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UNVEILING WOMANIST CONSCIOUSNESS WITHIN THE QUIET INNER WORLDS OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN IN SINDIWE MAGONA'S *LIVING, LOVING AND LYING AWAKE AT NIGHT*

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the interconnections between spirituality, selfhood, and womanist thought in Sindiwe Magona's short story collection Living Loving and Lying Awake at Night. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of womanism as articulated by Alice Walker and other Black feminist thinkers, the study examines how Magona constructs the inner lives of her female characters through narratives of spiritual strength, cultural resilience, and emotional survival. These stories portray Black South African women navigating structural violence, apartheid trauma, and domestic injustice while maintaining a deeply rooted sense of self and spiritual grounding. The paper argues that Magona's characters demonstrate a form of quiet resistance and healing that is distinctly womanist emphasizing community, care, and inner transformation. Through close textual analysis, this paper positions Magona's work as a critical site for understanding how Black women's inner worldssteeped in lived experience, ancestral wisdom, and spiritual conviction—can serve as a radical space of resistance and healing.

KEYWORDS: *Womanist, Sindiwe Magona, Spirituality, Selfhood*

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INTRODUCTION

Sindiwe Magona's literary work occupies a vital space in post-apartheid South African literature, particularly in its nuanced representation of Black women's lives. Her short story collection *Living Loving and Lying Awake at Night* (1991) explores emotional, spiritual, and psychological landscapes of South African women who have survived the historical trauma of apartheid, economic marginalization, and gender-based violence. It was told through the voices of ordinary women, the stories reflect deep spiritual introspection and a powerful journey toward selfhood and healing. These narrative threads align closely with the principles of womanism, a term coined by Alice Walker to describe a form of Black feminism that embraces "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually… loves music… loves the Spirit… loves struggle… loves herself. Regardless." (Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, 1983).Such moments highlight what scholar Layli Maparyan calls the womanist metaphysical realm, where the inner self connects with ancestral wisdom, nature, and God in the pursuit of justice and healing (*The Womanist Idea*, 2012). Magona's protagonists often lie awake not in helplessness, but in contemplationa process that leads to self-discovery and, ultimately, transformation. This aligns with womanist epistemology, which values lived experience, emotional expression, and spiritual grounding as

legitimate forms of knowledge. As literary scholar Barbara Christian notes, Black women's literature often emerges "out of need, out of the sheer need to testify" (*Black Feminist Criticism*, 1985). In Magona's case, this testimony is deeply spiritual and intimately personal.

This paper argues that Magona constructs a distinctly womanist inner world in her short storiesone in which spirituality and selfhood intersect to empower her female characters. Through close textual analysis of selected stories from *Living Loving and Lying Awake at Night*, the paper explores how spirituality serves not as escapism, but as a transformative tool for reclaiming identity, resisting oppression, and fostering communal healing. Magona's women are not merely victims; they are moral agents, spiritual thinkers, and resilient survivors.The existing scholarship on Sindiwe Magona's *Living Loving and Lying Awake at Night* primarily focuses on themes of apartheid, gender-based violence, trauma, and the everyday struggles of Black South African women. However, fewer studies have explored her work through the lens of womanism, especially with regard to the role of spirituality and selfhood as central forces in her female characters' survival and transformation. This review brings together key theoretical and critical perspectives that frame the present study.

