perpetrated on the female body. In such cases women cease to act innocent and turn to violence as a means to deal with gender violence. This study further claims that collective coping mechanisms allow women to work as a unified force, regardless of their different lived experiences, to respond to and resist instances of gender violence. However, this does not make their lived experiences homogenous.

Overall, the aim of the study is to interrogate the figurations of gender violence in selected South African crime fiction in English written by women so as to expand the debate on women's victimhood and vulnerability, the nature of gender violence and the varied responses of women

to that violence. To this end, this study critically assesses ways in which gender interconnects with violence and crimes perpetrated against women (and children) as they are portrayed by the selected female writers. Thus, this study breaks new ground by examining how violence is handled within a genre-specific form of fiction such as crime fiction. This enables the exploration of how particular forms of crime (murder, rape, kidnapping and human trafficking, among others) impact on the depiction of gender violence. In the process, there is an interrogation of how the portrayal of gender violence informs women's coping strategies, responses and resistance to monstrous crimes.

In this study, I show that female characters in the selected texts have agency and are not simply at the receiving end of gender violence, but they are also depicted as perpetrators and avengers. Locating gender violence within particular forms of crime portrayed in crime novels attests to the novelty of this study which permits a thorough, but inexhaustive analysis of representations of gender violence in South African post-apartheid society. What is different and new, though, is bringing together various texts written by black and white female South African women writers to confront a very old subject head-on utilising genre fiction, itself a traditionally male-dominated realm, to contest, reject and fracture metanarratives of gender violence. The thesis creates a dialogue between and among the selected texts on the subject of gender violence as a violent crime that is faced by women in post-apartheid South African regardless of their race.

Furthermore, in this study, patriarchy employs different modes of control that put female bodies in forms of captivity. This captivity is maintained through the propagation and dissemination of fear. In this light, Gqola (2007, 79) contends that the “[female fear factory works] to regulate women's movement, sexuality and behaviour [and is habitually performed in public spaces as] an effective way to remind women that they are not safe and that their bodies are not entirely theirs” (Gqola 2007, 79). In my thesis, I demonstrate, using the case of literary voices from and about South African crime fiction, that although the foregoing views explain the phenomenon of sexual violence, they do not adequately explain the female coping strategies which are evident in *Random Violence* and *Black Widow Society*, and the resistance of women's bodies scripted with

gender violence in *Like Clockwork* or *Red Ink*, and women's perpetuation of and complicity in the skewed gender power relations against other women in *The Lazarus Effect* and *Exhibit A*.

In my study, I contend that gender violence is a reflection of inequities in gender relations. This echoes the conclusion by Vincent and Naidu (2013, 53) that "gender-based violence has to do with positioning women within a hierarchy, and, by implication, men also." The implication is that the hierarchical positioning of women and men results in an uneven distribution of power as men are seen as more powerful than women. Precisely, gender inequalities which are a reflection of this power imbalance tend to disempower women by locating them outside the centre of power. It is in this context that I make use of notions of power relations, gender and violence to explore how the selected texts offer a representation of female access to power which is specifically against the norm.

Many crime novels focus on women who are normally the victims of gender violence. On the contrary, Binder (2017b, 100) observes that "[i]n the face of South Africa's appalling levels of gender-based violence, some crime writers are seeking new ways to write the female victim." Further to that, Binder points out that:

As a site for exploring questions of justice, crime fiction in its various subgenres has a long tradition of putting those in the limelight who fight for justice: the detective, who does so through truth finding and restoring the law, or, alternatively, the avenging perpetrator, who seeks to reinstall justice through retribution. However, the actual centre of these endeavours, the sufferer from injustice, the victim, remains invisible (Binder 2017b, 100).

Binder makes an important observation on the invisibility of the body of "the stereotypically female victim – both dead and alive" (Binder 2017b, 100). She argues that the female body, dead or alive, is under-represented as the quest is to arrive at some kind of social justice either through restoration of the law or through retribution. The notion of 'invisibility' is a recurring theme in Afro-American literature as illustrated by Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* where the blacks are the invisible other. This notion manifests itself in a visible/invisible dichotomy or the

presence-absence configuration. I concur with this contention and argue that women are invisible victims of gender-based violence, especially in the domestic space—something that female-written texts grapple with as they try to narrate the woman’s story by moving it from invisibility to visibility. I further extend this debate by problematising what Binder (2017b) calls a ‘stereotypically female’ victim’ as I argue that women at times reveal the ability to subvert or transgress their victimhood status, thereby becoming visible participants in the gender war or battle of sexes. Thus, for instance, the avenging perpetrator seeks to transcend the visible/invisible binary in the quest for social justice through retribution.

I further discuss thematic concerns of gender violence by foregrounding them within the genre of crime fiction. In discussing gender violence in the selected primary texts, the point of departure that I consider here is the involvement of female writers in what is traditionally regarded as a masculinist genre. In *Detective Agency, Women Writing the Hard-Boiled Tradition* (1999), Walton and Jones argue that “since the late 1970s [the crime novel] written by women and centering on the professional woman investigator has virtually exploded onto the popular fiction market” (Walton and Jones 1999, 1). Further, Walton and Jones (1999, 7) conclude that these women write “along hard-boiled formal and stylistic lines [while] challenging the gender boundaries demarcated by earlier male writers and, indeed, potentially undermining the very system of values on which the male hardboiled tradition is founded.” The study reveals how women from different backgrounds are depicted as undermining the value system that treats them as the gendered Other. In ‘Feminist Crime Fiction and Female Sleuths’, Gavin (2010, 258) observes that:

When detective fiction took root in the nineteenth century, female crime writers and sleuths challenged general expectations about both women’s writing and female characters. The standard critical inclination has been to see female crime writers and detectives as also subverting a specifically male “norm” for crime fiction. Women crime writers and investigators, however, while clearly expressing issues of female concern, have from the start been an integral part of the history of crime writing rather than simply an adjunct or reaction to it. As female detective fiction passed from Victorian originators through twentieth-century god-mothers of crime such as Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, and P. D. James and on to rebellious goddaughters like Sara Paretsky,

Sue Grafton, and Patricia Cornwell, a female and feminist vision of crime became a clear norm. The proliferation of female crime writing and fictional detectives since the early 1980s, ranging across styles as various as “cosy,” “hard-boiled,” “forensic,” and “humanist,” shows the female tradition in crime literature continuing to innovate and flourish.

Gavin raises a number of issues that are critical to female crime writing. Firstly, there is the idea that female writers and their female investigators subvert the gendered nature of crime fiction. Secondly, both the female writers and female investigators articulate issues that are of concern to women. Thirdly, from the beginning, female writers have formed part of the crime fiction writing tradition rather than being an appendage to it. Women writers are known to experiment with different crime genres where they tend to mix two or more forms. Furthermore, writing on female sleuths, Gavin (2010, 258-259) argues that:

Both male and female authors created fictional female sleuths in the nineteenth century. These “lady detectives” are independent, confident, clever women who variously use knowledge and observation of domestic environments and human behavior, female intuition, and their capacity for going unnoticed or being underestimated in solving crimes. They usually become detectives either because fate has made it necessary for them to find employment or, as Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan observe, in order to clear the name of a male relative [...]. Those female sleuths who work to restore masculine honor, and those who are young and attractive, generally cease detecting once they solve their cases or marry. Older spinsters, widows and female investigators created by women authors often, if only implicitly, have longer detecting careers.

Female crime fiction writers have managed to arm-twist and pluralise this male-gendered genre to suit feminist purposes throughout the twenty-first century by creating female investigators. However, critics of feminist crime fiction argue that female crime writers conform to patriarchal social structures that are antithetical to the goals of feminism because these female investigators tend to rely on their intuition instead of professional investigative procedures. The female intuition is what Clare Hart calls her “gut feeling” (Orford 2009, 221). This study argues that intuition or not, the female investigators are equally capable as men in solving crimes.

Another issue of importance in this current study is the fact that women are constantly exposed to violent crime whether in the private or public spaces. Frequently, gender violence is visited upon a female body by another body which is male. In this regard, Butler (2006, 19), writing in a different context, concludes that representations of precarity allow the audiences “to consider a dimension of political life that has to do with our exposure to violence and our complicity in it, with our vulnerability to loss and the task of mourning that follows, and with finding a basis for community in these conditions.” The selected texts attest to the notions of violence, vulnerability and complicity of women in the perpetuation of gender violence which tends to create a community of women. It is this community of women that foregrounds my discussion of gender violence in Makholwa’s *Black Widow Society*. I apply the same thinking to my study of gender violence which reveals that women, particularly in South Africa, are made vulnerable due to their exposure to violence as a result of high levels of crime, but they do not remain bystanders to such violence. It is on this note that the intersection between criminality and gender violence calls into question the very nature of literary representations of gender violence which tend to elide the violent crimes committed against and by women. However, I extend the discussion by underscoring the fact that women are also killers even though this brings forth ethical issues.

What is more is that women sometimes disturb the discourses that depict them as helpless victims of violent crimes as my focal texts demonstrate. In other words, female bodies, female coping strategy and female power as well as subjectivity are at the core of these texts that seek to undo patriarchal dominance. Mantymaki (2013, 442) concludes that “[t]he recognition and valorization of female agency and subjectivity, aspects traditionally denied women both fictional and real, have always been central to feminist critique.” However, the current study focuses on what I understand to be the various constituents of agency such as the resistance of female bodies, female coping mechanisms and women’s access to power, all of which are engaged to deal with instances of gender violence. Specifically writing about female-perpetrator agency in the form of killers, Mantymaki observes that “[w]hen produced through murdering, an obvious ethical problem arises, since killing can hardly be regarded as a sustainable way to construct a

positive female identity independently of the underlying social circumstances” (2013, 442). Interestingly, it is only when women decide to perform their gender subversively through killing their abusers or criminals that the ethical considerations become an important issue. On the contrary, the gender violence that breeds violent crime is often not deemed to be ethically wrong. In the end, female writers like Mackenzie and Makholwa are forced to restore ethical values to their works. In *Random Violence*, MacKenzie ensures that her female protagonist kills only bad people or criminals whereas in Makholwa’s *Black Widow Society* the analogy of the black widow which is infamous for eating its male partner after sex is forced to turn upon itself. In other words, some of the black widows are killed by their hired male assassin while those who survive are put behind bars with the exception of two founding members who are forced into exile.

I interrogate how the chosen texts challenge, dispute or project novel ways of discussing gender violence and female agency. This interrogation is in line with Adelene’s conclusion that:

...the image of the woman who kills for financial gain or who intentionally kills a child, challenges (and indeed violates) societal conceptions of stereotypical femininity, constructed as nurturing, vulnerable to abuse herself, and peace-loving. The issue of women’s violence makes us uncomfortable as it challenges the normative social fabric and causes us to confront our beliefs about polarised gendered norms (2010, 79).

It is clear that the notion of ‘female killers’ who seek restorative justice does not only violate legal structures of the statist justice systems, but is considered an affront to the traditional image of womanhood. It, therefore, takes an act of murder for the society to notice the existence of an aggrieved woman who has been forced to silently bear the scars of gender violence as part of her lived experience. However, crime fiction provides a space in which to engage with the social issues of the day such as crime, gender violence and taboo-breaking capacities for women which enable them to disturb the prevailing norms around femininity and victimhood. On that note, Binder concludes that “[in] a society that is threatened by real crime, while faced with an unreliable criminal justice system, crime fiction is argued to have a restorative function [and] can [...] itself be a discourse of resistance, an active coping strategy”

(Binder 2015, 2). Of importance is that female protagonists like Clare Hart in *Like Clockwork*, Lucy in *Red Ink*, the 'Triumvirate' (Tallulah, Edna and Nkosazana) in *Black Widow Society*, Jade de Jong in *Random Violence*, Voinjama (Vee) Johnson and her side kick, Chloe Bishop, in *The Lazarus Effect*, and Nina Jacobs in *Exhibit A*, are either powerful or are empowered female characters who challenge, resist and fight gender violence head-on.

The notion of the criminal *femme fatale* who threatens the male detectives was prevalent in European crime fiction. In her unpublished doctoral thesis that focuses on three authors: Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler and James Jaber (2011, 8-9) concludes that:

Much of the feminist criticism concerning the *femme fatale* criticizes how she is portrayed in the quintessential role of the "bad" woman, and how literary texts and films use a taxonomy which ultimately reinforces the binary between "good" and "bad" women. The canonization of the *femme fatale* in iconic and rather static images of the dangerous "bad" woman is often read as a projection of a male fantasy that serves a misogynistic and phallogocentric worldview. An important factor to note is that *femme fatales* were always viewed as an undesirable breed of women as they straddled the binaries of good and bad.

In the female authored narratives, the criminal *femmes fatales* tend to be depicted as subversive characters endowed with an agency that allows them to perform criminal acts in their quest for justice. Jaber's central argument is that the agency is evident in the way these criminal *femmes fatales* challenge the male detectives in the course of investigating crimes in order to lay claim to a male-dominated profession. Even though I do not necessarily use the term *femme fatale*, these views resonate with my thesis. My intention is to explore in particular the point where such characters subversively disrupt gender violence.

Similarly, Jaber's ideas (2011) are reflected in Redmond's (2014) unpublished doctoral thesis which deals with the subject of dangerous women or *femmes fatales*. These women are portrayed as tough female investigators. They are regarded as "[t]he 'new women' [who] directly contest the male detective by moving the centre of moral authority away from probic masculine subjectivity towards the social order" (Redmond 2014, 39). According to Jaber (2011, 39), "[t]he

female cop or P.I is just as strong, just as knowledgeable, and at times just as amoral as any of her male colleagues.” In other words, these female detectives subvert the genre by decentring the masculine fantasy which bred the *femme fatale*. In this study I do not refer to the female characters in my primary texts as *femmes fatales*, but rather as ‘female-killers.’ Female characters in crime fiction have gone beyond instilling in men the fear embodied by *femme fatales* to a position where they are they are the capable of using gender violence as a way to deal with gender violence.

Another issue that foregrounds my study is the use of violence as part of investigating crime which opens the space to challenge the traditions of female detectives. In her thesis, Ranta (2008, 36-37) concludes that “the key difference between female and male detectives, concerning the use of violence is that female detectives separate defense and protection from offensive action.” This description fits the characters of Jade in *Random Violence* and Voinjama in *The Lazarus Effect* who turn to violence only as a tool to defend and safeguard themselves. Ranta further asserts that “female detectives rarely initiate violence, they respond to it” (37) as is the case with Clare, Jade, Lucy and Voinjama, who “use violence to protect themselves or the people they care about, and even refuse violence altogether” (Ranta 2008, 37). I concur with Ranta that female investigators are often used to redefine the notion of violence in crime fiction so that it moves beyond being a means to an end, except in instances where “violence may sometimes be the only possible response to a violent milieu” (Reddy 1988, 113). Ranta’s contention is premised on how women writers imbue their lead female characters with agency that enables them to re-write the tradition of hard-boiled detective fiction, thereby disturbing its masculinist traditions. Also, I argue that my focal texts debunk the masculinist conventions of crime fiction, not only by bringing forth a female investigator or a toned-down version of the traditional *femme fatale*, but by subverting and transgressing the masculinist conceptualisation and use of violence which fixes or freezes women within the state of victimhood. Thus, the women writers use this genre fiction as a tool to dissect the representation of gender violence in crime fiction and re-envision it to enable women to empower themselves.

The research provides a critique of gender violence by bringing together crime novels by Margie Orford (*Like Clockwork*), Jassy Mackenzie (*Random Violence*), Angela Makholwa (*Red ink* and *Black Widow Society*), Hawa Jande Golakai (*The Lazarus Effect*) and Sarah Lotz (*Exhibit A*). Fletcher (2016, 197) contends that the “very decision to place a woman at the centre of a crime novel can be seen as a feminist act.” In the selected texts, it is the women’s stories about the ubiquity of gender violence that are depicted using the notions of women’s bodies, female-coping strategies and gender power relations.

Regarding crime fiction into which the above-mentioned texts are categorised, Vincent and Naidu observe that “crime fiction is a public and political response to gender-based violence [and it] contribute[s] to the discourses which counter gender-based violence” (Vincent and Naidu 2013, 48). In this light, Vincent and Naidu (2013, 49) conclude that:

In Margie Orford’s crime novels, the national challenge which informs the content and the form of the narrative is gender-based violence. From the plot lines, setting and characterisation to graphic descriptions of violated and narrativized bodies, Orford’s quest to address this theme (of gender violence) head-on is overt and relentless.

Moreover, in the Clare Hart series, gender-based violence is central to Orford’s project of representing the conditions that shape the experiences of women and children in the post-apartheid South African environment. Thus, crime novels offer hope to readers that somehow crimes can be resolved and culprits brought to book as shown by my primary texts. In an article on Coetzee’s *Disgrace* and Orford’s *Like Clockwork*, Every (2016, 31) underscores the “implications of gendered violence” that ensued after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa (TRC) testimonies by concluding that:

The texts explore the physical, psychological and linguistic incapability of narrativizing one’s suffering, and also the ethical implications of speaking for a victim, which is “both a way of rescuing and usurping the other’s voice” (Dawes 394). *Disgrace* devotes a lot of space to Lucy’s silence, but it is important to note that most of the primary characters refuse to speak, or are silenced, after perpetrating, or being victim of, suffering (Every 2016, 33).

Every also raises the question of “who owns the narrative *after* the act of violence has occurred” (Every 2016, 32 original emphasis). Making reference to *Disgrace* and *Like Clockwork*, Every points out that “these texts critique a narrative of closure, and the homogeneity of victim experience” (Every 2016, 36). Sexual violence in the form of rape often prevents the victim from disclosing this violation due to longstanding gender stereotypes that accompany sexual violation. Whilst Lucy in *Disgrace* decides to remain silent after her rape ordeal, female characters in Orford’s text confront the intimacy of a crime such as rape. Thus, Every (2016, 36) contends that the “texts (*Disgrace* and *Like Clockwork*) foreground the suffering of women, bearing witness to stories which were not (at least initially) foregrounded by the TRC.” Though I agree with the notion of ‘bearing witness’, in this study, I add that female characters also resist, respond to and cope with the seemingly ineluctable instances of gender violence that result in violent crimes.

Critiquing Margie Orford’s corpus, Murray (2013a) notes that “[e]ven the most cursory reading of Oxford’s novels reveals that concerns about gender and violence are central to the ‘political agenda’ that can be traced in her work.” Orford’s works are, therefore, concerned with the “vulnerability of the bodies of women and girls in contemporary South African society” (Murray 2013a, 68). She further argues that “in all Orford’s texts, readers are never allowed to get so swept up in the spectacle of the violence that they forget the women whose violations do not make the headlines” (Murray 2013a, 71). Orford’s oeuvre shows that misogyny is prevalent in all the strata of society even in what is known as the sex industry. Moreover, “Orford returns the reader’s attention to the extent to which the threat of gender violence has become normalized in women’s daily lives” (ibid, 76). The normalisation of gender violence is what makes it all too familiar to the extent of becoming acceptable.

Besides, Murray interrogates how “Sarah Lotz represents the gendered intersections of shame, women’s drinking and sexual vulnerability in her novel *Exhibit A*” (2013b, 210). Of importance is that shame, blame and sexual vulnerability are said to operate together in ways that shift the blame of sexual violence from the predator to the victim. As such, issues of female victimisation and agency are connected to the fact that “blame is intricately connected with shame” (Murray

2013b, 211). Additionally, Murray notes that there are “problematic intersections of shame, alcohol consumption and violent sexual crimes” (ibid, 215) at play since alcohol makes women susceptible to sexual violence for which they are blamed. Through the imaginative space of crime fiction, readers are allowed to engage with the gender stereotypes that centre on sexual violence that is perpetrated on women who drink alcohol. My thesis is an engagement with this imaginative space of literature in order to comprehend how gender violence is imagined or represented in texts where crime is central as a consequence of the uneven distribution of power between men and women.

In his thesis on ‘The Vulnerable Body in Contemporary South African Literature’, Van Heerden makes an important observation, namely that “the violation of another’s body is an expression of power in which the politics of race, class, gender, and crime combine” (2015, 46). I argue that gender violence is implicated in the gender relations between men and women and in the possibility of constituting agency in female subjectivities. This study engages crime fiction, especially the female-authored texts to comprehend new ways of reading female agency. I, therefore, argue that an intersection of gender, violence and crime poses a threat to female bodies, but at the same time opens avenues to disrupt the metanarratives marked on such bodies. I also add that the metaphor of the vulnerable body refers to a body-site where gender violence occurs and is confronted or subverted.

Mackenzie, for instance, transforms the conventional victimised female into an empowered woman who is ready to “resist the moral imperative to not fight violence with violence” (Binder 2017a, 46). I seek to extend this contention in relation to female violence by exploring the conduct of women who turn to social justice such as Clare Hart (*Like Clockwork*), Lucy Khambule (*Red Ink*), Voinjama (*The Lazarus Effect*) and the ‘Triumvirate’ (*Black Widow Society*). I, therefore, use *Like Clockwork*, *Red Ink*, *Random Violence*, *Black Widow Society*, *The Lazarus Effect* and *Exhibit A* to extend this argument by focusing on how gender violence is depicted as an interplay between the gendered structuring of female characters’ lived experiences and violent crime.

Jassy Mackenzie and Angela Makholwa focus on gender violence, locating it within a crime-ridden post-apartheid society. Binder (2015, 1) argues that these crime writers explore gender issues “through their creations of instantly memorable female killers as protagonists.” She points out that the writers “argue that since assertions of power have so long been connected to assertions of masculinity, performing the male role of the killer is a way for their female figures to move to a place of power” (Binder 2015, 1). Through giving women this form of agency, the female killers become “renegades who contest the dominant power and who are generally in control in an environment which is rife with inequality and where women more than not are the victims of crime” (ibid., 1). Some crime writers in South African tell their stories through strong female protagonists but Binder argues that:

[w]hat distinguishes Jassy Mackenzie, Angela Makholwa and Mike Nicol are their memorable female killers. Their exploration of gender issues and female resistance through their female avengers is unique in South Africa. Theirs is not primarily an investigation into female agency, but into female perpetrator agency. They explore alternative notions of justice for women and offer diverse ideas of agency and power for women (Binder 2015, 3).

The foregoing resonates with my thesis as I seek, as mentioned earlier, to demonstrate the coping strategies used by women that counter the essentially stereotypical victimhood status often accorded to them. In this regard, the focal texts show how women are empowered to transgress the ubiquitous gender violence emanating from violent crimes. Thus, the traditional notion of women as victims tends to limit the capacities women possess in subverting and transgressing what is seen as normative womanhood.

Commenting on Angela Makholwa’s crime fiction, Murray (2016, 16) argues that “a feminist literary analysis of Makholwa’s novels reveals [...] important concerns about deeply embedded gendered assumptions which create a society in which gender violence becomes not only possible, but the norm.” Such an inference would mean that society is guilty of normalising gender violence. It is in this regard that Murray contends:

Rather than regarding violence against women as aberrations, these texts [Makholwa's] suggest that such violence is pervasive and that the brutal instances of physical violence are merely extreme manifestations of discursive and structural gender oppression that shapes every aspect of the female characters' lives (2016, 14).

Makholwa's novels reveal that gender violence is deeply entrenched in social structures of inequalities between men and women across the racial divide, and the "deeply embedded gendered assumptions [...] create a society in which gender violence becomes not only possible, but the norm" (Murray 2016, 16). Furthermore, Murray argues that "Indeed, both Makholwa's texts [*Red Ink* and *Black Widow Society*] contain clear and compelling literary representations of the ubiquitous nature of misogyny in the contemporary South African society" (Murray 2016, 16). I argue that Makholwa's female characters possess female-coping mechanisms which allow them to resist and subvert gender violence irrespective of their racial allegiance.

Another scholar, Spencer(2014, 111), argues that some emerging authors use crime fiction to "rescript a masculinist genre by offering a female perspective that subverts, disrupts, destabilizes, and problematizes the dominant discourse of crime fiction." According to Spencer (2014, 111), "[f]emale authors use crime fiction to reveal that women can thrive in a male-gendered field as writers or fictional female investigators." Spencer focuses on crime fiction written by emerging writers such as Angela Makholwa and Hawa Jande Golakai, who are among the writers selected for my study. The central argument advanced by Spencer is that "[e]merging writers embrace crime fiction, because as women they are more vulnerable and experience anxiety in a world that is predominantly patriarchal" because "[t]he act of writing crime [...] allows for women's individual and collective agency" (Spencer 2014, 113). Put differently, through crime fiction, emerging female writers particularly from South Africa, provide different ways that can be used to think through depictions of women's experiences of gender violence. My research supports Spencer's view that crime fiction allows for women's subversive acts which are evident in the rewriting of this mainly masculinist genre to represent women's experiences of crime.

However, my point of departure is that, unlike Spencer, I seek to interrogate how crime, violence, and gender interact to 'terrorise' female subjectivities and how female coping strategies may aid in resisting and responding to gender violence. Though useful to my study, Spencer's thesis does not particularly focus on gender violence. Additionally, the thrust of my thesis is to examine how the female body is depicted in crime fiction in ways that show its potentialities, whether dead or alive, to narrate women's stories in order to de-silence the metanarratives that seek to mute their voices. Also, I explore the notion of gender power relations to show how it is used to disempower some of the victims of sexual violence and force some of them to assume responsibility for the crime that befell them.

This study interrogates the primary texts using the Butlerian notion of performativity and Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. These theoretical perspectives provided a point of departure for my understanding of the primary texts. Similarly, Ratele (2012, 15) notes that "violence, like steroids, becomes a resources for producing a masculine stereotype." Whether men perform a masculine stereotype or hegemonic masculinity, it is always women, children and other men who have to endure the (gender) violence that accompanies such a performance. However, Butler argues that "gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo [and] in its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status" (1988, 520). In addition, Butler (1990, 25) asserts that "[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being." As such I understand performativity to be the way men and women accomplish or 'do' gendered norms within a specific society in accordance with a given social script. Some societies tend to fetishise, normalise and condone men who use their physical stamina to uphold these societal norms. This means that, although the bodily performance of gender is influenced by societal norms, the body has the capacity to enact new ways of maintaining the given norms. In my focal texts, gender violence is performed through, by and on the body.

In performing gender, there is a possibility of subversive performance which is decidedly against the norm. This point is succinctly expressed in the notion of murderous women/female killers in *Random Violence, Like Clockwork, The Lazarus Effect, Red Ink* and *Black Widow Society* whose performance of gender disturbs the metanarrative of acceptable femininity. The accepted norm is that women are traditionally victims, not perpetrators of violence. By creating female killers, Mackenzie, Orford, Golakai and Makholwa depict women who perform gender subjectivities or identities in ways that disturb the norm, which makes them deviants/dissidents in the eyes of patriarchy. Through performances of murder or use of violence, these female characters complicate and overstretch the conceptual boundaries of femininity, female agency and female violence. The performative acts of the said female characters may be linked to Butler's conclusion that the "task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat, or, indeed to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to *displace* the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself" (Butler 1990, 148; emphasis in the original). In other words, the primary texts may be read as contextualising the foregoing contention by challenging the discourse that reproduces gender categories. I, therefore, argue that, in the selected texts, women are empowered to challenge gender violence by disrupting the acceptable structure of repeating a given norm.

As I demonstrate, the female body in the chosen texts is neither silently acted upon nor is it merely a slate to be written since female characters in the focal texts exercise agency by challenging gender violence. The female body actively emits signs and subversively resists, responds to and copes with gender violence. In order to understand further the prevalent gender violence in my selected texts, this study engages with the idea of 'hegemonic masculinity'. Connell argues that:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

[....]

It is the successful claim to authority, more than direct violence that is the mark of hegemony (Connell 2002, 38-39).

Connell employs the concept of 'hegemony masculinity' to describe a particular kind of domineering masculinity as it represents the ideal manhood that men strive to attain. Connell's contention is that, at any given period, there is a specific type of manhood that is considered to be superior to other types. Hegemonic masculinity is evident in the way men strive for power which they use to control and keep women in subordination. This is because this type of manhood is mainly concerned with assertions of power through the use of violence. This is evidenced in the way most of the men in the selected novels inflict gender violence on women's bodies as an expression of the power they have over women. Furthermore, Connell (2002, 44) contends that:

[v]iolence is part of a system of domination, but it is at the same time a measure of its imperfection. A thoroughly legitimate hierarchy would have less need to intimidate. The scale of contemporary violence points to crisis tendencies in the modern gender order.

In the above quotation Connell raises two important points that speak to my thesis: first is the contention that hegemonic masculinity is a gender practice that legitimatises patriarchy. In my thesis, hegemonic masculinity is employed to condone and normalise violence committed against women. Secondly and more importantly, violence as a part of hegemonic masculinity is a reflection of a gender crisis. When applied to my study of gender violence in crime fiction, it is shown in the way that men who commit crimes and resort to violence ably demonstrate the crisis of manhood that emerged in the aftermath of apartheid. In other words, the demise of apartheid created lacunae in hegemonic masculinity which opened the space for black and white (and other) masculinities to contest vacant positions. Put more precisely, in post-transitional South Africa, some men who were either emasculated by or enjoyed apartheid's hegemonic or militaristic masculinity, commit violent crimes as a way of appropriating a new form of hegemonic masculinity. Committing violent crimes against women becomes the men's way of expressing their gender identity. Some South Africa men use violence to lay a claim on hegemonic masculinity to the detriment of women and children.

In order to comprehend the topic of gender violence, the selected texts are analysed using two gender theories lens, namely Butler's notion of gender performance and Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. Within a literary context, these theories have commonly been applied to the analyses of gender construction in an effort to examine the lived experiences of women (and men). In contrast, the emerging field of post-apartheid periodisation delves into the South African post-apartheid cultural milieu, going beyond the question of gender violence to consider how societal and cultural conflicts in themselves signify violent crimes. Given this background, I posit that, when reflecting on the concerns of crime fiction, post-apartheid crime fiction written by women does certainly lends itself to the application of gender performance and Grosz's corporeal feminist theory. Additionally, the study argues that women writers also bend the crime fiction genre in order to provide social commentary on issues that affect women in a crime-ridden post-apartheid South African society. This leads to the conclusion that it is crucial to consider the importance of societal and cultural conditions that breed crime within a literary analysis of gender violence.

Clearly the introduction delves into some of the main theoretical and philosophical questions which are central to this study. In particular, it outlines the nature and importance of crime narratives that focus on gender violence and the relationship between gender, violence and crime as factors which give rise to the abuse of women in the selected texts. In doing so, it addresses the main theoretical approaches that this study employs such as the Butlerian notion of performativity and Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, foregrounding them in relation to the broader questions which this study focuses on. The fundamental questions addressed in this study, through my analysis of my selected literary texts, include: How do South African women writers depict gender violence? To what extent does this depiction of gender violence by women writers change when examined in the context of crime? In what way is the female body a viable vehicle through which women writers critique the ubiquity of gender violence in post-apartheid South African society? How do ideas about gender and violence play out in crime fiction written by women and how does this reflect South African social imaginaries

on gender violence? Finally, how, within the context of crime narratives written by women, do theories speak to fiction and how does fiction converse with theory?

The chapters which follow the Introduction provide an analysis of the literary representation of gender violence in the selected primary texts by discussing and comparing them. The discussion of a specific work of crime fiction directly or indirectly deals with the concerns of gender violence within the context of violent crime. Interrogating the texts in this manner frames the pertinent questions that relate to gender violence and violent crime which my study explores. Examining the texts also underscores the relevance of diverse approaches to exploring the interface between gender violence and violent crime. The interrogation of gender violence in each chapter focuses on how the selected writers treat attitudes to female bodies and how they represent female coping strategies and gender stereotypes. This is demonstrated through the chosen texts' subversion and transgression of the masculinist trajectory associated with crime fiction's representation of gender violence.

With the foregoing in mind, Chapter Two serves as a launching pad for my interrogation as it puts Margie Orford's *Like Clockwork* (2006) and *Red Ink* (2011) by Angela Makholwa in a dialogue on gender violence that results in crime. In *Like Clockwork*, Orford, dubbed the South African Queen of Crime Fiction (De Waal 2012), writes about a series of crimes that men commit against women that amount to gender violence. My decision to focus on Orford's first installment in the Clare Hart series, *Like Clockwork*, is based on two reasons. Firstly, as the first in the series, *Like Clockwork* contains Orford's exploration of the intersection of gender violence and crime which she attributes to the gender war against women. In light of this, her work offers an appropriate frame to demonstrate the impact of crime on gender relations in the world of fiction as marked on the bodies of women. Secondly, this text depicts the ubiquity of gender violence that emanates from violent crimes committed against women. In particular, the text explores how women's bodies are inscribed with gender violence which oftentimes leaves indelible scars, bruises or tattoos. Despite these indelible bodily markings, women disrupt the narratives written on their bodies. In *Red Ink*, Angela Makholwa delves into the psyche of an incarcerated serial

killer and rapist who wants his story chronicled by a former investigative journalist-turned-public relations practitioner. The process of placing the traditional victim at the centre of the story of gender violence by a serial killer and rapist dismantles the precarity of the female body. Body precarity serves as a strategy used by the female lead character to appropriate stories of violence marked on female bodies.

The main focus of Chapter Two is to show how the notion and nature of gender violence are portrayed in each text to illustrate the interface between crime and gender violence. An important point of departure in this chapter, which cascades into the following chapters, is the way high levels of gender violence which breed crime that treats women as victims are depicted in the context of the selected texts. My discussion of the literary representations of gender violence in each text assists in foregrounding the distinctions and similarities I make between the two female protagonists (Clare Hart in *Like Clockwork* and Lucy Khambule in *Red Ink*) in my interrogation of each of these texts.

Chapter Three focuses on the contrast between *Random Violence* (2008) by Jassy Mackenzie and *Black Widow Society* (2015) by Angela Makholwa. *Random Violence* focuses on a female investigator who wants retributive justice for the death of her father and for other victims of crime, whereas *Black Widow Society* centres on a group of women who use a hitman to eliminate their abusive partners or husbands a way to cope with domestic violence. At the centre of both texts is a commentary on the ethical question that surrounds women who become killers as a coping strategy against gender violence which is inflicted on their bodies by male perpetrators. It is this commentary which provides a framework for the chapter as it builds on the previous chapter. It establishes a distinction between the individual female killer in *Random Violence* and what is ultimately a collective network of female killers in *Black Widow Society*. These texts demonstrate that, far from being victims, women use violence as a way to attain retributive justice.

Chapter Four takes the discussion on gender violence to Sarah Lotz's *Exhibit A* and Hawa Jande Golakai's *The Lazarus Effect*. On the one hand, *Exhibit A* narrates the story of sexual violence experienced by Nina Jacobs at the hands of a police officer while she was inebriated. The text's narrative is constructed through the tropes of gender power relations that centre on alcoholism, rape and police corruption. The discussion develops on the previous chapter as it shows how *Exhibit A* explores sexual violence as a consequence of the powerless position of the victim who is raped while under the influence of alcohol. The analysis of the chapter reveals how patriarchy normalises rape by shifting the crime from the perpetrator to the victim who is portrayed as an alcoholic. On the other hand, *The Lazarus Effect* focuses on murder. The text shows how women are treated as victims rather than as perpetrators of violent crime such as murder, attempted murder and abduction. The text also presents female alternative sexuality in the form of lesbianism. Specifically, this chapter highlights the role of Pumla Gqola's notion of the 'female fear factory', the Butlerian concept of performativity and Connell's notion of hegemonic masculinity in understanding sexual violence and murder as forms of gender violence.

Chapter Five reflects on the issues raised and discussed in the preceding chapters of this study. It proposes further discussions relating to crime fiction and theoretical perspectives on the subject of gender violence and crime. It also attempts to establish how generic forms impact on the literary representations of gender-based violence within a very specific South African context and how the reality of crime is captured in the selected texts. Further to that, this chapter evaluates the limitations and the merits of my study, and proposes possible areas where further research might be required.

Analysing the texts within the above chapters allows for the exploration of the complexity of questions relating to the representation of gender violence in this study. As a result, the discussion in the chapters identifies areas of similarities as well as the points of differences between the selected approaches. The study's different chapters explore the notion of gender violence further by examining the intersection between gender violence and crime using the selected texts to provide a discursive context. As such, questions about gender, violence and

crime, and how they are depicted in the selected texts, are problematised in the chapters of this study.

.

Chapter 2

Owning the Story of Gender Violence mapped on their Bodies in Margie Orford's *Like Clockwork* and Angela Makholwa's *Red Ink*³

In this chapter, Margie Orford's *Like Clockwork* (2006) is analysed alongside Angela Makholwa's *Red Ink* (2007). Both texts are explored to establish how the female body is portrayed as a starting point of women's response and resistance to gender violence. The two writers question and/or re-write the female body in the context of gender violence within post-apartheid South African society. The representation of the female body has repercussions at the individual level for female characters who struggle to move on from victimhood to positions of power and authority, and, at the social level, which requires debunking the patriarchal treatment of the female bodies. The main thrust of this chapter is to examine Orford's and Makholwa's representations of female bodies in response to gender violence in their respective texts. Thus, the main aim of this chapter is on how male bodies in the two texts use brutal force to inscribe gender violence on the bodies of women and how female bodies speak back to the gender violence. In other words, female bodies are central to all the depictions of gender violence in which women and children are treated as commodities or items with a shelf life and always in the possession of men.

The reason for grouping the two texts together in this chapter is based on the fact that they participate or can be made to in a dialogue on how female bodies are mapped with gender violence. In two interconnected sections, I explore how female bodies resist and respond to gender violence inscribed on them. My analysis begins with an exploration of *Like Clockwork*, which I use to establish the ways female bodies are written with gender violence that breeds violent crimes. *Like Clockwork* sets the tone for gender violence and the crimes that accrue from such a situation by delving into stories that touch on the bodies of different women. Gender violence which results in a plethora of crimes such as human trafficking, murder, rape, battery and sexual harassment, is firmly inscribed on the female bodies. The 'authors' or perpetrators of these violent crimes include young boys, men, partners, strangers and husbands as well as

³ The idea of bodies written with violence is borrowed from Binder (2021), but in this chapter I use this idea to show that female bodies represent the state of victimhood of women. However, I go on to explore how the female victims of gender violence use the bodies to break free from their victimhood.

women themselves. On their part, women in the novel are not cast into victimhood, but move out of such places by appropriating the stories of gender violence that are mapped on their bodies. To achieve this, Orford uses various techniques such as plotlines that contain the main story told through a female protagonist and backstories that are briefly mentioned yet significantly contribute to the representation of gender violence. Flashbacks are also employed to fill the gaps in the story by providing background information whilst characterisation is used to develop characters from being victims to independent individuals with their own stories to tell about their bodies. The different settings also contribute to heighten the magnitude of gender violence and crime.

Red Ink foregrounds violent masculinities that are traceable to childhood trauma and patriarchal structures of power and domination. Whilst the thread of trauma from *Like Clockwork* is briefly mentioned, in *Red Ink* it is a central component of the exploration of the ways men who were traumatised in their childhood exert their violent masculinities on the bodies of women. However, this chapter argues that, even though violent masculinities inscribe gender violence on the female bodies, such bodies are not simply written on but they resist the control that patriarchy has on women's bodies. Whilst there is intimate partner violence in this text, the author delves into the random nature of violent crimes such as murder and rape which are employed to effect a sense of victimhood on women.

Female Bodies mapped with Violence in *Like Clockwork*

This section focuses on the female bodies that are both landscapes of violence and points of resistance. A close analysis of *Like Clockwork* shows Clare Hart, the protagonist, countering the traditional subject position of women. She is depicted as one who is preoccupied with championing the rights of women in the society of the text. Orford alludes to women's lived experiences that constitute fear and resilience which, together, produce subversion, resistance and response within women's subjectivities. Within the wider context of the text, the female body represents the pursuit of social justice and quest for self-determination, freedom and personal ownership of one's body. This is evidenced by the way female characters question and tear to pieces the script of gender violence. They replace this script with the one that shows how

women come to reclaim the ownership of the stories written on their bodies by disrupting the meta-narratives of femininity and female victimhood. Whilst the protagonist is a highly educated female, Dr Clare Hart, who, in her own right, is an empowered individual and an expert on femicide, other female characters created by Orford emanate from different social backgrounds and stations in life, and are equally important in owning the stories scripted on their bodies. The marginalised gender 'Others' that feature in this narrative include Whitney, Portia, Natalie, Constance, Theresa and Mrs Ruiters, among others. In this text, inscriptions on the female bodies include physical marks such as tattoos, scars, injuries and bruises, and signs of emotional violence. Such symbols spark resistance against gender violence.

Of importance is that Hart is an investigative journalist, documentary maker and part-time crime profiler who occasionally works in conjunction with the police to solve criminal cases and attain social justice for gender violence victims. Hart holds a doctoral degree in femicide where she argues that South Africa is engaged in a gender war since, at independence in 1994, "unspent violence was sublimated into a war against women. A war in which there are no rules and no limits" (Orford, 27-28). On this note, the text underscores that, even though gender violence that results in crime is analogous to a factory that manufactures fear in women, the female characters find ways to disrupt and contest such a condition of womanhood. To deal with gender violence, some of these women tap into their resilience or endurance which makes them archetypal survivors⁴. It is in this context that Orford's text offers discourses that allow women in positions of victimhood to eke out a way to appropriate the stories that are inflicted on their bodies. It is the awareness of how gender othering operates in the text that enables female victims to disrupt rather than buttress the patriarchal social structure.

A further point to note on the prevalence of gender violence is that, in *Like Clockwork*, everywhere Clare Hart goes, there are women who bear scars of violence mostly in the form of bodily markings. Binder (2021, 29) argues that "the indelible marks and tattoos on Orford's

⁴ I am thinking of the archetypal survivor which is a motif or a recurrent theme in Afro-American literature. In my focal texts, women, irrespective of their racial belonging, are portrayed as archetypal survivors as they are resilient in dealing with instances of sexual degradation, crude violence and physical subjugation that they encounter in their lives and which form the bedrock of their experiences.

victims' bodies tell stories of a veritable war against women and girls, waged mainly with the weapon of sexual violence." The bodily markings extend beyond gangster tattoos, scars, bruises or injuries to encompass the narratives of gender violence told by the female bodies. Women encounter gender violence in public and private spaces which constrains them from having rights over their bodies. Such a situation attests not only to the ubiquity of gender violence where the victims are mostly women, girls and children, but to the existence of gender war between men and women as alluded to in Clare Hart's doctoral thesis. As argued in this chapter, it is the battle scars on the female bodies that propel them to fight back against the perpetrators of violence or challenge social norms to make South Africa inhabitable and to free themselves from victimhood. It is important to note that, on her return to South Africa from England in 2001, Orford found a country that is not only riddled with high figures of gender violence, but a nation scarred by "the unbearable intimacy of violence" (van Heerden 2013, 54).

Evidently, the centrality of the female body in the Orford's text is hard to miss. Significantly, the body is depicted as some kind of a script that is at the disposal of male cartographers who map it with signs of gender violence. This portrayal drove Orford to seek answers by focusing on female bodies marked with gender violence. Hence, Orford (2013, 187) remarks that she was "flooded by victims, the horror of them, the sameness of them, the blankness of these bodies scripted with violence" and she discovered that "[c]rime and violence are highly sexualised... [because] the most mesmerising crimes are committed against women." In *Like Clockwork*, the female body is under the control of men who embody patriarchal power, however, the women fight to take control of their bodies. It is for this reason that, in her text, Orford unmutes the silence around violence by assigning voices to women as a way for them to resist, respond and cope with gender violence. More so, a number of the female characters, as this discussion seeks to demonstrate, are equipped with the means to break the bonds of the unbearable intimacy of violence which entwine the bodies of the victims and the perpetrators. Orford's protagonist, Clare, gives voice to the dead bodies through her work as a crime profiler while her work as a documentary maker enables her to restore the voice to the living victims of sexual violence.

In *Like Clockwork*, Orford depicts the relation between the living female bodies and violent crimes. I further extend my analysis to the dead bodies in crime fiction which I argue are also vested with the ability to speak back and against their violators. It is in this context that I explore how the female bodies respond to gender violence. This text is littered with instantiations of gender violence that are inflicted on the female bodies by the male bodies. However, women find their own voice with which to speak against the patriarchal tendencies to fix them within object positions as their bodies are shown to be unbreakable and capable of self-repair. Thus, the female characters refuse to be paralysed or immobilised and muzzled by the terror of gender violence.

The narrative structuring of the events in *Like Clockwork* exposes violence at an early stage of the novel as evident in the *Prologue*. This structure shifts the focus from the act of violence which makes the unnamed girl an extended image of victimhood, to her escape. In the *Prologue*, the story of recovery is narrated from the point of view of this nameless girl who could be any other woman who is a victim of random violence. In just two pages, words like “terrified,” “shocked” (7), “shivers” (8) and phrases such as “sits huddled”, and “burnt pulp at the heart of her palm” (8), caused by a cigarette, are used to describe the precarious condition of the nameless girl’s body. Despite her precarious condition, the nameless girl shows a resilient strain epitomised by the fact that “she is too filled with hatred to find a way to die” (8) and that she had offered some ‘resistance’ earlier on. She becomes an image of resistance and resilience as she escapes from captivity through a window. I believe this ‘window’ acts as a vista of opportunities which allow women to escape from victimhood towards freedom. Precisely, the girl, like other female characters in this text, looks for ways to disrupt the restrictions that violently turn women into the gendered Others. Thus, the ‘window’ opportunity becomes one of the strategies employed by the women characters to eke out a language that disturbs the grammar of violence which seeks to brutally mark women’s bodies with violence.

Granted that violent crimes tend to afflict women by threatening to render them helpless victims, the women in this text are endowed with resilience which enables them to emerge from such vulnerability much stronger and more determined to right the wrong wrought on their

bodies as exemplified by the nameless girl in the *Prologue* whom we learn later on is named Whitney. However, there are women like Whitney's mother, who are resigned to their positions of victimhood. The escape of Whitney, the nameless girl in the *Prologue* from what seems to be a stronghold of criminals with a hidden camera, presents one among many ways of resisting and responding to gender violence. The *Prologue*, therefore, offers the reader both a glimpse of the nature of gender violence depicted in this text as well as some of the ways to circumvent such a situation. However, in order to visualise and understand the nature of gender violence in this text, it is crucial first of all to consider the patriarchal tendencies that constrain women through instilling fear and a sense of helplessness in them, both in private and public spaces. This is captured in the following extract when Whitney is exposed to sheer violence prior to her escape. The narrator says:

The girl watches her heart line, curving round the plump mound of her thumb, burn away. Her sharp, shocked intake of breath breaks the silence.

'What's your name?' he murmurs, smoothing her long hair behind her ear.

'I want to go home,' she whispers. 'Please.'

The man strokes the rounded chin, her soft throat. Then he turns and walks back to his office. He is used to power, there is no need to swagger. He knows that the girl will not take her eyes off him. He punches a number into his phone. The call is picked up at once. (*Like Clockwork*, 7-8).

In this passage, one can glean at least three important issues that underscore the way violence is universalised or made familiar, enacted and resisted. First, an element of anonymity is shown where a definite article 'the' is used both before the nouns 'girl' and 'man' in the above scene. The asymmetrical relations of female and male bodies are evident in the power that the man wields over the girl. This is shown by the reference to the characters' bodies using short sentences that start with the third person pronouns 'he' or 'she' to denote the gender of each character. The binary opposites are present in the way the male character who is the victimiser is referred to as "the man" whereas the female victim is only known as "the girl" (7). In their brief encounter, the man is depicted as a shady, silk-clad smoker with "lean wrists" and "his head [is] close-cropped and scarred in places" (7). He is also described as "uncoiling" from a chair to pass

through a sliding door that leads to the girl's cell and "[h]e is used to power [hence] there is no need to swagger" (7-8). Earlier on, the omniscient narrator tells the reader that:

Two strides take him to the room where they have brought the new consignment. She looks at him, terrified. He finds this provocative. He holds out his hand to the girl. Conditioned to politeness, confused, she gives him hers. He looks at it. Then he turns the palm — secret pink — upwards. He looks into her eyes and smiles. He stubs the cigarette out in her hand.

'Welcome,' he says. (7)

It is this power that allows him to inflict violence on the body of the girl. The man's power is contrasted with the girl's innocence, despair, powerlessness and vulnerability which are, in short, a reference to her body. In this scene and in others in this text, deliberate efforts are made to show clearly the way bodily encounters which amount to unbalanced power relations create a situation where the infliction of violence is performed on, through and by bodies. In a subtle, yet calculated act of malevolence, the victimiser exerts his power on the girl by sexually violating her. This violation is shown when the victimiser traces the distinctly feminine contours of the girl's body, that is, the "secret pink" of her palm, and the reference to the girl's body parts such as "the plump mound of her thumb," her "long hair", "rounded chin" and "her soft throat" (7). In the *Prologue*, these bodily parts are used by 'the man' to inscribe violence on a female body, hence, possessing and commodifying the girl's body. For him, a female body is a "new consignment" or a "fresh delivery" to gratify the sexual cravings of his clientele made up of male sexual predators. The immediate implication is that the man is used to power which he displays by possessing female bodies.

In the intervening time as denoted by the statement that begins with "Many hours later..." (8) a lot has happened to the girl in the *Prologue*. The girl has been raped by a group of men and the episode has been captured by a secretly hidden camera. As a result of the violence that has been inflicted on her body, we are told that the girl "sits huddled in the corner of the room unaware of the unblinking eye of the camera watching her" (8). At this moment, she has been stripped naked and finds herself alone, cold and bruised. However, the finer details of what happened to the girl in the intervening scenes as well as her identity are only revealed later on in the text. Despite her state of vulnerability, she escapes from her captivity. Thus, the *Prologue* introduces

the reader to gender violence that is willfully written on female bodies by the male perpetrators represented by the anonymous man in this scene. Evidently, the anonymity of the girl represents the all-too-familiar experience of a woman's body in crime-ridden societies, but at the same time, it represents an element of a survival instinct in women as they fight to recover control of their bodies. The fact that the girl in question manages to escape demonstrates that defencelessness and confrontation can be found in the same body of the victim.

However, the main storyline of the text is centred on Clare's investigation of a serial killer and rapist in Cape Town. The narrative is spurred by the main events which consist of the successive discovery of the three dead bodies of young women who are found dumped in different parts of Cape Town. The first body is that of Charnay Swanepoel who is found dumped on the promenade, followed by that of Amore Hendricks which is discovered dumped between the rocks in the sea. The last body which is discovered amongst the beach palm trees is that of India King. The narrator comments that "[t]he way the two bodies of Charnay and Amore they had found so far had been arranged, and the symbolism of the wounds — almost like stigmata — pointed to a killer who made careful preparations" (113). Besides, what is common about the bodies is the way they have been specifically and visibly arranged in similar coquettish poses, each with "tarty clothes", "bound hand" and a "key" (9). It is when Hart follows the trail of dead bodies of these young teenage girls that she is led into Cape Town's underground sex trade where she concurrently interviews abused women for her documentary on sex trafficking and investigates the murder cases. The serial killer is Otis Tohar, the wealthy businessman and the proprietor of Isis Clubs and Isis Productions, a company that is involved in the production of pornographic films. The pervasiveness of the abused female body in crimes such as murder, human trafficking and pornography is quite pronounced in this text.

By making Hart her protagonist, Orford deliberately displaces the male body which traditionally has been at the forefront of crime fiction and the investigation process. When the reader is introduced to Hart, she has just finished making a documentary on the "implosion in eastern Congo" where peacekeepers were "exchanging food aid for sex" (*Like Clockwork*, 12). Making documentary films provides Hart with a platform which allows her to

break new ground and to open up spaces that mute the narratives of abused female bodies. Her character troubles the regulation and silence that define women's bodies as the gendered Other. She does this by giving voices to the unheard or suppressed voices of women who, in war situations, are the victims. By participating in the documentary films women find the voice to articulate their stories which have been stifled by the war. Notably, on the silencing of women, Harvey (1992, 4) concludes that the "voice is used as a powerful metaphor for the rebirth of what has been suppressed by patriarchal culture." In this text, patriarchy is represented as the attempts by men to own, control and discipline female bodies. For instance, war stories have generally been silent on the abuses that women endure — something that Hart's documentary on Congo seeks to unearth or redress. This is a theme that seems to provide a common ground for the female characters in the novel as they struggle against patriarchy in order to describe the gender abuse they have experienced, and express their own control and power over their bodies.

The above is clearly exemplified by the character of Natalie Mwanga. Initially, her voice is suppressed as she is trafficked from the Congo and forced to participate in pornographic films where she had to engage in sexual acts with different men while being filmed. The documentary produced by Hart transforms her from being a victim of abuse to an emancipated woman with a voice to speak the unspeakable of sexual violence by breaking the silence over such a violation of her body. This creates an opportunity for Natalie to rewrite the story of gender violence which had been imprinted on her body and to counteract the omission of her story in the pornographic films where she always "did things" (47). She says to Hart: "Maybe if you find that film you will bring it back to me so that I can stop [doing things]" (47). This means that in the film she is forced to engage in sexual acts with men.

It is evident that Natalie's story is not only meant to inspire other women in similar conditions to break the silence and reclaim their voices, but it represents the recovery of her rights to her body. In this sense, Hart's documentary films act as recovery spaces that empower women and other victims of gender violence to regain the ownership rights to their bodies by de-silencing the quietude that is imposed by the 'intimacy' of sexual violence. Besides, in the text, since

documentary films create new narratives, they can be seen as antithetical to metanarratives of disempowerment and cultural embeddedness of sexual violence which are propagated by pornographic films. In other words, documentary films give the silenced voices of women like Natalie the expressive power that is denied by the pornographic films.

In the text, the camera plays an ambiguous role in immortalising gender violence on women's bodies and, at the same time, it is used as an instrument to counter the metanarratives around female victimhood. In different ways, the characters of Hart, Natalie Mwangi, Cathy King, Theresa and Whitney demonstrate how the camera is both an instrument of oppression and a powerful tool of emancipation from gender violence. At the hands of men, the camera is employed to produce pornographic films which feature trafficked women who are coerced into participating in such films. In producing such films, the cameramen and the director have the power to decide how the women should and should not behave during the shoot. In other words, they decide how sexual violence should be enacted or performed on the women's bodies. This is aptly captured in the following conversation between Whitney and Hart when they are travelling to a safe house where Whitney would be safe from the gang members who were haunting her. Initially, she tells Hart that: "[The director] told them what to do. Sometimes he told them to do the things again. Then again." She continues telling Hart about the part played by the director in scripting sexual violence on the bodies of their victims:

'He filmed it. He had a camera. I think two cameras. One I saw when they first brought me in. I saw myself reflected in its eye: it stood there on a tripod. Like another one of them. First, they made me put on some boots —very high. I couldn't stand properly in them. And then it all started. But the other man, I saw him come out of the corner of the room where it was dark. He had another camera in his hands.'

'I thought he would help me.' Whitney laughed bitterly.

"Who was he?" Clare asked.

"He was a director. That's what they called him. He was telling them what to do. To me. He came right close to my face when they..." [...]. "When they hurt me. He liked to watch my face. Then he would make them do it again — what they were doing to me — so he could film that too" (207-208).

The nameless director was responsible for scripting violence on Whitney's body by instructing her violators to gang-rape her and repeat their actions while being filmed. This echoes Natalie's earlier words that in the films she was 'doing things', but it emerges that those things were being done on the bodies of women such as Whitney, Natalie and Cathy as well as the dead girls like Amore, India and Charnay. It was always the director who gave instructions to the men on what to do on the bodies of women, and how to inflict violence on them until he was satisfied with their actions. In such instances, the camera is used as a tool to capture the bodies of women in the moment of being crudely inscribed with gender violence. Thus, in such films, women are forced to perform sexual acts according to a script in the hands (or mind) of the director.

For human traffickers, pornographic films are a low risk and highly lucrative venture with high returns/profits as Kevin Landman says to Hart during an interview: "[One can] sell the same girl over and over again [because she] doesn't get tired, doesn't get her fucking period, doesn't get thirsty" (161). The director of a shelter for abused women, Shazneem, tells Hart that "[t]he return on an investment [on human trafficking] ...requires the smallest capital outlay — a plane ticket or a taxi ride and a bribe. It is limited only by the number of clients a body can service" (42). The point to note is that pornographic films frequently dispossess women of the control of their bodies as they are forced to perform sexual acts without their consent. It seems the preference of pornographic films over prostitution lies in the fact that the likes of Kelvin Landman view the female body as an inconvenience because of the monthly menstrual periods since the body has to undergo the "fucking period" (161)—something that is absent from pornographic films. On this issue of the treatment of the human skin (body), Connor (2001, 38) observed that "[s]adomasochistic pornography [...] shows the skin itself already shadowed by its disfiguration — tightly bound, caged and barred by fetishistic clothing, menaced by blade, stiletto or whip, or indeed actually bearing the marks of punishment." This is reflected in the way Otis Tohar forces his victims to wear ill-fitting boots and clothes, and even beats them before filming them for his pornographic films.

In addition, Whitney and Natalie articulate the way pornographic films mute women's voices, strip them of the ownership of their bodies, freeze them in a state of victimhood and doubly

violate them. They reveal that women are filmed against their will and the films are played over and over, and watched by different male clients in whose hands the films land, thereby repeating the violation again and again. For instance, Natalie confesses that she was “very afraid of the camera” (46) because, in the film, she was forced to participate in sexual acts even though she was a married woman. There is an element of being indecently touched even in instances where the person is not physically present because the man who owns the film can replay the pornographic scenes whenever he feels like it, pause it wherever he deems fit and drool. Hence, Whitney asks Hart some pertinent questions: “What was it for, Clare? Why did they do it? Why did they film it?”. She also adds: the whole situation “makes me feel sick [because] they did that to me and now it’s there for anyone to watch. It feels as if what happened is happening over and over. I can never stop it now because it’s on their tape” (208). The pornographic film thrives on voyeuristic images which position women as objects of sexual gratification and men as voyeurs.

Seemingly, the camera is empowered to objectify the female bodies. Hart further asserts that “when you have a camera you have power” (13). This implies that by possessing a camera which she uses to produce documentary films, Hart usurps the power from men who use it to produce pornographic films. However, she is mindful that people does not realise the power of the media. She does not think that “people can tell the difference between a documentary and reality television” (13). She is ashamed of “how intense the pleasure [is] to be had from [such] power” (13). The immediate implication here is that, even though power accrues from handling a camera, Hart is aware that such power is oftentimes abused and misused to further entrench gender violence on the bodies of women. It is against this backdrop that Hart decides to produce a documentary film on human trafficking by engendering a space of articulation for women who are usually the victims of such an activity. This puts Clare in a precarious position as her sister Julie warns thus: “Be careful, Clare. [...] investigating those guys is like poking a wasp’s nest” (13). This means that women like Hart pose a serious threat to patriarchal powers of inscription that are effected through the use of a camera. Holding a camera provides Hart with the means to tell women’s stories that allow for the repositioning of the female bodies in the discourse of gender violence. It seems the human traffickers are also aware of the shift in power when Hart uses the camera to probe their activities by bringing them into the spotlight. They react with veiled and

open threats as they ironically try to ensure that their activities are not captured on camera like those of their victims.

One aspect which illustrates the 'unbearable intimacy' of violence is the perpetrator's signature carved on the back of Constance, Clare's sister. The significance of Constance to the narrative is that as Clare looks at herself, she sees her ghost-body (Constance) in the mirror. In particular, she sees the perpetrator's violence in the way Constance's body is "[c]riss-crossed with scars, her thighs and breasts carried the knife emblems of the gang that had used her to initiate two new members" (51). Such crude imprints are meant to intertwine the woman's fate with that of her tormentor(s) so that she is constantly reminded of the violence. To further depict the markings of victimhood on the female bodies, Clare sees the following:

On [Constance's] back, illegible now, were brutal signatures where [the gang members] had carved their initials. Her left cheekbone was curved as sharply as a starling's wing, the other had been reconstructed out of the shattered mess left by a hammer blow that had glanced off her skull and spared her life (51).

Significantly, it seems that, after being crudely violated, the female body is reconstructed and repaired as a way to overcome the effect of gender violence. The reconstruction of Constance's shattered cheekbone symbolises the regeneration of the female body. Though she appears broken by the violence, her body shows resilience through her unbreakable spirit that helps her to move from victimhood to recovery as she survived a gruesome rape and physical violence. Clare reveals that, despite being hit with a hammer and gang-raped, her sister does not only remain alive, but recovers as shown by "her hip-length hair [which hid] a shattered face and the cold snake of fear coiled inside her thin body" (51). She, therefore, transgresses the perpetrator-victim bond which results from her body having been marked or tattooed with gender violence.

The story written on Constance's body ceases to be her tormentors' stories of rites of passage as she turns the story into one of survival against all odds. The regeneration of Constance's body defies Binder's (2021, 54) claim that "victims will never be able to shed the perpetrator's stamp, making it impossible for them to move beyond the traumatic event [because] indelible scars are suggestive of lifelong victimhood, particularly if they mirror psychological damage." This is

echoed towards the end of the novel, when we learn that “Constance Hart is heading home [t]o a house she has not returned to in the twenty years since Kelvin Landman began his career by carving his mark on her back” (317). This signifies the completion of the recovery circle as she returns to her original home after having stayed at a place of safety for abused women for a number of years. Women like Constance are able to undo the reproduction and continuance of victimhood represented by bodily markings. Thus, the man’s stronghold on the female body needs to be broken for gender violence to be understood and for women to free their bodies from patriarchal control.

In the novel, the character of Constance is contrasted with that of Whitney. They both suffered horrific violence at the hands of men when they were gang-raped and tattooed with the gangsters’ signatures. Like Constance, Whitney endured “a sexual assault perpetrated by several different people” (141). Of importance is that Orford presents the abused female bodies together in order to illustrate their symbolical and physical interconnectedness as a result of shared trauma that arises out of gender violence. The revelation of Constance’s trauma permits Whitney to narrate their story of healing as she is able to instantly connect with Constance. When they met for the first time, “Whitney wet her finger on her tongue and traced the marks like an artist tracing a pattern she knew by heart” (235). Unlike Clare, who does not seem to understand or read the pattern made by the markings on Constance’s back, Whitney is able to “read it” (235) because the patterns echo her own story. Whitney’s body is defined in relation to that of Constance which allows her to find healing through tracing the scars on Constance’s body. It is only after meeting Constance that Whitney finds her inner strength to confront the man who instigated the violence inflicted on her body in order to find closure. The novel ends with Whitney, with the help of Constance, shooting Kelvin Landman, which brings to full circle the process of healing. In short, despite the crude inscriptions of masculinity on female bodies in the form of scars, wounds, bruises and tattoos, women like Constance and Whitney work together to reclaim the stories written on their bodies.

What is particularly interesting when considering Orford’s representation of gender violence is the way she shows that such violence can be found everywhere. A ‘home’ is ceased to be a safe

haven from crime-related gender violence. This is evident in the vulnerability of the female body as exemplified by Portia Qaba, the housekeeper at the King residence, who tells Hart that “[t]he danger is in this house—it is right inside” (218). In addition, while at the Kings’ residence, the narrator says that: “Hart tested the bolt on the inside of the door [to India King’s bedroom]. It was clear that an amateur handyman had installed it. Or an unpractised girl” (212). This is contrasted to the security features that surrounded the Kings’ residence as shown by the “[s]ecurity beams [which] were discerningly positioned everywhere” (218) to identify danger and prevent it. Despite all these security features, danger looms in the house as much as there is danger outside which claims India’s life. On the other hand, after enduring the horrific gang rape instigated by her husband in their home, Cathy commits suicide. Both Cathy and her daughter India die after being abused in private and public spaces. Another female character, Tatiana, is abused within the safety of her home. However, instead of remaining fixated in a state of victimhood, Tatiana takes the decision to leave her position as a trophy wife to Otis Tohar by reclaiming her freedom from a life marked with “bruises blooming like bracts of irises up her arms” (98). With Hart’s assistance, she finds refuge in a shelter for abused women.

As mentioned earlier, a number of scholars have argued that, by creating female investigators, women writers directly challenge masculinist tendencies of crime fiction in which the detective is always a man. Hart is initially seen as a female investigator which in itself does not challenge the masculinist issues in the text. However, as the novel progresses, Hart is seen playing a significant role, attending to wider social justice, and taking a leading role as a crime profiler in investigating the deaths of three young women, culminating in the arrest of the serial killer. She also plays a significant role in the attempts by women to reclaim proprietorship over their bodies. The female investigator contests patriarchy and its assumptions of power distribution in the society by redefining the essence of the female bodies. Instead of being treated as powerless, a woman like Hart is seen as occupying a powerful position in the society as an investigator and a documentary maker. As a female investigator, Hart is committed to searching for justice for the victims of gender violence. Subsequently, since she is not the “domestic type” (12), Hart is depicted as a mediator between the powerful male body and the supposedly powerless female body. She is in a position where she can resist and defend herself against gender violence.

In her text, Orford tries to transform gender relations by re-defining the space occupied by the bodies of female characters in a crime-ridden environment. Her female characters disrupt the restrictions imposed on the women's bodies by the patriarchal order as they seek to broaden the space traditionally assigned to them. These women explore alternative ideas of social justice and various notions of power and self-determination. The ownership of one's body is a socially determined capacity to choose to perform one's gender in a particular way. This is shown by the way women disturb gender roles that patriarchy ascribes to their bodies by undermining and transgressing culturally crafted boundaries which consign women to the lower categories of society. Orford's description of the women demonstrates new ways of (re)writing the female body as she depicts characters that rise above their victimhood by reasserting their place within the society of the text. Such women include Constance, Theresa, Whitney, Natalie, Tatiana and Cathy, who perform their genders in subversive and transformative ways.

With regard to female bodies, I argue that, similar to the 'living bodies', dead bodies are invested with the capacity to break their silence by revealing the identity of the killer to the crime profilers like Hart and forensic experts like Dr Piet Mouton. Their tasks lie in a meaningful reading of the signs emitted by the dead body. Orford's intention here is to eke out space for the victims of gender violence by allowing the dead bodies to speak. Indeed, dead bodies speak 'a different language' which can only be understood by immersing oneself into the lives of deceased persons' moments prior to their death. In order to comprehend the empathetic language 'uttered' by the dead bodies, Hart has to decipher any signs that the victim's body emits as it tells the story of who the killer is. The dead bodies in *Like Clockwork* are far from totally surrendering control to the murderer(s) as they speak on their own terms because the investigator relies on the victim's body to find the clues that lead to the resolution of the crime. On the issue regarding reading the signs emitted by a corpse, Anusauskaite concludes that "[b]y imagining what the victim might have been feeling, and what he/she was *like*, the investigator can gather more information about the case" (Anusauskaite 2016, 137; emphasis in the original). In a like manner, Hart imagines the life moments of the deceased before their deaths as she tries to establish the identity of the killer by visiting the homes of the victims like India King.

Further, Hart visits the homes of the murdered young women to decipher hidden signs so as to stitch together the life stories marked on the dead bodies. A stitched story allows her to solve the cases of serial murders. In order to know the victims of the crime, she tries to understand their emotional states in the days leading to their deaths. The following excerpt from the text is one of the instances that illustrates the way a dead body emits signs that Hart reads as part of her job as a crime profiler. The point here is that dead bodies ‘speak’ without the killers intending them to, hence the narrator says that Hart notices that:

[The dead girl’s] throat had been precisely, meticulously sliced through. ... She lay spread-eagled on the promenade in full view of anyone who cared to look. Her face was child-like in death, dark hair rippling in the breeze. Blood, pooled and dried in the corners of her eyes, streaked her right cheek like tears. Her exposed breasts gestured towards womanhood. One slender arm was lifted straight above her head; the fingers of the left hand were extended, like a supplicant’s. The right hand— its fingers clenched— had been bound with blue rope, and rested on her lap (*Like Clockwork*, 9).

Hart deciphers from the dead body signs such a ‘slit throat’, ‘crusted blood’ in the eyeball, ‘placement of the body’ and ‘marks on bare arms.’ These signs help her to establish whether such a death was an act of random violence or that a serial killer was on the loose as well as the place where the murder was committed. After studying the placement of the body, she tells Riedwaan who is a police officer that “[i]t’s too neat...too arranged [and] there’s no blood. It doesn’t look to me like an argument over price that went wrong” (15-16). After reading the signs, Hart is able to conclude that the dead girl was neither a victim of random violence nor a transactional worker who had an argument with her client which led to her death. She concludes that a serial killer was on the prowl. Thus, rather than remaining silent in death, the dead bodies of Charnay, and, later on, those of India King and Amore Hendricks break their silence by offering clues that eventually lead to the arrest of the serial killer, Otis Tohar. Hart with “her unorthodox methods” (16) is described as one person who reads bodies for a living and is complemented by Piet Mouton who is nicknamed “Doctor Death” (21), who “had [a] bag of tricks” which helped him to open any secrets hidden in the body” (Orford, *Blood Rose*, 45).

In this context, the vulnerable and violated, yet eroticised body reveals the intersection between violent crime and gender which is played out on the dead bodies of women. However, an

analysis of the depiction of the dead bodies in *Like Clockwork* requires one to provide an answer to the question which forms part of the title of this chapter: whose story of gender violence is inscribed on her dead body? As a response to this question, I posit that it is the story of women that is firmly written on the female body. The moment the story is inscribed on their bodies, it ceases to be owned by the tormentor since women appropriate it as a catalyst for regaining control of their bodies. The dead body is not a simple part of murder statistics, but it actively speaks through the signs it emits which assist investigators like Hart to profile the killer. Though violent crimes lead to the vulnerability of female bodies, Orford's text is predicated on the capacities of women to disrupt and transgress essentialised repetitions of female victimhood. Even those dead bodies of women that pervade the public spaces exhibit potentialities to undermine their traditional victimhood. The dead bodies of Charnay Swanepoel, Amore Hendricks and India King deconstruct their victimhood by helping to establish the identity of the serial killer. In *Like Clockwise*, gender performance is an important transgressive strategy that enables women to redefine the narratives which are written on their bodies. This results in an emancipating feminist empowerment as women reclaim their bodies from patriarchal ownership.

Furthermore, another important point to consider in *Like Clockwork* is the depiction of women who do not easily accept their precarity without attempting to fight back to reclaim their bodies from the clutches of the victimiser(s). For instance, after being captured by Otis Tohar who earmarks her for death, Theresa Angelo, like Whitney in the *Prologue*, rises above a state of powerlessness by disrupting the narrative which defines female victimhood. For Theresa, the position of precarity becomes a resource that she turns to so as to stay alive and fight back against her captor. She realises that she has a chance at surviving by engaging her victimiser in a conversation and asking him questions that unsettle him. Commenting on Theresa's resolve to use her voice to eke out a vocabulary of survival, the narrator says: "She might survive if she kept her wits about her. If she kept talking. It seemed to throw the man off the mark" (292). By being inquisitive, she succeeds in unnerving Otis Tohar as the narrator reveals that he admits that Theresa was different from his other three victims because "[s]he wasn't obedient like the other girls [and] ...was making the sequence of the film in his head go awry" (298). It is evident that, by

asking unsettling questions such as “Is this where you brought the other girls?” (292), she manages to gradually assert her power over Otis Tohar, thereby unnerving and throwing him off the rehearsed script of tormenting and filming his victim before killing her. The following passage is one example of how Theresa uses the conversational mode as a strategy that allows her buy more survival time as demonstrated in the following conversation between her and her captor, Otis:

‘Who are you?’ [Theresa] asked him. ‘Why have you brought me here?’
‘Do you like movies?’ [Otis] asked, as if she had not spoken at all.

‘Yes,’ Theresa said. She would try something else. ‘I’m cold,’ she said. ‘Do you think I could have my clothes?’ (291.)

He looked at her naked body. But Theresa’s question had shifted something. Very briefly, he lost the power to direct the interaction. Theresa felt the movement deep within the chrysalis of hope she was holding fast (292).

As can be seen from the above conversation, Theresa succeeds in gaining an edge over Otis who seems to be momentarily thrown off balance by the former’s probing questions. With his previous victims, Otis had managed to use fear to enlist their submissiveness, but Theresa presents him with a new challenge he had not anticipated. Even when he uses violence to try and silence her, she courageously improvises by employing a ploy such as pretending to go along with the tormentor’s script, using sex to entice him as well as keeping the conversation going. She says to him, “Let’s make love first. [...]. Let’s make love and then watch your film” (299). This is not a genuine offer, but an attempt to use her bodily precarity to confront her captor as a strategy or a resource of staying alive. Earlier on Theresa had asked more questions and demanded to know the girl in one of the films she was being forced to watch. The below conversation illustrates this:

‘Who is this one about?’ she asked.

‘You’ll see now,’ he said. ‘Just give it to me.’

‘Tell me about her. I want to know who she is, what her name is. Tell me. [...]. I want to know who it is. I want to know why you have me here. I want you let me go home.’ (298).

In the excerpt, she starts by asking a simple question on the identity of the girl in the film which Otis wants her to watch, but she goes on to demand more answers from him. The word 'want' is used four times in the excerpt to express Theresa's firm desire, not only to know the girl's name, but to reassert control over her body which infuriates the tormentor. Her fight to stay alive can be viewed as an act of undoing patriarchal norms that consign women to a position of victimhood. In this respect, Butler (2015, 29) concludes that "norms are not simply imprinted on us, marking and branding us like so many passive recipients of a culture machine [because] those very modes of embodiment can prove to be ways of contesting those norms even breaking with them." The contestation of restrictive norms is evidenced by the revelation of what was going on in Otis's mind as he notes that "She [Theresa] wasn't doing things properly" (298). In anger, he violently hits her and she falls down. In the process, she subsequently catches him unawares by striking him twice with a stone she picked from the floor of the cabin. This gives her an opportunity to escape from his stranglehold. Interesting to note is that women in South Africa are sometimes referred to as a 'rock' or a 'stone' (*imbokodo*) which is what Theresa ironically uses to break free from the jaws of death.

In the text, violence against women is further normalised by the patriarchal system which employs such violence as a legitimate means to discipline women's bodies. Perpetrators justify the violence against women as something that women deserve. It is important to consider how patriarchy normalises gender violence even at the level of language, hence the notion of a 'grammar of violence'. This language of violence is evidenced by the way the character of Brian King emotionally and verbally assaults his wife in the name of disciplining her. In one such typical incident, Brian abuses, controls and disciplines his wife when he says:

'You idiot...That little slut is probably fucking herself silly. Just like her dumb bitch of a mother would, given half a chance. Make sure you do nothing to embarrass me. I'll see she learns her lesson when she does come home. You don't fucking move. You hear me?' (*Like Clockwork*, 165-166).

What emerges from the above quotation is the way violence is accepted as a verbal act that offers men like Brian King impunity to verbally assault his wife. In the above extract, Brian calls

his wife an 'idiot', a 'bitch', and his step-daughter, a 'slut'. These words are used as a way of degrading and shaming the female bodies so that women like Cathy King will lose control of their bodies. It is not only Brian King who describes women as sluts or bitches since the likes of Kelvin Landman and Otis Tohar use the same words when referring to their mothers. It is this misogyny that spurs the crime-related gender violence to become firmly imprinted on women's bodies as violent masculinities seek to assert authority, exert control and demand obedience from women.

In this text, various terms have been used to describe women's bodies in addition to the ones quoted above. Far from being ennobling terms, these words are used to degrade women's bodies. The bodies are depicted as tradable as denoted by words such as "new consignment" (7), "fresh delivery" (8), and "a present" (281). They are dispensable as shown by terms such as "sluts" and "bitches" as well as under the ownership of men through the use of possessive pronouns like "my" in "my girls" (220). These words serve to illustrate that female corporeality is under siege from various forms of gender violence that men employ to access, control and discipline these bodies. Even young boys believe that they have rights over women's bodies as attested by an incident where Hart witnesses a group of boys accosting a young girl. They subject her to unwarranted touching with one boy's hand groping inside her dress and they only stop when Hart blows the horn of her car. The terrified girl simply picks up her things and runs away. Such seemingly mundane activities demonstrate how boys are socialised to treat the body of a woman as an object they can play with without repercussions. This kind of behaviour is a result of how the boys have been culturally taught to treat femininity or the female body with condescension. In a separate incident, the man who discovers the third dead body of a young woman fondles her breasts and only stops when he realises that she is dead. Dead or not, he felt he had rights as a man to do so. The reader is even told that it was a long time since he had paid to touch a woman which further attests to the notion of women's bodies as tradable.

In analysing *Like Clockwork* within the context of gender violence, it is also useful to situate the male characters such as Kelvin Landman and Otis Tohar in relation to the way they perform hegemonic masculinities to the detriment of women's bodies. It is crucial to consider how men try to fix women's bodies in victimhood. The hegemonic or violent masculinity that Kelvin

Landman performs is one of the various gender strands that are meant to subjugate women by keeping them in positions that efface the control that women have over their bodies. This is evidenced by the power Kelvin wields over women who work in his establishments to the extent that they fear rather than respect him. One of Landman's girls tells Hart she was forced to abort her baby and the next day she was back on the streets to make more money for him. In this instance, Kelvin has the final decision on the reproductive rights of his female employees as he considered falling pregnant an unforgivable aberration as it affects his profit motive. Such a situation puts the woman's body in a state of precarity at the hands of profit-seeking male bodies. However, what emerges clearly in the so-called 'Fetish Night' that is held at Landman's club, is how women are forced to be complicit in brutally writing violence on other women's bodies for the sexual gratification of a mostly male audience. The narrator describes what happens during the 'Fetish Night' thus:

A spotlight cut through the darkness, illuminating a girl, naked apart from the intricate metal bondage gear biting hungrily where her flesh was softest. She was tightly blindfolded. Her tongue glistened red behind her parted lips. Two corseted women, strapped into high, shiny boots, stepped out of the darkness to spreadeagle her and handcuff her to a pole. Both held whips that they flicked first across their hands and then across the girl's breasts. The sound cracked sharply in the silence, and the girl's nipples stood erect. [...]. The strobe turned slowly tattooing the girl with flickering pornographic inanities. Each new word brought fresh blows from the stiletto-heeled dominatrixes. The girl writhed, either in faked agony or orgasm (159-160).

There is a deliberate effort to use the female body as a means with which to gratify male predatory sexual fantasies. Not only is the girl stripped naked, but even the metal bondage gear she is wearing is used to further inflict pain on her. Additionally, the whip is an instrument that crudely marks the body with violence which none of the men are subjected to. In the above passage, phrases such as "biting hungrily where her flesh was softest" and 'cracked sharply' combine with words like 'flicked', 'tattooing' and 'writhed' to graphically present how gender violence is inscribed on bodies of women in order to please the paying male audience who are obviously enjoying the scene. What is interesting is the narrator's comment that "[t]he girl writhed, either in faked agony or orgasm" which seems to suggest that both the 'agony' and

'orgasm' that the girl displayed were 'stage-managed' or falsified to satiate male sexual fantasies.

What is notable when considering the issue of traumatic childhood is the way this trauma is inscribed on the innocent bodies of women in both texts (*Like Clockwork* and *Red Ink*). It is in this light that Otis Tohar's characterisation in the text needs to be analysed. The trauma here and in *Red Ink* is manifested in the way Otis Tohar (*Like Clockwork*) and Napoleon and Sifiso (*Red Ink*, as I demonstrate later) inflict violence on women whom they later murder. It becomes clear in *Like Clockwork* that the serial killer, Otis Tohar, is repeating the childhood trauma that he had to endure at the hands of his father. Like Napoleon and Sifiso in *Red ink*, he chooses the female bodies as the turf on which to perform his manhood. Otis Tohar's father, a medical doctor, subjected him to the most inhumane torture method while his sister was forced to watch this spectacle without being able to help him due to her own helplessness. His father would beat him to a "point where [Otis] lost control of his bladder or bowels — their father, the great surgeon, would lift his daughter's skirt and make a precise incision alongside each of the others that marked the boy's beatings" (312). Arguably, such an upbringing illustrates the way Otis was taught to view the female body as a canvas on which to inscribe violence as seen by the incisions his father made on his sister's body.

This traumatic childhood experience culminated in Otis's emasculation, which made him feel inadequate especially in the presence of women. As a result, violence becomes his own way of rearticulating his male power. This is shown when he uses violence against his sister who becomes his first victim as he tries to re-assert himself as a man in a society in which he has been severely tortured and emasculated. The power that Otis' father wielded over him may be read as hegemonic masculinity which is a type of masculinity that is intolerant of subordinate masculinities and femininities. Thus, by committing violent crimes such as killing young women and displaying their bodies in public places for anyone to see, Otis Tohar is seeking to recover the ownership of his body that his father took away from him when he was young. Indeed, in this case Otis Tohar becomes a serial killer due to the unconscious repetition of a trauma experienced in his childhood.

In the above discussion, childhood abuse endured by Otis at the hands of his father has been considered. It is now important to note that Orford employs back stories to illustrate the ubiquity of violence in present day South Africa that is depicted in her text. In the course of her investigations, Hart encounters incidents that reveal the pervasiveness of gender violence in the world of the text. In one such incident, she notices a tattoo that had been inscribed on both Whitney's back and the dead girl's, resembled the one that Whitney's mother, Florrie, had. The narrator tells the reader that Hart noticed the "same distinctive tattoo on the tender skin inside [Florrie Ruiters's] elbow" (151) that the gang members inscribe on their victims. Before noticing the unmistakable tattoo on Florrie's elbow, Hart had shown her a photograph, remarking that: "That is the tattoo that Kelvin Landman marks his girls with. It was on a girl who was murdered" (150). Another woman who bears the same tattoo is Tatiana: "On [Tatiana's] exposed neck was the tattoo: two verticals scored through with an X" (98). The tattoos are distinct bodily markings of gender violence used by gangsters like Kelvin Landman to mark their sphere of influence on the bodies of women.⁵

However, female bodies marked with tattoos are not always docile, but employ the vulnerability of their bodies as a strategy to forcefully disturb the patriarchal norms that normalise the violence crudely inscribed on them. On this note, Connell (1995, 64) concludes that bodies are not blank spaces on which cultural messages are written, but are "addressed by social process and drawn into history, without ceasing to be bodies, they do not turn into symbols, signs or positions in discourse". Thus, most of the women in this text bear the signatures of the perpetrators of violence evidenced by the fact that the bodies of these women are scarred, tattooed, wounded and bruised by violent male bodies. Despite these visible markings of gender violence on female bodies, women characters in the novel actively resist, cope with and respond to gender violence rather than being merely hapless victims as demonstrated by female characters such as Constance and Whitney who save each other from victimhood, whilst Theresa, Natalie and Tatiana are rescued by Clare. The significance of doing gender in a

⁵ I argue that the gangster tattoos resemble the branding that farmers use on livestock to indicate ownership. Once you see a particular mark on a stray animal, you will be able to trace the unique mark back to its owner. However, in *Like Clockwork*, tattoos do not stop women from rebelling against their tormentors and re-claiming ownership of their bodies.

subversive manner resonates with the contention that women are no longer the traditional victims who need men to save them from victimhood.

Consequently, in *Like Clockwork*, a number of women are depicted doing non-normative femininity which disturbs the otherness of the female body as well as collapses the gendered body borderlines. Besides, subversive gender performance enables women to realise that they can move out of victimhood that ensues from gender violence. Whilst women share the commonness of victimhood that results from gender violence, they variously repossess the stories inscribed on their bodies. While men like Kelvin and Otis show how the arrangement of the gender system positions them above their victims, women, led by Clare, appropriate resilient gender identities. They do this by debunking traditional victimhood which is mainly seen as a patriarchal construct.

Having discussed the representation of the female bodies in the *Like Clockwork*, at this juncture I then analyse female bodies in *Red Ink* which I equate to *landscapes of gender violence especially looking at how women were terrorized by brothers with one of them earning the nickname of 'The Butcher.'* It was a nickname that accrues from how he murdered women.

Female Bodies as Landscapes of Gender Violence in *Red Ink*

Makholwa's *Red Ink*, which is narrated in the third person, is the story of Lucy Sibongile Khambule, a young woman and former journalist who works as one of the public relations executives at The Publicists, owned by Patricia Moabelo. Lucy Khambule is also a black investigator who is tough, humorous, strongly independent, intelligent, yet vulnerable to gender violence. Her portrayal in the text challenges the masculinist image of the investigator who is usually a loner because Lucy is surrounded by friends and family. When she works with Police Detective Morapedi to investigate a series of murders of people close to her, it is because she wants to attain social justice for the victims of crime. However, it is the chance to realise her dream of becoming a writer that lands Lucy into the world of sociopaths. This opportunity materialises when she unexpectedly receives a phone call from a convicted dangerous serial killer and rapist, Napoleon Dingiswayo, who is serving a life sentence at Maximum Security

Prison C-Max in Pretoria. His phone call drastically changes Lucy's trajectory as it puts her life and the lives of the people close to her in great danger. However, Napoleon wants her to write his biography because he believes that the media never afforded him the opportunity to tell his story, which led to the 'negative' images of him being flighted in the media during and after his trial. Soon after she agrees to write the life story of the infamous serial rapist and killer, a series of unexplained murders start happening.

In *Red Ink*, Angela Makholwa raises a number of issues pertaining to violent masculinities and concerted efforts made at dispossessing women of their bodies. In this light, Makholwa uses crime fiction to re-create the story of women's experiences of gender violence through a female protagonist. Like Orford, Makholwa creates a female sleuth as an instrument for women to regain their control over their bodies through recovering their voices oftentimes muted in masculinist crime fiction. Though one notices that most bodies of women in the text are marked with gender violence, the female protagonist, Lucy Khambule, is depicted as an empowered female subject who is in control of her body as much as she is economically independent and well-educated. She represents some form of social justice for women who are conventionally victims of gender violence. It is no small wonder that the two friends and business partners, Lucy and Patricia, find themselves being abused by their partners due to their successful careers, as illustrated later on.

Angela Makholwa's *Red Ink* further demonstrates that the violence inflicted on women's bodies is due to the performance of violent masculinities by men who had traumatic childhoods, as I seek to demonstrate. Whilst Orford briefly sketches the troubled childhood which might have turned Otis Tohar into a serial killer, Makholwa pursues this topic to include the childhood of two serial killers and rapists, the Dingiswayo brothers, Napoleon and Sifiso. As noted already, whilst Hart in *Like Clockwork* seeks to (re)construct the profile of a serial killer, Lucy Khambule in *Red Ink* chronicles the killers' lives by documenting their life story which turns to be a psychological study of sociopaths to understand the motives behind gender violence they perpetrate on female bodies. This results in the two brothers inflicting violence on female bodies as a way to deal with their traumatic childhood and find closure. As serial killers and rapists, Napoleon and

Sifiso are responsible for scripting female bodies with gender violence as an expression and reassertion of their masculinity.

Like Orford's *Like Clockwork*, *Red Ink* begins with a *Prologue* which paints a gloomy picture of the kind of gender violence that awaits women in the fictional world of the post-apartheid South African cultural matrix. Bodily precarity is captured in the opening sentence of the *Prologue* that states: "Busisiwe was nervous" (*Red Ink*, 1). She is the one of the victims that Siphoh (whom we learn later is Sifiso) savagely kills by mutilating her. Despite being a three-worded sentence, the implications are far-reaching for women who find themselves in precarious situations that threaten their safety due to the severity of gender violence. The reader is soon aware of the precarious state of the female body as one learns what is going through the mind of Siphoh who is Busisiwe's date, on the other side of the city. Her date is convinced that women "used men by exposing their flesh" and "[Busisiwe] probably carried diseases too" (4). The female body is described as 'diseased' which poses a threat to the male body. Besides, the female corporeal is reduced to 'flesh' which is used as a form of entrapment that allows women to get closer to men with the intention to infect them with deadly diseases. The state of bodily precarity is highlighted through the use of juxtaposition:

As she tossed aside the red outfit she had initially planned to wear, Siphoh decided to take the new hunting knife, which had been brought to him from the Congo, instead of his usual butcher's knife. At the moment that Busisiwe put on her lipstick, Siphoh packed the gloves he wore on these outings as a safety precaution. While she applied red nail polish to her toes, Siphoh took out the leather pouch he used to stock his other weapons, a small axe, a nine-millimetre pistol, some masking tape and a collection of smaller knives (3-4).

This passage portrays the danger that is inked in red on the bodies of women as the colour 'red' permeates the scene. Busisiwe's body is covered in red as shown by the red outfit and the red nail polish, and we are later told "her lips were smeared with red lipstick to go with her red skirt" (5). Whilst Busisiwe is readying herself for the date, Siphoh is arming himself with weapons of a hunter as he discards his butcher's knife for a hunting knife in addition to an assortment of knives, an axe and a pistol. His intention to shed blood symbolised by the colour 'red' worn by Busisiwe, is not hard to notice as the weapons he carries were hardly what one would carry on a

date. In the *Prologue*, Makholwa moves away from the state of anonymity where the names of the victim and perpetrator remain unknown to the reader by naming the two figures in the gender violence configuration as Busisiwe and Siphso.

Right from the beginning it is evident that the image of a woman's body disgusts Siphso who makes it his sole mission to save men from the 'evil' that is embodied in the female figure. He is convinced that he has a moral responsibility towards men who are at the mercy of a supposedly 'diseased' female body which can only be stopped from infecting the male body by an act of elimination. While on the other side of the city, Siphso is expressing his distaste towards the female body, his supposed date, Busisiwe, is accentuating her femininity so as to appear attractive in his eyes. Though both Siphso's and Busisiwe's focus is on the (female) body, it is obvious that they have divergent views on the image of the 'body' which exposes such a body to great danger. The irony here lies in that Busisiwe's aim is to impress her date whereas her date sees her body as some form of trap into which he will not fall. The omniscient narrator captures what is going on in Siphso's mind as he drives Busisiwe to a supposed date:

Did she really think that he would be interested in a woman like her? He felt nothing for women. Only one thing interested him. It still surprised him how many he had killed without anyone paying any attention. He was untouchable.

At that moment, Busisiwe saw him. He noticed her lips were smeared with red lipstick to go with her red and white dress. She was a slut, just like his mother had been. He wondered if, like his mother, she had a love for the bottle. Oh well, there would be no time to find out.

[...]

Like he always told his brother, women are natural-born whores, no matter what you do to try and save them. (4-5).