Alice Walker's foundational work, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983), introduces the term "womanist" to describe a Black feminist position rooted in the experiences of African-descended women. Walker defines a womanist as "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually… loves herself. Regardless." She emphasizes spirituality, strength, community, and a deep respect for cultural roots as integral to womanist identity. This framework offers a vital lens through which to understand Magona's charactersmany of whom are spiritual, emotionally resilient, and committed to healing their families and communities, even under systemic oppression. Building on Walker's foundation, Layli Maparyan's*The Womanist Idea* (2012) presents a more structured theoretical approach. Maparyan highlights the metaphysical dimensions of womanism, including the importance of spirit, balance, and harmony. She argues that womanism encourages transformative spiritual action that can repair the soul and society simultaneously. This is especially relevant to Magona's stories, where characters often seek inner peace through spiritual contemplation, moral decision-making, or cultural rituals. Maparyan's framework enables a reading of Magona's work not merely as political resistance, but as spiritual affirmation. In the South African context, scholars such as MzoSirayi and Barbara Boswell have examined how women writers use fiction to process the traumas of apartheid and patriarchal control. Boswell, in her essay *"Black Women's Literature as a Site of Healing in Post-Apartheid South Africa"* (2008), argues that storytelling by women like Magona acts as a therapeutic process—a space for voicing pain and reclaiming agency. She notes that *Living Loving and Lying Awake at Night* offers stories where "women transform silence into testimony and testimony into strength." This idea is consistent with womanist approaches that view storytelling as both sacred and political. Barbara Christian, in *Black Feminist Criticism* (1985), insists on the necessity of honoring Black women's storytelling traditions as sources of cultural and spiritual truth. She asserts that "for Black women, literature is not a luxury, but a necessity"—a space where spiritual survival and identity formation occur. Christian's view supports the idea that Magona's characters are not merely fictional constructs but embodiments of lived historical and spiritual realities. Further, scholars such as Yvette Christiansë and Desiree Lewis have analyzed post-apartheid women's writing in terms of memory, trauma, and ethics. Lewis, in particular, emphasizes how postcolonial women writers reconstruct female identity not just through resistance but through "the reinvention of the spiritual self" (Lewis, 2001). This idea complements the womanist reading of Magona's work, wherein female characters often retreat into spiritual reflection as a way to reassert their worth, dignity, and purpose in oppressive conditions.

Although Magona's work has often been read within postcolonial or feminist frameworks, applying a womanist lens allows for a more holistic interpretation that honors the intersection of gender, race, spirituality, and cultural survival. Her characters embody what Maparyan terms "spiritually-activated subjectivity"a form of inner awakening that translates into everyday resilience. Despite this potential, there remains a noticeable gap in critical literature that explicitly reads *Living Loving and Lying Awake at Night* through womanist spirituality. Most existing studies foreground Magona's critique of apartheid and gender inequality but overlook the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of her work. This study addresses that gap by arguing that Magona's stories reflect a deeply womanist worldview in which the cultivation of spiritual strength is essential to the construction of female selfhood. Sindiwe Magona's *Living Loving and Lying Awake at Night* (1991) offers a poignant tapestry of voices from Black South African women who bear the emotional weight of apartheid, gender-based violence, and social injustice. Yet within these voices lies not only suffering but profound inner strength, spiritual resilience, and a deep sense of identity. These qualities align with the principles of womanism, a theoretical and ethical framework rooted in Black women's experiences, originally conceptualized by Alice Walker. Womanism centers the spiritual, communal, and emotional lives of Black women, highlighting their self-love, strength, and capacity for healing. As Walker defines it, a womanist is someone who is "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female," and who loves herself and her culture with "fierce" intensity (Walker 1983, xi).This paper examines the spiritual and psychological interiority of Magona's female characters through a womanist lens, arguing that spirituality in her stories is not merely religious but a vital dimension of selfhood. Drawing on Layli Maparyan's work, which explores womanism's metaphysical dimensions, this study demonstrates how Magona's women embody a spiritually activated self—one that transcends suffering and claims personal and collective dignity. Her characters' journeys of reflection, storytelling, and emotional healing represent an African womanist reclamation of the self.

THE WOMANIST FRAMEWORK: ALICE WALKER AND LAYLI MAPARYAN

Alice Walker's formulation of womanism in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) provides the conceptual groundwork for this paper. For Walker, womanism is a theory that embraces not only race and gender, but also spirituality, love, and the power of lived experience. A womanist, she writes, is "serious... loves the spirit… loves herself. Regardless" (Walker xi). This emphasis on spiritual depth and self-love resonates deeply with Magona's portrayal of women who endure violence, abandonment, and lossbut who also experience healing and rebirth through inner transformation. Layli Maparyan extends Walker's concept in *The Womanist Idea* (2012), proposing that womanism contains a metaphysical and transformational dimension. Womanism, for Maparyan, includes the belief in "energy, vibration, and spirit as real and meaningful," encouraging spiritual practices that generate inner peace and outer change (Maparyan 14). She sees the womanist subject as someone who strives for balance, harmony, and healing, often through contemplation and ancestral connection. This lens enables us to read Magona's characters not just as victims of patriarchy and apartheid, but as spiritual beings striving to restore balance in their inner and social worlds.