In the passage, there is a clear attempt to reduce the female body to its constituent parts instead of treating it as a whole unit or an entity. Earlier on in the *Prologue*, there is a mention of "partly exposed breasts" (4), before moving to the "[smeared] lips", "high-pitched voice", "fake mannerisms" and the "smell" in the above excerpt. More so, the use of words such as 'slut' and 'whores' builds up an image of a diseased body which needs to be dismembered to save it from self-destruction. It is through this debasement of a woman's body that men like Siphso justify the

killing of women as they seek to save the women from themselves as well as assert their power over them. In order to save women and assert power over them, gender violence is firmly written on the body of a woman using the language of violence to describe gendered bodies as illustrated in the above excerpt. In a twisted way, Siphso believes that by killing women, he is doing them a great favour of quickening their process of self-destruction which, for him, is inevitable. Added to that, later on in the text, Siphso/Sifiso⁶ chooses to reduce a woman's body to its individual parts. When he encounters Lucy at Mitzi's bar, he says to her: "You women are all the same. You think all it takes is showing your tits and twisting your hair" (150). By making constant reference to women's breasts, he shows that he is convinced that women use such body parts to entrap men, but as for him, he will not fall into such a trap as he says to Lucy: "Sorry missy, this boy does not play those games" (150).

However, in this short *Prologue*, the reader soon learns that Siphso spat and urinated on Busisiwe and proceeded to decapitate her, an act which is part of a series of other heinous, sadistic and violent crimes against women. In this brief encounter between Siphso and Busisiwe the image of the dismembered body is crystallised in the mind of the reader. The reader is made a witness to the most brutal form of gender violence as shown by the way Siphso proceeds to dismember Busisiwe whilst she is still alive and pinned to the ground. The desecration of Busisiwe's body begins with the way Siphso urinates on her before proceeding to emotionlessly and methodically mutilate her while she is still alive. As he slices her huge breasts, he repeatedly says to her: "You think these things impress me? What are these, you whore? You think they make you better? Better than who? Better than who, you bitch?" (7). This gratuitous violence which seems to be an unmistakable characteristic of violent masculinity is graphically described by the omniscient narrator:

When [Siphso] finished with her breasts, he left [Busisiwe] lying there, her body a river of blood, while he went to get the rest of his weaponry. With the small axe, he started knocking at the bones on her neck. He liked the nickname the press had given

⁶ Later in the text, Sifiso's modus operandi resembles that of the man who calls himself Siphso in the *Prologue*. On one hand, Sifiso does not rape his victims but prefers to savagely kill them by mutilating them. On the other hand, Napoleon is both a rapist and a killer.

him, The Butcher. It flattered him. He had never intended to behead all his victims, just those two in Benoni who had given him a hard time. But since then he had felt obliged to turn it into a trademark (7-8).

What is evident in the excerpt is the clear indication of the 'unacknowledged gender war' that exists between men and women in this text and, by extension, in the greater post-apartheid South African cultural milieu. After every kill, he triumphantly claims a 'souvenir' from his victims such as Busisiwe's red panties which serves to remind him of his conquest over yet another 'seductress'. The narrator concludes the *Prologue* thus: "Once he'd severed Busisiwe's head from her neck, took off her panties. Red. What a surprise" (8). One observes from the excerpt that gender violence is embedded within patriarchal structures that tend to accept violence as a manly trait as indicated by the nickname, 'The Butcher' which the media had given him. Instead of being appalled by such a nickname, he is 'flattered' after feeling a little uneasy and he "felt obliged to turn it into a trademark" (78) — more like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In the 'gendered war' between men and women alluded to above, there are evident war ingredients such as the elements of a surprise attack, pre-planning and anticipation of the reaction of the target as shown by Siphso. He dramatises his planned attack on Busisiwe which resonates with the way soldiers prepare for a war where they even second guess how the enemy might react to their attack. The narrator tells the reader that "Siphso fantasised about the attack. Would she resist? Would she fight him? What would her face look like?" (6). There is a deliberate and concerted attempt to inscribe the female body with acts of violent crimes such as murder that Siphso was rehearsing in his mind as he was driving an unsuspecting Busisiwe to a secluded place. These crimes violate the woman's body in that they wrench away the control that a woman has over her body by either dismembering or crudely mutilating it or by attacking women as if in a war situation. Siphso deflates the crime of murder that he was about to commit by viewing it as an 'attack' which could be resisted. In that way, he would feel justified to kill her if she resisted or fought back.

There is a way in which women's ownership of their bodies is depicted as the capacity to act against, resist and overcome gender violence that is inflicted on their bodies. In this light, the

female character's repossession of her body from being objectified and victimised by men entails subverting the meta-narratives that work against her attempts to move beyond merely resisting gender violence to an assertion of power without being restricted by her gender. It is in this context that the character of Lucy Sibongile Khambule needs to be understood. The first time we meet Lucy is in Chapter 1 which opens thus: "Lucy Khambule [is an] impeccably groomed public relations consultant, former journalist and single mother" (9). Her lifestyle is sharply contrasted with that of Busisiwe in the *Prologue*, since Busisiwe considers moving out of her parents' home as a form of empowerment and liberation. It took just one 'date' with a possible suitor for her to lose her life. Lucy, in contrast, is in a business partnership with Patricia and her single status liberates her by enabling her to have total control of her body. Unlike Busisiwe, Lucy does not need a man to rescue her from poverty. Despite this gulf between the two women, they are both vulnerable to gender violence. This implies that class does not insulate women against the possibility of being inflicted with gender violence. Also of importance is the conclusion by Murray (2016, 16) that "Lucy is just as exposed to misogynist assumptions about women and to the gender violence that flourishes in a society that is structured according to a deeply embedded hostility to women." However, what sets Lucy apart from Busisiwe is that she challenges the patriarchal assumptions of femininity and violent masculinity.

Makholwa's *Red Ink* attempts to grapple with the ethical issues of what made these men serial killers. Even though these men find moral justification for their action in their traumatic childhood, Makholwa does not minimise the gravity of their crimes. Traumatic childhood or not, the actions of serial killers and rapists are unpardonable as indicated when Sifiso is killed towards the end of the text. The serial killers and/or rapists commit their crimes against bodies that are usually female. For instance, the serial killers (Napoleon and Sifiso) in Makholwa's text have mercilessly raped and murdered over forty women. This is the body count of the victims who are mostly women with the exception of Karabo. This largely illustrates the gendered and sexed nature of this violence. The text is centred on the meetings between Lucy and the imprisoned serial rapist and killer, Napoleon Dingiswayo. In one of the meetings, Napoleon tells Lucy that he

was not a born-killer, but in typical patriarchal tendency, he blames his mother and a host of other people for his violent masculinity by claiming that:

“Evil is not born, it’s created. Trust me. D’you think I was born like this? Do you think God decided, yes, this one is going to spend most of his life in and out of prison? No. it is people who have made me like this. From my mother to the rest of the stinking poison that kept on appearing in my life over and over again, I had no choice. They must not turn you into evil, Sibongile” (66).

In the above scenario, though Napoleon tries to convince Lucy (whom he calls by her second name, Sibongile) that he was not born an evil killer and rapist, it seems that he is trying to find ‘moral reasons’ for his actions. He shifts the source of evil from God to ‘people’ such as his mother and ‘the rest of the stinking poison’ whom he blames for his actions. The phrase ‘stinking poison’ suggests that the actions of other people like their neighbour, Aunt Pinkie, poisoned him to do evil things. While there is plenty of evidence that the environment Napoleon and Sifiso grew up in was full of violence and abuse especially of young children due to dysfunctional families, they themselves made wrong choices. In the quotation, Napoleon says he “had no choice,” which is not entirely true since by turning to crime, he had made his own choice. He could have chosen a different path to follow as he seems to advise Sibongile: “To me, you are an angel, and you must never let them change you” (66). This implies that it is the society through its socialisation process that produces monsters such as Napoleon. However, one might argue that it is the misguided choices which make him treat female bodies as canvases on which to inscribe violent acts.

The Dingiswayo boys share a father who deserted them when Napoleon was four years old. In addition, the different fathers of their three siblings are also absent which means Napoleon, Sifiso and their siblings grew up without a father figure they could relate to. Napoleon and Sifiso were physically and verbally abused by their mother, Martha, who was an alcoholic, which makes it easy for the brothers to blame her for neglecting them and in the same breath spare their absentee father who lets a woman raise boys as a single mother. The burden of parenting their baby sister, Florence, as well as doing household chores fell upon nine-year-old Napoleon

and seven-year-old Sifiso. Their mother's behaviour culminated in the older brother and sister fleeing from home. This explains why Napoleon blames his mother for the evil monster he has become, instead of all the absentee father figures who abdicated their responsibility towards their children. However, Napoleon comes close to locating the source of his mother's behaviour when he tells Lucy that:

She hated our father more than any of her other husbands or boyfriends. I don't know why, but she took out all her hatred of him on us. Those were tough times. When you are a child and all you know is violence, every single day of your life just becomes about survival. I'm not going to lie. I hated Martha, and I hated her more than any other person in the world. I know she was my mother, but she was a real bitch. (46-47).

The quotation does not provide reasons that could explain Martha's abusive behaviour except that she nursed the hatred that she had towards Napoleon and Sifiso's father. The quotation tells us what Napoleon thinks, but Martha's thoughts are not reflected there at all which does not give the reader a complete story. The traumatic incidents that Napoleon experienced included being burnt on the face with an iron by his mother, being raped by a neighbour known as Auntie Pinkie after being fed a drug-laced meal, and losing his baby sister Florence to a fire caused by a paraffin stove that his mother had forgotten to extinguish before going to a shebeen. Whilst men are mostly depicted as victimisers, through the character of Napoleon, the author shows that some women were also responsible for inflicting gender violence on the bodies of children. The actions of Martha and Aunt Pinkie show how some women also imprint violence on the bodies of young children such as Napoleon, Sifiso and Florence, among others. It is these bodily experiences that Napoleon and Sifiso later on replicate on various bodies of women who become their victims. Subsequently, Napoleon and Sifiso find themselves in foster homes after inflicting harm on their victims.

After being exposed to the harsh realities of life, Napoleon and Sifiso took to crime as a means to an end. This could be attributed to the fact that, throughout "their childhood, the Dingiswayo brothers seldom encountered warmth and kindness from the adults in whose care they were

placed, a factor that only served to strengthen the intense bond between the two siblings” (156). Besides, Napoleon tells Lucy: “The day those social workers came, we already knew that our mother was not like other mothers. And our relatives had their own problems. They did not want to get involved, so we never had a chance at a normal life” (53). However, there is a tendency to see female alcoholics as social deviants and as morally unhinged, yet alcoholism in men is viewed as a social pathology that requires medical intervention.

As discussed earlier in *Like Clockwork*, a close reading of *Red Ink* reveals that the context of the gender war that Orford writes about in her novel is made more explicit in *Red Ink* as epitomised by the magnitude of the violence that Napoleon and Sifiso perpetrate on women and, more so, by the manner in which such violence is inflicted. As discussed earlier, this text is an attempt to depict how the gender war is waged on female bodies. This war is exemplified by Napoleon and Sifiso’s ‘alliance’ against the matriarchal figure who represents the trauma that they experienced during their childhood. This alliance was a result of the vow the brothers made when they were teenagers after killing the head warden at one of the homes, Mrs Khuzwayo. They vowed that “[b]lood had never been thicker than ours. You watch my back, no matter what, and I watch yours little brother” (227). This alliance between the Dingiswayo brothers is further revealed when Sifiso tells Lucy: “We swore over the dead body of another whore just like you, our hands dripping with blood [that]...no woman [...] is going to tear us apart” (253). However, it is instructive to note that the weapons are used specifically to tear limb from limb from the bodies of women. Rejected and abused by parental figures, Napoleon and Sifiso are on a warpath against the bodies of black women as a way to perform their masculinity.

Furthermore, the brothers turn to crime in order to vent their cumulative hatred through criminal intentions evidenced by their antisocial personality disorder. Such behaviour is enormously perilous. It is evident in the way they relate to women, and is prompted by violent male fantasies that push them to commit serial murders and rapes which they perform on the bodies of women especially as demonstrated through Sifiso’s character. Sifiso brutally stabs a woman who was having sexual intercourse with Napoleon thinking she was abusing his brother.

After “a big, fleshy woman” (134) had taken Napoleon upstairs to offer him a rite of passage, Sifiso followed them after few minutes. The narrator says: “[Sifiso] placed his ear against the door and sure enough, he heard his poor brother moaning [...] He threw the door open, took out his *ou kappie* and stabbed wildly at the woman who appeared to be jumping on top of his brother” (135, italics for foreign language words). Like the serial killer in Orford’s *Like Clockwork*, the crime scenes that the brothers choose normally have an urban setting as they choose “open areas close to train stations and old industrial dumping grounds” (44). It is such an environment that provides the brothers with an ideal space to perpetrate their brutal misogyny and create their modus operandi. It offers them the inconspicuousness they need in order to go on committing their crimes for extended periods without being apprehended.

What is particularly notable in this text is that, by agreeing to work with Napoleon on the book project, Lucy is wading into danger that later devours those close to her. In order to write Napoleon’s life story, Lucy has to conduct a series of interviews with him in prison so as to know his side of the story after he claimed that the media onslaught against him had been largely prejudiced as his voice was submerged by those of the journalists who presented a grim image of him. Ironically though, by killing and raping women, Napoleon silences the voices of his victims, yet he wants his voice to be heard. Thus, the story deals with the ‘relationship’ that grows between Lucy and Napoleon and the extensive ripple effects this relationship has on her close friends. However, in the process of gathering the necessary information for the story, Lucy lands not only herself in harm’s way, but her friends and colleagues such as Karabo and Patricia as well. This danger of a killer lurking in the shadows is embodied by Sifiso, who is Napoleon’s younger brother, and KK Mabote, ‘the Sponsor’ and ‘professor’, who is a high-powered and influential politician and businessman. The Sponsor uses his money and power to employ the Dingiswayo brothers to execute all his illegal activities that include killing those whom he considers to be threats to his political ambitions. By agreeing to narrate Napoleon’s story, Lucy is placed at the centre of the story-telling process as she is set on writing a story of gender violence that breeds crime. Instead of featuring in such meta-narratives as a victim or the gendered Other, she is a leading figure who is in a position to narrate the story in her own words.

It is when dead bodies mysteriously begin to appear around Lucy that the reader is introduced to the dark world of sociopathic serial killers and rapists. It becomes incumbent upon Lucy to investigate these murders in order to find the perpetrator(s). As intimated earlier on, Lucy is not a professional investigator, but she uses her training and skills as a journalist to investigate and help solve the murder cases. In this text, the misogynistic patriarchal society is embodied by the Dingiswayo brothers, but Lucy is resistant to their violent masculinities even when Sifiso tries to intimidate her through a freak accident and a hostile encounter at Mitzi's bar. In that encounter, he threatens her in a subtle way, saying: "I don't like people taking advantage of my brother's vulnerability. [...]. Nobody realises how fragile that guy is, and quite frankly someone has to look out for him [and] [t]hat someone, Ms Khambule, happens to be me" (150).

Thus, in *Red Ink*, Makholwa shows that women are always in danger of violent crime that leads to gender violence, as we see in what happens to Lucy. She is exposed to danger represented by Napoleon's devious world despite the fact that he is imprisoned in a maximum-security prison. Lucy has to disguise herself as a strategy to ensure that she does not receive gratuitous attention from Napoleon. On her first visit to Pretoria's C-Max Prison, she decides to mask her femininity by accentuating boyish features. On this particular occasion, she wears a pair of old jeans, a raggedy jersey and a beanie, with no make-up. This performance of masculinity is meant to shield her from Napoleon's male fantasies. However, it is this unappealing masculine appearance that sexually attracts Napoleon. Lucy is also attracted by Napoleon as the omniscient narrator says that "[Napoleon] had the kind of face that seemed to make it safe to share your deepest secret without fear of judgement" (25).

On the face of it, Napoleon appears to be harmless which made it easy for him to entice innocent women. Like his previous victims, instead of being repelled by Napoleon, Lucy is deceived by his gentle demeanour. From the outset, Napoleon becomes obsessed with Lucy, turning his charm on her. After her first meeting with Napoleon, Lucy is left totally befuddled. However, the narrator tells the reader that "[Napoleon is] a man who was supposed to represent the sum total of all her fears but now, after meeting him, all she could think of was that he was a fairly normal, really nice guy" (27). After that first meeting, Lucy experiences Napoleon's

seemingly natural charm which might explain how he lured his victims before raping and killing them. In order not to be charmed by this dangerous man, Lucy constantly reminds herself that “a killer is a killer” (27). Besides, Lucy is lulled by the fact that Napoleon is confined within the walls of a maximum-security prison. A combination of this false sense of security and Napoleon’s charisma absorbs Lucy to a point where she throws down her guard when she is around him whilst Napoleon uses this opportunity to manipulate her. This manipulation serves to stroke his male fantasy which is quite evident in the letters that Napoleon writes to Lucy. One of the letters reads, in part:

Dear Sibongile

My darling, how good it was to see you looking so beautiful the other day when you came to see me. I could see that you took a lot of care before coming to see me. I must really say, I really appreciated it. I can’t remember the last time I was so happy. I must tell you something that I have been scared to let you know. I have met you before. I had a dream about you a few a years ago. You were my bride but I could not see your face properly. (81-82).

In the letter, Napoleon fantasises over Lucy whom he visualises as his lover. It does not occur to him that Lucy is only interested in hearing his story which he requested her to write. His fantasy leads his partners in crime, KK Mabote and Sifiso, to be afraid that their involvement in crime would be exposed as Napoleon is departing from their agreed scripts as shown by the letter he writes to Lucy. It is evident that Napoleon practises his sexual violence by executing his fantasies on Lucy’s body. In another letter to Lucy, he writes: “Why are you doing this to us, my love? Why, darling, when you mean the world to me” (185) and ends the letter affectionately with “All my love, [y]our sweetheart” (185). He uses the pronoun ‘us’ as if the two of them were actual lovers when, in fact, that was a mere fantasy.

The mentality of categorising women’s bodies along binary lines is ably captured by Napoleon’s encounters with Lucy. He has already decided, for whatever reason, that Sibongile is ‘his.’ The use of the possessive pronoun ‘his’ is meant to claim her and also to differentiate her from those women he raped and killed prior to being caught and sentenced. This is because “his

Lucy...[s]urely [...] couldn't be as bad as those other bitches...dirty fucking filthy whores. She wasn't like his mother...or was she?" (98). Earlier on, he tells her that: "They must not turn you into evil, Sibongile. To me, you are an angel, and you must never let them change you." (66). He creates an image of Lucy which makes her appear to be angelic, pure and an ideal woman unlike 'those other' bitches and whores, but he is shown to be ready to punish her should she cross the divide between whore and virgin. It is this othering of women's bodies that leads Napoleon and his brother to practise violent masculinities. Put differently, any transgression from his ideal is punished by rape, then cruel death. Makholwa demonstrates that it is this fixation with traditional femininity that makes some men commit violent crimes against women. Besides, like most men who have violent traits, Napoleon convinces himself that Lucy is his possession. This element of possessiveness is an ingredient of infatuation or obsession and, together with paranoid behaviour, it culminates in gender violence. It is, therefore, important to note that men like Napoleon and Sifiso engage gender binary systems and inflexible constructions of femininity to constrain the female bodies within a patriarchal structure. Women such as the Dingiswayo brothers' mother, who was an alcoholic, and Aunt Pinkie, who raped the then young Napoleon, are seen as deserving some form of punishment. This is because they dare to deviate from the prescribed or expected forms of femininity such as being a virgin.

Like Orford, who uses backstories to depict the ubiquity of gender violence, Makholwa uses fringe plotlines to demonstrate how gender violence that results in crime is entrenched by violent masculinities and accepted as part of women's experience in post-apartheid South African society. Lucy's lived experiences consist of common instances of gender violence such as intimate abuse at the hands of her former boyfriend, Ludwe. However, most people tend to overlook this form of gender violence until it is too late. An interesting point is how Makholwa presents misogyny in a veiled way, starting with Siphos in the *Prologue*. The victimisers such as Napoleon, Sifiso and KK Mabote seem to use their charm to lure women into a web of gender violence. These men are charming and difficult to ignore as Lucy realises when she first encounters Napoleon in prison as "she decided [he] was still quite good looking in a gentle almost priest-like fashion" (26). She is not alone in this because earlier on Busisiwe is enticed by a charming Siphos as she "had found herself taken in by his good looks and charm" (3) while

Fundi, Lucy's friend, is charmed by KK Mabote as seen when she tells Lucy: "I actually think I really like this guy [KK Mabote] ...it's strange because he's not my usual type" (95). The Dingiswayo brothers and KK Mabote represent men who irrefutably have control of the stories written on female bodies. As a result, a woman like Lucy has to confront the authority of a patriarchal order as she embarks on the construction of Napoleon's stories of gender violence. The interviews that Lucy has with Napoleon allow her to get the material that she needs to reconstruct Napoleon's life story. Moreover, "she was going to tell Napoleon's story but it would be written on her own terms [as] [s]he would expose the Dingiswayo brothers for what they were: murderous criminals" (259). However, Sifiso and KK Mabote conspire to stop her from writing Napoleon's story as they fear being implicated in the serial murders of women for which Napoleon was imprisoned.

Violent masculinities, as embodied in the characters of Napoleon and Sifiso, are an expression of power and control by men who seek to instill submissiveness in women. However, through the character of Lucy, the text offers retributive justice for the victims of gender violence. Lucy is not intimidated by the danger posed by Sifiso even when her friend Fundi tells her: "...you're putting yourself in grave danger, Luce" (123). Lucy's initial self-doubt is immediately overridden by her resolve to continue with her project of interviewing Napoleon for this biography. The narrator notes that: "Lucy did not scare easily but Fundi's conviction made her doubt herself. One thing for sure was that nothing could deter her from the project, so that was completely out" (123-124). She is resolved to forge ahead with her book project. In addition, it is the daring actions of one of Napoleon's victims which resulted in his arrest. The narrator remarks that "[w]hen Dingiswayo was nabbed in Germiston, his victim had bitten off some flesh on his calf. He tried to run, but the limp slowed him down and he was shot twice – in the arm and the stomach – by Detective Morapedi's men" (44). It is the notion of taking back control of their bodies that permits women to override their victimhood.

Furthermore, on one of her visits to prison, Lucy opens up to Napoleon by expressing her frustrations with her business partner, Patricia, who is unwilling to draw up a contract. Unbeknown to her she freely provides Napoleon with valuable information about Patricia which

leads to the latter's death. Patricia is later found murdered in her apartment with eighteen stab wounds. Despite the fact that the modus operandi resonates with the one Napoleon employed prior to being apprehended, Lucy dismisses the possibility that he could have caused Patricia's murder. She believes that "[b]ehind bars he [Napoleon] was, after all, no more harmless than a trapped mouse" (44). On this note, Ndlovu (2010, 225) claims that "[Lucy's] gullible view of the prison as a space of complete isolation and utter powerlessness prevents her from linking Patricia's murder with her interaction with the incarcerated Napoleon." However, Ndlovu seems to have underestimated Lucy as someone who did not see the danger that Napoleon presented. In other words, she is far from being gullible as she plays an important role in unmasking the person responsible for the deaths of her friends.

Even when she is warned by Detective Justice Morapedi, in charge of investigating Patricia's murder, to be cautious of Napoleon, Lucy does not take his advice seriously. Morapedi tells her that "[Napoleon] is very clever and even more manipulative" (106). However, she considers Napoleon to be harmless, as evidenced by an instance when she tells her friend, Fundi: "[r]emember, he's behind bars, we're not, so don't give him too much power" (105). Though she thinks she is in control, she is gradually being enticed into his web of deceit by Napoleon who regards her as his saviour, as the one "who would redeem him, forgive his previous misdemeanours, and usher him into a new life" (169). This foregrounds two valid points: firstly, we see again the violent masculinity which thrives on objectifying women as things to gratify men and allows them to relive their fantasies. Violent masculinity is built around attempts to control women's bodies by making them behave in a particular way which is captured by Napoleon's stance towards women. Lucy disturbs this line of thinking by not being there to sexually gratify male sexual fantasies as she has control over her sexuality. The second point is the female victimhood which is supposedly typified by the naivety of Lucy. However, Lucy is far from being yet another victim of Napoleon because she is in control of her life.

It is interesting to explore how from the onset Napoleon is presented as lacking control of his masculinity as he is under the control of two calculating men, KK Mabote and Sifiso. These two have formulated a well-orchestrated plan that revolves around providing Lucy with information

that will not implicate them in crimes the three men committed together and for which Napoleon took the fall. Though they are manipulating Napoleon, the plan begins to produce undesirable effects due to Napoleon's obsession with Lucy which interferes with the serial killers' devious covenant. In order to prevent undesirable ripple effects, Sifiso has to get rid of Lucy. His first attempt to kill Lucy and her boyfriend, Karabo, through a freak accident, fails. He then murders Karabo's housekeeper, Rosie, after breaking into Karabo's house and also later decapitates Karabo after attacking him in his house. To instill fear in Lucy, he sends her Karabo's heart which is supposed to be a stern and chilling warning against continuing with the book project. However, Lucy is not deterred from seeking justice for the victims of crime by this incident as she tells her friend, Fundi, the following: "I refuse to be living in fear like this. If someone is out to scare the living daylight out of me then I'd rather deal with the situation head on" (210). This is a clear demonstration of Lucy's resolve to confront gender violence head-on regardless of the danger that this poses to her own life.

Also of importance is the character of KK Mabote, who is hidden from the murders and rapes committed by the Dingiswayo brothers as he acts behind the scenes as one of the instigators of crimes committed against women. In a number of instances, Napoleon simply calls him 'The Sponsor' in place of his real name. In order to monitor Lucy's interactions with Napoleon, KK decides to get closer to Fundi so as to be privy of what transpires between Lucy and Napoleon. His plan is captured in the following words: "[KK] called Fundi's phone-sex service [t]o keep his ear to the ground" (218). By enticing Fundi, pretending to love her, he puts himself in a position where he can monitor Lucy's interactions with Napoleon as part of their plan to feed her with information that does not implicate him and Sifiso.

To assert their masculinities, Sifiso and Napoleon mark the bodies of their victims with violence that emanates from the crimes they perpetrate on their victims. By controlling and hurting their victims, the brothers establish their dominance over women's bodies; this acts as a source of gratification. One observes some major differences between the ways the Dingiswayo brothers kill the women they target. On one hand, because Sifiso is gay, he does not rape them since for him women are not sexually appealing. Such murders show the hatred he has towards women

whom he torments and disfigures before killing them. On the other hand, Napoleon's modus operandi involves raping and murdering women. Even though he intensely abhors them, he is sexually attracted to women. He performs his masculinity by demanding that women succumb to his resolve. In order to accomplish his intentions, Napoleon employs sexual violence, threats and coercion to assert his supremacy and control over women. His conquest over his victims becomes more exciting if the victim offers some kind of resistance. One of his victims is a karate expert who employs her self-defence skills to counteract his attempt to rape her. His warped male fantasy is stroked by her tenacity to fight for her life which he regards as a challenge. The heightened resistance of the karate woman has a corresponding effect on Napoleon who becomes even more resolute to conquer her. Recalling this event, he ponders:

Perhaps he would share the memory of the day when he sliced up that crazy karate bitch. [...] He had enjoyed raping her ... so much fire, just like Sibongile. The last image he had of her was so perfect, poetic almost. It was like a sacrifice to the gods. Her beautiful brown head, with those big chocolate eyes staring at him, the defiance finally wiped out of them. Once that head hung from her neck by only a few threads of skin, he knew it was all over for her. He would never forget her. She had looked lovely [...] finally submitting to his will, his command, after so much resistance. He had triumphed, unparalleled and uncontested (99).

The above scenario illustrates that violent masculinities assert power, exert control and demand submissiveness from women. Rape is a weapon that men use to exert their power on women's bodies by having sexual intercourse with unwilling women. In the above excerpt, Napoleon uses rape as a way to humiliate his victims, reduce them to the status of an object that he can control and sexually overpower them. After raping his victims, he then decapitates them. By inscribing pain and suffering on a female body, Napoleon performatively fulfils his masculinity. He finds gratification by staring into the lifeless eyes of his karate victim, noticing her submission to his resolve which makes him feel triumphant and superior. In other words, Napoleon employs violence to regain and re-assert his virility, identity, mastery, strength and dominance. Thus, crime and gender violence intersect in Napoleon's and Sifiso's attempts to re-assert their masculinity.

When Patricia, Rosie and Karabo are murdered one by one, Lucy soon realises that a serial killer is on the loose and she has to work quickly in order to help identify the culprit. At this point, it is also clear to her that Napoleon's obsession has turned into something fatal. Working closely with Detective Morapedi, Lucy discovers that she has fallen into a web of deception and manipulation orchestrated by three dangerous serial killers, KK Mabote, Sifiso and Napoleon. When Lucy decides to investigate these brutal murders, it is clear that she is putting her life in harm's way. As a female investigator, her actions debunk the narratives that construct womanhood around the notion of victimhood. On this note, Walton and Jones (1999, 179) conclude that "the female investigator investigating a serial killer can be read as disturbing the negotiation of female fears and male fantasies." Lucy's role as an investigator involves an ability to negotiate a difficult and dangerous terrain between the fears that she may be the next victim and male fantasies that act as a dangerous surveillance over women's bodies. This dangerous surveillance over women's bodies is epitomised by Sifiso and KK Mabote who decide to eliminate Lucy because of the danger she now represents. As mentioned earlier, Lucy is intent on exposing the Dingiswayo brothers for being murderous criminals. For Sifiso and KK Mabote, eliminating Lucy offers them an opportunity to maintain their dominance over women's bodies. In order to do this, Sifiso accosts Lucy in her bedroom. Before attacking her, he muses over the way he killed Busisiwe and wonders how it "would feel to cut through Lucy's breasts [and the] sound of a blade through soft flesh... [was his] favourite" (252). He fleetingly has the advantage when he throws Lucy on her bed as the narrator says:

He lay on top of her, the knife in his hand. ... 'Look at you now ... poor bitch is scared' ... he said, tearing off her shirt and the bra underneath with the sharp blade of the butcher knife, leaving her naked and exposed ... I have been waiting a long time for this.' (226).

Because violent masculinities thrive on exercising power and total control over a woman's body, Sifiso uses violence in order to exert his hegemony on Lucy. He uses a butcher knife to strip Lucy naked whilst pinning her down. The act of 'pinning down' women works as Sifiso's strategy to ensure their submission. He also employs the same strategy in the *Prologue* where he "strangled [Busisiwe] until her legs were so weak that he managed to pin her down on the ground" (7).

Similarly, he employs the same tactic as he took “out the piece of cloth that he had dabbed with just enough chloroform to make [Lucy] dizzy without losing consciousness [which] he shoved [into] her mouth and pinned her to her bed” (252). What is symbolic about the act of ‘pinning down’ is that it is meant to restrain women from ‘rising up’ or ‘standing up’ for themselves. Most of Sifiso’s victims do not rise up after being pinned down as they will be dead —getting up is a feat only achieved by Lucy. Furthermore, by stripping Lucy naked using his butcher’s knife, Sifiso’s intention is to objectify and dispossess her. Nudity and a butcher’s knife are the war weapons that Sifiso uses to create a precarious situation that makes his victims vulnerable and defenceless. Despite such a situation, Lucy refuses to capitulate to Sifiso’s intimidation even though she appears subdued on her bed. In the process, she turns her bodily vulnerability into a weapon that she employs to defend herself from Sifiso.

Lucy’s bedroom is suddenly transformed into a battlefield between male and female bodies as evidenced by Sifiso’s attack on Lucy. This scene shows how Lucy’s femininity actively resists Sifiso’s aggressive performance of hegemonic masculinity. With the help of Tshepo, Lucy manages to break free from Sifiso. The narrator says: “[Lucy ran] to the kitchen took out the biggest knife she could find from the drawer and raced back to her room [and] plunged the knife into Sifiso’s back” (254). By killing Sifiso, Lucy subverts the patriarchal norms surrounding the women-as-victims configuration as she is able to take back her control of her own body from violent masculinities, and from patriarchy. Precisely, Lucy’s act of killing a male perpetrator of gender violence aptly shows that the gendered female body actively creates meanings which allow for the redefinition of story written on such a body. What this means is that Lucy is not a powerless victim because she is able to withstand and mete out physical violence after being pinned down.

While in the text violence is an instrument that psychopathic men like Sifiso and Napoleon use to bolster male dominance and instill fear and terror, and intimidate and shame women, it is also becoming a way for women like Lucy to turn to in order to break free from patriarchal dominance over women’s bodies. The depiction of Lucy enhances female power as she is able to contest the inscription of patriarchal violence on her body by fighting off Sifiso. In the process,

the gendered embodiment of violence is forced to create a space for female resistance of gender violence. It is for this reason that the norms and constraints of gendered embodiment produce a different reaction from women who devise mechanisms for bodily resistance.

In fact, it is when crime, violence and gender intersect that women's bodies become vulnerable within post-apartheid South African society. *Makholwa* represents the ubiquity of gender violence by showing that women in South Africa are not safe neither in private nor in public spaces. Gender violence is depicted through violent crimes targeted against the female body, yet the same body provides a space for women to autonomously mediate their own identities amidst violent crimes. *Makholwa* gives women a sense of hope through her depiction of Lucy, a female investigator who decides to help investigate these violent crimes committed against women. Though she is also the target of crime-related gender violence, Lucy manages to overcome a world dominated by patriarchal figures in spite of the dangers and threats that she encounters. She refuses to be overwhelmed by the dangers that crime presents, as she reaffirms her control of her body by wresting control from men. In the process, she reclaims power and control; first, by leaving her abusive partner and secondly, by using violence to fight violence when she kills Sifiso.

Whilst Napoleon and Sifiso represent an unmistakable threat to black women's bodies, the embeddedness of gender violence is also evident in men like Tshepo and Ludwe who are not seen as criminals. However, the two embody a most subtle yet-dangerous form of gender violence which is rarely or openly talked about. This is because this form of inscription of violence does not leave visible marks on the victim's body since it represents the most intimate form of gender violence that usually goes unnoticed or undetected. It is for this reason Patricia and Tshepo's love affair looked like a classical example of true love due to the fact that "[t]wo weeks never went by without Tshepo ordering a bouquet of flowers to be delivered to his girlfriend's office" (20). However, the flowers and unannounced office visits by Tshepo masked his insecurities and the fact that he was a controlling personality. It is only later that Lucy discovers the relationship between Patricia and Tshepo was abusive and toxic. All the signs were there for her to see, for instance, the flowers that Tshepo regularly sent to Patricia's workplace

typified a classic behavioural pattern of an abuser trying to conceal his violent outbursts, then using flowers and expensive gifts as a gesture of apologising. Added to that were Tshepo's unannounced visits to Patricia's workplace which were one of his mechanisms to control and monitor her. Lucy also remembers the image of Patricia "drawn, wearing sunglasses in the office" (109). In fact, Lucy attests that "[Tshepo] really did seem caring and [Patricia] never confided in [her] about their relationship [as] she generally gave the impression of being very happy" (109). Such signs of abusive conduct were concealed by Tshepo's seemingly good personality and the silence of Patricia over what was happening to her. Additionally, when Patricia discovered that she was HIV-positive, he became violent, blaming her for infecting him. Like Sipho in the *Prologue*, Tshepo views the female body as diseased or as the source of deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS as he blames Patricia for infecting him without having proof of such.

When she learns about Tshepo's abusive behaviour, Lucy draws a parallel with her toxic relationship with Ludwe who had tried to create a gulf between her and her mother. Tshepo and Ludwe are clear examples of men who performed their masculinity by exerting power and control over women's bodies by putting them under surveillance. The violent behaviours of Tshepo and Ludwe reveal the subtle way criminality and gender violence intersect on the bodies of women because both of them can be said to be guilty of physical assault against their partners, yet these crimes go unreported and unpunished. Despite what seem to be functional relationships, the characters of Patricia and Lucy reveal how the female bodies are also emotionally or psychologically marked with injustice caused by the gender violence that breeds crime perpetrated against women. Instead of being fixed within a state of victimhood, Lucy ends her relationship choosing to be a single mother to her child. It is argued that, when Lucy ends her abusive relationship with Ludwe, she manages to break the patriarchal power structures that are responsible for reproducing and perpetuating female victimhood.

Subsequently, it is equally crucial to examine how stories of women are used to subvert prevalent gender norms. One such story is that of Lucy who manages to acquire her sexual freedom when she decides when and with whom to sleep as indicated by her open relationship with Karabo. She confronts the fundamental ideas, norms and values presumed to be rational by

patriarchy on sexual matters and, in so doing, she makes it possible to think differently about the woman's body in the context of gender violence and crime. In conversation with Fundi, she confesses that her casual fling with Karabo gives her "[m]ultiple orgasms" (72) which culminate in sexual gratification. Such candid expression of her sexual desires or pleasure is in defiance of patriarchal sanctions that tend to criminalise female sexuality whilst celebrating male sexual pleasure. Furthermore, she tells Fundi that:

There is no room for a stressful relationship where I have to keep wondering how someone else feels about me, where they are, what they're doing, and all that. With Karabo, it's kind of a seasonal thing, which suits me fine. Besides, when did you ever hear me looking for Karabo and not finding him available for me. It's the perfect arrangement (72).

Phrases like 'casual fling', 'seasonal thing' and 'perfect arrangement' attest to the control that Lucy has over her sexed body as she knows what she wants from such sexual encounters. Thus, Lucy is depicted as a woman who takes back her body from the clutches of patriarchal normative sexual relations.

The *Epilogue* ends with the news that the "convicted serial killer and rapist, Napoleon Dingiswayo escaped from Pretoria's C-Max Prison at twelve-fifteen this afternoon" (260). This shatters the temporary sense of retributive justice that the killing of Sifiso had attained. The escape from the prison by Napoleon threatens the lives of surviving women such as Lucy, Fundi, Ntswaki and Lucy's maid, Ntombi, among others. This is an indication of the continued precariousness of women's bodies in post-apartheid South Africa. The implication here is that gender war emphasises women's continued struggle to fight against gender violence by ensuring that serial killers and rapists like Napoleon do not access to the stories told by their bodies.

Conclusion

The focus in this chapter was the writing of gender violence on women's bodies. This chapter illustrated that the two female South African writers, Orford and Makholwa have appropriated the literary genre of crime fiction to foreground pertinent challenges that gender violence

inscribes on bodies that are mainly those of women. Despite the fact that literary critics tend to dismiss crime fiction as 'low-brow', in the hands of these women writers, this genre is challenged and refashioned to permit the writers to speak to the bodily experiences of South African women. Besides, this genre opens up new fruitful spaces where women writers can re-negotiate the problematics, ambiguities, and contradictions of female bodies, yet concurrently engendering new feminine subjectivities. In addition, this chapter highlighted that both live and dead bodies have the capacity to tell stories written on them in ways that give them rights of ownership. This means that women are not voiceless but that gender violence inscribed on female bodies is aimed at ensuring that their voices remain unheard or suppressed so that their stories remain untold. Gender as a violent crime thrives on the silence it imposes on those considered victims who are mostly women (and children) yet the texts analysed in this chapter locate the female voices at the centre of the narratives inscribed on their bodies.

Chapter 3

Their Life is Murder? Representations of Gender Violence in *Random Violence* and *Black Widow Society*

In the previous chapter, my argument focused on the female bodies which bear the landmarks of gender violence that breeds violent crimes. The central theme was pivoted on how such bodies can move out of a place of victimhood to a place where women appropriate the stories mapped on their bodies. In this chapter, it is argued that what enables the women to move out of victimhood are the coping strategies that the female characters craft to find a way out of gender violence. This chapter, therefore, demonstrates how coping strategies enable women to challenge or contest different forms of gender violence that result in violent crimes. Coping strategies allow different women to re-map the script of gender violence as a way to attain retributive justice against the perpetrators of violent crimes and domestic abuse. Also, this chapter specifically focuses attention on women's coping strategies as depicted through female characters in Jassy Mackenzie's *Random Violence* and Angela Makholwa's *Black Widow Society*. Specifically, the focus is on how female-coping strategies enable women to transcend their victimhood. Female-coping strategies are (re)constructed through the appropriation of violence traditionally associated with men as a mechanism to resist and respond to domestic violence and other forms of gender violence. This chapter demonstrates that the women characters in the selected texts are not simply victims of gender violence. The secondary concern is to problematise the notions of alternative justice they thrive for in contravention of the statist justice offered through the judiciary and law enforcement systems.

My examination of the texts in this chapter focuses on the ways women engage in female-coping strategies to reclaim their individual and collective identities from patriarchy. Focusing on gender violence, this chapter illustrates how women engage coping strategies to empower themselves in dissident ways as they contravene traditional norms. Thus, women's coping strategies, which at times border on the removal of male gender violence perpetrators, are built on women's equal ability to unsettle men's exclusive hold on violence. The chapter argues that 'killing' as a coping strategy does not only destroy male perpetrators of gender violence, but also targets the patriarchal structures of power that privilege male violence over female violence. The contention

here is that society has no problem in criminalising women's violent actions whilst treating the violence that men inflict on women as part of their socialisation. Though killing is a province for men who are marked as celebrated killers, female characters in the two texts emerge as the new type of celebrated killers.

My analysis which is motivated both by chronology and types of female coping strategies begins by analysing individual coping strategies in *Random Violence* which was published in 2008 before moving on to collective coping strategies in *Black Widow Society* which came out in 2013. The two novels, with their focus on a female sleuth and perpetrators of violence, demonstrate the ways employed by the two writers to (re)construct female-coping strategies. I am interested in how Mackenzie and Makholwa adopt or re-situate the woman-as-a-killer within the milieu of gender violence as a way to disrupt men's authorship of gender violence.

Focusing on how both texts situate women's coping strategies in the realm of gender violence, I demonstrate that Mackenzie and Makholwa endow their female characters with coping mechanisms that equip them to disrupt different forms of gender violence. As a result, the analysis of the two texts seeks to address the question: what is a woman? The variant to this question would be: what becomes of women after being exposed to or socialised in gender violence? Through their actions, women do not only disrupt gender norms but tend to trouble the notion of gender performativity. In other words, the two texts not only converse with each other on the subject of gender violence, but they also speak to the overarching theory of this study which is gender performativity. In short, women become killers and instigators of violence not by choice but as a coping strategy to deal with gender violence that results in crime. In the process, I hope to engage these texts in a kind of conversation centred on attempts to critically explore female-coping strategies which are pivotal in eliminating or least minimising gender violence. It is noted that, in both texts, women engage coping tools to defy patriarchal prescribed gender roles by disrupting socially constructed gender boundaries that consign women to lower categories of the society. Also observed is that, though acting from different points of view, Jade de Jong, the female protagonist in *Random Violence*, and the triumvirate

(Tallulah, Nkosazana and Edna) in *Black Widow Society* turn to killing as a coping strategy that helps them to attain social justice for victims of gender violence.

To streamline my discussion, this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part of this chapter entitled 'Getting Away with Murder in *Random Violence*?' argues that Mackenzie's *Random Violence* delves into the coping strategies of an individual female protagonist as depicted through the character of Jade de Jong who is a female killer. My reading of this text seeks to problematise the female-coping mechanism which is depicted through the notion of a female killer as a tool to fight gender violence. Though she works in conjunction with the police, at times Jade has to step outside the statist justice system to seek retributive justice for herself and other victims of gender violence. I argue that, in this narrative, by eliminating the criminals who perpetrate crimes against both women and men, Jade's coping strategy is not a matter of fending off gender violence, but it represents a concerted effort to actively use violence to carve an alternative path towards attaining justice. Using this logic, Jade is not just an instinctive killer, but an equaliser of some sorts. Jade's coping strategies empower her to challenge patriarchally assigned gender roles as well as subvert and transgress socially constructed gender relations that mark men as celebrated killers while women are treated as victims. Thus, as illustrated in this chapter, this text complicates female-coping mechanisms manifested as murderous.

The second part of this chapter, titled 'A secret society of murderous women/my life is murder in *Black Widow Society*', contends that Makholwa's *Black Widow Society* demonstrates how a network of women from different backgrounds who find themselves tied together due to the gender violence they have endured, serves as a juggernaut that seeks to destroy patriarchy. This network of women known as Black Widow Society or BWS seeks to exact retributive justice for female victims of domestic abuse. The network enables women to transform gender relations by decisively attacking and eliminating abusive husbands or partners using a hired male killer. Violence becomes a mode through which women create an alternative territory that is taken away from men. It is territory that the 'liberated' women cherish and collectively defend because it allows them to have a sense of self-determination and self-worth. Abused women sometimes

engage violence to disrupt the endemic nature of domestic violence. Thus, this section complicates the nature of gender performance that makes women act above the law which fails to safeguard them.

Subsequently, by taking murderous women as their loci, Jassy Mackenzie and Angela Makholwa offer alternative ways of rethinking and (re)conceptualising women's coping strategies as a response to gender violence that results in violent crime. At the same time, both writers problematise the kind of woman that is unleashed by gender violence; a woman becomes a celebrated killer. More so, the writers depict female characters that employ violence as the only way to attain retributive justice by eliminating men who are responsible for gender violence.

Getting Away with Murder in *Random Violence*?