The opening story in *Living Loving and Lying Awake at Night (1991*) weaves together profound aspects of existence, love and mortality along with a woman's fight for survival and her resilience in facing challenges. It unfolds during the hour when dreams seal eyelids shut and both benevolent and malevolent spirits linger in the atmosphere when lovers stir and reignite a fire and the souls of the chosen ones depart from the flesh, heading homeward. (1991:3) Instead of engaging in any of these activities we witness a woman lying awake on a mat in a small round mud hut. Her mind and body are so fatigued that she cannot sleep and thus remains connected to reality.We must have no doubt that this is a person suffering from daily needs. We learn that something bad happened on the day she will remember. This foreboding

causes optimism to be excluded and the melancholic reality of the woman's life to be brought into focus. Even the title of the story marks a starting point. Here is the depiction of a woman leaving the rural area for family survival. The focus of "Leaving" is a woman who remains nameless, as if she exists as a personification of many women, a representative of the South African woman. The story focuses on the physicality of a woman's life and on the practical details of survival. The passage highlights the impact of a male family members work on his relationship with his wife. While he may be physically distant from the family his wife feels that he forgets about them emotionally as soon as he leaves. This dynamic is influenced by gender roles with wives taking on the responsibility of managing family matters. However, the pressure on her to leave their children stems from societal expectations and perceived male irresponsibility. In a poignant moment the text describes her departure as being light and free like a seed carried by the April breeze symbolizing the difficulty of abandoning her children for the sake of survival. Despite her belief that leaving them is the only way she can fulfill her role as a mother she grapples with the challenges of fulfilling her obligations, in a world that often places unfair burdens on women.As she walks away from them, her thoughts overwhelm her as she takes care of her children. In the end, heroic conventions lead to finality, appropriated by the tough love of the woman who abandons her children. It can be shown to be one of the most horrific acts a mother can commit for the survival of her children. This can be shown as a strong African woman capable of making the right decisions to survive her family. Magona narrates the tale of South African women whose families live in townships or rural regions while they serve as domestic workers in urban settings. It is important to Magona that her stories do not close situations but open up new possibilities. The portrayal of her female character is very strong to find an appropriate resolution.

In Second story 'Athini' who tells the story is the nameless woman of the first story 'Leaving' reveals hope for a mother who left her home for her children. In 'Athini, we have seen the harsh ironies of South African life. where white employer has taken her name, who cannot cope with her, she does it in the form of the diminutive 'Tiny'. Despite the unequal relationship between Athini and her employer, this is still characterized as a class relationship as Athini. It has not interested it into a racialized framework. In comparison with her life in the village, the changes she is experiencing are thought-provoking enough that they make her think that a whole new world was opening in front of her eyes (15). It represents a moment of development, a step forward to what African women had experienced before leaving the village and confirming herself in her job. Magona depicts political realities of unequal power and lack of freedom that tend to subsume under the day-to-day tribulations of working women in these stories. Magona creates her character who can realise their oppression and tries to keep self-dignity. Stella's conversation in the third story,' Stella', is full of the outrage of the worker confronted by the unreasonable behaviour of her boss. Magona raises voice against the selfishness and inhumanity of white women.Magona places emphasis on the significance of African women in their role as caregivers taking care of children. Their bravery is rooted in practicality and daily survival rather than in the traditional notions of heroism associated with armed conflict. Magona portrays a sense of admiration for African domestic workers highlighting the challenges faced by black women in the realm of domestic employment. Despite being marginalized and overlooked these women bear the responsibility of upholding their families and, by extension their communities. She knows how closely linked these responsibilities are to the gender and class situation as well as racial situation.

POWERFUL MATERNAL VOICE

The maternal voice is one that can easily lip towards symbolic function. Magona attempts to destabilise the maternal voice as a conventional point of reference, especially which sees women as keepers of tradition, links to the past and to the continuity of their culture but something she resists at the same time as she desires it. Magona shows conflicted position in various mothers, as in her autobiographical voice. It also related to the idea that women accepted the low value placed on them, deriving their value from their supposedly natural functions, and leaving the management of society to men. Athini steps outside this to construct a different value for herself with a lot of sacrifices and challenges to convention. Alongside mothers come qualities like passivity, sacrifice and dependence intertwined with various forms of oppression. However, these African mothers have stood strong as pillars of the struggle in South Africa without feeling the need to boast about it. They are busy working tirelessly to ensure their children are cared for and that their families stay intact. Magona emphasizes the voice of African women through her writing. Magona portrays a mother's mindset who is willing to leave her children behind to protect them from starvation.

> If I couldn't do that, I wouldn't be a mother. I just wouldn't. If I couldn't do that, then I couldn't do that. That's all there is to it. Her mind screamed with the realization of what it meant. That's it. It felt like stumbling upon a treasure or discovering a refreshing pool of water in a vast desert. A discovery of hope. Her heart raced with excitement. She believed she had found the answer. I won't be a mother in that way. She would fulfill her responsibilities as she saw them and support her children. The only way she envisioned being a mother to her kids was by leaving them behind. (6)

The second part of *Living, Loving and Lying Awake* at Night explores the everyday challenges faced by black women in a society that heavily restricts their autonomy. In the story 'Flight' Magona uses a sympathetic background to activate the emotions of the reader. Women's escape is built into the emotional geography of the short tales of the book. As we are going to see, women don't always escape; they may be entrapped not simply by the valley and by rural custom but by the restrictions imposed by lack of education and opportunity, as well as by the violence of men. Here Magona focuses on women's escape from all violence and day to day hard work as she narrates"-new wives are worked like donkeys as their initiatives '(65). 'The Most Exciting Day of the Week' is a story that represents the activity, and the stimulation provided by Fridays in the village, told from the wide-eyed, sense-oriented perspective of the child. The details acquire a value through being recalled, their density and profusion establishing links with the past that make both the past and the present more solid. Moreover, in the story's naturalistic focus on such activities as the production and consumption of beer, the hurly-burly of fights at school, the cleaning of the house, or following lovers into the woods, it valorizes life without overt reference to ethnicity or to political and thus material oppression which presents implicitly in the poverty of the village and its infrastructure. In the conclusion of the child that 'money made the world go round' (71), we have an unspectacular observation not restricted to South African villages. More positive that certainly is the fact that money has a power, even within the constricted economy of the village, so that it changed people who were normal and ordinary. In allowing the operation of memory to be controlled from the recalled perspective of a child, the story can exclude the bitterness and political awareness of the adult, reclaiming the past as something worthwhile, a basis for identity formation and not simply for regret and frustration. Magona also focusses on how African mothers are helping in the activities of family.

Yet The Most Exciting Day of the Week', which ends with 'It is a day on which I not only count my blessings but see them' (71), can scarcely serve as a totalising idea of the past in South Africa, and it is immediately followed by 'Nosisa', in which an intelligent girl who seems to have many blessings to count ends up burning herself to death. A story of childhood like the previous one, it contrasts the domestic density of that story with the twisted promise of western education in which enough is offered to stimulate but not enough to provide any real hope. In her autobiographies Magona clearly shows how much she values education from the West. However, she takes a harsh stance when describing 'the African child conditioned to resemble a human bonsai; limited in both intellect and spirit, perfectly aligning with their stunted physique and faded dreams for a future that holds any significance' (1991: 74). Nosisa thus serves as a metaphor for the self - destructiveness and self-oppression that inequality can cause, she herself carrying the suffering of the world within her. Unable to see a way to end suffering she puts an end to her life. The irony is heightened in that Nosisa is considered lucky by everyone: she is the only one way to end suffering, she puts an end to her life. The irony is heightened with a complete uniform and all the books. She is good at schoolwork and already knows English through living with her mother at her 'medem's' house. What counts as luck is relative however, for here it only gives Nosisa a more complete picture of the darkness of her situation and that of all the people in the world trapped by constraints over which personal ability has no influence.