Random Violence (2008) is a typical detective or 'whodunnit' story which opens with the murder of Annette Botha outside her property. The reader anticipates a detective story that involves a sleuth whose actions centre around solving the crime. This feeling is further heightened by the fact that Annette's murder shows every sign of premeditated planning by the killer. The following passage shows that Annette's murder was meticulously planned for it to appear like a random robbery or a robbery gone wrong:

Her [Annette's] fingers brushed against the pepper spray on her key ring. It was her only chance, even if it was a hopeless one. She fumbled with the metal canister. Quickly now. Lift and spray. Aim high, go for the eyes. Praying for a miracle, she raised her hand.

The man fired twice. The first shot got her square in the chest, slamming her back against the gate. She began to slide to the ground, the second shot caught the side of her neck, ripping it open. (7).

After introducing the murder scene in the above passage, the story shifts its attention to Jade de Jong, a private female investigator who occasionally works in conjunction with the police to solve crimes. The reader learns that, apart from being a female investigator, Jade has "just completed a surveillance job in the muggy heat of an English summer" (9) and worked as a bodyguard "protecting the two consecutive girlfriends of a Greek shipping tycoon" (22). Upon her return to

South Africa after a ten-year self-imposed exile in Europe, she is enlisted to help solve the murder of Annette Botha. She agrees to take on the case, but her ulterior motive of returning to South Africa is her desire to avenge her father's death. She believes the death of her father, Police Commissioner De Jong, was stage-managed through a car accident. For this murder, she blames the Viljoen brothers, one of whom is set to be released from prison on medical parole. He is the reason that Jade comes back to South Africa.

The timing of Jade's return was meant to coincide with this release and provide her with the opportunity to kill the surviving Viljoen brother. Paradoxically, whilst she seeks to attain social justice for the dead woman and other victims of crime, she intends to exact self-styled retributive justice for her deceased father. I posit that retributive justice is her way to find closure for her father's death. This is in line with the contention that Jade's character seeks to fulfil the role of restoring justice that the malfunctioning criminal justice system cannot provide for the victims of crime. It is in this context that Binder (2015, 2) observes that "[i]n a society that is threatened by real crime, while faced with an unreliable criminal justice system, crime fiction is argued to have a restorative function." However, this self-styled retribution is problematic as it contravenes the acceptable forms of justice that the likes of David Patel who is a Police Superintendent and the late Police Commissioner De Jong stand for. Thus, the entire discussion in this section seeks to focus on Jade's role as a private investigator which allows her to engage a self-styled retribution as a coping strategy with the aim of fighting for social justice. From the onset, it should be pointed out that Jade is neither a victim nor a survivor of gender violence, but she emerges as someone who inhabits the epicentre of violence as a protector of victims of gender violence and an instigator of violence.

There are two sides to Jade's character, the investigative role and her killer side. Both traits can be traced back to her parents with her father known for his police work whilst her mother was a professional killer. Heavily drawing from Halberstam's views on the doing of masculinity and violence, and Dankwa's notion of situational masculinity, Binder coins the term "violent female masculinity" to describe Jade as a female perpetrator who is "able to produce masculinity and

assume the power position not by looking butch or by desiring women, but through violent, criminal behaviour” (Binder 2021, 82). Binder differentiates between Jade’s two sides, that of a perpetrator and an investigator. Binder treats Jade as a perpetrator rather than an investigator because of her killer side. She argues that “despite the fact that [Jade] is also an investigator, often in collaboration with the police – she will be discussed within the theoretical frame of the female perpetrator” (Binder 2021, 100). Despite the fact that Jade’s two roles are usually at loggerheads with each other, I treat her as an investigator as this role stretches the notion of a perpetrator which enables her to perform what Binder (2021, 100) calls “violent female masculinity.” As a point of departure, I argue that violence and/or killing allows Jade to effectively perform her role as an investigator.

As mentioned earlier on, in this study I treat Jade as a female investigator for two reasons. Firstly, this role allows her to perform her gender by un-scripting or undoing the gender script which insists that women should simply follow the norms that patriarchy has put in place. For that reason, the trait of a killer is used in the service of the investigator role because she mainly kills the undesirable elements such as criminals in her attempts to uncover the truth and which result in her solving cold cases. To cope with the violence that comes with her job as a detective, Jade engages violence as a means to an end. This is due to the fact that, in the course of her investigation, she walks into situations where the choice is to kill or get killed. As a result, her killer role allows her to be alert to the dangers or threats that come with her job as a detective. Secondly, the reason for theorising Jade’s role as a female detective is found in Jade’s childhood ambition of becoming a detective after discarding her intentions of becoming a lawyer. When she tells David whom she has come to admire about her intentions of becoming a police officer, he remarks that: “As a woman you’ll be limited, Jadey. [...] You’ll be kept in an admin position for so long you’ll start to grow mould. Why don’t you become a private investigator? That way you can be your own boss. Run your own show, work with the cops” (12). It is in this context that I treat Jade as a female private investigator who is able to ‘run her own show’ and, for her, killing becomes the occupational hazard of her chosen profession. Thus, I do not separate Jade’s two

roles as I argue that she has to make difficult decisions and choices in some instances, to kill or get killed.

As alluded to earlier on, Jade is viewed as a female investigator who finds it necessary to engage violence as a way to cope with gender violence that results in crime. To a certain extent, I concur with Binder's observation that "[g]iven the violence with which she acts, Jade is a more transgressive female figure than the female detective can be [because] [h]er gender performance is more pronounced in its masculinity and assertion of power and is best captured as violent female masculinity" (Binder 2021, 100). However, I am not convinced that Jade is doing a gender role known as female masculinity⁷ because this will be falling into the pitfalls of essentialising femininity. For femininity to be transgressive, it does not need to assume masculine attributes, rather it should be conceived as being on par or even above masculinity as illustrated by Jade's investigative role. As a result, the type of gender that is performed by Jade, if anything, should be treated as violent femininity which structurally deviates from violent female masculinity. As observed by Lindsay and Miescher (2003, 4), "ideologies of masculinity like those of femininity are culturally and historically constructed, their meanings are continually contested and always in the process of being renegotiated in the context of existing power relations." It is this point that allows for a departure from Binder's notion of violent female masculinity in favour of violent femininities which have no ties with masculinities. Such femininities are marked by fluidity that allows someone like Jade to access and effectively employ a female coping strategy in dealing with and combating gender violence.

In the conversation between Superintendent David Patel and Jade, he recalls Jade's plan "to open the first-ever multiracial, bisexual detective agency in South Africa" (46), but Jade describes the envisioned detective agency as "[m]ulti-gender" (46). Here, the notion of 'multi-gender'

⁷ The point I make here is that talking about 'masculine femininity' will not improve the position of women if they have to appropriate manly attributes in order to deal with male violence. Instead, women's transgressive behaviour should be directed at erasing patriarchal norms, values and beliefs that constrain the positions of women. This can be done if femininity and masculinity are on par so that being a woman ceases to be synonymous with victimhood. Jade's character reveals that men, just like women, can be victims of gender violence as much as they can both be celebrated killers.

offers women an alternative coping strategy that allows them to contest conventional femininity and masculinity which treat women as weaklings. Performing multi-gender roles enables women to break free from the victimhood that is associated with what is considered to be conventional femininity and the many ways in which uncontested conventional femininity may act as an oppressive force in women's lives. Arguably, Jade grew up in spaces dominated by men where she had to compete with boys or fight against them and learn to use a gun, but this does not transform her gender into female or situational masculinity. Her childhood exposed her to male spaces in order for her to see the opportunities of subversively stretching traditional femininity beyond its limits. She came to realise that as much as men are considered capable of violence and murder, the same applies to women, but the male-dominated society is not always keen or ready to acknowledge female violence or killers. It is women like Jade (and the members of Black Widow Society) who remind patriarchal society of what women are capable of doing in order for society to sit back and take notice of violent femininities. Thus, female masculinity sounds defeatist in relation to the goals of improving the conditions of women as it suggests that femininity is not strong enough to stand on its own without appealing to manly traits. It is in this context, that I prefer violent femininity as a kind of gender that makes femininity visible to society. Gender violence that is manifest in violent crimes provides women like Jade with opportunities to engage unorthodox strategies in order to turn the tables against the male perpetrators of violence. In short, Jade performs violent femininity in the course of her investigations.

Early in the novel, there is a hint that statist justice is failing the victims of crime due to ineptness, corruption and work overload within the police service. 'Good cops' like Superintendent David Patel are so overburdened with paper work as to frustrate them into resigning from their jobs while others, like Commissioner de Jong, who was incorruptible, are killed in order to stop them from performing their duties in rooting out corruption in the police force. Superintendent David Patel tells Jade the reasons why he kept postponing his departure from the police service when he says: "Every year, I tell myself this is my last year in the police service [...]. Then I think to myself, if I leave, whom the hell else is going to get the job done? It's

not like we don't have the numbers. We do. But nobody's halfway competent. That's the problem. Case files, evidence, reports go missing all the time" (38-39). Patel informs Jade that the new Commissioner Williams seemed to hate him but the reasons for such hatred only become clearer towards the end of the text when Robbie, a criminal who usually works with Jade, kills Police Commissioner-Williams. Robbie says: "I found the fucker, Jade. That's the guy who set us up. The one who phoned me for the hit on Viljoen. That bloody head cop turned informer on us. He's as bent as a wire coat hanger. Oh, and he squashed the Hirsch case, by the way" (236). As an upright man, David stood in the way of Williams's corrupt behaviour which culminated in the said hatred. Later on, Jade makes the connection between the corruption which emanated from Williams's greedy scheme and the death of her father as the reader is told that:

[Williams] tried to force her father into early retirement by sabotaging the high profile Viljoen case. When that didn't work, he'd bribed Jacobs to set up the accident. His attempt on Jade's life hadn't succeeded. When she shot Jacobs, Williams had to think fast. He deliberately misinformed her by saying that the Viljoen brothers had organised the hit on her father. Then he'd waited to see what she would do when she returned to South Africa, maintaining contact with Robbie so that he could use the gangster's greed as a bait (237).

The passage provides reasons that justify Jade's deviation from statist justice that fails to provide justice to the victims of crime. Precisely, the portrayal of Jade as a female sleuth puts her in a position where she is her own boss in a crime-ridden society. She is not constrained in her quest for the elusive justice because, if need be, she can choose to work with criminals like Robbie to solve cases and obtain social justice. In other words, she is able to flourish rather than "grow mould" (12) as David had indicated would happen if she chose to become a police officer. As mentioned earlier, the police service is severely compromised by corruption within its upper ranks. Thus, Jade acts as an equaliser or punisher who works to achieve justice on behalf of the dead victims of violence. For that to happen, she is prepared to kill for justice.

Significantly, for Jade to invade and appropriate male-dominated spaces, she has to debunk the metanarrative that treats gendered sexuality as a determiner of who becomes a victim of gender violence. However, for Jade to thrive in male-dominated spaces, she devises a coping mechanism

that would not demean her gender as a weaker sex. In a conversation on multi-gender roles with Superintendent David Patel, her part-time boyfriend and investigative partner, Jade insists there is a distinction between sex and gender which allows gender to be understood as a 'doing'. She corrects David's reference to "bisexual detective agency" thus: "Not bisexual. Multi-gender. There's an important difference" (38). The term "multi-gender" provides new ways of thinking about gender so as to liberate women from oppressive femininity. In her course of seeking retributive justice, Jade performs multiple genders which critically subvert normality that is characterised by male violence. In this light, Binder (2017, 38) concludes that "[a]s a woman who habitually moves in the masculine world of crime, be it as an investigator or perpetrator, Jade performs multiple gender roles and thereby transcends conventional femininity." I agree that, as an investigator, Jade transgresses traditional femininity so that women can also enter the realm of celebrated killers— a province mostly dominated or occupied by men. However, I suggest that women like Jade become equipped with a coping mechanism as seen in her readiness to perform violent femininity to fight against patriarchal hegemony which inflicts gender violence on women. Multiple gender roles allow women to be proactive when dealing with different instances of gender violence.

Jade's coping mechanism is evidenced by her avenging and killing instincts. This is shown when Mackenzie employs the literary device of the flashback to provide the reader with a glimpse of those incidents in Jade's earlier life that shaped and prepared her to be able to use violence as a coping strategy to deal with male violence. A close reading of the text suggests that her childhood prepared her to use a gun as an effective weapon to defend herself and attain some form of justice. As a result of her early childhood in the care of her widowed father, Jade finds herself in spaces mostly dominated by men as her father "didn't see why he should make an exception for her just because she was a girl" (33). To function effectively in such territories meant that she had to be able to defend herself using a gun which is traditionally a symbol of male power. We are told that:

Jade played football and took judo lessons and fought with the other kids in the area, just as she would have done if she'd been a boy. Maybe more, because being a cop's

daughter in a poor neighbourhood wasn't easy. Jade was as tough as any other boy, and [her father] wasn't going to treat her any differently when it came to her first shooting lesson (33).

It is this type of childhood that armed Jade with the means to cope with all forms of violence. She needed to be tough if she wanted to survive in a poor and probably crime-ridden neighbourhood that obviously did not take kindly to a child of a police officer. With such a childhood background coupled with a father who did not treat her softly, Jade acquired the means with which to defend herself when under attack earlier on in her life. This is because “[Jade’s] father taught her to shoot the day she turned thirteen.” This exercise “was [her] rite of passage” (33) which was accomplished by taking her to a farm belonging to her father’s friend, Doppies. It is on this day that Jade got a valuable and life-long lesson in self-defence using a gun as she became a sharp-shooter. She excelled at shooting on her first day of handling a gun to the extent that a stunned Doppies said to her: “Keep shooting like that, you’re going to be a dangerous woman when you’re older” (36). Indeed, as this chapter proves, she became a dangerous woman who was feared even by men as demonstrated later on. Further, her childhood experiences significantly contributed to the woman she later becomes.

Jade’s gun-training in her childhood equipped her with the relevant skills to expertly cope with violence. She is able to use the gun to kill criminals rather than be a victim of gun-inflicted violence. This coping mechanism enables her to lay her claim on power that has long been linked to masculinity. This implies that she appropriates the patriarchal constructs of power to reclaim a sense of justice for the victims of crime. By being a sharp-shooter, she becomes ‘a dangerous woman’ which entails being a menace to men, especially the bad ones. She subversively performs her gender in a manner that counters the limitations that surround femininity. Such a doing of gender represents a coping mechanism that allows her to disrupt gender violence that forms part of women’s lived experiences.

Most importantly, as a female investigator who combines orthodox and unorthodox means to attain justice, Jade’s coping strategies enable her to function in a crime-ridden society instead of becoming another crime statistic. Even though she is forced into killing criminals on her way to

restoring justice, it is her investigative role that influences and justifies the actions she adopts on each occasion. Despite this recourse to alternative justice, Jade is not entirely convinced that it is the best form of justice since there are times when she regrets her actions and even wonders how her father would react to the woman she had become - a point I will return to later. Interestingly, gender violence that breeds violent crime is responsible for creating the woman that Jade had become— a woman who would be unrecognisable even to her own father. However, by creating a strong female character, Mackenzie depicts someone who is able to challenge the limitations and controls imposed on femininity which are usually associated with victimhood. Thus, Harris (2013, 124) concludes that “by creating fictional characters who refuse to give in to the threat and terror created by the discourse about crime, who refuse to reproduce the awareness of powerlessness and resolve to act against all the odds, such crime fiction offers coping strategies”. Indeed, gender violence that breeds violent crime permits a female investigator who comes from a gender marked by violence to turn to killing and using violence as a coping strategy. In the process, she refuses to reproduce the victimhood of women like Annette Botha, Yolandi Storr (Annette’s former workmate), Ellie Myers and many other nameless women who are murdered by a syndicate of criminals.

In Mackenzie’s text, Jade is represented as a trained killer who feels uncomfortable in situations where she is not armed. It is for this reason that the gun is to be viewed as her primary coping strategy that forms part of who she is. Her character feels complete only when she is armed since “[g]uns felt like an extension of her own body [because] shooting was almost as instinctive as breathing” (*Worst Case*, 11). This ‘part of who she is’ (73) reveals how she has developed a coping strategy which is usually associated with killing using a gun or anything that can act as a weapon. Jade emerges as a celebrated female killer who kills more than once as part of her job, as a form of self-defence and as a way to attain justice for the victims of crime. As long as she is not armed, she feels a sense of insecurity. This explains why the first thing she does after she has returned to South Africa is to visit an old associate, Robbie, a known criminal, to buy a gun to complete her personality. When Robbie hands her a gun, she realises:

It was a Glock 19. Compact, black, stubbly and functional, with a simple but brutally efficient design that always made her think of a shark. Her fingers closed around the

ridged grip and she felt it nestle into her palm. It felt hard and cold and familiar. She looked at it more closely. It was very familiar. It had a C-shaped neck on the barrel that she'd been in the habit of running her fingers over the last time she owned it (16).

The extract shows the Glock 19 was Jade's weapon of choice as she feels some form of familiarity with the gun when Robbie hands it to her. She soon discovers that it was her old gun which "had done its job [and] she'd never wanted to see it again" (17). She had used the gun to kill criminals in the company of Robbie, which was an act of criminality on their part. This implies the gun and Jade shared a past which she had wanted to erase by asking Robbie to dispose of the gun as she never wanted to see it again. Working with Robbie, a known criminal, exposes her criminal side, and she has mixed feelings over this dual role because:

By sitting here with Robbie, holding an illegal, unlicensed firearm in her hand, she knew she was betraying David. But unless she went through with what she planned to do, she couldn't help him with the case. It would be too dangerous. Because Viljoen would learn she was back (18).

On the one side she is conscious of the fact that possessing an illegal and unlicensed gun is in violation of what David and the police represent, and, therefore, is an act of betrayal. On the other side, she is bound by her promise to help David resolve a cold case which necessitates putting in place a strategy that will enable her to cope with the dangers that lie ahead. This is evident in that appropriating the 'gun' puts Jade in a position that enables her to deal squarely with instances of violence emanating from the patriarchal construction of power. She turns this power against men when she uses the same weapon to kill men since shooting comes naturally to her. The act of killing is portrayed as a suitable coping strategy which serves as a response to male violence. In the text, women's violence extends beyond being a mere response to male violence, as it is depicted as a coping strategy used to assert the right to self-protection and as a survival instinct. As observed by Reddy (1988, 113) "violence may sometimes be the only possible response to a violent milieu." In other words, violence may at times be the only option available to women to cope with gender violence. Thus, there are times when Jade has to resort to violence as an act of self-defence or self-preservation when she has to fight for justice.

In the process of investigating crimes, Jade not only invades male-dominated spaces, but she appropriates them in such a way that she can equal or surpass her male counterparts in crime detection. It was her father who provided her with a firm grounding for her investigative skills which permit her to be actively involved in the fight for justice through her investigative work. Because of the strong association of violence with masculinity, a woman who turns to killing as a form of coping strategy is treated as a rebel whose doing of gender challenges the image of women as vulnerable, angelic, nurturing and harmless. In other words, if a woman kills, she debunks such a traditional understanding of femininity which has ramifications for who she becomes. Like other women, Jade realises that her life is always under threat of random violence. Hence, she develops a killer instinct or a 'gut feeling' which is part of her coping strategy that provides her with the first line of defence against threats of violence. Having been in a number of dangerous situations, Jade adopts a coping strategy that makes her stay alert in different environments as this could be a matter of life or death. This is shown on her first day in South Africa upon her return:

[Jade] couldn't hear any cars on the bumpy road outside. Only the muted beep of the electric fence power supply.

That didn't mean she felt safe. Jade never felt safe. Not in cottages, not in hotels. It was laughably easy to gain access to a hotel room. She'd done it before when she needed to. A plausible story at the reception desk, a swift bribe slipped to the right person. Or better still, a hurried entry into the room as the turndown service was being done, with an apology to a chambermaid who wouldn't think twice about it. Jade never opened a hotel room door without wondering if somebody was inside, waiting for her (42).

Rather than representing the prevailing sense of vulnerability, this passage reveals the coping mechanism that takes the form of staying alert without at once letting her guard down. Staying alert serves as a survival instinct that permits her to be aware of the vulnerability that comes in the form of threats of random or organised crime that is always lurking somewhere, waiting to strike. Also, the passage reveals that such a coping strategy turns Jade into a complex female character whose survival, at times, depends on acting a criminal role to stay alive or to be a female private investigator in order to achieve social justice for victims of crime. From the passage, we see that she has to employ unorthodox means such as using bribes to illegally gain

access to hotel rooms. However, unlike hardened criminals, she stepped outside the law “when she needed to” (42) which implies that such acts would be out of necessity only. Interestingly, for Jade, at times the means justify the end as she uses unorthodox means to attain justice even if such acts make her an outlaw.

The sense of vulnerability that crime brings is heightened by security features at the cottage where Jade stays. We are told such as the house has “[s]teel security gates, burglar bars on all the windows and an alarm system that was linked to an armed response company” and an “electric fence” (14). However, Jade is aware that these security features are not enough to deter violent crime from being perpetrated on women like her. Her father had taught her a valuable lesson when he told her: “[...] never make yourself vulnerable. Trust your gut feeling. And always watch your back, or have somebody watch it for you” (43). It is this ‘gut feeling’ that enables Jade to realise that someone was already watching her movements upon her arrival back in the country. On the second day after her arrival, she woke up:

.... gasping for breath and scrabbling under the pillow for her gun. [...]. Jade padded over to the window and looked out. She could see the gleam of the metal of a car [that] was parked on the road outside her house, headlights off. Somebody was watching her (19).

The implication is that Jade is a discerning individual who does not want to be taken by surprise. The coping strategy of a predator, a killer and an investigator prepares her for anything that could serve as a source of possible danger. In other words, she does not wait to fall victim to crime, but she actively identifies the warning signs that most people ignore at their own peril. From the foregoing passage, we see that she was conscious that “[s]omebody was watching her” (19) within days of returning to South Africa.

The character of Jade expands the female-coping strategy through being figured as a female killer; this is also likely to alter the way women are perceived. This coping strategy permits women to be in control and not dependent on men, thereby changing what women become after using and being exposed to violence. This is exemplified by Jade who is both independent

and in control of her surroundings. This debunks the existing power structures. She creatively uses violence to achieve her goals. For instance, she becomes a criminal when her surrounding situations demand that she does so. In such instances, she employs violence as a female-coping strategy in order to kill the criminals. Thus, in her pursuit of what seems to be elusive justice, she elects to work in collusion with criminals such as Robbie to kill other criminals. However, whenever she becomes a criminal, she thinks of her father and she “[wonders] what he would say if he knew how far beyond the law she had gone, and how much further she planned to go” (67). A coping mechanism that involves breaking the law goes against what Jade’s father stood for. As a result, she muses over how her father would have reacted to the woman she has become.

Further to that, when Jade assumes the role of a criminal, it is usually because the wheels of state justice are malfunctioning. At such times, she finds herself on the wrong side of town and that of the law in her relentless search for social justice. In one such incident, Jade is taken by Robbie to see the old mother of the soon-to-be-released Viljoen whom she blamed for the death of her father. The reader is informed that “[i]t had been ten years since Robbie had held the wheel for her. Ten years since she'd leaned out of the passenger window and stared, with cold and merciless accuracy, down the barrel of her gun” (72). On this particular day after visiting the house where Viljoen stays, it was her turn to hold the wheel for Robbie as he set himself to kill another culprit. The reader learns of her resolve: “She'd done it once. She'd do it once more. But that was enough. Never again” (73). This shows that it was not going to be the first time she had stepped out of the confines of the law as a way to attain justice for the crime victims as her past is littered with such incidents. Jade realizes how problematic such a form of justice is and resolves to stop acting the role of a criminal, though this decision is only temporary.

Throughout the novel, the author employs flashbacks to show that there are times that she vacillates between acting outside of the law by conniving with Robbie and working within the dictates of the law with David. Flashbacks allow the reader to get a glimpse into Jade’s past which is littered with instances where she acted outside of the law to eliminate criminals using

her gun, the Glock. One moment, she resolves not to help Robbie to kill again, but, in the next, she helps kills a man. This resolution is shown when she says: “No. I’m sorry, Robbie. I can’t do this with you” (73). Moments later, she changes her mind when she learns that Robbie wants them to seek justice for a young woman who was murdered on the orders of a drug baron, Hirsch. The young woman had agreed to stand as a witness in a criminal case against Hirsch. Without a witness willing to testify in court, he escaped imprisonment and, with the girl’s father dead as well, there was no-one to avenge her death or seek justice for her. It is the likes of the murdered young woman who is a crime victim that make Jade opt for justice outside state justice. In such cases, statist justice would have failed the victim of a crime as seen in the acquittal of Hirsch due to lack of witnesses. It is for such reasons that Jade agrees to work with Robbie to eliminate Hirsch to attain some form of justice for the murdered young woman:

‘So all’s well and good for her. Except for one day,’ Robbie snapped his fingers, ‘something clicks in Princess’s head and she runs away. Back home to Daddy, skinny as an Auschwitz prisoner and pregnant. So he gets her into rehab, sorts out the baby problem, and decides he’s going after the main man. Princess agrees to testify, the police make an arrest, and everyone’s looking forward to a day in court.

‘Then what happened?’ Jade asked, although, with a sinking heart, she knew.

Robbie grinned, without warmth. ‘What do you think? Princess is home alone one afternoon, and there’s a break-in. She gets five bullets in the chest. No key witness and, surprise, surprise, no case. There was a problem with it. Seems one of your friends in the police service didn’t follow correct protocol so the file got trashed’ (73-74).

In the above passage Robbie convinces Jade that the murdered young woman deserves some form of justice even in death. The fact that the case file had vanished and there were no witnesses meant the culprits would not face any justice. For this reason, Jade is persuaded to be Robbie’s partner-in-crime as his getaway driver, just to kill Hirsch.

When Robbie tries to kill Hirsch, thinking he is alone in his car, a bodyguard emerges unexpectedly from the car ready to kill Robbie. Subsequently, Jade is forced to kill a man to save Robbie from certain death by squeezing the “trigger...once, twice, three times” (80). A most pertinent point here is that, by killing the criminal’s bodyguard, Jade attains a sense of

retributive justice for the female victims of crime such as the murdered woman. Interestingly, though Jade is a killer, she is remorseful when she kills the guard who was about to kill Robbie. She believes the guard was collateral damage or an innocent victim because their main target was Hirsch. Being remorseful shows that, even though she is capable of killing, she is someone who kills only when the situation demands it. Added to that, her remorse reveals the unsustainable nature of retributive justice which, at times, is attained at the expense of innocent people. Her conduct as a killer does not make her a serial killer⁸ like the Dingiswayo brothers and Otis Tohar who kill one person after another for no apparent reason. Also, she is not like her late mother who was a professional killer or Mzwakhe who is hired to kill abusive husbands in *Black Widow Society*. On the contrary, she kills for two reasons. Firstly, she kills in the line of her duty as a private investigator working to resolve cases that have gone cold. Secondly, she kills to get social justice for the victims of crime and provide closure for the surviving relatives of Ellie Myers, Annette Botha and other surviving family members.

In Jade's case, there is one female coping strategy with various dimensions. One of the facets of her coping strategy is being able to determine ways in which she can achieve justice for the victims. This female coping strategy is epitomised by the way she manages to make progress in a case that was becoming a cold case. Through a flashback, we discover that Jade's investigating skills were honed by her father. We are told: "[A]s a child, she had travelled with her father wherever his investigations had taken him" (27) and she would write some notes while at other times her father would write the notes for her. Her father told her to trust her gut feeling when investigating a crime. This is evident when she starts investigating Annette's murder which initially appears to be an exercise meant to find justice for the dead woman. Her investigation leads to other murder cases such as those of Ellie Myers, Adrian Muller, Dean Grobbelaar, among others. She discovers that one way or the other these murders are interlinked. Before Annette's murder, her brother, Adrian Muller, was "[s]tabbed while he was withdrawing money

⁸ Binder (2021, 100) describes Jade as a "serial murderer", but her use of this term significantly differs from mine especially as evidenced by the discussion of serial killers/murderers in Chapter 2 of this study. On that note, I would not treat Jade or the black widows as serial killers whom I view as sociopaths or psychopaths such as Otis Tohar (*Like Clockwork*) or Sifiso and Napoleon (*Red Ink*).

from an ATM" (24) whilst Dean Grobbelaar, a private investigator hired by Annette, was brutally murdered after being tortured. Furthermore, Yolandi Storr, Annette's workmate, was brutally assaulted. Further, Jade establishes that Ellie Myers was also murdered in a more or less similar way as Annette when:

'She arrived home late one evening. The twenty-second of February. Five years ago. She stopped outside the gate while she waited for it to open.' The man sighed: a ragged, hopeless sound. 'Ellie was pulled from the car and shot. She died before the paramedics arrived. They took the car, an Audi if you need to know. The vehicle tracking company found it twelve hours later in Umbro Park. Abandoned, undamaged and locked' (168).

Jade observes that both Ellie and Annette had been "hijacked in their driveways [and had been] shot dead" (168). The fact that property owners were being killed in a seemingly random manner meant that there was an element of vulnerability that coerced the surviving spouses to sell the property and relocate to other areas, leaving the syndicate of criminals to cheaply purchase the property. The main crime committed against women is that of murder as seen by the number of women killed in the text even though there are men who are also killed. However, most of the men who get killed in the text have close links with the women who are the overall victims of gendered violence. This puts Jade in a context where she needs to solve the murder cases and bring the murderers to justice. Regardless of the threats or dangers that she is exposed to, she is relentless in her quest for justice even if it means attaining retributive justice for the crime victims. Nonetheless, killing the culprits does not dent her investigative skills which lead her to discover the connection that existed in what were considered to be random murders.

However, Jade's investigation leads her into a dangerous lair of organised crime committed by a syndicate specialising in building upmarket estates from lands cheaply acquired from frightened owners. She is constantly being followed and watched by a black Mercedes. In one such incident, the Mercedes chases her down a gravel road with the obvious intention of killing her. Instead of being immobilised and covered by the dreadful pursuit, she is shown to be a figure of female

empowerment who contributes to the emancipatory counter-discourse on social justice. Concerning the threats that she was encountering, the passage reads:

A black Mercedes was parked outside her house, off the road, concealed in the deep shadows of a tree. The shiny, low-slung vehicle looked out of place on the country lane. It was parked facing away from her, its sleek bonnet pointing towards the road she usually approached from.

Jade couldn't see a number-plate on the back of the car. She didn't have her weapon with her. She would have to run.

[...].

Checking her mirror, she saw the Mercedes swing sideways, dust kicking out from under its heavy tyres. The driver had seen her and he was coming after her (199).

Though she manages to escape a certain death, the criminals are determined to get her out of their way. It emerges that the criminals are a syndicate masquerading as estate agents, using the name White & Co. They target properties in prime areas by killing one of the partners to create a sense of vulnerability in the remaining one and “[crime] causes panic sales” (52). For instance, the company wanted to force the owners of a house situated on 83 Rivonia Road to sell off their property, but the husband was reluctant to sell. The following conversation between Whiteboy and his contact revealed that they planned to eliminate the husband who was not willing to sign the papers to sell their house, hence the conversation begins with Whiteboy asking his contact:

‘Who?’

‘The husband.’

‘If he’s out of the way it’ll go through sweet’ (97).

From the brief conversation, it can be deduced that the plan involved taking the husband out of the picture by killing him and the wife would then sell the property. The murders of property owners are designed to appear as cases of random violence instead of organised crime. It is ironic that the title of the novel implies that people are victims of random violence caused by crime, yet there is a syndicate that is involved in organised crime targeting specific areas of Johannesburg. One stage-managed murder resulted in White & Co developing “Fairway Lodge

after the grieving owner had sold them the family home. His wife had been shot and killed outside the house while leaving for work one morning" (218). Also, the narrator notes that:

Lake View Manor had been started when the residents sold their place after the next-door neighbours were brutally tortured and murdered in a house robbery. White & Co had killed two birds with one stone on that particular project because the woman who lived at the end of the road had sold to them too. That beautiful piece of land then had forty luxury cluster homes erected on it and became Sandton Ridge (218).

Though these cases were seen as random violence, the foregoing examples show that a well-organised crime syndicate was behind all these murders: Ultimately, it is Jade who connects the seemingly disconnected incidents by linking them to the criminal activities of White & Co. This proves that she is as efficient as any investigator and as any other male detective, if not better as attested by Whiteboy who tells his contact: "The detective (Jade) is good, I hear. And the girl's father was good too" (98). Jade is good at investigating crime as she discovers the connections between different incidents, thus:

She was sure Whiteboy had helped Mark (who was Ellie's husband) with his cleaning up campaign. Kill the detective and torch his office. Shoot Annette at her gate. Locate and destroy her computer. And create a plausible scenario for each one. For Grobbelaar, make it look like a brutal revenge job. For Annette, a hijacking. For Yolandi, a house robbery. Who would ever connect three such different crimes in crime-ridden Johannesburg? (227).

In this passage, Jade's detective skills allow her to make such a connection among the separate crimes and a history of other crimes that White & Co committed to cheaply acquire properties from their frightened owners. She achieves this feat by relying on a strategy that allows her to cope with the violence that she encounters in trying to solve Annette's murder and, as it turns out, other murders as well. What I describe as a female coping mechanism is the subversive act of tearing apart oppressive norms that subject women to gender violence.

An example of an incident where Jade has to cope with danger is when she confronts the criminals sent to erase any incriminating evidence in Grobbelaar's office. She manages to deal

decisively with the violence that the men in Grobbelaar's office represent. Jade uses her defensive skills as a mechanism to cope with the danger she finds herself in and to escape from such a life-threatening incident posed by the armed thugs. Jade's encounter with the criminals in Grobbelaar's office is one of the incidents that reveal how she creatively employs an element of surprise to get the better of her adversaries, as noted below:

The gunman grabbed at her with his left hand. He caught her hair and his finger ripped strands out of her scalp as she tugged her head free.

Then she grabbed the doorframe, elbowing him back as he lunged for her again. He stumbled over the shoes inside the doorway and skidded on the pooling petrol, his arms windmilling. Jade dived out of the room, closely followed by his accomplice. (48).

This passage depicts how Jade escapes from the armed men by extricating herself from this incident, thereby demonstrating her female-coping strategy. It is the female coping strategy in the form of her fighting skills that enables her to defend herself and escape from the danger posed by the two thugs. As a form of self-defence, she knocks away the man's gun arm. Also, she defends herself against the man who 'grabbed' and 'ripped' strands of her hair by tugging 'her head free' and 'elbowing' him before diving out of the room. Her actions are symbolic in that her coping mechanism is depicted as an act of rebellion and resistance against the violence that she encounters. Thus, she has to use violence to combat the violence embodied by the thugs in Grobbelaar's office because negotiating with armed men is not a matter of choice since her life is in danger.

Jade's coping strategy as manifested in her killer side is seen when Whiteboy abducts David and Piet (Annette's former husband), and threatens to kill them if she does not come to the secluded rendezvous. She finds herself in a vulnerable position at the mercy of Whiteboy who was readying himself to rape and then kill her. The narrator describes Jade's precarious state below:

Jade lay sprawled on the grass with Whiteboy standing above her. She still couldn't see his face, not even when he dropped down onto one knee and placed a

hand on her arm. She heard him breathe and smelt the faint odour of old cigarette smoke as he bent forward.

Systematically, he began to rip away her clothing.

She struggled with the strength of despair, knowing that however hard she fought she had no chance against his power and bulk. That he was enjoying the chase as much as he would savour the kill. That David was a short distance away, hearing every movement, listening to every sound (231).

The passage shows that Whiteboy had Jade at his mercy and was taking his time to kill her, knowing that her part-time lover and investigating partner, David, was in earshot, yet unable to help her. To heighten Jade's sense of vulnerability, Whiteboy goes on to strip her naked. The act of 'stripping' is an attempt to erase Jade's identity and sexuality to create a state of vulnerability and powerlessness. Whiteboy's violent actions are aimed at disempowering Jade. They are a vivid demonstration of masculine power used to control and subdue 'dangerous' women to force them to tow the submissive line. However, Jade is both resilient and unbreakable. We are told that she "resisted every step of the way... pushed his hands away and bent her knees... kicked and thrashed and tried to bite, hearing the panting and sobbing of her own breath in the stillness" (231). She did not give up as she "windmilled her arms in the surrounding grass, hoping to find a sharp stick or stone that she could fight him with" (231). In order to cope with such a situation, she uses the sharp edge of a bottle she picked up from her surroundings to surprise, fatally stab and instantly kill the unsuspecting Whiteboy. Jade's encounter with Whiteboy represents another incident where she effectively employs the surprise element to kill him. Though she is unarmed, she uses her killer instinct to overcome the threat posed by Whiteboy and to move from a position of victimhood to that of power.

However, Jade's attempt to seek restorative justice further exposes the rot in the police service that David had previously mentioned. Not only do important evidence and dockets disappear from the police stations, but even incorruptible law enforcers like Commissioner De Jong have to pay with their lives while some, like Superintendent David Patel, find themselves being frustrated. After acquiring valuable information on the Viljoen brothers who have callously killed their workers, Commissioner De Jong is killed in a car accident and his briefcase with important

evidence disappears at the scene of the accident. It later emerges that there are corrupt officers like Jacobs, the Redcliff chief of police. Jacobs was a corrupt officer who connived with criminals to kill De Jong in an ostensibly freak accident and displayed inappropriate behaviour towards a young Jade who “didn’t like the way he watched her [and] the way he touched her when her father wasn’t around, his big hands cupping the flesh of her arm or waist, hot and greasy against her skin’ (77).

In addition, Commissioner Williams is another high-ranking corrupt officer who colluded with Mark Myers (Whiteboy’s contact) who called himself Graham Hope, to arrest and later release Piet Botha into the hands of the former. Commissioner Williams is later killed by Robbie who had followed him to the place where Whiteboy and Mark had planned to kill Jade, David and Piet, but it was the threesome (Whiteboy, Mark and Williams) who ended up dead. As a result of the high level of corruption in the ranks and file of the police service, Jade has to resort to restorative justice such as killing the criminals. In the end, the victims of crime have their deaths avenged through the actions of Jade and Robbie who, between them, managed to kill the men behind a series of murders.

Towards the end of the text, the issue of moral ambiguity emerges when Jade has to occasionally work outside the law since, as discussed, the police service was marked by high levels of corruption. This is encapsulated when we are told:

[Jade] shivered to think how close she had come to murdering Viljoen, with Williams poised to close the jaws of his trap around her. How she now believed that Williams had been on Whiteboy’s payroll as an informer, a trusted inside police connection. No wonder he had been unhappy when David was promoted to the higher ranks of his team and was assigned the investigation into Annette Botha’s death (237-238).

This passage serves to underscore further the level of corruption in the police service that worked to derail the wheels of justice. The implication is that for the justice system to function smoothly, the corrupt elements in the police service and their criminal paymasters have to be eliminated. Thus, the novel ends with the deaths of Williams, Whiteboy and Mark, who have

worked together in a syndicate that – as discussed previously - specialised in cheaply acquiring properties after killing the owners. Their deaths serve as a form of retributive or restorative justice for the victims of their crimes.

Jade's investigative role should be understood as a fight against institutionalised corruption and violence as well as patriarchal structures of power that produce gender violence. Throughout the text, Jade's role as a female investigator (who kills if need be) enables her to challenge gender violence that marks women as victims. She does not only subvert conventional femininity but she stretches it to a breaking point so as to defend herself against violent men. To this end, her character speaks to conceptions of female-coping strategies that destabilise the state of vulnerability that disempowers and limits women. Thus, there is no doubt that the character of Jade in *Random Violence* reads like a script on how to get away with murder as a way to restore justice for the victims of gender violence that breeds crime. There is no denying that her investigative role provokes ethical questions. However, it is these ethical issues that form the basis for questioning and undoing the norms, values and beliefs as power structures that have and are still used to inflict gender violence on women. The immediate implication is that at times it takes an act of deviance for society to see the need to erase the oppressive norms, values, customs and beliefs and adopt new ones.

Jade is a woman who independently employs her coping strategy to straddle the moral borderline in her quest for justice. In such instances, violence as a form of a coping strategy tends to transform the victim-perpetrator configuration as it places the female victim on par with or even above the traditional male abuser. Jade is an investigator who turns to killing to achieve her goals, thereby suggesting that she uses violence as the language that patriarchy understands. Either way, she is not an ordinary victim of violence, but she is a version of a woman who is produced by gender violence. Subsequently, Jade continues as a character in the Jade series where she becomes more violent. That Mackenzie allows Jade to live up to the end of the novel and continue killing in the other novels is presumably due to the fact that she only kills in self-defence or in the course of her investigation.

Their life is murder: A secret society of murderous women in ‘Black Widow Society’

Should I commit myself wholeheartedly

and risk everything?

There is no point complaining

I am caught under your spell

I read that the black widow spider

Feeds on her mate

Perhaps I should cancel our dinner date (Black Widow Society (BWS)⁹, 217-218, emphasis in the original).

From the epigraph above, we see that the black widow spider is famous for one thing: it lures the male spider for sexual consummation which fatally ends with the death of the latter. It is for this reason that this particular type of female spider is famously known as the black widow; a self-made widow. Thus, the black widow spider self-consciously makes itself a widow by killing the male spider. Interestingly, the title of the novel is derived from the above epigraph which alludes to the murderous actions of this particular type of a female spider. It is the act of killing the male spider that resonates with the actions of the fictional women who sanction the killing of their abusive partners or husbands. In the text, the black spider can be read as a symbolic violent reaction to male abuse which, for the abused women, serves as a coping mechanism against gender violence. In other words, the actions of the female characters in the text resonate with those of the black spider not only in terms of the killing of their partners but also in accessing violence as a means to an end. Thus, in this text, the title is a constant reminder of how these women orchestrated the killings of their husbands.

I use the term ‘collective’ as a rallying point for abused women in the fight against domestic abuse. It becomes a strategy that is engaged by these women to find social justice. In this case, I use this term differently from Binder’s notion of ‘collective’ as a form of sisterhood to imply a female coping strategy that arises from unity-in-diversity. I concur with Binder’s (2021, 116) conclusion that “the Black Widows’ communalism both invokes and subverts the traditional

⁹ In my discussion, I will use BWS to refer to the secret society and *Black Widow Society* to refer to the novel itself.

understanding of ubuntu.” However, I argue that the sisterhood of the black widows addresses the loopholes found in society such as the failure to take into consideration that men and women are unequal partners. This is evident in that the black widows emanate from homes marked by the ubiquity of domestic violence which implies that a woman is not an equal partner in the marriage. As previously discussed, it is mostly women who are victims of domestic violence. The playing field is not level.

It is for the preceding reasons that my point of departure lies in viewing the collective actions of the black widows as unprecedented attempts to shake the very foundations of patriarchy. In other words, the only way to build a new, equal and just society is to destroy the existing norms, values and beliefs as embodied by abusive men, and supplant them with new ones. Interestingly, as much as the women act collectively as jury and judge, their lived experiences are quite diverse. Even though this collective stance goes against the discourses that often accuse women of being back stabbers or complicit in the violation of other women, there still underlines differences among them. For that reason, the term ‘collective’ is used to illustrate how women may disentangle themselves from their differences so as blend together to forge a new normal that treats all abusive men as the enemy that should be eliminated. However, such actions should not be seen as homogenising their lived experiences. Unlike Jade, the members of BWS are not investigators, but they also employ unorthodox means to attain social justice for and by themselves. Their actions unhinge patriarchy in very significant terms.

The collective female coping strategy acts a transgressive tool that allows the abused (oppressed) women to leave their abusive (oppressor) husbands. These women come from different racial backgrounds and choose to rally behind each other despite their inherent differences. This is evident in the cases of some of the women who eventually become members of the society. For instance, Salome O’Leary, a coloured woman, was infected with the deadly HIV virus by her promiscuous husband, Scott, who blamed her for infecting him; Tallulah, a black woman, was locked out of their matrimonial home at night by her husband, Mphikileli; a white woman, Edna, who was almost driven to commit suicide after her openly promiscuous husband,

Jake, impregnated one of his secretaries; Lloyd, the husband of a black woman, Thami Mthembu, cheated on her with her cousin despite ascending the political hierarchy through her family connections. The common thread running through these and other experiences of women is the identity of the abuser who is always male. Even though their experiences of domestic violence are different, these abused women are united by their subversive acts against domestic abuse. Binder (2021, 114) observes that “the Black Widows’ subversive gender performance originates in situations of entrapment and is a matter of survival, of refusing to be victimised any longer.” Thus, the abused women choose to end their victimhood by engaging a collective female coping strategy as a tool to extricate themselves from the entrapment of domestic violence. The lives of these women are entangled together or share an intersection and social solidarities that bind them together.