Magona's ability to convey the mood of her stories is evident in 'It was Easter Sunday the Day I Went to Netreg' as the narrative opens with the sound of brakes grinding in protest and a blood red Volkswagen coming to a hesitant and trembling halt (1991:95), a rhetoric of violence and anguish. The verb 'grinding' suggests a noise that assails the ears as well as an action that is the smooth working of the machinery involved; 'protest' is the result of this action; the car is not simply red but 'blood-red'; while 'lurched' and 'shuddered' both suggest movements that are uncoordinated and uncontrolled. In addition to this level of emotional reverberation, she writes insistently about events and experiences that may serve as metaphors for the violence of South African society, with special emphasis on that perpetrated against women. In this story we read of the abortion which the girl is forced to have as a metaphor for the perversion of the theoretically natural relation between people as well as of women's motherhood and the creative principle in general. These all end in the violence of the forced abortion, occurring on the day consecrated to the Resurrection in the Christian calendar. This violence is intensified by the melodramatic ending of the story, and it is a violence that makes the abortion not simply a personal matter, nor one that occurs within the asymmetrical power relations of men and women. It shows how apartheid deeply affected people's lives, mainly because the educated and knowledgeable white officials failed to understand that these men were also human beings. The confinement of men in hostels called Single Men's Quarters where they cannot bring their wives or live with their families puts a strain on the men, their families and the nearby township communities. This would be banal were it simply the story of a man satisfying himself with a young girl he had no intention of marrying, for this is hardly a scenario that requires apartheid as a conditioning factor. Indeed, the man in the story would have married Linda, and a teenage pregnancy ending in marriage might have outweighed the negative forces seen as impeding personal relationships, but Magona intensifies the evil of the system at the end of the story by revealing both its cyclic repetition (it is not just a matter of individuals but of repeated patterns) and its outraging of family bonds: the man who had made Linda pregnant was the same man who, fifteen years previously, had made her mother pregnant with her and disappeared. Not only has the prolonged grouping together of men without women been destructive of family bonds, but even the attempt by Mteteleli to redeem his past irresponsibility by marrying Linda is invalidated by the perversion the system has facilitated. The story's closure here is the closing down of healthy human development by the

alliance between capitalism and apartheid, its melodramatic nature forcefully metaphorical of the alliance's destructiveness. Survival here means no more than that: Linda survives but can scarcely be said to be alive, a witness to the living death that the system produces.

In the last story, 'Now That the Pass Has Gone', escape is also discussed, as in the first story of the book. It is made clear that after all, 'none of us escaped' (1991: 155). Things have changed in South Africa (now post-apartheid, unlike in the first part of the book) but the emotional landscape has been left so damaged that new strategies need to be found, among which writing is one of the most powerful. There is an optimism in the last paragraph: in being able to tell and to walk - by walking, we can walk away, so important in the first story. The optimism, however, is not simple but strategic, after escape has gone. It's the darkness of the previous story which showed the profound divisions in South African society, even though the disappearance does not represent the end of problems but the beginning of new ones, principally rebuilding and retelling, for history remains pass will never die' (1991: 155). Thus, closure of "The pass has gone; the is compromised in the individual stories as well as in the volume as to produce a series of structures in which closure is opened out, but whole. By writing a volume of 'vignettes' Magona has allowed herself also the occasional structure in which it is terminal and destructive. In this way she can make a series of points about the realities of Xhosa women without being limited in the metaphorical restriction of the o closure in a novel, especially a realist novel. Closure, ultimately, is about survival. Given that no human reality other than death can be said to constitute absolute closure, the convention of fictional closure is a metaphor, and moreover one which is principally generated by narrative In Magona's sense it does not mean that the stories are over, but only that told in this way they are useful, they are aids to going forward to survival. A volume of short stories with its multiple variations on closure may provide a more useful metaphor of survival than would a novel.