I argue that the black widows are not performing violent female masculinity, but are violently transforming femininity in ways that threaten the very foundations of patriarchy, that is, the norms that treat women as the gendered Other. I am not convinced by Binder’s (2021, 113) observation that, “The Black Widows ‘do’ violent masculinity from a variety of female subject positions, but it is a strategy that unites them.” My point of departure is based on two points. Firstly, it is a reiteration of the point made when I discussed Mackenzie’s *Random Violence*, namely that violent female masculinity is an essentialist term that does little to detach women from men as points of reference. Rather, the black widows should be seen as doing violent femininity in as far as they seek to violently destroy men who are an embodiment of gender violence. Beyond that, the black widows represent a new version of women who rise from domestic abuse. What distinguishes such women from others or from what they were before joining BWS is their readiness to use violence to eradicate male abusers and their capability to work together as one well-oiled machine. Secondly, the ‘strategy that unites [women]’ that Binder refers to, is the collective female coping mechanism that is fashioned not out of the need to regain what they lost, that is, their innocence, but out of who they desire to be. This is evident in that the title ‘black widow’ precedes the very act of becoming widows. By agreeing to the terms and conditions of BWS, an abused woman becomes a widow. Notably, it is Tallulah,

Nkosazana and Edna who are the Triumvirate that later decides on the logistics of eliminating the abusive husband.

For change to occur there is need for those who are considered victims to employ unethical or unorthodox means to create a new normal or a new gender order. This is quite evident in the actions of the black widows who become eliminators as a way to create a habitable landscape for women and men. China Gumede, Nokuthula's husband, realises the danger of the black widows by ordering a hit on his wife, only for him to be killed by Mzwakhe. Though his action represents an isolated incident in the text, it serves to show that men have come to realise that the ubiquity of domestic violence creates women who do not think twice when it comes to using violence to eliminate their male abusers. China had impregnated another woman and might have known that such an action was punishable by death. Thus, China decides to have his wife killed before she can order a hit on him; this is a point I discuss later on.

From the onset, *Black Widow Society* is a collective narrative of women who have been abused by their husbands and partners. Told in a third-person narrative form, *Black Widow Society* is a tale of various women from different social standings who are victims of domestic violence. In the text, Makholwa shows how these women characters engage with a collective coping strategy¹⁰ to deal with domestic violence not by simply subverting the traditional role assigned to women, but by breaking the boundaries that define biological femininity and masculinity. This novel particularly explores how women delve into the collective coping strategy as a mechanism with which to fight against various instances of gender violence, particularly within the enclosed domestic sphere. I claim that collectivity refers to how the relations between or among the women are negotiated within the space provided by a grouping such as the novel's secret society. This space is meant to nurture the collective development of abused women. In other words, this network helps women in their attempts to collectively cope with gender violence. In this text, the secret society enables women to act as collective figures. However, as will be demonstrated, Makholwa does not seek to homogenise these women as depicted in the

¹⁰ A collective coping strategy is a mechanism that is based on killing or eliminating male abusers by ordering a hit on them. Such a strategy enables the victims to work together to deal with gender violence.

characters of the members of the powerful organ of the Black Widow Society¹¹ known as the Triumvirate. Thus, the collective coping strategy is a way that abused women confront and emancipate themselves from gender violence that is rife within the domestic space.

Unlike *Random Violence*, *Black Widow Society* (2013) is far from being a detective story. In essence, it is a rendition of how abused women decide to turn the tables against their abusers by appropriating the power that normally resides in masculinity. The focus is not so much on how these women appropriate power but on how they devise ways to confront violence head-on. At the heart of this text is the story of abused women who emanate from different social backgrounds within the South African post-apartheid society. What brings and ties these women together is their experiences of domestic violence that is perpetrated by their partners or husbands. By interweaving the experiences of abused women into one, yet multifaceted story, Makholwa presents a network of women who employ a coping strategy that results in social rebellion against norms that create victimhood. When pushed to the limits, these women become life-takers thereby disrupting the traditions that consider them to life-givers. The women act in a radical manner as they actively seek to eliminate the male abusers. In the process, the unacknowledged aim of BWS is to replace the patriarch with the matriarch as embodied in the character of Tallulah. She emerges as the leader of the women whose declaration of sisterhood should be seen as a challenge to brotherhood.

By creating a narrative based on female solidarity, Makholwa's text disturbs patriarchy as a singular point of gender violence and pluralises the dimensions of power. Through the BWS, a secret society of murderous women, Makholwa depicts women characters that perform gender subjectivities or identities in ways that transgress and subvert the norm, which makes them deviants/dissidents. However, these women have no desire of becoming or acting like men, they are simply showing what becomes of women when driven to the wall by patriarchally sanctioned gender violence. This comes out clearly through the character of Tallulah who becomes the

¹¹ Black Widow Society is a secret society which was formed to offer abused women an alternative justice based on killing the abusive husbands. The core of the society consists of the three founders who are collectively known as the Triumvirate.

matriarch to the members of BWS— a term that is on par with patriarch. In this instance, matriarch is a title that is not employed to aid or buttress patriarchal oppression of women rather it is subversive as contests the traditional roles assigned to women.

When viewed as a movement of abused women, BWS resonates with the hashtag #MeToo movement that began on social media platforms as a way for the survivors of different forms of gender violence to devise means with which to cope with violence. Beyond sharing their stories of abuse, these women take decisive actions against the abusers. However, the term ‘widow’ is given a new meaning as a title that carries power and serves to show that one does not become a widow but is made one by electing to be a member of the group of self-made women. In other words, ‘widow’ is a title that is assigned to women whose partners or husbands have been eliminated on the orders of the Triumvirate, which is the most powerful organ of BWS. This means that widow is an ennobling title that abused women in the novel consciously and actively acquire as a coping mechanism. This is despite the fact that the violence that accrues from becoming such a widow is problematic because it wades into acts of criminality.

The storyline is premised on secret society whose activities go beyond being just an ordinary support group for abused women, but is a society of killers despite the fact that “[n]one of [them] ever wanted to be murderers” (259). Even though these women collectively agree to get rid of abusive men, they rarely get their hands dirty with the blood of their husbands or partners. Instead, they enlist the services of a man who is a former convict to do the dirty jobs for them in the manner of setting a thief to catch another thief. The only time the women kill someone is when they kill their own hitman, Mzwakhe, towards the end of the novel. This secret society of abused women is “very unambiguous about almost everything it represented. Its core principles: trust, honour, secrecy, sisterly love and protection. Its objectives: to eliminate the suffering of women in the hands of men” (36). Precisely, the principles represent the set of norms that bound the members together.

To achieve its objective, the secret organisation operates on a code of conduct that must strictly be adhered to. As demonstrated later, it is the breach of this code of conduct that leads to its demise. Thus, Makholwa's novel addresses the tendency by society to shy away from talking about the ubiquity of domestic violence within marriage and how women, who are usually the victims of such violence, find alternative coping strategies that work for them. Here coping does not entail staying within an abusive relationship, but it is a mechanism that women use to break free of patriarchy and gender violence. I, therefore, argue that this particular collective female coping strategy opens up areas that are silent on the subject of domestic violence in particular.

Basically, there are two important things that characterise the collective coping strategy of the widows. Firstly, the widows are collectively murderers who, as mentioned above, do not actually dirty their hands with the blood of the abusive husbands. Instead, they employ a man whose past includes being a former convict to be the eliminator of the men condemned by BWS. Unlike the black widow spider which is famed for using consumptive sex to lure the male spider so as to kill it, the black widows employ a man to murder other men. It is only in the end that the widows use their hands to kill a man who, ironically, had been their hitman.

Secondly, even though the actions of the widows are a result of collectivity, it is the powerful organ of BWS known as the Triumvirate,¹² consisting of Tallulah, Edna and Nkosazana, that ultimately sanctions the killings after assessing the merits of the cases brought before them. The Triumvirate acts as jury and judge although the sentences are passed in the absence of the accused. In the chapter entitled 'The Black Widow Spider Always Feeds on her Mate,' Mzwakhe says: "These women decided to play judge and jury with their husbands' lives, they weighed the crimes committed by their husbands and decided to impose death sentences on the poor

¹² I use the word 'collective' here to imply female comradeship that allows women to act together to eliminate abusive husbands and partners based on the BWS secret code. However, I am cognisant of the varied nature of the identities of the key members of the Triumvirate who do not always agree on the best course of action to take to obtain justice for abused women. For instance, on the one hand, Tallulah is genuinely interested in the cause of helping all women who are abused in the domestic sphere. On the other hand, Nkosazana is driven by the profit motive that accrue from the elimination of husbands (abusive or not). Yet Edna is the level-headed one who reconciles the two warring sides of the other two members. Thus, the collective action is destroyed by Nkosazana who chooses to act alone in the case of millionaire, Max Cameroon, even though Tallulah is against killing him as he is not abusive to his young wife.

bastards” (264). Such a situation represents the expanded version of femininity which had now the power to decide how and when the abusive husbands are to be eliminated. However, collectivity as a female coping strategy does not position the widows at the same level of power as the final decisions on eliminations are made by the Triumvirate.

In the novel, the discourse of patriarchy operates within the notion of control. Patriarchy treats abused women who turn to their neighbours for help as shameful, whereas the men who are normally the abusers are exonerated, celebrated and even insulated from such shame. In the text, instead of being subjected to such shame, the unnamed bleeding woman prefers to stand in the dark cold rather than to seek the assistance she certainly needs from her neighbours. It is the issue of shame that serves as the inhibitor to seeking help as “[s]he wonders why her husband is not afraid of what the neighbours will say” (2). While the abused woman contemplates the shame that accompanies the action of seeking help from the neighbours, “her husband lies in their bed” (2), ostensibly unmoved and unashamed by his actions. Crucially, in her analysis of *Black Widow Society*, Murray (2016, 21-22) identifies the element of shame “that attaches to being a victim of domestic violence, and the concomitant impulse to hide the abuse, [as] a common thread in the narratives of women in such relationships.” However, the opening chapter of the text ends with the unnamed woman taking a stand as “[s]he swears this is the last time” (3) that she has to endure domestic violence. That she remains unnamed until later in the novel shows that this was the kind of domestic abuse that women were forced to live with until they decided to take the drastic steps that include killing the abusers. Later in the text, we learn that this unnamed woman is Tallulah, who is forced to adopt a radical stance that would, as we learn later, include eliminating the men who abuse women which then leads to the birth of BWS.

Female solidarity is a crucial component of the female coping strategy when it comes to battling the domestic violence, isolation and secrecy that create vulnerability among many of the female characters in Makholwa’s text. Through the creation of characters that come from different backgrounds, Makholwa reveals that the victims of domestic violence do not experience or react to it in the same way. For instance, there is a compulsion by some of the victims of domestic

violence to blame themselves for the abuse as they even attempt to conceal it. A case in point is that of Thami, who is unexpectedly served with divorce papers but elects to self-isolate as she wallows in her pain. Before being served with divorce papers, Thami believed in a fairy tale of a happy marriage with her husband, Lloyd, as evidenced by her ruminations over “her fourth-year anniversary with this amazing man who seemed to be the embodiment of all her wishes for marital bliss” (4). Though the warning signs that Lloyd was cheating were quite clear, she ignored them as she “wallowed in his sweet mutterings, in his soft yet masculine touch and she allowed herself to be completely lost in love” (7). However, barely two weeks pass before “divorce papers [are] delivered to [Thami’s] office address” (7). What pains her most is that “everybody knew” about her husband’s infidelity yet “she remained none the wiser” (29). As a result, she finds herself shedding “tears of humiliation” which made her feel “like locking herself up in her house” (29). This represents an emotional abuse which is a kind of domestic abuse that some women in the text have to deal with in their relationships with men. It is this emotional abuse among others that makes the women in the text turn to a collective female coping strategy as a way to deal with gender violence under the banner of BWS.

Furthermore, since patriarchal power structures repress women in their ability to choose and to act, the female-coping strategy becomes a means of counterattacking and overpowering those structural constrictions to liberate themselves. This coping strategy inevitably culminates in the transformation of the lives of female protagonists such as Tallulah and Edna Whithead, among others. For instance, as part of the Triumvirate, Edna occupies the powerful position of secretary-general. She is transformed from a woman who was on the verge of committing suicide to a powerful mining magnate who is the “proprietor of the Modimola platinum mine” (138) after the organised elimination of her abusive husband. Edna’s husband, Jake Whithead, had a “cookie jar [which] was a troop of sexually available secretaries who had been a constant in her more than two-decades-long marriage” (39). Because Edna had been unable to give him an heir apparent, Jake chose to sleep with most of his secretaries whom he called the ‘cookie jar’. As a result, Edna was on the verge of committing suicide upon receiving a picture of a baby boy named Jake Junior from Jake’s 22-year-old secretary. It was a call to Tallulah that saved and

transformed her into one of the most powerful businesswomen and a founding member of BWS. With the help of Tallulah, Edna adopted a coping strategy that meant engaging in violence which significantly allowed her to change the traditional femininity imposed by patriarchy. She was no longer “this submissive housewife, living with a man [she] barely saw” (138). It was this event that had transpired fifteen years ago that turned her into the woman she had become.

At this point, it is important to analyse the character of Tallulah, whom – as previously mentioned - we learn is the unnamed woman we first met in the first chapter. In this first chapter, her vulnerability is graphically captured as she has to endure physical violence when her husband “kicks her like a useless piece of garbage” leaving her feeling “a sense of worthlessness overcoming her” (3). From that moment she swore to herself that “this is the last time” (3). The reader meets her for the second time in the chapter entitled ‘Surprise Elimination’ where she is addressing the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of a secret organisation known as BWS “as its members referred to it” (16). BWS is said to be her brainchild possibly borne out of her resolution that she will never be kicked again like a piece of dirt. It is a society that draws its membership from “wealthy women from varying professions” (17).

In this chapter, ‘Surprise Elimination,’ Tallulah is certainly a transformed woman as she is described as “the matriarch of the BWS” (17), “their grande dame” (17) and “the godmother of this sect” (17). Such words are indicators of the woman she had become and the power that she now possesses. This transformation occurs after she had adopted a coping strategy that centred on ordering the elimination of abusive men like her former husband, Mphikeleli. Significantly, as a great transformation from the Tallulah in the first chapter, she now occupies a most powerful position that is conventionally associated with men within patriarchy. She is no longer the shamed woman as she now commands respect from the members of this secret society. Thus, the female-coping mechanism which involves using violence involves women who turn to retributive justice to regain their place in a society that only gives power to men. Equally important is the observation that female killers take violence out of men’s hands and into theirs.

Such actions represent the symbolic act of de-gendering the notion of perpetrators, a concept which is traditionally associated with men.

An interrogation of the notion of the collectivity of the abused women is crucial to an understanding of *Black Widow Society* as a text that foregrounds the female coping mechanism. This form of coping strategy is epitomised by a sisterhood that is cultivated within the ranks and files of the BWS through sisterly bonds that tie the abused women together. Victims of domestic abuse normally have to deal with the abuse on their own and their screams and cries are dismissed as a family affair that outsiders should not interfere with. This type of violence is very private and the victims are not prepared to openly acknowledge that they are being violated. By belonging to a secret society, these women collectively deploy violence to fight gender violence because negotiating with violent men cannot be an option when they continue to suffer at the hands of abusive men. The representation of the collective female-coping strategy resonates with the lived experiences of women under patriarchy and serves to create alternative models of female experience that challenge the hegemonic perception of women as helpless victims.

The notion of 'sisterhood' is, therefore, an affront to patriarchy as it is a deviation from the kind of women who "had come to the society broken, weak, vulnerable, and without confidence" (18). Words like 'broken', 'weak', 'vulnerable' and 'without confidence' describe how powerless these women were due to domestic violence that was perpetrated by their husbands or partners. More so, what made these women powerless is that they lacked the means with which to cope or to make their voices heard against domestic abuse. Crucially, the sisterhood offered by BWS transforms the widows to become "strong, solid and in control of their destinies" (18) as much as they are confident and powerful women who occupy the position of celebrated killers. Besides, this sisterhood is bound by a secret code that is evident even in the bracelets "with an elegant diamond-studded emblem that curved into the shape of a black widow spider [which] marked the unbreakable ties that bound each of them of the society" (18). The secret code symbolises the new norms that BWS created to counter the oppressive patriarchal norms. Binder (2021, 1178) remarks that, "Tallulah's metaphor of 'finding one's anchor' implies that the Black

Widows offer its members of their sisterhood the security they were previously deprived of by their abusive husbands.” Up to a point, I concur that BWS acts as a form of security for abused women, but it serves also as a collective coping mechanism that enables them to deal with gender violence. This implies that this sisterhood is not simply a challenge to brotherhood, but it is an appropriation of the powers that have long been enjoyed exclusively by men. Sisterhood differs from brotherhood as it is born out of the desire to take revenge as a result of the abuse the women suffered at the hands of men.

In her address to the Annual General Meeting of BWS, Tallulah attempts to justify the existence and the activities of the society by outlining that its main “aim is not to turn this (society) a sprawling society” (19). The idea is to keep the society secret due to the nature of their operations which explains why they met once per year unless there was an urgent issue to be addressed. She believes that the creation of such a society is a moral duty of the abused women, but it entails doing something unethical like orchestrating the incidents that result in the death of abusive men. Thus, as a consequence of domestic violence in their relationships, the abused women turn into authors or instigators of murder acts after losing their innocence. In other words, domestic violence turns a woman from an innocent, powerless and non-violent individual into someone capable of plotting the death of her partner or husband to protect herself. It is these instances of abuse that justify the need for retributive justice. The female coping mechanism only applies to specific women, that is, those who are the victims of domestic abuse. It is in this context that Tallulah says:

Be not proud of your actions sisters because the aim is not to turn this into a sprawling society. We are here purely because of the ties that bind us. We have a moral duty to ourselves and each other to protect what we’ve lost, that innocence we recognise whenever we glimpse those who have had to endure our baptism of fire (19).

The extract reveals the bonds that exist between and among the abused women which are indicated by the deployment of the collective pronouns such as “we” and “us” as well as the possessives “our” and “your.” Even though these women characters hail from different

backgrounds, they elect to use a largely collective-coping mechanism as they choose to act together against domestic violence by orchestrating the elimination of the male culprits. However, as mentioned before, to eliminate the errant and abusive husbands and partners, the BWS employs a male professional hitman, Mzwakhe Khuzwayo. Interestingly, the modus operandi of the society is to use a professional hit-man, when in fact, men are the reasons behind the formation of this secret society. After the eradication of the abusive men, the BWS goes on to claim the life assurance policies belonging to the victims. In this case, Binder argues that killing the male abusers represents a dynamic coping mechanism. However, as pointed out earlier on, I treat the coping mechanism as a strategy that is adopted by the female victims of gender violence to break free from abuse.

Consistent with the notion of women contesting their victimhood, sisterhood provides an opportunity for women to use solidarity as a form of a coping mechanism against gender violence. This is reflected through the notions of sisterhood and solidarity that foreground the existence of BWS. What is interesting is how Tallulah describes the 'before' and the 'after' of these women:

'Sisters [...] as much as I bemoan the escalating numbers of our kind, a part of me applauds the fierceness, and sheer willpower that has brought all of you earth mothers to this room. For many years, others like us endured pain, trauma, and torture at the hands of unappreciative dogs who badgered and bludgeoned us. Pelted us with vitriolic words and violent beatings until one day, we finally stopped and listened. We listened to what our souls told us. Yes. Yes. We listened to what our souls told us' (19).

It is evident that women had to endure gender violence in their married lives as they were verbally and physically assaulted. Words like 'pain', 'trauma' or 'torture' capture the sufferings and the abuses that women were subjected to. The 'enemy' is depicted and framed in the foregoing passage through the use of hate words or phrases such as "unappreciative dogs" who "badgered and bludgeoned us", "pelted us with vitriolic words" while the use of "our," "we," "us," "sisters" and "earth mothers" universalises the experience of women. After identifying their enemy, these women are transformed as indicated by the contrast between the "us" who

“endured pain, trauma, and torture” as an object of domestic abuse and the “us” who are agentic and act upon what the souls say. In this text, sisterhood empowers females to move past the individual suffering by adopting a collective coping mechanism that enables them to “fight[ing] for justice and help[ing] the underdog.” Significantly, the statement “[we] listened to what our souls told us” (19) which Tallulah uttered twice reveals how domestic violence torments or traumatises, agonises and tortures women to a point where their souls say: enough is enough. They listened to their souls which called for retaliation as the best form of self-defence as a coping strategy.

Furthermore, women find strength through a network of relationships with other women which is valuable, even when such solidarity exists in diversity. Lorde (1984, 116) remarks that “a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood does not in fact exist.” Despite such arguments or regardless of such differences, female solidarity is necessary as it provides a coping strategy for abused women to deal with instances of domestic violence. It is in line with this observation that Tallulah tells the members of BWS: “Be there for a sister who bears that dark, sad and haunted look that you used to wear [...] be aware of that woman whose smile does not reach her eyes. Whose burst lip, and clumsy explanation of countless ‘accidents’ rings untrue. You remember those excuses” (19). That the newly empowered ‘black’¹³ widows belong to a sisterhood means that their allegiance should be to care for other women in situations of abuse by helping them to free themselves. It is on this note that Binder (2015, 3) observes that Makholwa’s *Black Widow Society* “tap[s] a resource common amongst black women: the interdependence between women. Their sisterhood procures female empowerment beyond the individual and beyond the current generation.” While I agree on the issue of the interdependence of women, I would add that the point raised here is that women choose to collectively reposition themselves as perpetrators and not victims of domestic abuse. In other words, female empowerment can only be attained through actively adopting coping mechanisms that permit women to collectively extricate themselves from gender violence.

¹³ The members of BWS are all referred to as ‘black widow’ to denote their actions of killing their husbands or partners which resemble those of a spider known as the black widow.

What makes the study of domestic violence in this text even more interesting is that there are times when its method of eliminating spouses or partners is counter-productive. In the chapter “Surprise Elimination”, the reader learns that the society’s modus operandi becomes the same method that is used against them when one of their members is eliminated by her husband. This is shown when Tallulah is interrupted while delivering her speech at the AGM of the society by the news that a senior member of the BWS, Nokuthula Gumede, has been murdered. In a twist of events, Nokuthula has “just been killed in a robbery” in her home (22) as her husband has apparently “had her taken out” (22). As it turns out, the same husband, China Gumede, is also eliminated in a hit sanctioned by the BWS.

The earlier discussion of Tallulah can be developed further by focusing on the chapter entitled ‘Tallulah’s Secret’. In this chapter, Tallulah’s other side, which involves momentarily relinquishing her power to men, is revealed. When it comes to sexual gratification, she is depicted as someone who prefers a man who can “take charge” because she likes the “games of master and servant” and the “slightly misogynistic” side of men and to be “punished” (106) as well as to be sexually “[man]handled” (107) or dominated by men. Despite temporarily relinquishing her power to men, Tallulah still retains control of her body as she decides how she wants to be handled as much as she has firm control over her sexual preferences unlike when she was married to Mphikeleli. Though sexuality counts as one thing that belongs to women, it is essentially the male-dominated society that controls it. This is depicted in the text where Mphikeleli, Tallulah’s late husband, often foisted on her his preferred sexual style, the old missionary position, during their love-making, thereby resulting in her lack of sexual gratification:

Sex with Mphikeleli had always seemed quite perfunctory and mechanical; she’d married him when she was twenty years old and barely out of her school tunic so she’d merely gone along with whatever he wanted in the bedroom, which was usually just the boring old missionary position.

It was only after he’d left the land of the living that she started experiencing the exciting variation that came with making love to more sexually experienced men.

In time she began to understand what she liked, how she liked to be handled in bed, for this was after all the only domain where she could indeed ‘be handled’ (107).

This reference to Tallulah's sex life with Mphikeleli reveals that it was an uneventful, "perfunctory and mechanical" activity characterised by the "boring old missionary position" (107), but since his death she was now in control of how the sexual act should be done. Though we learn that the sex scene signifies the only realm wherein she can be handled, she expresses her sexual autonomy by choosing men who are more experienced in satiating her sexual drive. As a result, the new woman who emerges out of violence seems to exist outside the conventions of what constitutes a woman in a male-dominated society. On the one hand, this is exemplified by what happens when Tallulah's sexual acts change the moment she orders the elimination of her husband. On the other hand, as a lesbian, Nkosazana challenges the notion of sexuality which is normally conflated with gender when assigning the victim status to women. She ranks as the only member of BWS who has never been married and has always been in control of her sexual identity. Her lesbian identity places her outside the male-dominated heterosexual marriages or relationships. Besides, her lesbian character tends to raise issues related to sexism and female solidarity which is based on the lived experience of domestic abuse.

Symbolically, the sex imagery shows how women exercise their coping strategy in an attempt to attain self-gratification by challenging patriarchal hetero-normative sexuality. Besides, Tallulah is also in a position to choose the place and time to have sexual intercourse on her own terms. Conversely, her right to enjoy sexual encounters in the way she does means that she has to allow herself to be dominated by her male sexual partner. This is a decision she voluntarily makes without being coerced by her male partner. This is revealed when the reader is told that: "When she discovered how liberating it could be to allow that domination, for once to be free of responsibility, she revelled in it. She preferred powerful men who can take momentary charge over her body during sexual acts" (107). Her choice of sexual partners included a string of 'boys' such as Boris who, on the one hand, was endowed with "masculine assurance," was "cocksure" and had a "naturally domineering personality" (105). On the other hand, Kingston "was straight out of an old bodice ripper novel" and "was ultra-confident and knew how to handle a woman...especially a woman like Tallulah" (106) while Khaya described himself as a student. She turned to these 'boys' when she needed to be "fixed" (105), sexually. Though the word 'fix/fixed'

suggests that something is broken and needs to be repaired, in this instance, it has a therapeutic effect as it helps Tallulah to restore her sanity amidst the killings. In other words, she needed fixing because "[s]he had travelled into the darkest plains of the universe to assert this power she now possessed" (106). For this reason, Tallulah's character reveals how women can attain a sexual liberation which they do not enjoy in their marriages. Thus, NtamboNtambo and Christelle (2018, 29-30) conclude that "free sexualities do not only make [women]... attain self-fulfillment but [are] equally a symbol of their resistance because they go against the description of femininity prescribed by patriarchy and colonialism." As a result of free sexualities, Tallulah acquires vast sexual experience as she knows what gratifies her and the type of sexual partner that can satiate her sexually as an articulation of the control she has over her body. Also, she becomes the controller of her own sexual pleasure and desires, which, in itself is a departure from her married life where she was treated as a sexual object by her husband.

It is interesting to note that Tallulah's character stretches femininity even further by uprooting the male dominance in sex matters. As previously mentioned, her late husband always preferred a missionary position which installed him at the centre of the sexual act. This means the desire and enjoyment of sex elided the woman from the equation. Tallulah was a sexual object designed to offer her husband sexual gratification. If a man can derive enjoyment from a sexual act by being the dominant force, a woman like Tallulah can do the same or even better by choosing when, how and with whom to have sexual intercourse. Whilst patriarchy would frown on such sexual liberty, for women like Tallulah, it serves to give them control over the sexual act which represents a norm that flies in the face of conventional femininity. If one wants to find an answer to the earlier question of what is a woman or what becomes of a woman in a society ridden with gender violence, then the answer can be found in a woman like Tallulah who has control of every aspect of her life. In fact, each and every member of BWS represents a different version of women who are the products of domestic violence.

Thus, in the text, to negotiate their way in a context where gender violence is rife and where the danger of being relegated to mere victims is as profound, women try to move beyond being survivors to being the writers of their own scripts. The stories of the BWS women would not

necessarily warrant a space in the masculinist narratives, yet their experiences of gender violence demand that they actively devise ways or means to cope with such situations. It emerges that no woman remains unscathed in contexts where gender and sexuality are under permanent patriarchal surveillance. In the text, the specific means of redress comprise severe punishment against the abusers as a way of getting even for heinous wrongs committed against women, and providing a final solution for the social illness the perpetrators would otherwise carry forth into future generations. It is in this context that De Kock (2016, 113) argues that “[w]hat is unusual about such bloodletting in Makholwa’s case, apart from its effortlessness, is the nature of its morality-tale framing.” The element of morality-tale framing implies that in Makholwa’s text there is a contestation of ethical problems relating to whether it is right or wrong to kill abusive husbands. As a result, the creation of murderous female characters complicates the notion of a female coping strategy as it is against the moral values that view the murder of abusers as ethically wrong. In the text, bloodletting seems to be normalised through the way the members of the secret society seemingly get away with murder.

It is evident that this text is not positing a simple solution to the ubiquity of gender violence caused by men especially in view of the ethical questions that arise from the killing of abusive men. Rather, the text problematises the practice of resolving domestic violence through murder since the killing of abusive husbands and partners does not appear to eradicate gender violence. In order to resolve this ethical or moral problem, Makholwa adopts several strategies. Firstly, she creates women characters who are remorseful about the killings of or the intention to kill their partners as epitomised in the character of Janine Myburg. She is forced by Alex to seduce a widower, Maxwell Cameroon, for a “coupla million” (69) and get rid of him in the process. Instead of going ahead with the plan to eliminate Maxwell, she backtracks and decides to turn the tables against Alex. The actions of these women reveal the unattainable nature of a coping strategy that based on committing murder. In the chapter, ‘No Honour amongst Thieves’, Janine realises that “this whole thing [of killing Maxwell] is a bit of a...it’s a mistake” (247) because “[she loved her] husband” (248). The character of Janine represents a crucial difference since she is not abused like the members of BWS. Having her husband killed would have gone against what BWS stood for since it was a society for abused women.

Also, Makholwa shows that, despite being one of the women behind the creation of a killing machine in the form of BWS, Tallulah still had a humane side that prevented her from becoming a heartless and heinous killer. In the chapter, 'The Triumvirate 111,' Tallulah and Nkosazana are at loggerheads over the new case that the latter brought for deliberation by the Triumvirate. Nkosazana admits that the case falls outside the scope of cases BWS normally deals with since there is no "marital dilemma" (139), though this case is worth millions of Rands. Whilst Edna muses over whether an old man falling in love with "a significantly younger woman [is] a crime" (140), Tallulah is incensed that Nkosazana expects her "to send a man to the gallows just because he happens to be old and wealthy and just happened to fall in love with a young woman" (40). This shows that Tallulah has a humane side that prevents her from killing a man who is not abusive, but happens to be rich and in love with a young woman. She argues against eliminating innocent men based on their wealth and wonders if BWS is about "getting into the pockets of the rich, no matter what the circumstances" (140).

Despite being involved in a series of murders, Tallulah believes that BWS has a moral duty to itself that includes liberating women from abusive relationships by killing the abusers without being driven by monetary gains since the organisation is "not a profit-making body," but it exists to "help women" (52). What, therefore, justifies the killing of abusive men is that these women are acting in self-defence against domestic abuse. Thus, the moral duty of BWS is to offer social justice, albeit retributive justice, to the victims of domestic violence so that they can regain their ability to act independently. This is despite the contradictory nature of what BWS calls a moral duty and what morality stands for since killing an errant male is itself an immoral act. Even though these women are in the business of murdering abusive men and reaping the money from their insurance policies, Tallulah believes this should not be done in a way that violates the code of the society.

There is an interesting development in the case of Thami, who agreed to the elimination of her husband and cousin, but who is then remorseful for her complicity in their murder. In the

chapter, "The Haunting of Lady T", Thami regrets that the murder of Lloyd and Nomhle "did not provide her the sweet justice she had craved" since what "she felt was this hollow sense of loss and the huge weight of regret" (171). This remorsefulness reveals that, despite assenting to the murder of her husband and his lover, she still had a part of her that was bound to morality because she was convinced that "the whole thing ...had an alien, dark and malevolent quality to it" (170). Statements like "They (black widows) just seemed so evil and tainted"(170) and "She (Tallulah) was like a vampire" (170) demonstrate that Thami was against the coping strategy that was based on murder and made or transformed women into dangerous killing machines that sought to attain an alternative sense of justice. Thami describes the Young Women's Academy which was Tallulah's project as "a lofty ideal [because] all that they were doing was making themselves feel better about their murderous pursuits" (170).

The demise of BWS begins in the chapter 'Truth Serum' when Thami reveals how she had agreed to the killing of her husband, Llyod, by a hit-man hired by BWS only to realise her mistake. She confides in Khaya, a stranger she has just met at the time she started regretting her actions. After listening to what looks like a confession about the murderous activities of BWS, Khaya asks her an ethical question: "Don't you think you could still make things right with your conscience...with God by exposing them?" (213). Such a question allows Thami to see how complicit she is in the killings undertaken by the BWS as she admits that: "I'm no better than those...I'm exactly like them. What they did, I did too" (213). By constructing a character who is contrite about what she has done, Makholwa restores a sense of morality.

In the text, Makholwa seems to further acknowledge the moral and legal consequences of murder. To resolve this unethical situation, Mzwakhe becomes the society's nemesis. Notably in the chapter entitled 'The Black Widow Spider Always Feeds on her Mate,' the narrative describes how Mzwakhe turns his gun against the members of the society, leading to a bloodbath at what becomes the society's last meeting. After murdering Marie, Mzwakhe shoots and kills several members of the society, including Thami and Nkosazana, but he is also killed in the process. The act of killing the hired gun and other members of BWS is symbolic in that it puts an end to a

coping strategy that created criminals out of women. Thus, using a man to eliminate abusive men does not necessarily culminate in the end of domestic abuse since Mzwakhe, BWS's hired gun, kills the women he was paid to protect. In this text, the female characters who sought to leave their abusive relationships by killing their partners or husbands do not remain unpunished as five surviving members are arrested in "what is termed the 'Black Widow Society Case'" (277). It is only Tallulah Ntuli and Edna Whithead that manage to escape jail time, which enables them to attain the goal of creating the academy for young women. The two reflect that the Black Widow Society "had managed to eat them alive, just like all black widow spiders do" (273).

The final chapter, entitled 'Four years later,' most succinctly captures the nobler goals of BWS:

Most of the households in Karawa made their living from fishing which was barely enough to feed the mouths of family members. Female children were seldom exposed to any education due to a lack of funds and infrastructure. With the arrival of Tallulah and Edna, changes began to sweep through the community especially for the young rural girls (277).

This suggests that educating girls and young women is a more viable coping mechanism to fight domestic violence than that which turns women into killers. Tallulah and Edna decided to invest in the young girls emanating from poor communities. Perhaps the reason why Makholwa saves Tallulah and Edna towards the end of the novel is that they have to realise the dream of founding the Young Women's Academy, though this happens in the remotest part of Malawi. The moral issues raised in the text are resolved through a process of purgation. The purgation of the murderous women is necessary for a new breed or a new crop of empowered young women to arise out of the demise of an organisation that consisted of women who were compelled to turn to killing their abusive spouses or partners as a coping strategy.

However, it is Tallulah's reaction to the death of Nokuthula Gumede, who has been killed in a hit sanctioned by her husband that is ironic. Tallulah says, "without the slightest hint of irony," that: "Imagine a husband killing his own wife — the mother of his children? You really have to wonder what kind of society we're living in" (22). While Tallulah finds it appalling and almost

unpardonable for a husband like China Gumede to organise the elimination of his wife, she does not find it equally repulsive for a wife to arrange a hit on her husband. Indeed, it shows that the world painted in the text is a strange one if one act of killing one's spouse is condemned in one context and glorified in another context. Violence that accrues from the domestic sphere erases any vestiges of innocence that might still be remaining in the marriage institution. In other words, while the BWS condones the killing of husbands or philanderers by their wives, this rule or thinking does not extend to the killing of wives by their husbands.

Empowering the next generation of young women serves as a mechanism for resolving the fragility or vulnerability of women. It was always Tallulah's dream to start a programme known as the 'Young Women's Academy' "aimed at producing a new breed of woman who would be given the type of education that would empower her to avoid the kinds of decisions that had led most of the black widows to their ill-fated marriages and partnerships" (17). Gender violence does not simply take place, but it is part of a much broader system of skewed patriarchal structures of power and social disparities that usually imply that the choices of women are severely constrained. As a result, the empowerment programme epitomised by the 'Young Women's Academy' would allow for a deep-seated reconstruction of the female-coping strategy by ridding it of its murderous traits. The Young Women's Academy would enable women to make better life choices on issues that centre around the institution of marriage. If women are empowered to make individual choices, this would help them in attaining social and gender justice. Subsequently, the goals of the envisaged academy clearly state that there is a need to produce a new crop of women who are able to perform an empowered form of femininity which does not see them as victims. This implies that the term victimhood would cease to be solely associated with women, but will be applicable to anyone who has been violated, sexually, physically, psychologically, politically, economical, socially or otherwise. That person need not be a woman.

My act of choosing to read the murderous actions of these women as a transgression is linked to the notion of collective female coping as a tool with which to fight gender violence. Gender

violence turns these women into killers, an act which constitutes transgressive womanhood. This type of womanhood is based on the legitimate use of force as a coping strategy against the dominant social conditions of gender violence which treats women as victims. Being part of the collective coping strategy affords these women a sense of group participation and power that involves breaking the continuous production and representation of gender violence as authored by men on passive women. This is what the souls of these abused women tell them to do after enduring domestic violence. In short, it seems Makholwa is saying that, when society drives these women to the edge through patriarchal gender violence, we should not be surprised when they become monsters or killers who take the law into their own hands. The alternative is to empower women through educational programmes for them to chart their own destinies. Thus, women are not mere survivors of domestic abuse, but they may be violators and instigators of retributive justice. However, the act of de-gendering the notion of perpetrators which is conventionally linked to men is abandoned towards the end of the novel with the killing or incarceration of the women who had killed their husbands or partners.

Conclusion

In both novels, the protagonists experiment with female coping strategies in the face of gender violence. On the one hand, in Mackenzie's *Random Violence*, the focus is on the individual coping mechanism seen in how a female investigator deals with, fractures, resists and challenges the patriarchal structures of power that lead to gendered violence. On the other hand, Makholwa's *Black Widow Society* delves into the collective female coping strategies as depicted through women who turn to murder when faced with domestic violence. In this text, women orchestrate murder to attain social justice and to have access to collective coping strategy as widows. This chapter, therefore, suggests that both texts contest, fracture and trouble the patriarchal forms of representation of women as victims of gender violence by foregrounding female-coping strategies at individual and group level. The traditional position of womanhood is revised through the notion of a female-coping mechanism. It is this form of coping strategy that envisions a new system where patriarchy gives way to a more equal society peopled by women and men who have equal access to places of power. Such a society allows women, like men, to break culturally endorsed forms of violence and be recognised for their daring acts. In short, the

question 'what is a woman?', which this chapter sought to address, reveals that, after the act of eliminating the criminals and abusive men, these women are significantly transformed as they are no longer weaklings and innocent individuals as per societal definition. Thus, a woman is someone is endowed with power and can exercise it in ways that can be considered violent. She is in a position to resist any form of gender violence.

Both texts implicitly acknowledge that their solution to the problem of gender is fictional. However, there is a difference between Mackenzie's and Makholwa's attitude towards violence or violent women. On the one hand, in her text, Mackenzie seems to regard violence as a means to an end as her protagonist gets away with murder as she escapes jail time. Her actions are always backed by compelling reasons which have to do with investigating a cold case and finding justice for the victims of violence. As noted already, Jade continues to commit violent acts in the other installments of the Jade series where she is the lead character. In other words, violence is what keeps Jade alive in the fictional world marked by gender violence against women. On the other hand, Makholwa problematises her proposed solution to domestic violence that centres on eliminating abusive husbands and partners. Her attitude towards violent women is seen in the way some of the members of BWS, including Nkosazana, one of the founding members of BSW, and its hired killer, Mzwakhe, are killed towards the end of the text. The surviving members, with the exception of Tallulah and Edna, are arrested. This means Makholwa is not willing to permit her proposed solution to domestic violence to become a viable option. Thus, in *Black Widow Society*, Makholwa demonstrates that the victims of domestic violence who normally suffer in silence can be driven to the extremes where they can be forced to take the law into their own hands.

Chapter 4

Speaking the Unspeakable of Gender Violence in 'Exhibit A' and 'The Lazarus Effect'

In the previous chapter, I focused on the female coping strategy as depicted through the notion of murderous women. I argued that some female characters kill, intentionally or unintentionally, as a coping strategy against gender violence in the post-apartheid South African cultural matrix. I also demonstrated that those women resort to violence in response to the violence they encounter in private and public spaces. However, in this chapter, I examine how gender violence in Sarah Lotz's (2009) *Exhibit A* and Hawa Jande Golakai's (2011) *The Lazarus Effect* is represented as a form of unequal power distribution between males and females. Both texts deal with the dynamics of power relations that are employed to perpetuate gender violence against women. Also, in this chapter, I focus on the important differences between the accounts of gender power relations or power struggles in the form of sexual violence as depicted in Lotz's text, and murder and the disappearance of children as portrayed in Golakai's text. These texts reveal that female characters deliberately subvert and disrupt the skewed gender power relations that seek to confine them in positions of victimhood. Thus, this chapter aims to provide an analysis of gender power relations that are deployed in patriarchal societies to inflict gender violence on women as a way to control them.

The discussion of the two texts is structurally subdivided into two parts. The first subsection, 'Tripping over the Fenced Landscapes of Gender Power Relations in *Exhibit A*' frames gender power relations within the subject of women who drink alcohol. The second subsection entitled 'Undoing gendered power inequalities in *The Lazarus Effect*' looks at the way women transgress their subordinated positions to contest gender violence. I start by exploring how the skewed gender relations operate to deny the female victim of gender violence some form of social justice using Sarah Lotz's *Exhibit A*. Through unbalanced gender power relations, the victim of rape is stripped of the power over her body. The crime of rape and the inherent violation of the female body are often accompanied by a 'blame the victim' mantra. The victim is labelled as culpable for the crime of rape. It will be demonstrated that the perceived drinking problem in women in the text is used to disempower the female victims of rape. In general, through intoxication, victims lose control over their bodies and fall prey to sexual abuse. This section

illustrates that the female victim, Nina Jacobs, actively seeks justice against the man who raped her by disrupting the power configuration that is tilted against women who drink alcohol. This is no mean task as all odds are pitted against her. *Exhibit A* narrates the story of a corrupt police system and documents the collusion of the justice system with the patriarchal system to disempower women through sexual violation.

The second part of this chapter focuses on Hawa Jande Golakai's *The Lazarus Effect* by exploring how a migrant female investigator, Voinjama, decides to investigate the disappearance of young children in Cape Town. Working in conjunction with her white lesbian assistant, Chloe Bishop, Voinjama (or Vee) is depicted as a female who disrupts the unbalanced gender power relations as she seeks to deal with her own troubled past. In the process, her character debunks the vulnerable migrant identity which complicates the gender power relations between men and women, particularly as a woman who does not belong to the society and country she finds herself in. As a result, she has to concurrently undo gender power relations as well as the disempowered position of a migrant woman in her quest to find social justice for the victim of murder and closure for a traumatic past. This text establishes the interconnectedness that exists between Vee and Jacqui, the girl who disappeared without a trace, as an example of how survival is presented as an assertion of some power in instances of gender violence. On the one hand, Vee asserts her some power by surviving her childhood trauma and physical attacks she later encountered in the course of her investigation. On the other hand, not only does Jacqui refuse to disappear without a trace, but she speaks to Vee through visions which lead her on the path to seek justice for the deceased girl. In other words, even dead bodies can assert some power by refusing to die in vain. Thus, by solving the case of Jacqui's disappearance, Vee effectively deals with the spectre of the past that came back to torment her, but she also obtains justice for Jacqui.

Thus, the two texts contribute to the dialogue of undoing the unbalanced gender power relations that are a facet of women's lived experience in post-apartheid South Africa.

Tripping over the Fenced Landscapes of Gender Power Relations in *Exhibit A*

Lotz's novel, *Exhibit A*, depicts the spectrum of gendered power struggles where women are confined to the periphery as the gendered Other. It is ironical that even as they are repressed, they are expected to behave within the acceptable gender norms. It is from such confined spaces that women seek to break free by contesting the power that traditionally lies in the hands of men. Lotz's text advances a feminist agenda based on Nina's attempts at undoing gender power relations that are mainly responsible for entrenching sexual violence as a form of social and patriarchal control over women. The text is used to trouble the silencing and regulation of women's bodies as the gendered Other through an exposition of the unbalanced power relations between the victim and the victimiser. Nina's quest for justice represents a woman's attempt to break the walls around the unutterable crime that traumatises and disempowers the victim. It is in this light that Gqola (2015, 21) posits that "[r]ape is the communication of patriarchal power, reigning [sic] in, enforcing submission and punishing defiance. It is an extreme act of aggression and of power, always gendered and enacted against the feminine." As a result, when the victim of rape, Nina Jacobs, seeks justice against the rapist, she is challenging the conservative or patriarchal society that renders her powerless and punishes her for straying outside the bounded fence of womanhood. Her fight to attain social justice begins when her sister, Rachel, solicits the assistance of a Cape Town-based lawyer, George Allen. Together with his friend, Advocate Patrick McLennan or the Poison Dwarf, George decides to represent Nina Jacobs on a pro bono basis in her quest for justice. At this point Nina retains hope that she will find justice this time around after her first rape ordeal was erased by her conservative adoptive parents.

A closer analysis of *Exhibit A* reveals that the novel explores how the crime of rape represents the unbalanced societal or gender power relations that are meant to keep women within an enclosed space. More specifically, sexual violence is a weapon of power that is deployed against women who drink alcoholic beverages as a way to whip them back into line. The story centres around Nina who is raped by a police officer in a police cell whilst in a drunken stupor. The text focuses on Nina's attempts to reclaim her power by seeking justice against a corrupt police system. In the process, she challenges the prevailing gender power relations over women who

are alcoholics and supposedly promiscuous. The story becomes a power struggle between a powerless rape victim who has to prove that she was indeed raped by a police officer at a police station and a powerful officer who is an embodiment of the corrupt police system in the small town of Barryville that tries to conceal the crime. Thus, the text provides a literary representation of gender power relations that work to control and condition the behaviour of women. Through Nina's character, Lotz seeks to question a patriarchal society that still employs alcohol and rape to prevent women who are raped in drunken state from seeking justice. That Nina has to stand up to fight and attain some form of social justice exposes the negative power relations that women are subjected to in a patriarchal society. In this text, patriarchal hegemony or power is disrupted by subversion, contestation or resistance offered by women who are traditionally depicted as the powerless Other. Subsequently, in this text, Lotz provides an intersectionality of gender, power relations and violent crime as a way to trouble skewed gender relations that presents men as more powerful than women. However, this does not imply that women are permanently powerless, but that patriarchy always thrives to impose its power on women by silencing using violent acts such as rape.

Two things are quite clear from the onset of the story. Firstly, Nina Jacobs migrates from Cape Town to the little town of Barryville which makes her an outsider. As a result, she fails to fit into Barryville's closed society due to her outsider status. Secondly, she is depicted as a renegade; she is a chain smoker and a drunk, shabbily dressed in oversized clothes, which all point to a dissident. As the narrator says: "Her slim frame is draped in a floaty dress that looks like it should be worn by a model advertising crumbly chocolate or tampons" (37). It is this failure to fit in and conform that makes Nina an un-woman.¹⁴ It is for this reason that her account of rape is not believed, which has an effect on her quest for justice.

The title of the novel, *Exhibit A*, is derived from the name that George gives to an unwashed, stinking and dirty Cape Town mongrel that has just witnessed a house burglary at Patrick's place.

¹⁴ I borrow this term from Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* where the term is used to describe those women who are deemed useless because they cannot perform their assigned role as baby-making machines or baby incubators. This is the role women are required to fulfill in the Colony of Gilead and failure to do so results in the women being cast off as unwomen. However, in this chapter, I use the term to describe women who are considered useless on account of their drinking habits which makes them powerless even to access social justice.

Even though the dog does not perform an important role in the main events of the story, he is constantly present in the story as much as he becomes an integral part of George's personality and life. Incidentally, the dog becomes part of George's life when he reluctantly agrees to look after him at Patrick's request, albeit temporarily. However, the events in the story point to the need of an exhibit in the form of bodily or physical evidence that can be used to prove that the crime of rape has, indeed, been committed. Ironically, the victim of rape fails to produce the evidence that points to sexual violation since all possible evidence was contaminated by the perpetrator and his colleagues or simply destroyed. As discussed later, both the victim and the perpetrator mention the issue of the condom, but none was ever found at the scene of the crime.

The story is told from a first-person narrative perspective by George, who describes himself as the “worst-dressed lawyer in Cape Town” (10). It is when Rachel calls him to assist her sister Nina that George decides to step in and offer his assistance. In particular, the case involves an offender who (mis)uses his power as a police officer to force himself on Nina who, because of her drunken state, is too subdued to stand and fight against him. In this milieu, the police officer is also operating under the illusion that Nina cannot seek justice for herself. However, this changes when Rachel, the victim’s sister, invites two lawyers, George and Patrick, into a story of a small town that is warped in a web of gender power relations, a corrupt police system, and veiled and open threats from the powerful accused police officer and his colleagues. George and his unruly partner, Advocate Patrick McLennan, together with Exhibit A, a stubborn township mongrel, set out to the platteland town of Barryville to investigate the rape allegations levelled against a police officer at a local police station.

In *Exhibit A*, women encounter lopsidedly different power structures which culminate in gender violence. This is shown by the fact that power and control rest with a corrupt police system and patriarchy, and, to challenge that power, a female character like Nina has to reconfigure power on her own terms. This is evident in that women and men are portrayed as two dissimilar groups. Where men enjoy power, access and privilege within the differential power distribution, women are often represented as repressed and powerless. It is for this reason that a woman like

Nina Jacobs who performs her gender in a way that disrupts normative womanhood attracts negative perceptions through the labels that the society attaches to her. This is exemplified by the doubts that are cast over her reconstruction of the rape incident as alluded to earlier on. Thus, Nina is an example of a woman who is cast off from the predominantly man-dominated power structures on the basis of her transgressive behaviour and her migrant status.¹⁵

From the time Rachel calls George in the middle of the night to tell him that her sister, Nina, who stays in Barryville, has been raped, Nina's character is put under the spotlight. The heinous case of rape is downplayed by the society to the chagrin of the lawyers. Instead of finding ample evidence to support the rape allegations, George and Patrick discover that most of the people they interview or come across in the course of their investigations criticised Nina. In other words, they prefer to talk about her drunken behaviour than about the crime of rape. Some doubt that Nina has been raped. Furthermore, in their investigation of Nina's rape allegations against a police officer, George and Patrick discover the deep-seated power imbalances in Barryville. The two lawyers find themselves treading on the corrupt police system, a conspiracy of lies and power imbalances which make their quest for justice elusive. The investigation by the two lawyers ruffles some feathers within the police station where the rape incident took place. As Murray (2013, 211) argues, "the sexual violence which the female character in Lotz's text experiences clearly exposes problems of profound gender inequalities in the larger social system." Therefore, patriarchal structures of power as represented by the police system and Nina's adoptive parents are responsible for defining traditional forms of womanhood. Traditional womanhood is identified by powerlessness and conforming to oppressive beliefs, norms and values particularly in cases of sexual violence.

In *Exhibit A* (2009), Lotz indicts the skewed gender power relations as evidenced by the way rape is depicted. Rape and police corruption act as twin forces that churn a series of events that

¹⁵ In the analysis of Lotz's *Exhibit A* and Golakai's *The Lazarus Effect*, the term 'migrant status' carries two different, yet related meanings. In Lotz's text, the term represents the notion of an outsider and non-belonging. Nina is originally from Cape Town as she came to Barryville to look for a job and finds an environment that is different from her home town. This makes her an outsider and an outcast. In the case of Voinjama (Vee) in *The Lazarus Effect*, the term denotes someone who comes from another country. In South Africa, Vee is considered a foreigner, which makes her vulnerable to xenophobia and xenophobic attacks. However, it is also the outsider/migrant statuses that allow Nina and Vee to challenge the dominant narrative over rape and murder, respectively.

expose the gendered nature of power which results in gender violence. It is through these events that power struggles occur between different genders which explain why gender violence continues to be inflicted on women and perpetuated in a highly conservative small town. As a result, women like Nina have to embody themselves in an alternative space to subvert the normative gender roles. Through Nina's character, the text reveals how gender roles convey a skewed power and access matrix predicated on inclusions and exclusions, including accepting alcohol consumption by men whilst frowning upon women who drink.

Barryville is described as “one of those tiny South African towns that's stuck in a time warp and is dripping with small-town prejudice and incipient racist values” (6). This makes the town a place where patriarchal power structures are still intact and lopsided in favour of men, and where racism, though veiled, is still considered a factor in sexual violence. Besides, Barryville seems a place that is still in the past as it “looks like a 1970s movie set of a Karoo town: rural, quaint, and no doubt dripping in blood-soaked history if you like that sort of thing” (16). There are several important features about this town that make it a place characterised by power inequalities: firstly, it is a 'small town' and 'rural' which implies that it is easier for a woman like Nina who is seen as alcoholic to be known in and around the town, and to be labelled a promiscuous woman. For instance, on the day Nina leaves Linda's farm, Linda says: “You make me sick to my stomach and everyone in Barryville knows that you're a liar, a whore and a...” (108). This is despite the fact that the only proof of Nina's alleged promiscuity is drinking alcohol in the company of men as revealed by the newspaper that a bartender gives to George and Patrick. The text reads: “On the front page, under the banner 'Barryville Bugle' there's a grainy black and white photo of a plump woman tossing her dreadlocked hair, surrounded by grinning guys clutching quart bottles of Black Label” (30). Thus, by sharing alcohol with men, Nina is regarded as a woman of questionable moral standards, yet the men in the picture with her are spared such disempowering labels.

Secondly, Barryville is 'quaint' or old-fashioned which probably explains why this town is characterised by gender inequalities that treat women differently on account of being alcoholic. Lastly, Barryville is still marked by a 'blood-soaked history' which was most likely based on 'racist

values' and unequal access to power. Racist values displayed by the police officers lead them to take Nina to the police station as she was presumably in danger of being raped. Such a situation constrains the position of women to traditional or normative roles as assigned by the patriarchal power structure. As a small, rural and old-fashioned town, Barryville is likely to be a conservative society where it is easy to spread scathing rumours about someone's character. The rumour mill and labels disempower women by confining them to feminine positions of subservience while allowing men to be powerful.

The first thing that emerges from the investigation conducted by George and Patrick is the outsider status of Nina. It is difficult for her to fit into Barryville's conservative society. As an outsider/migrant, Nina is seen as invading the closed spaces of Barryville. By performing her gender in a transgressive way, she disrupts the power structures of patriarchy that seek to objectify women. By drinking alcohol, going to bars and sharing alcohol with men, Nina disturbs normative womanhood. Through performing her gender in a non-conventional manner, she is viewed as a free-spirited woman. Whilst drinking among men in the text is viewed as something close to an abomination, Nina's actions challenge such social taboos that surround alcohol drinking by women. Women's relationships with their bodies are oftentimes regulated and policed through patriarchal dictates which set and uphold 'questionable' moral standards. Nina's character shows that women are capable of reclaiming their power from male-dominated places. The moment Nina steps into Barryville, she becomes a subject of gossip because of her 'wayward' behaviour which does not seem to fit into Barryville's social fabric. George says:

Small towns need someone or something to gossip about and it looks like Nina was the easy victim the majority of the town's residents (the white ones, anyway) had singled out. As if to prove the theory, Nina's unhealthy pallor seems to improve the further we chug away from Barryville, as if it really was the town itself that was poisonous to her system (126).

By becoming the subject of small-town gossip, Nina's reputation is tainted as she is regarded as an outcast among the white folks in Barryville. This is because she is seen as a carefree woman whose actions make her prone to be sexually violated. The phrase 'poisonous to her system' suggests how debilitating gossiping was to Nina who is described as 'the easy victim.' In the

process, gossiping is meant to disempower her and fix her in state of victimhood. Significantly, patriarchal power is used to superimpose societal expectations often seen as acceptable. The way Nina behaves, especially in public, is castigated. Patrick says: "Lot of God-botherers in this part of the world [i]f Nina likes a drinky and likes a laff, they might not approve" (144). Such expectations are meant to render her powerless thereby preventing her from seeking justice for sexual violence that occurs during her state of drunkenness.

In the text, labels are used for othering women so that they see themselves as inferior or powerless. The challenge comes when a negative label is confirmed; the society is quick to accuse the victim of 'self-grooming' and of being 'culpable' of the rape crime. However, the society in Barryville fails to critically introspect beyond the normative set positions and view the heinous crime for what it is. In the small rural town, drinking among women is still labelled as an aberration that subverts normative femininity. Nina attracts a horde of negative labels. For instance, on three separate occasions, George and Patrick are told that Nina is labelled a "compulsive liar" (99) who makes up stories, a "thief" (123) and a "drunkard" (99). In addition, Patrick says to Nina, "Let's face it lassie, according to Linda, you're an alcoholic" (203). All these labels work in conjunction with each other to portray Nina in a negative light as something that the society of Barryville needs to rid itself of.

A number of instances demonstrate the power struggles that pit Nina against patriarchy. For instance, when interrogating Linda in the court scene, Patrick remarks: "Now, Mrs Wilson. You've testified to my learned colleague that the plaintiff [Nina] is a liar, a thief and an alcoholic" (206). The words 'liar,' 'thief' and 'alcoholic' are terms that are spoken in the same sentence when people are talking about Nina. These words are employed to dismiss the crime of rape as it is difficult to believe anything said by such a person. The terms are used as labels to perpetuate Nina's inferiority by confining her to the assigned subordinated positions that are occupied by women in the society of the text. This is evident on another occasion when the manager of a restaurant where Nina used to work and his wife call her a 'liar' after she accuses the manager of stealing her tips.

Women are caught up in power struggles which affect their reputation in society. The existing power relations are tilted against Nina in such a way that the rape incident goes unheeded. Through a process of unbalanced gender power relations, it is Nina's character that comes under sharp scrutiny rather than what happened to her in a police cell. In a manner reminiscent of the scapegoating of Sula in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, Nina's reputation as an alcoholic and her supposed promiscuity excite the attention of people in Barryville. This is despite the rape that befell her in a police cell. A closer look at the meaning attached to alcoholism tends to reveal the power that lies behind the person who defines a given behavioural trait as constituting alcoholism. Even though Nina is labelled a drunkard or defined as an alcoholic, there is evidence that proves otherwise as she could simply be someone who likes drinking alcohol. This becomes clear in the court scene where Linda Wilson is cross-examined by Patrick. The question of what constitutes alcoholism forms a significant part of Linda's evidence:

'I see. You have much experience with alcoholism then, do you?'

'What do you mean?'

'You've described Ms Jacobs as an alcoholic. You obviously know what an alcoholic is. Would you please tell the court what you regard as an alcoholic?'

'Well, obviously someone who's always piss...drunk.'

'And would you say that this is a fitting description of Ms Jacobs? An alcoholic? Someone who's *always* drunk?'

'Yeah, she was always drinking.' (207; emphasis in the original).

From the above extract, we see that Linda uses her power as an employer to define Nina's drinking habits as an example of alcoholism. To her, alcoholism refers to behaviour that is marked by being always or totally drunk. However, her understanding of being always or totally drunk is put under scrutiny by a barrage of questions from Advocate Patrick as shown in the cross-examination:

'All the time? Every day?'

'Yes.'

'During day time? While she was working for you?'

'Well, most evenings then.'

'But didn't she work at Ciao Afrika five days a week?'

'Yeah, till she got fired' (207).

From the foregoing cross-examination, it is evident that Linda's definition of alcoholism is quite problematic. When Patrick asks if Nina was drinking all the time, her response is not convincing enough as she later reveals that 'all the time' meant when Nina was working in the evening. However, it emerges that most of the evenings Nina works at a restaurant. In fact, she used to work six days from morning to late afternoon at Linda's farm before going to the Ciao Afrika restaurant between half past seven and midnight. This hardly makes her an alcoholic unless she was drinking and working at the same time. As a result, this means that Nina could not have been drunk all the time as suggested by Linda which leads her to say: "She always seemed to be, like, pissed – I mean drunk – at the weekends" (207). During the cross-examination, the time denoted by 'always' or 'all the time' is first reduced to during the day, then to during the evening and finally to the weekend. It is clear that Linda labels Nina a drunkard as well as a liar and thief due the fall-out that took place between the two of them. It is thus untrue that Nina is a hopeless drunkard or a compulsive liar or a thief. Even those people who claim to have seen Nina drunk in town such as Mrs Pieterse, the rape counsellor, judged her behaviour based on the gossip that was initiated by Linda. It is for this reason that Inge, Nina's friend, says that Nina simply liked having a good time which included drinking alcohol.

On two different occasions the bartender and Inge use the word 'like' in reference to Nina's drinking habits. On the one hand, when the bartender tells George and Patrick that Nina "likes a drink" (31) especially Jägermeister, the word 'like' is used euphemistically to refer to a drinking problem. It is not difficult to miss the point that the bartender uses the word 'like' to illustrate that Nina is someone who cannot control her drinking habits. On the other hand, Inge says Nina "liked to have a drink and [...] she liked to have a bit of a party time" (153). In this instance, the word 'like' shows that Nina is a free spirit or a liberal woman who enjoys having a good time which includes drinking alcohol. In other words, Nina finds pleasure in drinking just like men do

which makes her an equal and not subservient to men. Thus, this difference in the way Nina is viewed by the people in Barryville reveals how the power game plays out as Nina suffers character assassination. The issue of drinking alcohol serves to confine sexual violence to the periphery as if it never took place.

Whilst there is nothing wrong or inherently sinister about power, it is when such power is misused or abused to result in gender violence that it becomes a cause for concern. The police system, which is an embodiment of state power, is seen to be misusing such power as it tries to efface the rape incident that involves one of its officers. As figures of state power, the police officers are expected to offer protection to women who are usually the victims of gender violence. However, the text reveals that the problem or crisis of gender violence lies in the very structures that are vested with powers of protection. As argued by Moffett (2006, 130), “the failure of South Africa’s overburdened criminal justice and health systems to respond appropriately to the crisis, suggests an unacknowledged gender civil war.” This ‘unacknowledged gender civil war’ is manifest in the actions of the Barryville police who do everything in their power to erase the rape incident to protect their colleague. There are a series of events where the police use intimidating tactics to frustrate attempts by George and Patrick to procure evidence and witnesses who can testify against the accused police officer. Firstly, when Nina is being counselled by Mrs Pieterse, the rape counsellor, a female police officer, Constable Chantal Fredericks, interrupts the session by informing Nina that her cellmate wants to lay sexual assault charges against her. What is interesting is that the female officer, ‘Chantal The Intimidator’, uses the same crime that Nina was accusing the police officer of as a way to threaten or influence her to drop the rape charges. It is the nature of the crime that Nina is accused of and the timing of informing her about the crime that illustrate how the Barryville police were abusing their power by intimidating Nina to prevent her from proceeding with her accusation. In her statement, Nina writes that: *“a policewoman (I think her name is Chantal) walks into the room and points a finger at me and says that the lady in the cell with me is going to press charges of sexual assault against me”* (48; emphasis in the original). However, when George and Patrick question Mrs Pieterse if she had counselled Nina’s cellmate, Elise Arendse, she says: “Nee. I never saw her” (146).

Secondly, when George and Patrick together with Mrs Pieterse go to her office to look at the statement that the counsellor had compiled pertaining to Nina's rape, they are also interrupted by a police officer who orders them to go to the charge office. The two lawyers are threatened in no uncertain terms and told to leave the police station as Inspector Norde tells Patrick to "[f]uck off!" (36) before proceeding to "[blow] a stream of smoke in Patrick's face" (36). It is this form of intimidation that drives Patrick, who is known as a fearless lawyer, to say: "I tell you something Georgie. These fookers are dangerous" (36). Rattled by the intimidation they experienced at the police station, George proceeds to tell Nina that: "I think you should know Nina, we think it's best that you leave Barryville for a while. [...]. For your own safety" (40). In addition, Patrick says: "Just in case the cops decide to... influence you in any way" (40). The ellipsis shows Patrick's fear of the police after the encounter at the police station. The point is that the police abuse their power in their attempt to conceal the crime that occurred in one of the cells. Based on the actions of the police, George is convinced that they would win an intimidation case against the police, as he says: "Well, obviously we're strong on the assault, and if we can get that cop Chantal in the witness box, we're home and dry on the intimidation" (185).

Thirdly, the intimidating tactics of the Barryville police are further shown when Nina wakes up at night to find a police van parked outside Kendra's farm where she is now working after leaving her job at Linda's farm. Nina is so scared that she calls George very early in the morning, asking him to fetch her from the farm. Her fear is evident in the conversation she has with George. When George says to her: "If you're feeling scared, why not go next door to Happy and Primrose", she responds by saying: "You don't get it, Georgie, they're also terrified of the cops. Everyone in the town is. Well, everyone in Ashburn, anyway. And Kendra being like she is..." (123). This and other incidents are well-orchestrated to unduly influence or intimidate Nina and everyone connected with her case not to proceed with the investigations. In addition, the only witness, Elise Arendse, who shared the cell with Nina and who Constable Chantal claimed wanted to lay sexual assault charges against, disappears without trace. George and Patrick believe the police had a hand in her disappearance as she was the only person who had witnessed the rape incident. The implication here is that something sinister like murder could have been committed against Elise Arendse.

Lastly, the police in Barryville are bent on defeating justice using open and subtle forms of intimidation. This is exemplified by an instance when Nina drives to town in Kendra's car only to see her abuser passing her in a police van. Rather than being on suspension pending investigating into the rape incident, the culprit freely roams the street. This in itself is a demonstration of power and an indication of how untouchable he is. However, in court, the accused wants to portray Nina as a violent woman who resisted detention and swore at the police. In court, the accused says to Patrick: "Ja. [...] by that stage she was resisting arrest and swearing at us. [...]. She was swearing at me non-stop" (217). However, Patrick is not convinced that Nina was capable of intimidating a trained officer to a point where he felt threatened. This leads Patrick to say to him: "And you were intimidated by a woman less than half your size, swearing at you? Come on, Mr van Vuuren. I put it to you that you arrested her with something else in mind, didn't you?" (218). The point is that the Barryville police are a law unto themselves as they abuse the power vested in them by the State in their attempts to ensure that their colleague is not tried for the crime he wittingly committed.

In this text power can further be understood as the act of being in control of a series of events. The pre-planning of the rape incident serves to illustrate the would-be rapist was in control of the entire situation. The police cell is a constricting space that is meant to strip the detained persons of any power they might possess. The police officers decide to put Nina behind bars. If their intention was to protect Nina, they should have allowed her to join Gareth behind the counter where he is busy chatting with the other officers. It is unfortunate that Gareth's drunken behaviour seems acceptable among the police officers considering where he is seated when they bring in Nina. It is clear that "[t]raditional gender role stereotypes convey a double standard regarding alcohol consumption: drinking men tend to be viewed more positively than women" (Abbey & Harnish 1995, 298). This is illustrated by the way that Nina's drunken conduct is deemed disorderly and deserving of a punitive action such as detention without trial as van Vuuren claims that "[Nina] was drunk and disorderly. I put her in the van to protect herself" (217). In addition, van Vuuren appropriates power to decide what is good for Nina because, "[a]t first the idea was to bring her in from the street, in case she was endangering herself" (217). It is

not clear how Nina “could [have been] a danger to herself [since] [a]ll she was doing was standing by the side of the road, waiting for Linda to fetch her” (217).

As noted above, van Vuuren insinuates that rape was a racial issue as Nina was exposing herself to the dangers of being raped since she is a white woman. Among the other reasons provided by van Vuuren for detaining Nina, he says: “she’s a white lady [who was] all on her own in the night. In this country that’s not safe” (217). By uttering such a racist and sexist statement, van Vuuren is trying to show how, because of her race and gender, women like Nina are vulnerable to gender violence. It is suggested that it is only men like van Vuuren who have the power to protect and save Nina from what awaits her in a lonely spot. However, Moffett concludes that rape is colourblind since “sexual violence is an instrument of gender domination and is rarely driven by a racial agenda [because] racial accusations and assumptions like these prevent the unmasking of patriarchal violence” (2006, 134-135). The bottom line is that discussions of rape in post-apartheid South Africa should no longer be contextualised in terms of race relations so as to the ubiquity of this crime. By bringing in the race card, van Vuuren is trying to shroud the subject of sexual abuse by profiling the potential rapist as a black man, thereby avoiding facing up to the consequences of his crime. This is reminiscent of the case of Oscar Pistorius, where he killed his girlfriend and claimed it was a black man behind the closed bathroom door who killed her. As argued by Carlin (2014, 3), for Pistorius, “the faceless intruder of his imagination had to have had a black face, because the fact was that for white people crime mostly did have a black face”. It is this racial thinking around crime that is being problematised by Lotz’s text as a way to name and shame the rapist and debunk the gender power narratives surrounding sexual violence.

It is evident that, from the time the police picked up Nina from a lonely spot, she was an easy target for any rogue police officer, but not for an imaginary black man. All rapists wield power over the victim who is rendered powerless in the course of rape and in its aftermath. Subsequently, I argue that Lotz’s text shows that the issue of rape needs to extend beyond the race narrative which post-apartheid South Africa might not have totally weaned itself from, to toxic gender relations. If rape as a social crime is to be effectively dealt with, the text suggests overhauling the social and patriarchal structures that breed and condone rather than castigate

the rapist. All evidence in this text points to a trial-within-a-trial where Nina is treated as the defendant as she has to prove that she was a victim of rape whilst the perpetrator, van Vuuren, is relaxed during the court proceedings. The text suggests rape is a form of sexual violence that is produced at the level of differential access to power by men and women. This elicits the need to dislodge the rapist from the place of power by pluralising and democratising the process of access to power. Besides, the text endeavours to do away with the silence around the identity of the powerful perpetrator. Even though, when talking about reality, Gqola (2015, 35) sarcastically says “[n]obody wins against a hero,” in reference to rape cases of former President Jacob Zuma and former black cricketer Makhaya Ntini, the text demonstrates through Nina’s character that we can still unmask, shame and name the wayward sexual conduct of the same hero. That Nina was raped had nothing to do with her racial identification or category as much as it has to do with being the gendered Other who is marked by lack of power. For instance, van Vuuren had power at his disposal to detain Nina overnight despite the fact that Linda had come to fetch her and that she had not committed a crime.

When the rape incident is contextualised within the scenario of power games, it is clear that the dynamics of power are responsible for reproducing this form of gender violence. In *Exhibit A*, the dynamics of power centre around the difference in the social bodies of the victim and the victimiser. Patriarchy as embodied in the police force is seen as working to disempower women by keeping them in subservient positions. From the time the police picked up Nina where Gareth had left her, there were many instances of abuse of power that culminate in sexual abuse. Rape is a crime that is committed by and through unequally matched bodies as it involves overpowering and disempowering of one body by another. The victim, Nina, is described as petite as she is “tiny— a couple of inches shorter than Patrick” (39). The perpetrator, Constable Frikkie van Vuuren, is twice Nina’s size. Despite this difference between Nina and Constable van Vuuren, the reader is told that “Nina was maced despite her diminutive size” (96) so as to further neutralise and momentarily incapacitate her. What emerges from this incident is the struggle between the two uneven and gendered bodies of Constable Frikkie van Vuuren and Nina, who is severely disadvantaged as she is intoxicated. Moreover, she has been sprayed with a mace or pepper spray and was held in a tiny police cell. It is this act of using sexual violence to

disempower women that leads McFadden (1992, 179) conclude that “[t]he sex act is invariably posed as empowering to the male and degrading to the woman, and positions in the sexual act reinforce male power over the female”. Rape is a crime of violence whose aim is to disempower women (and other victims). Regardless of what the defence counsel may consider to be holes in Nina’s sworn statement, she recalls the events at the police station thus:

“They [the police officers] open the door and there’s this little room in the front of the cell like a corridor and the one guy sprays mace or pepper spray in my face, and they laugh and I can’t see and they push me into the cell, where I try to sit down. I think the spray must have knocked me out or something because when I start feeling better I notice that there’s someone else in my cell” (47, emphasis in the original)

The mace or pepper spray and the laughter are weapons used to disarm Nina in order to make it easier for what appears to a pre-planned sexual violation. The actions of the police officers were designed to intimidate Nina by installing her in a position where fear reigned unabated such as in a police cell. This creation of fear is in line with Gqola’s (2015) argument that “the manufacture of female fear factory, relies on quick, effective transfer of meaning” (78). In this case, Nina has to realise that she is severely impaired in terms of power distribution due to the state of vulnerability signified by the police cell. To his advantage, the perpetrator had the power vested in him as a police officer and he was able to place her in police custody whilst Nina was further disadvantaged by her intoxicated state.

When he left the police station after detaining Nina, among the things that Frikkie van Vuuren buys was a packet of condoms which he intended to use in his sexual escapades. He presents his sexual adventures as something acceptable among virile men even if there is no woman in sight as he says in response to Patrick’s question: “I like to be prepared. I plan on having sex every night if I can help it” (219) to which the narrator remarks that “[t]he cop says this unsmilingly, as if he’s merely stating a fact” (219). A close reading of the text reveals that the condom was an accessory in committing rape as van Vuuren intended to eliminate the presence of semen on Nina’s body which would have proven that she had been raped. As pointed out by Gqola, “[t]he story [of rape] told by a woman needs a body of evidence. It is not an interest in the pain of the rape, but a burden of proof placed on the survivor or victim of rape” (2015, 29). The point here is

that the trauma or the agony of being raped experienced by Nina is totally ignored as the focus is on whether or not she can prove or provide proof that she was a victim of rape. The issue of evidence is clear when Patrick says to George; “If we don’t get hold of that fooking cellmate, the only chance of proving rape is to find some forensic evidence” (123).

With regard to the process of gathering proof to back up Nina’s claims, it is clear that the evidence was tampered with so as to conceal the crime. Explaining the procedures to follow in a case where an officer is the alleged victimiser, the forensics expert, Dr David Prouse, says that the station commander should have been informed about the incident. After such an allegation “the station commander] in turn is obliged to call in the Independent Complaints Directorate” (204) to investigate the allegations and “[t]he complainant would be accompanied by the police to an appropriate medical officer, for the conduct of a full medico-legal examination” (204) while the victim’s clothes would be taken to forensics. Despite such standing procedures, the Barryville police, led by Inspector Norde, deliberately failed to gather evidence that would either disprove or prove that Nina had been raped. Thus, in the absence of evidence in the form of physical bodily markings or traces of semen which might have been effaced by the use of the condom, Nina is severely disempowered. The ‘burden of proof’ that Gqola is talking about tends to install the victim in a position of powerlessness. This differential access to power is quite evident in the statement as Nina further states that:

“Then the door opens and I hear a man enter. He sounds like he’s going ha ha ha, laughing to himself. He comes in and he pushes me down on my back, and he kneels on my arm. And I say please don’t do this, and I can feel him pulling down my jodhpurs and he climbs on top of me and he puts his penis in me and rapes me. Then he gets up and I close my eyes and pull up my pants. I can hear him laughing again in that way again, ha ha, ha. Then, I curl up in a ball and the lady in the cell strokes my arm again and I push her away” (47; emphasis in the original).

The extract depicts the differential power relations captured through the use of verbs such as ‘pushes’, ‘kneels’, ‘pulling’, ‘climbs’ and ‘puts.’ These words convey the power behind the doer of these actions whose laughter is further used to disconcert his victim. The ‘object’ (of the sentence) that suffers the action of the said words (verbs) is Nina. Besides, the words do not hint at consensual sex activity but show the use of force and power to gratify the doer’s sexual

desires. These action words, 'push-kneel-pull-climb-put', are one-directional as they show how violence is directed against the victim who can only close her eyes and pull up her pants after the act is done. This brings me to Moffett's (2006, 129) contention that "in post-apartheid, democratic South Africa, sexual violence has become a socially endorsed punitive project for maintaining patriarchal order. Men use rape to inscribe subordinate status on to an intimately known 'Other' – women." As a woman whose conduct was an affront to the conservative society of the town of Barryville, Nina is the Other who needs to be reined in using rape as a punitive tool. In other words, alcohol is just a pretext to justify the rape incident.

In addition, the victim is further disempowered as she has to take the lead role in a rape reconstruction exercise by furnishing information. In the presence of George, Patrick and Dr David Prouse, Nina goes over the rape incident where the issue of the condom comes up. In response to Prouse's question: "And you're sure he didn't use a condom?", Nina says: "He might have...you know...I think he did. [...]. I think I saw one next to me after he'd...you know...finished. I think I turned my head and saw a condom lying next to me" (92). The ellipses are indicative of the blanks in her memory about this issue of the condom which could have been due to "trauma [which] can fuck your memories" (93). She is clearly trying to recreate or reconstruct the events of this fateful day, which raises doubts in the minds of her all-male listeners. George raises these doubts thus:

How could it be possible for a guy to kneel on her shoulder and put on a condom before the rape? Logistically it doesn't seem plausible. The mechanisms are hard enough to visualise without this complication. Never mind the fact it's impossible to put a condom on with one hand. I can barely put one on using two (92).

Despite such doubts, there can be no denying that Frikkie van Vuuren planned the whole rape by ensuring that there were no loose ends. As pointed out earlier on, using a condom is one such precaution as its use would mean no traces of semen would be found on Nina's body. As a result, it would be difficult to incriminate him for raping Nina. The doubts are partially removed as van Vuuren is made to pay for physically assaulting Nina in police custody, but not for sexual assault.

Power dynamics are further played out or dramatised in the court scene where there are concerted attempts by the defence lawyer and the accused to portray Nina in the most despicable manner. The overall aim is to render Nina powerless to narrate the events that lead to the rape incident by proving that she is at fault for what happened that fateful night. The defence lawyer believes Nina was making up the entire story of being raped and uses rape myths to discredit Nina's story. The defence lawyer, Robert Xhati, dexterously averts talking about the rape incident by choosing to strip Nina of any control she has over what happened to her body. According to Gqola (2015, 144) rape myths include, among others, that "perpetrators are monsters who are abusive all the time" and that "rape myths are just harmless ignorance" (146). Xhati leans on what appear to be rape myths by concentrating on the part played by the victim's supposedly promiscuous conduct and not the crime. This contention is in line with Anderson and Doherty's (2008, 9) conclusion that rape myths are "arguments that tend to attribute responsibility to the victims, exonerate the perpetrators of rape and trivialise the severity of a rape experience, but which are not supported by empirical evidence." Xhati employs such myths to trivialise Nina's account of events so as to minimise the magnitude of the crime she suffered. Through her quest for justice against the man who raped her, Nina is on the path to reclaim control over her body and free it from the limitations imposed on it by patriarchy.

In the text, it is clear that instances of gender violence lead women to challenge their victimhood status that tend to disempower them. This results from the fact that, as has been argued, gender is a politically and socially sanctioned set of power relations that places men and women in intricate and unequal relation to each other. The chauvinist nature of patriarchy tends to privilege male dominion over women by consigning them to socially inferior roles. As Bourke (2015, 2) argues "[r]apists literally invade and attempt to conquer the sexual terrain of their victims, and— thus transforming her 'no' into his 'yes'— strive to triumph over their social territory too." The first time Nina is raped under the influence of alcohol, she does not get to decide whether or not she wants to press rape charges against a man who raped her. Unlike Lucy in Coetzee's *Disgrace* who decides to remain silent after being raped, Nina was silenced by her adoptive parents who did not want their name to be tainted by such accusations. It turned out that the man who raped Nina had been her drinking companion in a bar in Port Elizabeth on

the fateful night in question. In other words, in a manner reminiscent to honour killing, Nina's right to justice is sacrificed in order to preserve the honour of her adoptive parents. It is through Nina's outburst over her frustrations that stemmed from the refusal by the State to prosecute the police rape suspect that George and Patrick learn about the first rape incident. This was after the Attorney General informed Nina's lawyers that "[they] will not be prosecuting due to lack of evidence" (99). This leads Rachel to tell George and Patrick that Nina "was at a club in Port Elizabeth [where] [s]he met this guy, went home with him and then ... you know" (192). The point is that Nina's adoptive parents wielded power over her that prevented her from having recourse to the justice system.

As mentioned earlier, the court's decision is based on the lack of (bodily) evidence to prove that the allegations were true, thereby implying that Nina's word was not enough to instigate trial proceedings. It is this lack of evidence that shifts the case from a criminal court to a civil one where the motive is to get compensation. As a result, the accused walks scot-free after being slapped with a fine for a serious crime such as rape, as shown later on. This further shows that rape "is the communication of patriarchal power, reigning [sic] in, enforcing submission and punishing defiance" (Gqola 2015, 21). In addition, by refusing to prosecute, the State condemns the victim and exonerates the victimiser. Thus, Nina was expected to abide to gender structures where any deviation from the norm is severely punished.

A nuanced reading of Lotz's text further reveals how the female characters in the various stations of life complicate or push to the limits the representation of women living under patriarchal hegemony. Firstly, even when women come together as members of a book club, that does not make them a homogenous group. Whilst the book club has members who have heterosexual marriages, women like Inge and Kendra are depicted as lesbians. Barryville is described as a Mecca for gays (104). For some women, the only way to deal with the lack of power is to create a space of their own where they attain power within the positions created by patriarchy, such as being wives. The notions of wife and unwoman represent poles of a relative degree of power and powerlessness in a society marked by uneven power distribution. Such positions can be viewed as troubling Butler's concept of performativity since those who consider

themselves to be the wives do not perform their gender against the given norms. The wives are complicit with patriarchy in perpetuating the subjugation of other women like Nina. It can be argued that Nina's actions reveal that even those who are rendered powerless strive to access power to tell their own stories.

Further, Lotz constructs a dissident woman who disrupts societal taboos in response to sexual violation as an attempt to forge novel mechanisms of rethinking the ways that women engage in contesting issues of gender power and sexual violence. As a result, to trouble the discourses around rape, Lotz creates a character who does not fit into the patriarchal structures as she stands out as an outsider and as a dissident. As an outsider and a dissident, Nina is poised to challenge the deafening silence over the subject of rape as it is rumoured that the police in this little town are in the habit of sexually violating women. The fact that attempts to explore this claim fail to yield any truth could only mean that the victims could not come out to openly speak about their ordeal for fear of the perpetrators who belonged to the powerful section of the town, the police. This is evidenced by the way the woman who shared the cell with Nina disappeared without a trace and all attempts to find her proved fruitless.

Nina, the victim of sexual violation, is twice hindered from seeking justice as she is not only blamed for being a drunkard, but is rendered powerless and guilty for what happened to her. Nina transgresses as she refuses to accept the roles of the victim/oppressed to break the walls that are continuously erected by the victimiser/oppressor to stall her quest for justice. Nina's character and, to a lesser extent, those of the lesbian couples, signal the disintegration of binaries that characterise the positioning of men and women on the power hierarchies. In short, while Nina unmutes the silence over sexual violence, the lesbian couples emerge from the surveillance that monitors and controls their sexuality by performing an alternative sexuality. Thus, the narrative of rape raises questions of gender inequalities rather than those of racial configurations.

The unbalanced power structures that culminate in gender violence are evident the moment Nina tries, with the help of her friend Inge, to press charges against the rapist at Barryville police station. The actions of the Barryville police reveal the dynamics of the power game that is played

in such a way as to conceal what Patrick terms a “Schedule One offense” (35). The police are unwilling to open a case of rape and institute an investigation to find the truth of the matter. When Nina and Inge try to open a rape charge against one of the police officers at Barryville, a female police officer initially refuses to take her statement. It is only when they threaten to take the case to Sotherton police station that the police officer agrees to take down her statement. Additionally, George and Patrick soon find out how the police are using their power to conceal the rape incident as one of the police officers says: “We’re at the preliminary stages of the investigation” (36). This means that the rapist is unlikely to face the wrath of the law without the assistance that Nina obtains from George and Patrick. Besides, after reporting the rape incident, the police neither request the clothes she was wearing on the fateful day to take them to forensics nor do they take her to the hospital for a medical examination as demanded by standard procedure in such cases. Nina has to go to the hospital accompanied by her friend Inge. Also, the next day after raping Nina, the rogue officer threatens her thus: “I will get you if you say anything” (48). As argued by Murray (2018, 71), “patriarchal disciplinary measures shape the experiences of female characters in service of an inherently unequal gendered status quo.” This ‘unequal gender status quo’ is maintained through threats that Nina receives when she is released from custody. Threats against reporting sexual violation represent the typical rape discourse where the victim is silenced by further threats of harm.

A conservative society such as the small town of Barryville is structured along patriarchal lines. Through the notion of traditional womanhood, patriarchy controls and regulates women’s behaviour by putting expectations on what is normal and what is abnormal. Power is regulated using even those activities that are considered mundane such as a book club for women. Though there is nothing sinister about women coming together to read books as members of a book club, such a platform in the novel serves to entrench old forms of gender power inequalities and concurrently produce new forms of gender differences. The book club is constructed on power imbalances of social exclusion which are designed to ‘tame’ the ‘estranged’ women like Nina. The idea is to bring them back to the set of accepted feminine roles as evidenced by the way Nina is excluded from the book club presumably because of her drinking problem. Traditional power relations are seen in instances where women such as the members of the book club are treated

as gossipmongers especially if they gather together in one place. Significantly, this is meant to construct femininities as landscapes whose markers include invisibility, subordination, inferiority and passivity which in turn perpetuate the victim status as an act of disempowering women. Whilst these women are busy spending their time in small talk and reading, men are either working or drinking alcohol in bars. As a result, when Nina goes to bars alone or in the company of men such as Gareth, she is ostracised for being a drunkard and is also viewed as a woman with questionable morals. However, by daring to enter spaces and places conservatively known to be “male dominated”, Nina contests patriarchal power structures.

Drawing from the above contention, we see that the women at Kendra's place reinforce societal labelling that associates women with gossiping. They spew lies about Nina without actually knowing her fully or her being privy to some of the things they say about her. It shows that the women are reiterating normative womanhood by seemingly living up to the stereotypes that label women as gossipers. This is evident when one woman admits that she never got to know Nina well, yet the rest of the women agree that Nina is a liar, a drunkard and a thief. This woman says:

'I liked her. [...]. I'm not sure why, but she doesn't seem to fit in with the other women in the group. I can't believe I haven't noticed her before—she's model-quality stunning. I never really got to know her, but when I saw her at braais, she was always nice to talk to' (154).

Nina is portrayed as an outcast or a renegade as she could not fit into the group of women. This tendency to label Nina as a liar elides the seriousness of the crime that has been committed against her thereby magnifying the problem of sexual violation. This can be contextualised within Gqola's claim that “those people who constantly say ‘but women sometimes lie’ are part of the problem. Each time someone says, hears and believes that most women lie about rape — or that saying so is the legitimate response to someone telling you that s/he or they were raped — they make it more unlikely that someone else will speak of their own violation” (2015, 12). Even though these women of the book club confess that they do not fully know Nina or that they knew her from a distance, they still claim the power to attach negative labels to her by casting

her as a liar. This explains why these women are not entirely convinced that Nina has been raped as they believe that she made up such a story under the influence of alcohol.

However, Nina seeks to disrupt these labels that are attached to her by not giving in to pressure to drop her rape accusations against the man who should be protecting vulnerable citizens. Significantly, the book club women vividly recall the occasions when Nina was either drunk, supposedly making up lies or being accused of stealing, but they conveniently forget those occasions when she had freely offered to assist them. There is a perpetuation of the subjugation of women with some women like the ones at Kendra's house participating in ways that further entrench such practices. In short, Nina's drinking was not only condemned by men, but by women who should have empathised with her. As a result of the power arrangements, Nina finds it difficult to convince the society of Barryville of the rape she endured in a police cell. This is partly because she has to face male views of alcoholic women that disadvantage female rape victims. At the same time, she has to face women's disapproving remarks about her conduct, and their exclusion of her from their inner circle.

Further to that, the women gathered at Kendra's place as well as Linda pedal the myth of rape by shifting the attention from the rapist to the victim. Not once do these women give Nina the benefit of the doubt over her rape accusations as they are focused on Nina's actions that led to the rape incident. The question seems to be: what did Nina do or not do for her to be raped? The sentiments of these book club women over Nina's rape allegations are summed up by Pam: "[W]ell, everyone's been saying that Nina made it up. The rape, I mean. Or maybe that she was confused about it" (152). Moreover, many women seem to agree with her as "[t]here are several murmurs of assent" (153). Another woman remarks: "Ja, but you didn't see [Nina] as I did. [...]. Completely drunk. Out of control" (153). Such a conversation shows that there are attempts by various characters to delete or omit the issues of rape and the identity of the rapist as they centre their attention on Nina and her drunken behaviour. As a result, a crime such as rape seems to be excused and not deterred. Focusing on the South African context, Gqola contends that "[w]e often place so much pressure on women to talk about rape, to access counselling and get legal services to process rape, but very seldom do we talk about the rapists. We run the

danger of speaking about rape as a perpetrator-less crime” (Gqola 2015,7). Even though Nina is not being pressured to talk about rape or seek counselling, it is the silence about the rapist that is troubling. The rapist remains a mirage in the rape narratives of the text as it is only the victim who can see him.

In *Exhibit A*, rape shapes Nina’s identity in ways that disempower her. This is illustrated by the fact that even in instances where Nina is telling the truth or has done nothing wrong, no one is prepared to believe anything that she says as George soon finds out in his interaction with the women at Kendra's house. This makes Nina an unwoman as she cannot fit in with other women. By being considered an unwoman, Nina is rendered powerless and unworthy to be called a real woman. As stated previously the members of the book club do not consider Nina to be a real woman as she does not belong with them. The title of wife, which is in contrast to unwoman, is a position of power and authority as shown in the society projected in the text. The wife of the restaurant manager considers herself more powerful than Nina whom she regards as a liar. She elevates herself to a position that is above that of Nina and gives her power and authority. Thus, this text depicts various women who are jostling for power no matter how little such power is and even when acquiring powers comes at the expense of fellow women. In the process, these women are complicit with patriarchy in reproducing the power imbalances that relate to the myth of rape and the victimisation of women as they are prepared to doubt the sincerity of Nina’s story.

Working in conjunction with patriarchy, the members of the book club deny other women the power to stand up for their rights such as the right to social justice. However, by colluding with patriarchy, women acquire power even if such power is insignificant. In other words, women such as Chantal, the female police officer at the Barryville police station, use threats or intimidating tactics to instil fear in Nina so as to stop her from pressing rape charges against the male police officer. In the process, she is admitted into the clique of men she works with though it is at the detriment of a fellow woman like Nina. Such actions work in favour of patriarchy which employs the element of divide-and-rule to prevent women from working collectively to eliminate acts of gender violence such as rape. Subsequently, the actions of these women

together with those of Chantal resonate with the belief that women are their own worst enemies. Instead of allying with Nina in her quest for justice against a corrupt police system, they turn to name-calling or a labelling system that tends to magnify female victimisation. When Superintendent April from the Provincial Commissioner's office takes over the investigation of the alleged crime against a male police officer, she promises George and Patrick that that she will get to the bottom of the case. However, George and Patrick soon detect a change in April's conduct with the latter surmising that "It might not be Superintendent what's-her-name, laddie. More likely to be pressure from the above" (129). It could be concluded that patriarchy as it is represented in the novel ensures that a woman like Superintendent April, who seeks justice for sexually abused people like Nina, is demoted to a detective position and reassigned to a lowly station such as Mitchell's Plain police station to stop her from unmasking corruption within the police force.