AFRICAN WOMEN'S DAY -TO-DAY EXPERIENCES

In the opening tale Magona presents Atini and delves into her challenging choice to part ways with her kids. As Atini reflects on her situation she reaches a somber yet honest conclusion. What does hell look like? I recognize it because I find myself here. I know it through the accounts of these women who share their experiences with me. Sure, the expressions vary some convey anger while others express sadness or remorse. I've even comes across words of commendation. However, beneath it all the message remains consistent. We are bound as servants in the kitchens of white women. (59)

She shares stories about abortions, sterilizations and enduring abuse to keep a job. She talks about horrible working conditions low pay and constant ingratitude from everyone around. We meet women who are angry sarcastic defeated oblivious naive ambitious and kind. Black women in all their diverse forms. The focus is solely on the experiences of Black women. Magona explores the rivalry and tension within Black communities especially regarding job offers and reputations. She highlights how Black maids would prefer serving white women rather than Black women due to the greater stigma attached to the latter. Additionally, she narrates tales of Black women supporting each other and finding ways to cope with the daily grind of life and work. She highlights the ridiculousness of Black housekeepers looking after the kids of their white bosses but being too busy to take care of their own.

They think keeping an eye on their kids is a walk in the park, like slathering on some peanut butter or jelly. But it's not as straightforward as they believe. This only highlight how little they truly know about their own children. In the mornings you can spot women in uniforms dropping off white kids at school. It's quite a sight until you stop to ponder who takes the black kids to school. There's a noticeable clash between generations here with younger maids striving to better

their lives by forming support groups organizing boycotts and aspiring to study and leave this town behind for good. Joyce was one of those maids who dreamed of becoming a doctor. She was also a feminist and refreshingly candid! She shares her perspective on the issue. Feminism in this country has been hindered in part due to the attitudes of women towards black women. How can I consider a sister to my father, the white woman? The time that a black maid spends working for a white woman is worth more than just money; it symbolizes the freedom for the white woman to shape herself into whoever she desires. And she fails to acknowledge her debt, to the black maid who asks for so little in return freedom from need and a fair wage for her efforts.

These stories explore the journey of Black women in South Africa during the apartheid period. They provide a glimpse into the lives of people whose narratives were often neglected and whose realities were frequently misrepresented by the media. With moments of both sorrow and inspiration "Flight" portrays a young girl witnessing a bride or soon to be bride running away from her village, into the misty morning. The reasons behind her escape and her ultimate destination remain a mystery; we are merely presented with this enchanting scene of a woman evading her pursuers and vanishing, into the enchanting fog. In Sindiwe Magona's writing her voice comes through as both gentle and sharp. Many of her stories carry a weight of sadness depicting women who have been raped children who have been killed and men working tirelessly in mines. This backdrop of sorrow weaves into the fabric of everyday life in Cape Town and its surrounding areas. Magona draws parallels between the impact of white colonisation on the land and the lives of black South Africans and the effects of commercial skin lighteners that replaced traditional ochres. The fence representing loss of land and dignity serves as a reminder of how these creams symbolise the erosion of culture and livelihood. Just like the fences marred the land the creams left us with blemishes on our skin today thousands bear marks on their faces while the land carries scars. Both show the deep wounds inflicted by colonisation.

Through her stories Magona confronts the prevailing beliefs, inconsistencies and narratives present in the writings of fellow South African women authors, mainly white but sometimes not. She explores topics such as race, class, gender, sexuality and the influence of apartheid on the lives of black women, in particular. A recurring theme in her stories is the dynamics between madams and maids. Indeed, it is with this relationship that the collection begins under the subsuming title "Women at Work." Magona constructs several stories about black women whose differing attitudes to domestic service and white madams are revealed through a series of monologues each of which (except the first and last framing story about Atini) carries the woman's name as title.

The issues of poverty and displacement, the separation of families, the stratagems and guilts of white madams, the failures of some black husbands, the potential threat of certain white "masters", the hazards of relationships with other black women, are some of the concerns of this story. Atini, forced by poverty and the neglect of her absent husband, abandons her young children in an act of desperation leaving them to the, yet unknown, care of her mother-in-law. The value of husbands is encapsulated briefly as you only have a husband when his body can lie next to you and his stick pushes up your thighs" (P.6). Many of the hazards and corruptions of domestic service are experienced by Imelda, who is constantly alluded to by the other woman but who does not speak herself.Sometime after her madam brought her to get an abortion, she discovers that "the doctor took care of Imelda. Not just for the current situation but also for all the potential future pregnancies she might have had" (31). Sophie's liberal madam angers her because she is required to wait on other blacks:

> I complain because I don't know why she has to make me serve people who areas black just like me. It is a punishment, I feel. I am a maid and they are teachers, and nurses, and social workers, and soforth. So what! I leave the location and its people and I come to work in a. whitewoman's kitchen. And there she takes her kombi; takes it and goes to the location to bring it right back here to her kitchen. Is she going to serve this whole location she brings here? No. The maid is there. Now, I am a maid to serve black people. I am not saying she shouldn't like all people. But, really, it's not fair to make me sweat for people who are as poor as I am. Not one of there people has ever given me a tip. Not a single one. White people tip. Black people just sit there and eat and cat and eat ..." (133)

In the narrative featuring Joyce, a twenty-year-old activist, she voices her criticism towards white madams who attempt to alleviate their guilt by addressing the treatment of their domestic staff. Joyce argues that the true solution lies in treating these workers fairly and providing them with wages. She points out that the progress of feminism in South Africa has been hindered to some extent by the condescending mindset of women towards their black counterparts.Through a series of narratives delving into the interactions between black and white women Magona presents a spectrum of viewpoints on the subject. Drawing from her experiences as a domestic worker Magona reflects in her memoir on how many white children in South Africa grow up without proper guidance or care. They passively absorb societal norms, attitudes and behaviors over time which contributes to a deeply rooted political culture in the nation. Nosisa, a teenager, views herself as an outsider, a victim and an inferior. She feels different from her peers because she has been able to stay with her mother in the quarters while they only see their mothers sporadically.

> It is I who must envy you. Do you not see that daily, I watch my mother's enslavement? Unlike you, I have no shield in the shape of a home. Nothing separates me from Mother's work. Nothing separates her from the place where she works. It is her work, her home, and the only place where she can be. Mother is a slave and I know, for am I not daily, witness to that yoke? Township children are lucky, truly they are, believe me. Do they daily we their mothers treated like dirt? No, worse than dogs? . . . by the women they work for. And by the husbands of those women. By their children, their friends and their relatives? (85)

Her sense of hopelessness pervades the story. She feels excluded in her black school by her "flawless English', her school uniform, her shoes, her cut lunch; she resents her mother's passivity; she resents being excluded from the life and the kinds of expectations Karen, her "erstwhile playmate" and daughter of the household, has. Through questions like Why can't Karen wash her own dishes? Why must I wash mine and hers? Aren't we both children'? Didn't we both just return from school? Am I not as tired as she is?' (90) Magona powerfully interrogates the exploitative and soul-destroying nature of apartheid and reveals some of the ways into which children, both black and white, are socialised to reproduce inequality in their own lives. As it happens, Nosisa chooses not to, and the story concludes with her shocking means of resisting this nexus.

Another Magona story "It was Easter Sunday the day involves the collusion of a maid and madam in procuring an abortion for the maid's daughter, Linda. Magona recognises more disruptions. Both are useful to examine the effects of context, positionality and feminisms and could be considered at greater length than space allows here."Now That the Pass Has Gone" explores the dynamics between black men and women and reveals differing perspectives on the repeal of pass laws. However it also reinforces a prevailing notion that black men faced disempowerment during apartheid differently than women did. The story begins with the elation of a young black woman (the story's narrator) who expresses relief at

having escaped some of the excesses of the pass laws. The speaking position of her mother who next takes up the story is markedly different since she is dubious about the whole process, and then, through the recollections of the mother, the speaking position shifts again to the story of China, a young man from their past. A naive element in the mother's "voice" is reminiscent of the speaker's voice in "The scars of umlungu." When the story returns to the narrative control of the first narrator, she has shifted her position and now reflects on the long-term adverse effects.

In the story "It was Easter Sunday when I visited Netreg" Linda on her way to the abortionist observes a young boy. She absentmindedly thinks that he will grow up to be a handsome man one day based on the promise she sees beneath his tattered clothing. Or maybe he just really needs to relieve himself. During the abortion the object that enters her is described as cold, smooth and slippery and is much smaller than a little boy's penis. Whenever she has sex, which she doesn't find enjoyable a man's penis reminds her of what she lost many years ago. The candid exploration of sexuality highlights the profound sense of loss she experiences after the abortion and her subsequent inability to conceive. It also emphasizes the heavy toll Linda pays for the incestuous encounter, which is depicted as an unintended consequence of apartheid's impact on society.