Throughout the text, Nina's position concerning the rape incident remains largely unchanged. It does not seem to occur to everyone else that Nina could not have made up the events after the night in police custody which she writes in her statement. It seems that her sexual abuse is something that is expected to befall a woman who visits the bars alone or in the company of strange men when other women devote themselves to reading books and tending to their family. Nina does not try to modify her alcohol consumption to suit the social expectations, but fights to attain justice for herself and other victims of sexual abuse. As a result, thinking about rape demands a process of empowering women to face the scourge of gender violence differently owing to inherent differences among them. For instance, if the women in the book club had amassed the little power that they had to assist Nina in her ordeal, it would have been difficult for the divide-and-rule tactics that sustained and continue to sustain patriarchy to work smoothly or to remain intact.

The court scene serves as the ultimate dramatisation of the power struggles between men and women. What transpires at the court reveals the power games that are used to reinforce gender violence by entrenching what is considered appropriate female behaviour based on what is admissible in the court of law. In court, Nina is saddled with a seemingly insurmountable burden

of proving beyond measure that she is a credible plaintiff and convincing the listener (the judge) that her story of rape is plausible. Basing her argument of the notion of credibility and plausibility in cases of rape, Gqola (2015, 31) remarks that:

[p]lausibility is about the listener, whereas credibility is about the person telling the story of the rape. Credibility depends on how believable the speaker is. To be believable, the speaker has to fall into a category that is seen as possible-to-be-rape; it has to be someone who can be raped [which excludes] [s]ex workers, wives, slave women and men [since they are considered to be] 'impossible-to-rape.'

Based on what the Barryville society considers plausible Nina falls within the category of people that are considered impossible-to-be-raped due to her supposed immoral conduct. This means that, as an alcoholic, no-one believes her story of rape and they dismiss it as a figment of her alcoholic-induced imagination. This is clearly shown in the court scene where the plausibility of Nina's story as well as the credibility of her conduct is under siege from a barrage of questions from Robert Xhati who is representing the defender, Van Vuuren. Xhati seems to draw his strength from the societal trial that found Nina's conduct wanting based on the prevailing, yet unwritten code of moral standards.

At many levels, Nina fails the credibility and plausibility test. It is clear that the defence strategy of the lawyer representing the accused is centred on poking holes in Nina's credibility and faulting the plausibility of her narration of the events that led to the rape. Through the character assassination of Nina, the defence lawyer, Robert Xhati, deflects the attention from the crime of rape to the character of Nina. The labels that the society attached to Nina's conduct are reiterated in court to deny her social justice. Xhati portrays her as not only as a woman who is given to making up stories, but as someone who has tripped over the gender lines based on role expectations. The action of 'tripping' suggests that she is 'the fallen one' who can only be redeemed who can only be redeemed by punishing her as a woman who strayed from normative femininity. As mentioned before, this is done by deliberately depicting Nina as an alcohol addict. This echoes the title of Moffett's (2006) article which screams the words: "These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them." This implies that it is Nina's conduct that forced van Vuuren to 'punish' her to save her from herself. A nuanced reading of this claim reveals that such punishment came

in the form of rape which he denies committing without denying that he intended to punish Nina for being a danger to herself.

One aspect which illustrates the defence counsel's attempt to disempower Nina is the fact that they deprive her of the ownership of her story by faulting her memory of the events. In the court scene, she is accused of making up or confusing things and creating non-existent stories because she is a compulsive liar. The idea is to prove to the court that Nina is not a credible witness. For instance, after she discloses that she had fought with Gareth Bowery, Xhati asks her:

'What was the fight about?'

'I can't exactly remember. All I can remember is that we were arguing and shouting at each other.'

'Did he assault you?'

'No.'

'Did you feel that your life was in danger in any way?'

'No, I don't know for sure...No.' (191).

Specifically, Xhati tries to demonstrate that Nina was not a victim of sexual violence. He argues that, up to the point Nina quarrelled with Gareth, she was not in any danger. For him, danger would mean being physically assaulted and being scarred, bruised or injured. The fact that Nina answers two of the questions concerning her safety in the negative exposes that she was not the typical victim of gender violence, but is someone who chooses on her own to be left in a lonely spot at night. If Gareth was not a danger to her, it implies that Nina was a danger to herself due to her drunken stupor. It is at this point, through this scene, that Lotz reveals the power relations and social expectations that are imposed on women and contribute to the ubiquity of gender violence against women and children.

Furthermore, the court scenes firmly locate the triadic issues of gender, violence and crime within the realm of power. In other words, the series of events that take place in the text converge at the court where Nina and van Vuuren meet each other as belligerents in a power struggle. In fact, the court scenes serve to demonstrate how deeply entrenched the skewed power relations are as represented by the male characters of the defence attorney, Robert Xhati, and the accused police officer, van Vuuren. When Nina is put on the stand, she faces the trial of

her life when her character is ridiculed by Xhati as he tries to defend the perpetrator by accusing her as the culprit. He does this by solely focusing on her character. He portrays Nina as a woman whose image was tainted by her drunkenness which compromised her reconstruction of what transpired on the night of the rape incident. Concerning the time Nina was dropped off by van Vuuren and his colleague at a lonely spot at night, Xhati asks:

'Did he threaten to assault you?'

'No'

'Did you feel that your life was in danger in any way?'

'No. I don't know for sure...No.'

'So why, Ms Jacobs, did you ask him to stop the car and let you out in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the night' (191).

This meant that her version of the incident was inadmissible as constituting a true reflection of what transpired on that fateful night. The spotlight shifts from van Vuuren and the sexual abuse to Nina, her drinking problem and her supposed promiscuity. Xhati is resolved to prove that, as a result of her drinking, she had made herself culpable for the crime that was perpetrated against her.

The intention of Xhati is to demonstrate that Nina is a drunkard who is irresponsible to a point where she does not regulate her drinking levels. In order to win the case, Xhati draws on stereotypes of women who drink alcohol as shown by his focus on the events that resulted in her being raped. He does not once allude to the crime that his client committed as he chooses to prove that the events of the story were largely falsified by Nina. As a court performance, he argues that Nina has not taken the right precautions to stay away from danger and, when such a crime was committed, she played a role in it. Xhati's questions are aimed at disempowering Nina by casting doubt on the reconstruction of the events of that fateful day. The reliability of a memory that was affected by blackouts is being queried. Though Nina tries to look confident and unshaken by Xhati's line of questioning, he is persistent in poking holes in her character by casting doubts on her integrity as a woman. This is shown when he is bent on deflating her composure by making her feel powerless as he proceeds to ask her:

'How long do these blackouts normally last?'

'I don't know. Um... maybe an hour or so? It's difficult to say.'

'And during these blackouts, you can't remember anything?'

'No.'

'So anything could have happened during this time" This time you were in the throes of a blackout?'

'Yes.'

'These blackouts. Quite convenient, isn't it...?' (191).

From the above, we see that gendered power relations operate in the context of the reconstructions of the events that occurred on the fateful night. Xhati employs alcohol-related blackouts not only as a way to dispel Nina's account of the sequence of the events, but to usurp her ownership of the story of her sexual violation. In the process, Nina is reduced to a weak or defenceless position as she is depicted as someone who cannot be relied upon as a result of her poor recollection of the events. She is judged on her memory and drunken behaviour rather than on the merits of what happened to her. For this reason, I argue that her character represents the way women are disempowered by the crime of rape as they find their reputation on trial rather than being afforded justice for what happened to them.

More so, Xhati's contention is hinged on Nina's drinking habits as he tries to ensure that Nina is not seen as a victim of sexual violence, but is simply a liar and a drunkard. In this and other ways *Exhibit A* depicts the power imbalances that lead to the denial of justice to the victims of sexual violence. By daring to speak the unspeakable of sexual violence that occurs under the influence, Nina is changed into a visible and audible character. Despite Xhati's relentless attempts to denigrate her, Nina challenges this as she says in a direct address to the judge:

'I remember fighting with Gareth and telling him to let me out of the car. And the next thing I remember clearly is being on the phone with Linda. I remember very clearly the police arriving and them telling me that Gareth had sent them to look for me and asking me to come with them to the police station' (192).

In the quotation, Nina challenges Xhati's attempts to poke holes in her reconstruction of the events on account of the alcohol-related blackouts. Even "[t]he judge nods as if satisfied" (192) with what Nina says above as she spoke about the events that culminated in the traumatic incident in the police cell. As argued by Caruth (1995, 4) "to be traumatized is precisely to be

possessed by an image or event.” Disregarding such trauma, Xhati deliberate tries to convince the court that alcohol caused Nina to jumble up the events of the day she was raped as a result of having had too much alcohol in her body. Xhati perpetuates the power imbalances between the victimiser and the victim of rape¹⁶ whereby the perpetrator is exonerated of the crime whilst the victim is left to languish in the trauma of sexual violation.

Nina is placed in positions that are structured along unequal lines as a result of patriarchal power relations that entrench misogyny in the society of the text. In the two cases of rape that Nina is subjected to, the punisher is a male figure vested with unassailable power or is in a position of authority. This is exemplified by Constable van Vuuren, a police officer, who appropriates the power to punish Nina for what he and his colleagues define as transgression. The labels that are attached to women who are alcoholics are employed to entrench female victimhood and sexual violence against women whilst concurrently effacing the perpetrator from the picture. This results in a situation where there is a deliberate attempt to cover up the abuse by discrediting the rape victim as an unreliable person. In *Exhibit A*, this is magnified through the character of the rapist, van Vuuren, whose stature when being questioned in court overshadows the magnitude of the crime he is being charged with. It amounts to a trial of characters: one who is deemed to be a 'bad woman' based on alcohol consumption and the other who is 'a good officer' of the law who tries to save the intoxicated woman from herself. Van Vuuren's relaxed mood in court reinforces the power that he imposed on his victim. We are told that van Vuuren was comfortable on the stand: “[van Vuuren] looked as comfortable on the stand as Prouse, his arms folded loosely over his chest, his right leg thrown over his left” (216-217). His posture shows that he is in control and is confident that he will be able to escape jail time. Even the manner in which he responds to the questions reflects someone who is confident that he will not be incarcerated.

¹⁶ The word 'victimiser' is used as the signifier whereas the word 'victimised' represents the signified, respectively. This does not imply that a woman like Nina is always powerless whilst a man like van Vuuren is always the powerful. The victimizer-victimised dichotomy demonstrates how the rapist engages the act of rape as a weapon to render women powerless and to exact himself on the female body.

Another issue regarding Van Vuuren is that his characterisation serves to entrench patriarchal control over a woman like Nina who is depicted as disorderly, immoral and drunk. The only way to deal with such women is to discipline them using the mechanism of a police cell. Van Vuuren says to Patrick: "I suppose I decided to keep her to teach her a lesson" (218), rather than releasing her into the custody of Linda who had come to fetch her. A combination of punitive instruments is used to rehabilitate straying women and return them to normative behaviour. Thus, Nina's story is an example of the narratives of women who are sexually abused, especially by men like van Vuuren who are in positions of authority. Nina is clear about the fact that she has been raped. It is her level of intoxication that allows society and the legal system to punish her to such an extent that her rapist gets away with his crime.

Towards the end of the text, Nina is depicted as a transformed individual. Despite the existence of uneven power relations that seek to constrain women from speaking against the most intimate form of gender violence, namely sexual abuse, Nina is relentless in her quest for justice. In this power struggle, her character is greatly transformed as she tells George the following towards the conclusion of her court case: "I'm glad we went after them, Georgie. I'm glad we didn't give up. I've got a life now, and they can't take it away from me, can they?" (223). At the end of her court ordeal, Nina becomes a changed person as she is no longer timid or lacking in self-confidence. She is ready for a new life outside the continent of Africa after getting a chance to work in Europe. This is after a woman known as Sheila⁶⁹ whom George had met on online dating site arranged for her to work abroad. Despite not succeeding in getting van Vuuren convicted, with the help of George and Patrick, Nina succeeds in challenging the disempowerment of women who are raped under the influence of alcohol. She does this by taking the man who raped her in police custody to court which in itself is a direct challenge to the patriarchal subjugation of women.

In the text, Nina seeks justice for the crime that is twice committed against her under different circumstances. She rediscovers and reclaims a sense of power that allows her to disrupt its limits. Nina rejects the powerlessness of femaleness and projects the image of a woman who likes her drink. As a result of the power games that are operating in the society of the text, a woman who

likes her drink is treated as an outcast and is seen as unwomanly. By choosing to drink alcohol just as men do, Nina openly challenges and reverses the power imbalances that relegate women to inferior positions marked by gender violence. In challenging patriarchal views held about women who drink alcohol, the text does not put emphasis on Nina's body as a site of sexual violence, but uses it as a means of expression of women's power struggles to attain justice for themselves. The power struggles between men and women are exemplified through the perpetuation of gender violence which the male-dominated society of Barryville seems to condone.

Significantly, power differences are informed and upheld by societal beliefs in normative femininity which prescribes how women should behave. However, Nina seeks to question the uneven power distribution that is endorsed and maintained by society concerning women who drink alcohol. Nina's actions defy social taboos and the social discourses of power that limit women from accessing the place of power. Questions related to the body such as pleasure, desire and ownership of one's body bring forth the power inequalities that produce gender violence. Also, power dynamics as depicted through the character of Nina entail the capability to make independent decisions and to contest or challenge the dominion that men have over women. Crucially, Nina's stance may be read as challenging the theoretical formulations on the doing of gender. She performs her gender in ways that subvert and challenge the conventional gender roles assigned to her such as daring to take a stand against a police officer who is feared in the little town of Barryville.

The novel revealed that patriarchy, the judiciary and police system work together to confine women who stray from acceptable womanly ways to a state of powerlessness by refusing to prosecute the rapist police officer. Nina's rape case ranks among those cases that are dismissed for lack of evidence despite her conviction and knowledge that the crime has been committed on her body. Since Nina's account of the rape incident is affected by memory blackouts caused by alcohol, the Attorney General's office feels there is no prima facie case against the accused. It is this thinking that labels women as accessories to gender violence that is inflicted on them when they are drunk. The only course of action left for her to refute this label is by opting for a

civil case against her perpetrator. However, the refusal to prosecute by the Attorney General's office reveals the patriarchal obstacles that hamper attempts by women to disrupt the patriarchal lines of power. Such obstacles prevent them from finding justice in rape-related crimes as perpetrators like van Vuuren go unpunished. In the end, the failure of the criminal case reveals the power imbalances between the victim and the victimiser. In *Exhibit A*, Lotz is working towards depicting rape as an act that is not solved at the level of the crime since the rapist walks scot-free after the criminal case fails. As a result, the text seems to suggest that solving the crime of rape has to begin at the level of the society by transforming the structures of power that are tilted in favour of men. Other measures include changing the perceptions around rape by focusing on the rapist and not allowing him to remain an absentee perpetrator. Van Vuuren is brought before the court to face charges levelled against him even though the charge does not stick. Thus, Nina's quest represents some kind of justice and victory as her actions managed to ruffle some feathers in the power echelons of the society. In the next section, I problematise gender power relations in Golakai's *The Lazarus Effect* through an exploration of the literary depictions of female characters.

Undoing Gendered Power Inequalities in *The Lazarus Effect*

In *The Lazarus Effect* (2011), Hawa Jande Golakai focuses on power configurations that produce gender violence as evidenced by the disappearance of children in Cape Town, which includes the disappearance of Jacqui and her murder by her step-sister. It tells the story of a Liberian female investigator, Voinjama (Vee) Johnson, who works with Chloe Bishop, a white South African lesbian, to investigate the case of missing children. Vee is an investigative journalist employed by a Cape Town magazine, *Urban*, and its sister publication, *City Chronicle*. What leads Vee to launch an investigation into the cases of children who have vanished is the image of a teenage girl in a woollen red hat who haunts her in her dreams. Later on, the teenage girl turns out to be Jacqueline Paulsen (also known as Jacqui) who has not been seen for two years. She was last seen when she went to play tennis with her friend one Saturday morning. Vee also wants to take her career in a new direction as she seeks to embark on investigative stories that focus on more serious issues. She obtains permission from her editor, Portia Kruger, to embark on an investigation relating to the cases involving the disappearance of children in Cape Town. In this

text, Golakai destabilises and disrupts the patriarchal structures of power by a creating a powerful, yet vulnerable female protagonist who has a troubled past. In her attempts to find the missing children, she has to deal with entrenched forms of power inequalities that keep women in subordinated positions.

Central to Vee's investigation into the disappearance of Jacqui is the family dynamics which is crucial to the interaction between Jacqui and Rosie as well as the rest of the family. The relationship between Jacqui and the family of Ian Fourie, her biological father, was strained due to the hatred that existed between the two families. Jacqui was caught between the animosities between the two families: that of her mother, Adele Paulsen, and that of Ian Fourie, her biological father and his other family. Adele and Ian came from middle-class coloured families and had been childhood lovers in the eighties during apartheid South Africa. Their relationship ended when Ian went to study medicine in Europe where he met and married Carina, a white woman. Adele tells Vee that Ian could have married a coloured girl like him, but chose to marry a European woman. Despite being married to Carina, he fathered a daughter, Jacqui, with Adele, which means he had two families. Despite the hatred between the two families, Jacqui wanted to have a relationship with her father's other family, particularly with her siblings. She was fond of her half-brothers, Sean and Lucas. Her relationship with her half-sister, Rosie, was based on the juvenile offences they committed together and which excluded the other half-sister, Serena, who was a born-again Christian. It was Jacqui who dragged Rosie into committing these offences. Later, it was Rosie's turn to be excluded from Jacqui's relationship with Serena. It is this relationship between Jacqui and Serena that made Rosie jealous and resentful of her half-sister. The strained relationship between Rosie and Jacqui affected their interaction and finally led to the murder of Jacqui.

Set in Cape Town, *The Lazarus Effect* focuses on women who find themselves disempowered as a result of gender violence. The story is told from a third-person narrative centring on the female investigative team of Voinjama Johnson (or Vee) and Chloe Bishop. Through her protagonist, Vee, Golakai shifts from women as helpless victims of patriarchy towards depicting empowered individuals who fight gender violence with sheer willpower. Significantly, Golakai's text disrupts

gender power relations that seek to keep women in inferior positions. In the process, Vee rejects traditional victimhood and prescriptive norms that tend to constrain the position of women. Thus, the text explores the adventures of the investigative team of Vee and Chloe as they deal with the uneven distribution of power. The story rearranges and challenges the power relations between men and women.

In their quest for answers about what happened to Jacqui, Vee and Chloe interrogate Jacqui's families and friends to gather the information needed to solve the case. However, in the process, Vee and Chloe find themselves entangled in power struggles between men and women. In the course of the investigation, Vee and Chloe manage to expose the shifting poles of power where both men and women are seen as perpetrators on the one hand and as victims of gender violence on the other hand. By seeking to discover the truth about the vanishing of Jacqui, Vee is concurrently obliged to face her bottled-up trauma and troubled memories of the atrocities she encountered during the civil war in Liberia. In a whodunit form, the *Prologue of The Lazarus Effect* opens with a description of the corpse of a young woman that is floating in a storm drain. The mystery surrounding the dead body points to an unsolved murder case:

The teenager broke the bones of her neck and wrist and felt no pain. The core of her being, the person who in life had loved the colour red and soggy chips soaked in vinegar and salt, had left her body two years earlier. The husk that represented what was left of her was passing through an underground drainpipe that lay between a field and a residential suburb with a heavy business component. Stinking, litter-strewn, muddy water, swollen by heavy rains and the effluent of other people's lives and carelessness, pushed the remains back and forth (9).

This fittingly spotlights, given the overarching concern with the missing children, the body of an anonymous girl (Jacqui, as the reader will learn at a later stage) who has been missing for the last two years. The *Prologue* establishes a clear connection between the missing girl and the watcher. The protagonist of the story, Vee, and the missing girl are somehow connected via stark visions that are depicted in the text. However, there is a possibility that a crime of murder has been committed which would allude to there being a victimiser and a victim. Crucially, the three figures in the *Prologue* referred to as the 'body/corpse,' 'the watcher' and 'Voinjama Johnson' lead to an exploration of the gendered positions of power that tend to normalise gender

violence. The *Prologue* creates a power link between the female protagonist and the lost teenage girl through the visions of a girl in a woollen hat. Golakai writes: “The girl in a woollen hat was still there when Vee blinked at the dawn once more” (13) and “her own health and sanity depended more than her livelihood on finding the truth behind Jacqueline Paulsen's disappearance” (47). The *Prologue* of *The Lazarus effect* serves to posit three main questions or knowledge gaps which the reader fully expects the narrative to pursue and resolve: Whose dead body is it? Who is the girl in the woollen hat? What happened to her?

The body of a teenage girl floating in the stormwater drain described in the *Prologue* does not immediately reveal the identities of the victim and perpetrator. Rather, they remain unknown at this stage, but there are hints at the underlying power dynamics. This is because the dead body attests to the violation that has occurred in the story. However, in respect to the identities of victim and victimiser, there is no mention of possible names that can plug the gap. Concerning the dead body of the unnamed girl, the omniscient narrator states:

The body had lain dry and undisturbed over two summers, but particularly heavy rains caused the concrete channel to shift and settle once more. The corpse's rest was finally over as the swollen flow of water knocked it through several metres of sub-city planning, abuse the bones weren't holding up against too well. The cause of the neck break was a simple matter of size and mechanics: the larger channel diverted into smaller culverts and the unusually large cargo was being forced towards a pipe that couldn't handle it. With force, the corpse could have passed through and eventually washed into the river running through that part of the city. Instead, it lay wedged in a nook, rocking gently (9).

From the passage, we learn that the corpse is floating in water, meaning that it has not been discovered after being dumped into the water by the killer(s). The only person who is a witness to the body is a powerless individual known as the watcher. At one point the watcher goes to the police station with the intention of reporting this case. The watcher is chased away due to his untidy appearance. What this means is that, for the identity of the body to be established, there is a need for an investigation into the cause of death and the identification of the violator as well as that of the only witness known as the watcher. It is at this point that the power game begins to surface, especially about the identities of the killer and the victim. As it will become clear later on in the story, the investigating team of Vee and Chloe believe that the killer or the person

responsible for the disappearance of Jacqueline Paulsen must have been a man. By focusing on female investigators, Golakai disturbs and complicates societal conceptions of the hierarchal power structures. The female detective displaces the traditional detective in crime fiction, who, as has been discussed, is usually a male who occupies a place of power.

Furthermore, the *Prologue* introduces the reader to the protagonist of the story, Vee, who is poised to challenge the disparities in the distribution of power among men and women, men and men, and among women. Vee is introduced as a vulnerable character who feels she is quickly losing control of her body. The first time we meet her is when she is trying to take control of her body from a series of panic attacks. She is “a solo jogger passing the open expanse of Rondebosch Common [grappling] with the smaller but no less important issue of personal biology” (10). Soon after that, the true identity of the jogger is revealed, thus:

Voinjama Johnson, bitter but determined, was out for an early run. She had no objection at all to the principle of fitness, but rather to needing to do things like this to prove to her body that she was mistress of it and it had to listen to her. So far, things weren't looking that way (10).

Vee decides to turn to jogging as a way to establish control over her body, which seems to be revolting against her. In fact, by jogging, she turns her body into a form of defence which gives her some form of control over her body as will be demonstrated later on. By adopting a training regime centred on jogging as a way to have firm control over her body, Vee is portrayed as a radical character. She fights to rewrite the patterns of power especially those concerning the control of a woman's body. Keeping fit is the only way that will enable Vee to have firm control over her own body thereby disrupting the normative notions of female victimhood. The “obsession with self-defence and physical fitness is also ... a symbolic possession of the object of violence, making it an active subject – taking control of the gendered body itself, vulnerable as it has traditionally been to being overpowered by patriarchal figures” (Walton & Jones 1999, 179). Thus, Vee turns her body into a self-defence mechanism that enables her to have access to power that is reserved for men.

The narrative seeks to unearth the violent past that haunts Vee from the time she started struggling to gain control over her body. Her suffering affirms the varied nature of power relations that underline the trauma that is mainly evident in the violent oppression of women. By establishing the interconnectedness between Vee's childhood trauma and the girl she is in her dreams, Golakai depicts characters who re-invent the structures of power that produce gender violence in the South African post-apartheid society. The reason that leads Vee to think that jogging will enable her to regain control of her body is revealed thus:

Bent double and gripping her knees for support, [Vee] thought about her larger worries. Surely, ...by end of the season, things had to get better. If things improved, if "it"[trauma] was under control by then, then these absurd morning runs wouldn't be necessary anymore. Were they necessary even now? It felt quite fair to wonder as she gasped for breath, muscles twitching, bullets of sweat prickling on her forehead and back, in her armpits and between her thighs. The running was supposed to be good for clearing her head, but evidently, the blockage up there was being cleverly circumvented (11).

In this quotation, Vee's body is portrayed as rebellious as she experiences twitching of muscles, prickling of sweat on her forehead, back, armpits and thighs, and has to gasp for breath. It would seem her body is fighting against her which explains the reason it should be put under control. It is precisely for these reasons that Vee wants to once again have control over her body so as to put an end to jogging. Symbolically, her body might be rebelling against the constraints that women have to endure as a result of the unequal access to power. Furthermore, her battle to control her body can be seen as a power struggle that is usually played out on female bodies. Her internal power struggle is described as follows:

A series of spasms grew from flutters and trembles to agonizing involuntary clenches, melting suddenly into one whole-body muscle seizure. Vee collapsed forward and swallowed a howl with difficulty, clamping it down to a low groan. An exhausted runner taking a breather along the sidewalk of a Cape Town suburb at six in the morning was hardly a head-turner. But winded and jerking like a puppet, with sweat plastering her clothes to her body — that was bound to slow any passer-by down. [...]. As sweat and tears of pain prickled, she flexed her neck and looked up. [...]. Vee felt her legs give out, and she collapsed in the grass along the footpath (12-13).

In the quotation, the description of 'spasms' evokes the notion of a traumatic past that has not been fully dealt with and which she now struggles to overcome. The convulsions suffered by Vee

are indicators of the trauma that ensues from being a victim of gender violence which she was exposed to during the civil war in Liberia. Even in such a dangerous environment such as war, she managed to subvert the notion of female victimhood by killing her tormentor, using the weapon that gave him power over her and other defenceless people. However, Vee's trauma is further provoked by the "Air Girl" (26) photograph that is pinned on the noticeboard of the Wellness Institute (WI). She sees the photograph when she takes a friend's child for a check-up at WI, a private hospital. The Air Girl turns out to be Jacqueline Paulsen, the girl who disappeared without a trace and who torments Vee in the form of recurring visions.

Yet it is important to note that by focusing on an African migrant detective, Golakai rewrites the representation of female power and the power of othering people from different parts of Africa. As alluded to earlier on, Vee is suffering from post-traumatic stress which leads to panic attacks that make her lose control of her body. Interestingly, the connection between Vee and the Air Girl exposes how women are disempowered in the context of the text. At the same time, as suggested by Fasselt (2016, 1123), "[in] the interrelatedness of her Liberian and South African characters, rather than the exoticised difference and 'foreignness' of 'the other Africa', Golakai privileges forms of mutuality over separation." This mutuality is evident given that, despite being a migrant from Liberia, Vee is able to connect with a missing South African girl she does not even know. As Caruth (1996,8) argues that one can "[r]ead the address of the voice ... as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another." This is evident in that the way Vee and Air Girls (Jacqui's) stories become entangled in such a way that Vee needs to solve the mystery behind Jacqui's disappearance in order to find closure to her traumatic past.

The narrative says:

This Air Girl, this Smiling Everywhere Girl — she was here, in this picture, in this very hospital. There was no mistaking it, no question about that smile. She was the one from the parking lot, from the jogging day, the one hovering over her bed, disturbing her dreams. When her heart was thudding, and her throat and eyes were furnace hot, and those cold bumps like painful anthills rose all over her skin, that face was the one that sometimes taunted her. Vee wiped the cold sweat from her forehead and tried to press back the wave of another anxiety attack (26).

What can be recognised here is the underlying trauma that seems to torment Vee in the form of the image of the Air Girl, who is also described as 'this smiling Everywhere Girl'; this connects the two women as victims of violence. Powerlessness and vulnerability tie the women's experiences together. The plot of the story centres on the disappearance of young children, particularly Jacqueline (Jacqui) Paulsen. This leads to the attempts by Vee and Chloe to investigate Jacqui's disappearance. Even though Vee and Jacqui are differently situated, she kills a child soldier who tried to rape her while Jacqui is killed by her young half-sister in a heated argument. This makes the two women intertwined or entangled. Vee and Jacqui share a set of relations which are expressed through Vee's investigation into Jacqui's disappearance. The trauma that afflicts Vee is denoted by the blackouts she has to endure:

Her recent blackouts told of a subconscious dissatisfaction, but her subconscious wasn't really her problem if it didn't speak up. True, making its presence felt by sending her into rapturous torture with no provocation at the oddest times was not ideal, but that simply meant there'd have to be some new ground rules (37).

The full extent of trauma as a bodily action that disempowers the sufferer is clear only when Vee has attacks even in public spaces. Further to that the trauma is personified as it has a personality of its own and seems to enjoy tormenting Vee, at times, without the slightest provocation. Marder (2006) argues that "although living through trauma thus exposes the traumatized person to a seemingly unbearable degree of isolation, the very act of surviving trauma entails discovering new ways of relating and being related to others" (p. 2). In this case, Vee has to survive her trauma as shown by her determination to subvert the state of trauma-induced powerlessness by setting 'new ground rules' that would enable her to take possession of her body.

The cause of the trauma that leads to the blackouts, panic attacks or seizures suffered by Vee can be traced back to her childhood. Dr Marcus Neethling, a psychiatrist, is close to the cause of Vee's blackouts when he tells her that: "Panic attacks are quite common among those with post-traumatic stress disorder, people who've suffered the loss of a loved one or gone through horrific experiences like war —" (157). Her trauma is portrayed as having a presence that traces back to the past where she was almost raped by a rebel child soldier. In a panic, she grabbed a

cutlass and fatally stabbed the rebel soldier. However, she had bottled up her trauma over the years. Even though the act of killing a rebel soldier defies the patriarchal discourses of murder, Vee is a young girl who only kills to defend herself. This does not make her a female killer like Jade in Mackenzie's *Random Violence*. Notably, this explains the trauma that she has kept concealed for a long time. As Dr Marcus Neethling explains to her:

'Surprisingly, the body and the mind both store up traumatic memories, which are expressed in different ways. All our systems communicate, even when we set up mind-blocks. Anxiety attacks are often associated with real or irrational fears, and with major life changes. I guess you could say the body reacts against a conscious effort to suppress the anxiety. Unfortunately, the experience is like having a meltdown' (157).

It appears that Vee can only heal and find closure from her traumatic past by discovering what happened to the girl in her visions. The reader is told that:

One girl stood near the boy's elbow, at the edge of the photo but somehow in the middle of it, as central as the boy himself. Her smile was unsure in comparison to the others but still bright, and as she leaned over to fit into the frame her hand rested on the boy's arm. Even without the red woollen hat and the benefit of age to carve away the baby's cheeks, the face was unmistakable. A strangled animal sound surprised Vee before she realized it emanated from her own throat (25).

Again, the above passage serves to reinforce the connection between Vee's suffering and that of the girl she sees in the picture at the hospital. It is this picture that leads her to investigate what happened to the smiling girl who seems to be everywhere. By seeking to find out what happened to the Smiling Girl in the picture, Vee can confront the trauma that leads her to challenge the idea of female victimhood.

Apart from being a woman, Vee is also a migrant from Liberia who works in a country that has become known for xenophobic attacks; this too puts her in a vulnerable position. As a migrant detective, she occupies a peripheral position within the post-apartheid South African society. She is saddled with her migrant status which is viewed with revulsion in South Africa. Vee dealt with xenophobic violence perpetrated against African migrants since "[her] last major assignment [was] a quest into the world of xenophobic riots and a city shredded by hateful prejudice" (43). As a migrant, she encounters a series of incidents that serve to disempower her. Her character

represents the typical figuration of the disempowerment of female migrants. Therefore, “Golakai...successfully employs the form of crime fiction to negotiate stereotypes against African migrants and to critique new forms of social hierarchies that have emerged in post-apartheid South Africa” (Fasselt 2016, 1122).

In the text, migrants are 'othered' as outsiders within the South African society. As an outsider, the 'migrant' represents the problematic position of certain forms of subjectivities when it comes to the power dynamics of belonging and lack thereof. While exploring the difficulties associated with female migrant victimhood, the text also depicts femininities imbued with agency. As a migrant, Vee is doubly rendered powerless: first she faces the threat of xenophobic attacks, and secondly, as a woman, she is expected to be a submissive female. Such an identity in South Africa can be dangerous as evidenced by the fact that hateful prejudice defines the xenophobic attacks that have frequently been perpetrated against migrants. Thus, as a migrant and a woman, Vee has to transgress the prevailing power inequalities by becoming resilient in coping with a series of attacks.

In her investigation, Vee finds herself constantly attacked by those she suspects of being responsible for Jacqui's disappearance. She is compelled to strike back in self-defence. This makes her job as an investigator extremely dangerous as seen when Etienne Matongo says to her: “Your job is dangerous, no? It's not a good job for a woman” (214). This suggests that the investigative job is a preserve of men as it is fraught with danger. By taking the job of investigators, Vee and Chloe challenge the male chauvinist tendencies that define this job. The two female detectives have to fight against the dangers they encounter in the course of their investigation.

In a nation where women are not safe at home and in public arenas, Vee decides to enrol in self-defence sessions as well as taking up jogging to exert power over her body, as discussed earlier, since she is affected by panic attacks. She has to prepare herself for the dangers that come with the job of an investigator. She assumes power that enables her, later on, to fend off any attacks that she comes across. Her investigation lands her in a series of attacks that lead to her hospitalisation. She is physically attacked on different occasions by Ashwin Venter, who was

Jacqui's former boyfriend, and twice by Jacqui's half-sister, Rosie. Adele Paulsen, Jacqui's mother, informs Vee that Ashwin is Jacqui's former boyfriend and that the two used to quarrel. What made Ashwin a prime suspect in the disappearance of Adele's daughter is that he was regarded as the last person to see Jacqui before her disappearance. To gather more information on this issue, Vee questions Marieke, who is the suspect's sister. In retaliation to what he perceived to be a violation of his privacy, Ashwin decides to attack Vee outside her place of work. Attacking Vee in public can be considered Ashwin's way of openly demonstrating his manly power by using gender violence against a woman. On the day that she is attacked, Vee is unaware of the impending attack as Ashwin ambushes her:

An unfamiliar man jumped out of a parked car and lunged at Voinjama with such ferocity she didn't have time to react. The pizza box went flying as she lurched, arms out to brace an impending fall. She made a rough landing on her knees and skidded face first into the pizza, smearing her white top and the side of her face.

The guy wasn't finished. He dragged her upright by a fistful of hair (190).

At this point, the aim of the attacker, Ashwin, is to render Vee powerless using physical force. Such a stance echoes the way women are deliberately, violently and openly punished for what patriarchy considers misdemeanours. Vee's alleged misdemeanours are the act of daring to interrogate Ashwin's sister on a private matter concerning him, in his absence. The power struggle between Ashwin and Vee takes a twist when she is forced to fight back after this surprise attack:

Vee landed a solid punch in his stomach. A puff of air and a groan of surprise escaped him, and as he struggled for breath, she had time to gather her wits. Only just. Screaming an incomprehensible war cry, the man lunged again and the two almost went down together. Punches, scratches and yells flew as Chloe ran forward and tried to separate them, but Vee's body blocked her. Then the man took Vee by the neck and shoved, and Chloe flinched at the sound of a head connecting with a nearby streetlight. [...]. Meanwhile, Vee slumped over, keeping her balance. The man made [sic] for her again. She kicked out a leg with as much force as she could manage and got him in the crotch. After he dropped to his knees, she collared him and slammed his head into the concrete. [...]. Judging from her manic look in her eyes there would be no stopping her until the stranger's head was a bloody mess (190).

Unlike Ashwin's sister, Marieke, who does not defend herself when he beats her up, Vee demonstrates that she is a powerful woman as she fights back. In the process, she is more than Ashwin's match. She employs her defensive tactics to overturn the scales of power as she subdues Ashwin. It is in this context that Naidu (2013, 6) describes Vee as "a smart-talking, ass-kicking, sexy, transnational character". These are the traits that enable her to explode the binaries of power that constrain the position of women in a male-dominated society. More so, by fighting back, Vee subverts the patriarchal system of power that treats women as weak and vulnerable to any form of gender violence. In other words, self-defence forms an integral part of her identity, but more so, it allows her to have access to the seat of power. I concur with the contention that: "[b]y targeting Ashwin's phallus, she deliberately focuses on the most vulnerable part of his body, which also functions as the nerve centre of his masculinity. Her counterattack empowers her, and leaves Ashwin feeling disempowered and emasculated" (Spencer 2014, 124). This type of action empowers women to appropriate power from men thereby contesting the notion of women as nothing more than victims of violence. Thus, she is portrayed as a woman who transcends the condition of vulnerability and submissiveness by embracing the strength to disrupt such powerlessness.

In the second incident, Vee is almost run over by a driver in a Mercedes-Benz E-class in a hit-and-run accident. Later in the text, the reader learns that the driver is Rosie. Her crime of trying to kill Vee by running over her challenges the gender binaries of power between men and women. This implies that young women like Rosie contest the profile of a killer who is usually a man by collapsing the binaries between men and women, and old and young people. Rosie has been getting uncomfortable with the investigation into Jacqui's disappearance as this will reveal that she was responsible for her disappearance. She notes that Vee and Chloe are proving to be relentless in their pursuit for answers. As Vee is jogging one early morning, she realises that she is being chased down the road by a car which forces her to run for her life. After failing to knock her down the first time, the driver manages to hit her before fleeing the scene.

It is evident that the discourses of power that tend, in crime detection, to be associated with men's volition are revised in this text. Also, there is a pluralisation of the notion of the victimiser.

The foregoing incident serves to entrench the notion of female victimhood through the use of violence. However, this incident reveals that men no longer have the monopoly over the use of violence against women. But wherever they emanate from, the dangers that Vee and Chloe encounter in their investigative activities do not stop them from doing their job. Instead, it is revealed that Vee is not someone to shy away from dangerous situations. We are informed by the omniscient narrator that:

It [violence] had long forced her [Vee] to come to terms with what should've been an uncomfortable truth. The seduction of being immersed in the dangerous unknown and her willingness to remain neck-deep in the filth of humankind was far from healthy (201).

The text foregrounds the changes in the positions of women and depicts women's opinions of themselves. In the passage, the use of the word 'seduction' denotes how Vee is enmeshed and enticed by dangerous situations, yet refuses to back down from such situations.

In this text, ideologies of sexual power are further represented in the side stories that accompany the main storyline. This implies that even in those aspects of life that are considered unimportant, there is an element of disempowerment that puts women in positions of passivity and subordination. One example of a subtle form of sexual power is evident in the way Chloe Bishop sleeps her way into getting a job at *Urban Magazine*. Women who sleep with men to get a job are one of the examples of sexual power. In this instance, the narrator says:

Five minutes later, Chloe found herself on the floor, divested of everything except the skirt. She averted her eyes in horror from his [Cohen's] erect penis, glad its latex sheath gave her one less thing to worry about. No one had warned girls like her effectively enough about this brand of sexual encounter and she was grateful for it; prior knowledge would have made soldiering through impossible. Her feelings about them had been cemented early on in life and weren't likely to ever change. He actually held her panties up to his nose and breathed them with deep reverence before entering her. [...]. I guess this is why it's called a carpet interview, [Chloe] thought (81).

As a lesbian, Chloe does not engage in sex with the manager known as Cohen for enjoyment, but sex serves as a source of empowerment. In her case, the sexual act may be read as rejecting the notion of women as lacking initiative to get what they want as she shows initiative. In fact, she gets horrified by Cohen's genitals as much as she sees the sex act as something that needs

‘soldiering through’ or some form of endurance. In the process, Cohen is the one who is used by Chloe in order to land a job. Chloe does not emerge out of this situation as a victim, rather she has access to power by exploiting Cohen’s sexual desires to get a job.

In addition to depicting the vulnerability of women and children the text also foregrounds patriarchal power ideologies that constrain women's subjectivities when it comes to confronting instances of (gender) violence. In a representation of empowerment, Vee is portrayed as a self-made woman who seeks financial independence as a key to disrupting the stranglehold of patriarchy. It is partly Vee’s quest for financial autonomy that evokes her drive towards freedom from patriarchal subordination. In instances where women are depicted as powerless victims of gender violence and where murders of women are examples of such disempowerment, Vee contests the violence that is normally experienced by women. This is manifest in how she employs violence as her first line of defence.

By creating such female investigative journalists, Golakai reconfigures the structures of power that treat women as submissive and helpless victims of violence. As female detectives, Vee and Chloe are empowered to do the job that is traditionally reserved for men. The notion of female detectives working together disrupts patriarchal structures that seek to put a wedge between women as victims of violence. Vee and Chloe do not only disturb what is regarded as traditional roles of women in society, but they also rupture the very social norms that confine women to these positions of subservience. They managed to solve Jacqui’s disappearance, one of the (c)old cases of women and children who disappear without a trace. The female investigators are empowered with investigative skills to unearth the truth concerning Jacqui’s disappearance. This shows how female detectives may find inventive ways of working together within the context of violence. This represents attempts by women to move away from the condition of powerlessness that confines them in a position of subordination. Thus, solving cases creates prospects that debunk the notion of female victimhood and extricate women from the hold that patriarchy has on them.

The tendency to associate women with being submissive is a result of the way power is distributed in the society. In the text, there is creation of new power structures that make the

place of power accessible to both women and men. As a result, male privilege that is centred around the power that patriarchy assigns to men is now diluted by male fear of empowered women. Men fear situations where they cannot control women because that is an indication of powerlessness. This is evident in the way Ian Fourie believes his position as a man and father privileges him to make demands and always get what he wants, especially concerning the illness of his son, Sean. The doctors advised the family that Sean needed an organ for the leukaemia to be cured, but none of his siblings were the right match. When Jacqui, his daughter with Adele, proves to be a match for his sick son, Fourie demands that Jacqui becomes an organ donor. However, Adele puts his male privileges in check as she tells Vee that:

‘Ian had no choice but to ask for our help. At first, he came in here demanding it, saying it was his fatherly right to use one child to help the other as he saw fit. I told him to adjust his attitude and come back when he had. ...Then he expects to snap his fingers and I put my daughter through pain for what? I knew then I'd never get any respect, unless I demanded it, so I demanded it. He had to tell Carina the truth, and they both had to come to my home and speak to me about it properly. Which they did’ (54-55).

Ian’s sense of entitlement makes him believe that, as a man and a father, he has the final say on important family matters. His ‘fatherly right’ typifies the power that is enjoyed by men in a patriarchal society where women occupy a submissive position. However, such manly power is challenged by Adele, a woman who is expected to be submissive.

The physical threats that Vee encounters in her work do not stop her from pursuing all possibilities that would help them find answers to Jacqui’s disappearance. This makes Rosie panic as she is close to being discovered as the person who killed Jacqui. As a result, Rosie decides to eliminate Vee to prevent the discovery of the murder she committed and concealed for two years. Subsequent to the failure to kill the investigators in a hit and run accident, Rosie kidnaps Vee and Chloe, and keeps them in a confined space as her prisoners. This confinement in the dungeon renders Vee and Chloe powerless as Rosie ascends to a place of power. This lopsided distribution of power revivifies Vee’s captivity during the civil war in Liberia and the images recur. This new confinement heightens her levels of anxiety and the suppressed traumatic images resurface. She had killed a child soldier who was trying to sexually abuse her.

This was an event where she tilted the balance of power in her favour. In other words, she ended up swapping positions with the child soldier who had come into the room projecting power whilst Vee was his targeted victim for sexual gratification. Describing the incident in which Vee kills a child rebel soldier, the narrator says:

Everyone [in the room] had seen everything. With unsure fingers [the rebel boy] reached out and rubbed at [Vee's] chest; where big women had breasts, she had only tiny nubs.

'Don't touch me,' [Vee] whispered tearfully, taking a step back. One foot tripped over something; her body was too light to stop its fall.

The boy knelt down beside her. Her fingers scabbled on the ground until they closed around the cutlass. She drove it up and hit against something hard. The boy's face changed. Warm liquid spurted onto her skin. The door was still open... (258).

This is the source of the trauma that she suffers years after the incident described in the quotation. She has to perform her gender by deviating from the subservient roles that normally make women the typical victims of gender violence. Amid (2011, n.p) describes Vee as “the antithesis of the often powerless and exploited female figures one encounters all too often in crime fiction.” This point underlines the fact that women like Vee are contesting the patriarchal power structures that install them at lower levels of the power stratum.

While the death of child rebel soldier enables Vee to exercise her power, Sean Fourie’s death due to lymphocytic leukaemia creates a power vacuum in the Fourie family. His death had devastating consequences for the entire family as they could not fully deal with their sorrow and anguish. The family was torn apart with the father, Ian, choosing to dedicate his time to his medical career whilst his wife, Carina, was embittered by the loss of her favourite son. The parents neglect their remaining children, Lucas, Serena and Rosie. Of the three, Rosie is affected the most by this neglect as she is the youngest child. The family fails to relate to each other as the adult members seem to have neglected their responsibilities towards the younger members, especially Rosie. As a result, Rosie steps in to assume the mantle of power as family’s adult members are preoccupied by their grief. Rosie becomes the defender of the family as she seeks to prevent any scandals that would further tear up the already dysfunctional family. On one

occasion, when Rosie asks her sister, Serena, “What’s the date today?”(36). Serena’s bodily gestures are said to communicate the following:

You *know* what day it is today. The day Sean had begun what would prove to be the final bout of treatment for leukaemia. They all knew, had been *raised* to know and remember every landmark of their brother's short life (Golakai 2011, 36, emphasis in the original).

For the parents, especially Carina, what seems to matter to them is to remember Sean’s death. However, it is her parents’ neglect when she is only eight years old that drives Rosie into a relationship with her half-sister, Jacqui. Initially, Jacqui seems to fill an emotional vacuum when she came into the lives of the Fouries as she was very close to Rosie. Rosie tells Vee that:

‘I think she was cool and fun and she paid attention to me, which no one else ever did. *I think* the real reason Serena got all churchy and wanted to bring Jacqui along was that she got jealous, we were spending so much time together and leaving her out of everything. [...]. Like if *they* were hanging out together, she’d have less time for me’ (123, emphasis in the original).

This observation suggests that the dysfunctional nature of the Fourie family led to a power vacuum. As the elder sister, Jacqui initially takes the reins of power particularly in the eyes of Rosie. This is further shown by the fact that Jacqui taught Rosie how to shoplift. The rift between them begins when Jacqui starts excluding Rosie from her relationship with her other half-sister, Serena. It is this rift that makes Rosie feel obliged to defend her family, even against Jacqui. Thus, there is every reason to believe that Rosie sees Jacqui’s death as a way of protecting her family from a supposed scandal of an incestuous love affair between Jacqui and Lucas which has led to Jacqui’s pregnancy. However, she is not aware that the two are not in love and neither is Jacqui pregnant when she kills her.

As noted above, the representation of female violence challenges and displaces the masculinist narratives that treat women as helpless victims. Whilst Adele suspects that Ashwin is the killer or at least knows what has happened to her daughter, it turns out that her killer is the least expected person because of power imbalances. The reader learns that Ashwin is questioned several times and put behind bars for two days as a prime suspect in Jacqui’s disappearance, but he is released due to lack of evidence. However, Golakai's detective protagonist persistently

seeks to uncover the truth about what happened to Jacqui which includes interrogating every person directly or indirectly connected with Jacqui. She starts with Ashwin, who had been Jacqui's former boyfriend. As will become evident in this discussion, the re-arrangement of power allows for the emergence of more complex female characters who contest the hegemonic power in society that is responsible for creating female marginality. Such marginality is the one that consigns women to the position of victimhood. By creating powerful female detectives and complex female characters, Golakai shows her intent to disrupt the discourses of patriarchal power that result in gender violence.

Golakai imaginatively recasts the politics of power through the sexuality of some of her female characters. This alternative sexuality serves as a form of power that counters patriarchal power that upholds heterosexuality as the only acceptable form of sexuality. By bringing in the issue of lesbianism which in certain quarters is regarded as a dissident sexuality, Golakai challenges the gender power relations. Initially, Chloe refrains from disclosing her sexuality to Vee and her family, but her family finds out that she is lesbian. She moves out of the family home to be able to use her sexuality as a form of sexual power. Chloe rejects the idea of being pinned down to heterosexuality and hetero-normativity, which are held dear by her family. While trapped in the dungeon, Vee also 'discovers' that Chloe is gay when she divulges her sexuality to her. Out of nowhere and thinking they will not make it out of the dungeon, Chloe says to Vee: "I'm gay, you know...That's why it sounded so ridiculous when you asked about a boyfriend. Never had one of those before" (265). Chloe goes on to say: "I'm sorry, I know it's a lot to take in right now. It just sucks that I couldn't be completely honest with you from the start, 'cause I wasn't sure how you'd handle it. But seeing as we're trapped in here and might not make it through the night..." (266). The phrase 'handle it' suggests that Chloe was unsure about how Vee would react upon learning about her sexuality as she expects a negative reaction. In the end, by disclosing her sexuality, Chloe regains her sexual power as she need not fear being discovered by her colleague.

Another example of an inversion of the power struggles based on gender is evident when the captor of Vee and Chloe turns out to be Rosie, a young woman, rather than a stereotypical man.

The way Rosie captured Vee and Chloe shows her appropriation of the power that is usually associated with men. She is calculating and has the whole operation planned. She deviates from and purposefully disrupts the straight lines of the patriarchal power structures. Such actions represent how she subversively displaces men from the upper echelons of patriarchy by demonstrating that women can be killers who can get away with murder as she would have had it, had it not been for Vee and Chloe's prying eyes. To silence the two detectives, Rosie "hunted and knocked them down in the dark of night, put them in the back of a car with dark hoods over their eyes, drove them [to WI] and locked them in a dungeon, like the biggest cliché of the century" (260). The word 'hunted' suggests an empowering label for the one performing this action as this gives the person the power to dominate the one being hunted. Like a true hunter, she has everything planned as she hunts down Vee and Chloe by trailing their movements, knocking them down one by one and taking them to a secluded place at WI where she locks them up. To be in a position to knock down her victims and put them in her car, Rosie shows great strength. Vee informs Chloe that: "Yes, it was Rosie [...]. Rosie brought us both here" (260).

In most cases, women are portrayed as victims of sexual violence, unlike men who emerge as the victimisers. In an earlier discussion of *Exhibit A*, it was pointed out Nina is a woman who becomes a victim of sexual violence after being raped in a drunken state by a police officer in a police cell. However, in her text, Golakai debunks this politics of power that views women as victims through her male character of Ashwin who is sexually assaulted in a holding cell where he is detained as the prime suspect in Jacqui's disappearance. Marieke informs Vee that "[t]hey did things to [Ashwin] that no one would wish on their worst enemy, that no man would ever repeat even with a gun to his head. Ashwin screamed and called for help... [...]. If he wasn't fucked up enough before Jacqui, he suddenly was after that" (171). The powerlessness that comes with being raped is something that Ashwin does not want to deal with head-on and he reacts by turning to gender violence against women – and not men like him - whom he regards as victims of rape.

The rape of Ashwin challenges the notion of rape as a crime committed solely against women. Both men and women can be victims of rape since rape is a crime of dominance. This contrary to

McFadden's (1992, 184) conclusion that "sex is a weapon that men use against women – and [it] is the most blatant expression of that violence [because] raping not only confirms that the male is in control, it also satisfies the desire to dominate." Such an understanding is problematic considering that Ashwin is not a woman yet he is brutally raped in police custody. Ashwin's example represents the fluidity of the notion of victimhood since not only women but men as well can become victims of rape. Men too, as the silent victims of rape, can be disempowered. This implies that rape is a crime that is used as a tool by the perpetrator to disempower the victim regardless of gender.

The problem with male rape is that it tends to silence the victim. The victims remain silent for fear of being humiliated as it represents an act of emasculation. This is revealed when the narrator informs us that: "never in a thousand hells would she (Marieke) admit to sharing that private shame, confess to telling a stranger how [Ashwin's] defilement in police custody had led to the mental anguish he suffered over the loss of his manhood" (176-177). Despite the trauma of the sodomy, Ashwin does not want to accept that he "had been raped in custody" (181) preferring to seek solace in the view that only 'bitches' get raped and not a man like him. The tussle for power is shown by how Ashwin chooses to brutally assault his sister as a way to recoup what is left of his manhood:

Marieke gasped and choked as slowly her head started to fill with hot, deoxygenated blood. The last thing she heard before she slumped out of consciousness was Ashwin's voice telling her over and over again that *she* was the bitch. Women were the bitches, not him, never ever him (177; emphasis in the original).

The vocabulary of power is conveyed by the word 'bitches' that Ashwin employs as a way of 'othering' the rape victims as women and certainly not as men like him. To reassure himself that he still deserves to be part of hegemonic masculinity despite being sodomised, Ashwin repeatedly uses the word 'bitch' as he brutally assaults his sister. The word, therefore, carries two related meanings. Firstly, it is used derogatorily to refer to men who are seen as weaklings or 'wives' of powerful men within the prison setting. Such men are either raped within the prison or they can choose to be a bitch to the leader of prison gangs, hence they perform what may be termed an inferior masculinity. Secondly, the same term is used to render powerless those

women who stray from what is considered the traditionally correct womanly behaviour. These women are placed on a rank lower than that occupied by respectable women as noted in the discussion of Lotz's *Exhibit A*. In the process, Ashwin elevates himself above both men and women whom he considers to be 'bitches' as he tries to attain hegemonic masculinity. Thus, he entrenches the image of the 'bitch' that treats women as commodities at the disposal of hegemonic masculinities as he tries to maintain the existing power binaries.

The disruption of traditional femininity is contained in the phrase "lying bitch" (175) which serves to constrain the position of women in the society of the novel. More than once, Ashwin says to Marieke: "You lying bitch" or "Lying bitch" (175). As pointed out earlier on, the word 'bitch' is used to degrade the status of women to that of a 'whore', or a 'slut.' The word 'lying' has a disempowering effect on the women. In two separate incidents, women are referred to as 'liars' by both male and female characters in ways that degrade women. After assaulting his sister, Marieke, for allegedly disclosing family secrets to a stranger, Ashwin tells his sister that: "You women are all the same, all lying bitches" (177). This statement echoes an earlier one uttered by Dr Carina when she tells Vee that: "All women are liars, my dear. It's the bedrock of all our relationships" (242). This resonates with the way Nina in *Exhibit A* is described as a liar who tends to make up stories. In that text, as has been discussed, women are depicted as gossipers that gather together under the pretence of the book club to churn out one lie after another. Interestingly, in Golokai's text, both Ashwin, who is a suspect in Jacqui's disappearance, and Dr Carina, who hands herself over to the police confessing to the crime, employ the pronoun/determiner 'all' which alludes to the prejudice that homogenises women as born liars.

In *The Lazarus Effect*, Golokai reverses gender power configuration by displacing men from their privileged positions of domination. By placing women, including young women, at the centre of power, Golokai rewrites the script of gender violence as women are no longer the sole victims of violence. It is interesting to note that the text ascribes very different values to female characters such as Vee, Chloe, Serena, Adele, Carina and Rosie. These women variously perform their gender by acting in ways that subvert the ascribed gender roles. Unlike the other women listed, Rosie's subversion of normative gender roles is depicted through her criminality that comes as a result

of killing her half-sister. Even though Rosie does not pre-plan Jacqui's murder, she intentionally conceals her body and acts as if nothing has happened for two years. However, there are still female characters like Marieke who are depicted as passive as they cannot fight back when faced with gender violence. For instance, Marieke is complicit in entrenching gender power imbalances that disadvantage women as she believes that Jacqui deserved the physical beatings that are meted out to her by Ashwin:

Imagine how bad it looked to the police. He had a record, he was jealous and hot-tempered. Jacqui ended the relationship, and people knew he'd hit her before—. She asked for it,' Marieke barked stoutly (171).

Thus, Marieke believes Jacqui deserved to be beaten as 'she asked for it.' The phrase 'barked stoutly' shows that Marieke is convinced that her brother's actions are justified as he is provoked by Jacqui's actions. It seems that Marieke speaks and acts from a position of someone who, even while disempowered herself, regards victims of gender violence as responsible for what befalls them.

However, soon after meeting and talking to Vee, Ashwin flogs Marieke until she falls unconscious accusing her of divulging his shameful secret to Vee. The reader is told that "Ashwin rammed into her from behind, using the full weight of his body to shove hers into the cold cement" (175). Words like 'gripped,' 'dragged,' 'shaking' and 'slapped' show how Marieke is physically assaulted and how her brother reasserts his power on her body. When she screams, cries or begs her brother to stop beating her, it reminds him of his own brutal abuse in police custody where he screamed to no avail. In this instance, the use of physical force is a power mechanism that patriarchy employs to silence women and keep them in their submissive roles. In addition, Ashwin uses violence to regain and reaffirm his manhood which he believes he lost in police custody when he was savagely raped. Thus, in both instances, there was no justification for Ashwin's violent actions against Jacqui and Marieke except that his actions are used to confine women within their ascribed gender roles of powerlessness.

One of the lingering examples of uneven gender power relations is centred around the identity of the 'perpetrator' of a violent crime like murder as suggested by the unclaimed corpse floating

in a sewer at the beginning of the *Prologue*. During their investigation into Jacqui's disappearance, Vee and Chloe focus their attention on men whom they regard as possible victimisers. Their list includes Jacqui's father, Ian Fourie, her half-brother, Lucas, her former boyfriend, Ashwin, and her father's benefactor, Philemon Jabulani Mtetwa. Each of these men, according to Vee and Chloe, had a motive that could have led to the disappearance of Jacqui. Ashwin is a prime suspect as he is the last person to have seen Jacqui alive and, like a jilted lover, he may have believed he had a reason to 'kill' Jacqui. After Ashwin, Ian is a second prime suspect whom Vee pursues relentlessly until the night she is abducted at the Wellness Institute. The next suspect is Lucas, who is seen as a possible victimiser who could have 'killed' Jacqui to conceal her supposed pregnancy as a result of their incestuous affair. The last suspect is Philemon, who becomes Ian's benefactor after the latter has been given a new lease of life after a heart operation. He could have 'killed' Jacqui to return the favour he owed Ian for saving his life. Vee doubted Carina's (Ian's wife) confession to the police that she was responsible for Jacqui's disappearance and that she had also attempted to run over her (Vee), was true. She still believed that a man was responsible for Jacqui's disappearance because of the power wielded by men in a patriarchal society, thereby missing the main piece needed to solve Jacqui's disappearance.

Of importance is that Vee's investigative skills undercut the female-directed script of victimhood as she and Chloe manage to reveal the truth about Jacqui's disappearance. Vee and Chloe manage to have the person responsible for Jacqui's death arrested. As previously discussed, they discover that the person responsible for the disappearance and the subsequent death of Jacqui was Rosie who, acting at the spur of the moment, ran over Jacqui. With the help of her sister, Serena, and that of the deputy chief security officer at WI, Etienne Matongo, she dumped the body in a sewer drain. At this point, the reader learns that the body that the watcher saw in drainage water was indeed that of Jacqui. However, none of the male suspects had a hand in the disappearance and the subsequent death of Jacqui. Vee admits:

'Naturally we had our reasons, good ones, but we were looking in completely the wrong direction. I made the biggest mistake by assuming this had to be a man's crime. From the beginning this had nothing to do with the adults; they were just bystanders. It really began with Sean, and then it sucked in Jacqui. Serena and Lucas were satellites' (279).

She raises important issues concerning the distribution of power in the society of the text. Vee and Chloe had erroneously regarded the case of Jacqui's disappearance and subsequent death as "a man's crime" (279). Besides not being a man's crime, it proves to be a child's or girl's crime. Even as patriarchy gives power to men to control and have authority over women, in this case, a young woman turns out to be the murderer.

The text raises two issues that highlight how and why women writers contravene the conventions about murder. First of all, the female killer is not seen as fitting the typical profile of a killer who tends to be a man. In this case, a female killer is depicted as straying from the straight line of the normative femininity, which in turn disrupts the patriarchal structures around the notion of power. This is due to the fact in a world full of violent men, women are not seen as capable of killing. Thus, in their investigations, Vee and Chloe look to men for the possible killer, thereby making murderers out of men. Secondly, the killer is usually a stranger and not young. However, in this instance, the killer is not only a woman, but a girl or young woman, thereby further challenging the status quo. In a nation where gender violence is on the rise, disproportionately affecting young women and children, as shown by how girls and children are disappearing in Cape Town, a young female killer emerges to ruffle the patriarchal metanarratives on victimhood.

As a young female killer, Rosie complicates the situation. In this instance, both the killer and the victim are young women. This represents woman-on-woman gender violence which displaces the man as the victimiser, thereby contesting the assumed gender inferiority and cultural silencing of women. In the process, women create their own image of female identity which contravenes the one pedalled by patriarchy. This is exemplified by the fact that a furious young girl, Rosie, is shown to be capable of killing her half-sister, Jacqui, after being involved in an altercation. However, this moving into the place of power cannot be read positively since Jacqui is an innocent victim who cannot be equated to the criminals killed by Jade in Mackenzie's *Random Violence*. More so, the family murder committed by Rosie problematises the notion of murder as it deviates from the norm of women as life-givers and not takers of life. Unlike Vee

who kills in self-defence, Rosie kills Jacqui in the spur of the moment. Her reason for killing is to defend the reputation or image of her family.

Using the flashback technique, the novel informs the reader of the events of the fateful night that ended with Jacqui's death. Rosie is responsible for the gender violence as the victimiser, thereby replacing the male culprit who was the main suspect in Vee and Chloe's theory. The chapter entitled 'Anatomy of a Murder: Just Do it' reveals what transpired on the day Jacqui was hit and run over by a car driven by an enraged Rosie. The family relations play an important role in Jacqui's death. The relations between Adele Paulsen, who is Jacqui's mother, and the Fouries, her father's other family, were strained. The relations become strained when Adele withdraws Jacqui from being an organ donor to her half-brother, Sean, who later dies. As noted elsewhere, the death of Sean after failing to get an organ from Jacqui results in the disintegration of the Fourie family. This situation foregrounds the quarrel that eventually leads to Jacqui's death. We are told that, after arguing with Rosie, Jacqui decides to leave her father's place, but:

Rosie slunk inside and closed the door. [...]. Blindly, she grabbed a set of keys from the hook near the door [and] ran outside.

The engine sprang into life. Jacqui turned with a look of puzzlement on her face. Then she started to laugh as she advanced. Her lips were moving but Rosie's ears felt numb. Her head was throbbing. She couldn't see straight. The car raced forward. The look on Jacqui's face changed to one of fear and then of horror. She swung around, took two running steps before the thud. The car reversed and went over her again (292).

After running over Jacqui, Rosie reaches out for her sister Serena to assist in getting rid of Jacqui's body and covering up her murderous act. The sisterly solidarity represents the usurpation of power that is traditionally reserved for men. This inversion of power locates women at the centre of the gendered script of gender violence as evident when Rosie seeks Serena's assistance after killing Jacqui. However, this shared secret represents how the bond between the two sisters forges new forms of power relations that see women as killers and accomplices in the crime of murder. As a female killer, Rosie enters into the realm of power that privileges males over females. Mäntymäki (2013, 442) observes that "[i]n this society patriarchal power is maintained by a hegemonic masculinist ideology which promotes violence as a means

to recreate itself.” Killing her half-sister, Rosie, along with Serena, her accomplice in the murder, disrupts the patriarchal system of power that regards women as victims of crimes such as murder.

Conclusion

The chapter explored the gender violence that results from the continual and differential power distribution between men and women. The texts covered in this chapter delve into the subject of gendered power relations which are used to entrench gender violence. The two texts depict female characters who subvert the state of disempowerment created by the patriarchal society. In Lotz's and Golakai's texts, the authors created female protagonists who disrupt metanarratives that stereotypically foreground violence within patriarchal discourse. The constructions of femininities in both novels attest to women who deliberately disrupt patriarchal boundaries around what is deemed to be 'proper' femininity. However, in both texts, there is a problematisation of the subversive behaviours of women in environments littered with gender violence as women either connive with men to perpetuate these power imbalances against other women or openly disrupt them. In her argument of what she calls 'cameline agency', Nkealah (2017, 129) concludes that this type of “agency conjures a new system where patriarchy gives way to a more egalitarian society populated by de-gendered women and men, where women – like men – can break socially imposed codes of silence and be hailed for their daring.” Women thus need to be recognised as capable of committing violent crimes. As a result, women are capable of breaking down the walls that constrain them within normative femininity, even in problematic ways.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Throughout this study I explored the literary presentations of gender violence in selected crime fiction written by South African women. I emphasised the notions of female bodies, women's coping strategies and power struggles as central to the understanding of the way gender violence is depicted in each text used in this study. I demonstrated that South African crime fiction written by women reveals that woman, both black and white, are victims of gender violence which is a violent crime perpetrated against them. The selected texts illustrated that, even though women are depicted as victims of gender violence, there are ways in which the female bodies resist, cope with and are resilient to such violence as much as they expropriate the power that is vested in the male bodies. Put differently, women are capable of moving beyond being mere victims of gender violence to a position where they take charge of rewriting the gender script and/or speaking back to the violators. This positioning of women does not only complicate the notion of gender violence, but, in very important ways, problematises what becomes of women when they enter the realm of crimes such as murder or are victims of rape and human trafficking. As a result, I demonstrated that female victimhood is not a permanent feature of gender violence as shown by female characters that transgress and subvert such violence. As Baxter (2003, 31) argues, "theories of females as universal victims of patriarchy no longer do." Gender violence sometimes turns women into female killers as women use violence to eliminate men who are normally the authors of the gender violence script. In some cases, the female characters use violence to end the violence that forms their lived experiences, which makes them instigators of violence or avengers rather than innocent and docile bystanders.

The study sought to contribute to scholarship on gender violence in three ways: it contributes to global scholarship on the construction of female lived experience of gender violence that breeds violent crime; to offer a reading of female-authored South African crime fiction, and, possibly, to suggest multifarious forms in which gender violence is to be understood when situated within crime fiction, specifically texts written by women. In expanding the ongoing debates on the understanding of gender violence, the study acknowledged how problematic the notions of perpetrator and victimhood can be. The texts studied here sought to redefine or re-think these

two notions as they are reflective of how gender roles are performed in specific contexts by both male and female characters.

At the outset, I established that female bodies are written with all forms of gender violence to include even the most brutal ones such as murder, rape and human trafficking. Through a critical analysis of *Like Clockwork*, I showed that female bodies are not a canvas that is silently receptive to the inscription of gender violence, but that these bodies seek ways to undo, subvert and disrupt such violence. It emerged from my exploration of this text that, with markings of gender violence in the form of tattoos, brutally carved on their bodies as well as bearing scars, injuries or wounds, these women find ways to recover the control of their bodies from the male perpetrators. They manage to sever the victim-perpetrator bond by employing violence against the victimiser. However, in cases where the victim-perpetrator bond remains, these female characters manage to reverse the roles with women becoming the violators. In the end, women emerge as victors as they attain some form of justice for themselves and for those who lost their lives to gender violence. Still in relation to the female body, I argued that Makholwa's *Red Ink* demonstrates how serial killers terrorise mostly black women as an outlet for the difficult childhood that turned them into monsters. Interestingly, despite being victims of such heinous crimes, there are still women who are able to fight for social justice as one of the serial killers dies at the hands of a woman. As a result, the misogynistic tendencies that are reflected through the gender violence that breeds crimes are actively challenged by female bodies.

I also considered a female coping strategy as a form of agency in Mackenzie's *Random Violence* and Makholwa's *Black Widow Society*. In *Random Violence*, Mackenzie takes the reader through crime detection processes that a female detective employs to solve a series of crimes that are perpetrated by a criminal syndicate. However, as I demonstrated, she is forced to employ unorthodox means like acting outside the bounds of law in order to attain justice for the victims of crime. I observed that when female-coping strategies are depicted as a form of female agency, they empower women to find new ways of dealing with gender violence or speaking back to perpetrators of violence. In the process, women who are imbued with the means to cope

with gender violence are in a better position than those without such means to disrupt the traditional female victimhood particularly by dispossessing men of their power by expertly using a gun, which symbolises manly power. However, I further argued that such a situation raises ethical questions when the female protagonist assumes the role of a criminal even though the reasons for doing so are noble.

Makholwa tackles the notion of collective female-coping mechanisms by depicting a network of abused women who try to eke out a language of freedom from patriarchal oppression by eliminating the men who abused them. This network of murderous women, as I argued, complicates our notions of what is ethically acceptable and what is not as they sanction the elimination of their spouses or partners and cashing in on their pensions and insurances. Faced with domestic abuse, these women find justice in a network of like-minded women who help them eliminate their abusers thereby justifying their murderous actions. By becoming murderers, these women tear apart norms that bind them to passivity or subordination, but as Makholwa reveals in her text, such a solution is problematic as it is an act of criminality. I demonstrated that killing as a coping strategy is unsustainable as it flouts the laws of the land and can only end in incarceration as shown in the text.

The text seeks to restore a semblance of morality through a process self-purgation where this society of women cleanses itself through the killings of its members by its male hired gun who also dies in the subsequent bloodbath. Only two founding members escape whilst those that remain alive are incarcerated. In this chapter, I noted that the female-coping strategy is the weapon of self-assertiveness used by women who have been abused by their partners or husbands or who have been denied justice by the statist judiciary system. Through an analysis of the depiction of murderous women in *Random Violence* and *Black Widow Society*, I argued that female characters are able to contest and disrupt the patriarchal notions of female victimhood. These two texts demonstrate that through the act of killing their abusive partners or husbands and criminals, these women are empowered to fight for their rights and to attain retributive justice regardless of the ethical issues of such actions.

Finally, I argued that power struggles are employed as a form of objectification of women. Taking *Exhibit A* and *The Lazarus Effect* as my case study, I established that whilst some women act within the realm of normative femininity which renders them powerless, others actively debunk various forms of power inequalities they face in order to gain access to power. In *Exhibit A*, rape is situated within the power struggles that accrue from alcohol consumption by women. Women who are sexually abused in a state of drunkenness are disempowered as they suffer character assassination as the focus shifts from sexual violence to their conduct. In the process, both the justice system which refuses to prosecute an alleged rapist and patriarchal power structures conflate alcohol consumption by women with sexual promiscuity and persecute women who are victims of rape. The victim who has been raped twice on different occasions under the influence of alcohol relentlessly seeks justice with the help of two pro bono lawyers against a corrupt police system and by challenging patriarchy. The text demonstrated how the victim of rape and a social outcast is transformed from being a timid woman to one who is assertive in her quest for justice in a situation where she is rendered powerless. Additionally, the protagonist's quest for justice is aimed at ensuring that she asserts control over her sexuality and body as well as to have freedom to decide whether to drink alcohol or not without being a subject of rape and social discrimination.

In *The Lazarus Effect*, I showed that disempowerment is not specific to women, but affects men as well. I observed that the interconnectedness of women's lived experiences allows them to heal or recover from their traumatic past and afford justice for the victims. It is through investigating a missing girl that the female protagonist manages to confront the trauma that had been buried in the pit of her mind. In the process, she has to navigate through a number of power struggles surrounding female victimhood, murder and social profiling of a murderer. As it turned out, the killer was neither a stranger nor a man nor an adult, but a teenage girl related to the victim who tried to fill the power vacuum within her family. Significantly, in considering the notion of power struggles, I also touched on women who physically fight off their assailants and trauma in order to extricate their bodies from patriarchal control that defines how they should

conduct themselves. I also touched on how rape destroys the male victim as he employs the same violence inflicted on him to recoup what he supposedly lost through the act of sexual abuse, that is, his masculinity. In the process, the male victim seeks to use women as cannon fodder in a power battle to restore his manhood that he believes was lost in the moment of sexual abuse in police custody. Thus, I argued that the gender war amounts to power struggles between men who have been power-holders and women who have always been powerless.

In order to explore the representations of gender violence within South African crime fiction, I used female bodies, female coping strategies and power struggles as the centre point of my analysis of gender violence that breeds crime. As I demonstrated throughout my study, the notion of female victimhood is performatively challenged, disrupted and subverted by women as they do their gender in ways that counter normative or traditional femininity. By doing their gender subversively, different female characters in the selected texts allow for the rethinking of unequal gender relations that result in violent crimes.

In my reading of South African crime fiction written by women, I identified that gender violence, to borrow Gqola's (2015) term, is a 'South African nightmare' that defines women's lived experiences of the post-apartheid nation. As I have argued throughout this study, this violence against women is, as depicted in the chosen texts, eliciting new responses from the traditional victim in order to survive and to be resilient and emerge as a victor in the gender war. Significantly, in the gender war against patriarchy, female characters have to dismantle taboos that include rape myths and murder that provide props to keep patriarchy intact. This dismantling of the existing patriarchal structures is necessary particularly with regards to rape myths. According to Bourke (2015, 2) "[r]ape myths situate sexual torture in the realm of moral edification." If such myths are not broken, it is likely that female voices will remain unheard especially in cases of unspeakable forms of gender violence such as rape. Notably, through my focus on narratives written by women, I have demonstrated how such survival and resilience are expressed in myriad ways that include reversal violence, elimination of the abusers, seeking retributive and social justice and wresting control of one's body from the control of abusers.

Each chapter explored how women resist, cope with and become victors and survivors when faced with gender violence. However, the selected texts also need to be read as being in a conversation which involves writing against gender violence as well as speaking and fighting back against the abusers and a patriarchal system of power. This is demonstrated by the ways in which women in these novels contest and disrupt female victimisation as well as redefining the very notions of victimhood and victimisation. In other words, I observed that women are no longer the sole victims of gender violence neither are men the only ones responsible for victimisation of women. I therefore argued that gender violence created a space for women to turn the violence they endured against the male violators. In the process, these women regain their identities and craft new identities.

As illustrated in this study, South African crime fiction written by women may be viewed as a way to rethink a dated topic of gender violence especially in terms of how women cope with, respond to and challenge such violence. The texts selected for this study offer numerous female characters who reinvent themselves in order not only to survive the ubiquity of gender violence that leads to violent crimes, but to emerge as victors even if such victory means killing the male violators. A new group of fearless and daring women arise out of gender violence through breaking all the rules that are traditionally used to subjugate them. This is despite the fact that breaking such rules may not necessarily be political or morally correct.

The selected texts emphasise that gender violence that results in crime compels women to be transgressive in their performance of gender and transformative in reclaiming the narrative written on their bodies. Women are shown to be capable of transforming the narrative behind the scars on their bodies. The female subject in South Africa is under threat due to the high levels and severity of gender-related crimes as shown in the selected texts. The crime fiction discussed in this study is a reflection on the pertinent issues of gender violence that constitute the lived experience of the South African woman despite a constitution that, on paper, protects

women, girls and children. Such a situation produces a new breed of women who do not perform their gender according to a patriarchal script, but go on to rewrite it.

I demonstrated in each chapter through a comparative examination of the primary texts that there are interesting conversations that may be discerned. These conversations suggest that novel meanings and readings of the texts may be established especially on an old topic such as gender violence. The authors of the selected texts appear to argue that neither female killers nor the continued vulnerability of women are viable as answers to the problematic questions of gender violence that afflict women. In their various ways, the selected texts seek to contest prevailing discourses of gender violence.

This thesis was limited to six crime novels written by South African female writers thereby leaving other emerging female writers as well as male writers from the scope of this study. The limitation included the area of focus which was on gender violence as it is depicted in crime fiction. This meant that other works by female writers that fell within crime fiction without focusing on gender violence were left out. Also, left out of this study were those texts by women which focused on the theme of this study without writing within the genre of crime fiction. The conversation or the debate around the topic of gender violence in South African female-authored crime fiction was centred on three different yet interrelated sub-themes namely, female bodies, female coping strategies and gender power relations. This implies that further academic research is needed on other issues that were outside of this thesis such as men's reactions to the growing number of women who resist gender violence as depicted in the selected texts of this study.

The study was built on the literary representations of gender violence in crime fiction with overall golden thread being the contestation of narratives or discourses patriarchal victimisation of women. As this study demonstrated, women are no longer victims in gender violence since women fought to own the stories inscribed on their bodies. They also adopted strategies to cope

with gender violence such as the elimination of the abusers. Additionally, women refused to be silenced as they took back their power from male perpetrators of gender violence.

Whilst this thesis recognizes that the victims of gender violence are mostly women and children, it does not pretend that victimhood is static and that men cannot be victims, but this deserves attention outside of this thesis. It is suggested that further studies can delve into an exploration of how gender violence creates victims out of men and boys and how the performance of hegemonic masculinity is responsible for such a situation. In this regard, Ratele (2012, 17) observes that:

violence in different forms affects both women and men; third, greater numbers of boys and men than girls and women are victims of physical violence; and fourth, there is worrying lack of attention and underreporting of men's sexual violence against boys and other men. While it is known that not all males use violence, the literature on men and boys in Africa can make it difficult to believe that African masculinity is not identical with violent masculinity.

Thus, further studies can ensue from the foregoing observation as well as making comparative study of how females and males are depicted as victims of gender violence in South African crime fiction written by women. I pose the following questions for further study: How do male victims of gender violence resist, respond and cope with gender violence in crime fiction written by South African women? How do texts written by women treat male victims of gender violence? In what ways do men's resistance to gender violence differ or similar to that of women in crime fiction written by women? How does the literary representation of gender violence in crime fiction written by South African women differ from that from other regions or parts of the world? In what ways do South African female-authored crime fiction contribute to the global debates on the ubiquity of gender violence?

Such studies will bring a holistic understanding of gender violence, which despite being a dated topic, continues to be a scourge in the contemporary times.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Golakai, Hawa. Jande. 2011. *The Lazarus Effect*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.

Lotz, Sarah. 2009. *Exhibit A*. Johannesburg: Penguin Books.

Mackenzie, Jassy. 2008. *Random Violence*. New York: Soho Press.

Makholwa, Angela. 2007. *Red Ink*. Northlands: Pan Macmillan.

—. 2013. *Black Widow Society*. Johannesburg: Pan Macmillan.

Orford, Margie. 2006. *Like Clockwork*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Abbey, A., and Harnish, R.J. 1995. Perception of Sexual Intent: The Role of Gender, Alcohol Consumption, and Rape Supportive Attitudes. *Sex Roles*, 32 (5/6), 297-313.

Adelene, A. 2010. Africa in "Murderous women"? Rethinking gender and theories of violence. *Standpoint Feminist Africa*. 79-92.

Amid, J. 2011. 'Crime Fiction and the 'Metaphysics of Disorder.' SlipNet. 20 October. Available at <http://slipnet.co.za/view/reviews/crime-fiction-and-the-%E2%80%98metaphysics-of-disorder%E2%80%99/> [Accessed 08, 2021]

Amid, J. and de Kock, L. 2014. 'The Crime Novel in Post-apartheid South Africa: A Preliminary Investigation'. *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*. 19(1), 52–68.

Anderson, I., and Doherty, K. 2008. *Accounting for Rape: Psychology, Feminism and Discourse Analysis in the Study of Sexual Violence*. London: Routledge.

Anusauskaite, M. 2016. The Role of the Body in Forensic Crime Fiction. *Acta Academiae Artium Vilnensis*, 80–81, 135-144.

Astbury, J. 2003. Whose Honour, Whose Shame? Gender-Based Violence, Rights and Health. L. Manderson and L. R. Bennett. (Eds.) *Violence Against Women in Asian Societies*. New York: Routledge, 159-70.

Attwell, D., and Harlow, B. 2000. Introduction: South African Fiction After Apartheid. *Modern Fiction Studies*. 46(2), 1–9.

Baxter, J. 2003. *Positioning Gender in Discourse: A Feminist Methodology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Binder, S. 2015. Female Killers and Gender Politics in Contemporary South African Crime Fiction: Conversations with Crime Writers Jassy Mackenzie, Angela Makholwa and Mike Nicol. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. 52 (2), 263–280.

—. 2017. A Case of Transgression: Investigating the Gender Performance of Jassy Mackenzie's South African Renegade Detective Jade de Jong'. In O. Moreillon, A. Muller and L. Stiebel. (Eds.) *Cities in Flux: Metropolitan Spaces in South African Literary and Visual Texts*. 37-53. Munster: LIT Verlag.

--. 2021. *Women and Crime in Post-Transitional South African Crime Fiction: A Study of Female Victims, Perpetrators and Detectives*. Leiden and Boston: Brill Rodopi.

Bourke, J. 2015. *Rape: A History From 1860 To The Present*. London: Little, Brown Book Group.

Butler, J. 1988. Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*. 40(4), 519-531.

—. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge.

—. 1993. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. London: Routledge.

—. 2002. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge.

- . 2006. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London and New York: Verso.
- . 2015. *Notes towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carlin, J. 2014. *Chase Your Shadow: The Trials of Oscar Pistorius*. London, UK: Atlantic Books.
- Caruth, C. 1995. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins U P.
- .1996).*Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.
- Cixous, H. 1976. The Laugh of the Medusa. *Signs*. 1.4 875-93.
- Connell, R. 1995. *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- .2002b. On hegemonic masculinity and violence: response to Jefferson and Hall. *Theoretical Criminology*. 6, 89–99.
- Connor, S. 2001. Mortification. In S. Ahmed and J. Stacey. Eds. *Thinking Through The Skin*. London: Routledge, 36-51.
- Cornwall, Andrea. Ed. 2005. *Readings in gender in Africa*. London: James Currey Ltd.
- Decure, N. 1999. 'In Search of our Sisters' Mean Streets: The Politics of Sex, Race and Class in Black Women's Crime Fiction. In K. G. Klein. Ed. *Diversity and Detective Fiction: Race, Gender, Ethnicity*. Bowling Green: Bowling Green University Press,158-185.
- De Kock, L. 2011. High Noon in the Badlands. *Mail & Guardian*, May 6, 2011. <http://mg.co.za/article/2011-05-06-high-noon-in-the-badlands/> [Accessed 08, 2021].
- . 2015. From the Subject of Evil to the Evil Subject: "Cultural Difference" in Postapartheid South African Crime Fiction. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*. 16(1), 28-50.
- . 2016. *Losing the Plot: Crime, Reality and Fiction in Postapartheid Writing*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

De Waal. 2012. Murder she wrote: Margie Orford, SA's crime fiction queen. Available at <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2012-03-02-murder-she-wrote-margie-orford-sas-crimefiction-queen#.UZzEdKJHKSo> [Accessed 25 January 2023]

De Villiers Graaff, K. 2017. *Masculinities and gender-based violence in South Africa: a study of a masculinities-focused intervention programme*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University.

Every, K. 2016. 'Growing Scar Tissue Around the Memory of That Day': Sites of Gendered Violence and Suffering in Contemporary South African Literature. *Journal of International Women's Studies*. 17(2), 30-42.

Fasselt, R. 2016. Making and Unmaking 'African Foreignness': African Settings, African Migrants and the Migrant Detective in Contemporary South African Crime Fiction. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 42(6), 1109–1124.

Fletcher, E. 2013. Margie Orford's Daddy Girl and the Possibilities of Feminist Crime Fiction. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*. 25(2), 196-209.

Gavin, A.E. 2010. Feminist crime fiction and female sleuths. In C.J. Rzepka and L. Horsley (Eds). *A Companion to Crime Fiction*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 258-269.

Gqola, P.D. 2007. How the 'cult of femininity' and violent masculinities support endemic gender-based violence in contemporary South Africa. *African Identities*. 5(1), 111–124.

—. 2015. *Rape: A South African Nightmare*. Johannesburg: MF Books.

Grosz, E. 1993. *Bodies and knowledges: feminism and the crisis of reason*. In L. Alcoff and E. Potter. (Eds). *Feminist Epistemologies*. New York: Routledge. 187-215.

---. 1994. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Harris, M. 2013. 'You Think It's Possible to Fix Broken Things?': Terror in the South African Crime Fiction by Margie Orford and Jassy Mackenzie. *Clues: A Journal of Detection*. 31(2), 122–131.

Harvey, E. 1992. *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts*. London: Routledge.

Higginson P. 2008. Tortured Bodies, Love Bodies: Gendering African Popular Fiction. *Research in African Literatures*. 39(4), 133-146.

Jaber, M. 2011. *Sirens in Command: The Criminal Femme Fatale in American Hardboiled Crime Fiction*. Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy Thesis, University of Manchester.

Klein, K. G. 1995. *The Woman Detective: Gender & Genre*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Knight, S. 2004. *Crime Fiction 1800–2000: Detection, Death, Diversity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kinsman, M. 2011. Feminist crime fiction. In C. R. Nickerson (Ed), *The Cambridge Companion to American Crime Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 148-162.

Kriesteva, J. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York. Columbia University Press.

Lindsay, Lisa A. and Miescher, Stephan F. (Eds). (2003). *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Lorde, A. 1984. The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action. In *Sister Outsider*. Freedom, CA: Crossing, 40-44.

Mackenzie, J. 2011. *Worst Case*. Cape Town: Umuzi.

Mäntymäki, T. 2013. Lover, Avenger or Deadly illusionist? Women Murderers in Contemporary Crime Fiction. *Languages in Motion*, 1, 198-208.

Marder, E. 2006. Trauma and literary studies: Some enabling questions. *Reading on*, 1(1), 1-6.

McFadden, P. 1992. Sex, sexuality and the problems of AIDS in Africa. In R. Meena. Ed. *Gender in Southern Africa: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues*. Harare: Sapes Books, 157-195.

Moffett, H. 2006. 'These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them': Rape as Narrative of Social Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32 (1), 129-144.

Munt, S. R. 1994. *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel*. London: Routledge.

Murray, J. 2013a. Reading Crime through a Gender lens: Interactions of Shame, Women's Alcohol Consumption and Sexual Vulnerability in a Crime Novel by Sarah Lotz. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*. 25(2), 210-219.

--.2013b. 'The Girl was Stripped, Splayed and Penetrated': Representations of Gender and Violence in Margie Orford's Crime Fiction. *English Academy Review: A Journal of English Studies*, 30(2), 67-78.

--. 2016. Constructions of Gender in Contemporary South African Crime Fiction: A Feminist Literary Analysis of the Novels of Angela Makholwa. *English Studies in Africa*. 59(2), 14-26.

--. 2017. 'And They Never Spoke to Each Other of It': Contemporary Southern African Representations of Silence, Shame and Gender Violence. *English Academy Review*. 34:1, 23-35.

--. 2018. Disciplining Women: South African Literary Representations of Gendered Surveillance and Violence. *English Academy Review*. 35(2), 71-82.

Naidu, S. 2013. Fears and Desires in South African Crime Fiction. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 39, 3, 1-23.

--. 2014. Crimes Against Nature: Ecocritical Discourse in South African Crime Fiction. *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa*. 19(2), 59-70.

Naidu, S., and Le Roux, E. 2014. South African Crime Fiction: Sleuthing the State post-1994. *African Identities*, DOI: 10.1080/14725843.2015.1009621.

NtamboNtambo, P. A., and Christelle N. P. 2018. Misogynism and the Dynamics of Power: A Radical Feminist Reading of Angela Makholwa's *Black Widow Society*. *International Journal of Studies in English Language and Literature* (IJSELL). 6(1), 28-39.

Nuttall, S. 2009. *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections on Post-apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

Orford, M. 2007. *Blood Rose*. London: Corvus.

—. 2010. Writing Crime. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*. 22(2), 184-97.

—. 2013. The Grammar of Violence, Writing Crime as Fiction. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*. 25(2), 220–229.

O'Toole, L.L., Schiffman, J.R. & Edwards, M.L.K. (Eds). 1997. *Gender violence: interdisciplinary perspective*. New York: New York University Press.

Paquet, L. 2015. Professional Eyes: Feminist Crime Fiction By Former Criminal Justice Professionals. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Doctor of Philosophy Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences University of Sydney.

Plain, G. 2001. *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Priestman, M. 2003. Introduction: Crime Fiction and Detective Fiction. In M. Priestman. (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-6.

Ranta, R. 2008. Hard-Boiled Ideology and the Woman Detective Challenging the Idealization of Masculinity Whiteness and Heterosexuality in Sara Paretsky's *V.I Warshawski* Novels. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Tampere School of Modern Languages and Translation Studies.

Ratele, K. 2012. Violence, militarised masculinity and positive peace. *Gender, Peace and Security Occasional Paper*, 6. 4-24.

Reddy, M. T. 1988. *Sisters in Crime: Feminism and the Crime Novel*. New York: Continuum.

South African Police Service. 2018. Crime statistics revealed Crime against Women in South Africa: An in-depth analysis of the Victims of Crime Survey data. *Statistics South Africa Report*. 03-40-05, 1-24.

Spencer, L. G. 2014. *Writing Women in Uganda and South Africa: Emerging Writers from Post-Repressive Regimes*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University, South Africa.

Van Heerden, I. 2015 *The Vulnerable Body in Contemporary South African Literature*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Humanities Research Centre, University of York.

Vincent, L., and Naidu, S. 2013. *Vrou is Gif2: The representation of violence against women in Margie Orford's Clare Hart novels*. *African Safety Promotion Journal*. 11(2), 48-62.

Walton P and Jones, M. 1999. *Detective Agency: Women Re-writing the Hard-Boiled Tradition*. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press.

Warnes, C. 2012. Writing Crime in the New South Africa: Negotiating Threat in the Novels of Deon Meyer and Margie Orford. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 38(4), 981-91.

Worthington, H. 2011. *Key Concepts in Crime Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Young, S. 2020. Feminist Protest and the Disruptive Address of Naked Bodies. *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa*. 32(2), 158-167.