Magona brilliantly describes the mixed feelings of an impoverished mother, who is not able to make ends meet and feed her children on her own. Empowering, the book captures the feel of what a mother of five goes through. A mother subjected to extreme poverty, a non-caring husband who is completely oblivious of his duties towards his family and a mother-in-law, whom she never could get along with. She cooks food for her children, not knowing if there would be another opportunity for them to have a morsel. Every day is a challenge and 'living life every day as it comes', best explains her state of mind. The long-standing concept of mothering has a very deep meaning, and it brings along with it a plethora of challenging and demanding decisions for a mother to make. The pain of childbearing to child-rearing is an exceptionally complicated task at a woman's hand and doing all this without the husband's support is even more toilsome. Magona's character passes through the same ordeal of bringing up her little children all by herself.

The most difficult of the decisions for the mother, however, was to abandon her children not because she wanted to run away from her responsibilities but in order to look for work so that she could provide for her family. Therefore, the events leading up to mothering can have a great impact on the effects on the children as well as the mother, as all these are interwoven with each other. With reference to the woman being portrayed in the novel, she was left with no other option than to flee in the middle of the night leaving behind five children. She did this with a heavy heart, only with the hopes that her children will be taken concern of by her mother-in-law in her absence because she failed to feed them.

THE SACRED SPACE OF STORYTELLING

Throughout the collection, the storytelling space itself becomes sacred. The act of lying awake and listening to other women's truths allows for healing and shared wisdom. This is central to womanism, which honors oral traditions, ancestral knowledge, and collective memory. Barbara Boswell argues that in post-apartheid women's literature, "the recovery of voice is a spiritual and political act" (Boswell 2008, 124). Magona's stories embody this principle: as each woman speaks, she reclaims her narrative, her self-worth, and her soul. Maparyan affirms that womanism "redefines power as the capacity to transform oneself and others through love and spirit" (Maparyan 29). In Magona's work, the characters do not wield power through domination but through care, emotional truth, and spiritual endurance. Their stories are rooted in silence, sorrow, and reflection, yet they blossom into wisdom. The narrator's presence as a listener model empathic, womanist witness—validating others' pain while creating space for growth. Womanism affirms the spiritual, emotional, and

communal dimensions of Black women's lives, recognizing their struggle not just against gender oppression but also racial and economic injustice. Walker writes: "Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender" (Walker, 1983, p. xi), emphasizing the depth and richness of womanist thought. This framework resists Western individualism and instead privileges interdependence, heritage, healing, and belief in spiritual wholeness. It is through this lens that Magona's short stories come alive—not just as accounts of hardship, but as deeply womanist texts that honor the soul, strength, and spirituality of Black women.

MOTHERHOOD, MEMORY, AND MORAL AGENCY

Womanism emphasizes motherhood not only as biological but also as a cultural and ethical role. Many of Magona's characters are mothers, and their maternal identity informs their spiritual and moral framework. They are not passive figures of suffering but active moral agents navigating oppression with integrity.Here, motherhood is not merely a duty but a spiritual calling, requiring fortitude. Her selfhood is rooted in caregiving, not as submission but as survival. Magona also shows how the memory of foremothers sustains her characters. The voices of grandmothers and ancestral women echo through the narratives, offering wisdom and reminding the protagonists of their inner strength. This aligns with Walker's emphasis on ancestral reverence in In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: "Our mothers and grandmothers… were not 'feminists,' as we define the term. They were creators, who lived lives of spiritual struggle and resistance" (Walker, 1983, p. 233).

CONCLUSION

Sindiwe Magona's *Living, Loving and Lying Awake at Night* provides a powerful archive of womanist resistance. Through stories of prayer, storytelling, memory, and maternal strength, Magona constructs a spiritual inner world where Black South African women can reclaim selfhood in the face of systemic dehumanization. Her narratives assert that the soulthe deeply spiritual, emotional, and reflective core of a womanis a battleground of both suffering and triumph.In embracing the womanist tradition, Magona not only records the lived experiences of women but also dignifies their spiritual resilience. The inner world of her characters becomes a sacred space of moral clarity, where silence, memory, and faith are not weaknesses but enduring legacies of strength.

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