

# Community and Narration in Emma Mashinini's *Strikes have Followed me all my Life*

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This paper investigates the construction of self in the autobiography of Emma Mashinini, *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life* (1989). I draw on the insights generated by poststructuralism, which has problematised the relationship between language and the writing subject. For poststructuralists, 'language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific' (Weedon 1987:21). I will therefore read Mashinini's autobiography as a discursive construct in which the author uses narrative to organise her experiences, and, in the process, impose a pattern on her life which is dictated by the demands of storytelling.

While I generally align myself with feminist scholarship, I am wary of essentialising female identity. Many contemporary scholars have questioned the idealisation of 'sisterhood' which takes no account of other subject-positions<sup>1</sup>. Chandra Mohanty (1991:57) cautions against the use, as an analytical category, of 'womanhood' which defines women primarily as victims of various forms of chauvinism. Such a classification, Mohanty warns, has the unintended effect of giving women an 'object status'. To understand the concerns and motivations of female (and male) writers, it is therefore imperative to ground texts in their historical context. Indeed, many female writers manage to carve a space for themselves in the social hierarchy despite the prevalence of patriarchy.

Among black South African autobiographers, Emma Mashinini stands out, first as a female worker and, secondly, as a second generation urbanite without much attachment to the countryside. At the time of writing her autobiography, Mashinini was working as the Director of the Division of Justice and Reconciliation for the Church of the Province of Southern Africa and she retained a strong loyalty to the trade union movement, which she had served for eleven years. Indeed, her autobiography can be read as a personalised account of the advent of the Commercial

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Newton and Rosenfelt (1985:xvii), and Personal Narratives Group (1989:19).

Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA). Although the text traces Mashinini's life from her birth in 1929, the accent of the unfolding narrative is on the period from the 1960s to the 1980s—years in which she occupied a public space, first as a worker, then as an activist, and finally as a detainee. The autobiography documents the development of the author from a submissive and docile housewife to an independent trade unionist of international repute. This article sets out to interrogate the manner in which Mashinini locates her identity in work and activism. The argument developed will be that in her autobiography, Mashinini places herself at the centre of 'the community' to derive the moral authority to speak for herself and on behalf of others who share her sense of community. It is her capacity as a culture-broker which enables her to construct images of community in her autobiography. The community to which she belongs is never static but shifts constantly to signify such diverse categories of people as the family, the trade union, black women workers, the Black Consciousness Movement, the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress, black people generally and her immediate neighbourhood. 'Community' is therefore a very unstable and relatively romantic concept. Bozzoli (1987:5) makes the observation that:

The good connotations of 'community' rest in its ability to conjure up images of supportiveness; of a place of kinship ties, of rest and rejuvenation; of cross-class co-operation.

It is in relation to these positive connotations of community that Mashinini constructs her identity in *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life*. Stuart Hall (1996:112) defines identity as 'the names we give to different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. This conception of identity, with its emphasis on historical and rhetorical rather than biological underpinnings of identity, helps to cast light on the construction of self in Mashinini's autobiography.

Mashinini's recollection of her life pivots around three crucial determinants: work, activism and imprisonment. In her autobiography, she spares only ten pages to narrate the first twenty-seven years of her life. She thus deliberately glosses over her life prior to her political conversion to accommodate the public profile she paints for herself. By de-emphasising her role in the domestic realm, Mashinini makes a conscious effort to contest the conventional and prevalent prescription that women occupy the private sphere whilst men dominate the public domain. The next thirty-seven pages (pp.13- 50) focus on her trade union career, and this thread is continued in the last pages of the book, following her description of her release from prison. The focus on her role as an activist corresponds with her stated motivation, in the book, that she is setting out to document 'the evil of the apartheid regime' (110). Her detention, which lasted about six months from November 1981 to May 1982, is

accorded almost the same space as her career—about thirty-seven pages (pp.51-88). In other words, the two experiences of activism and detention are accorded equal significance in Mashinini's autobiography. It is instructive to consider Mashinini's other reason for writing the autobiography, since she ostensibly wrote the book to alert future detainees to the conditions in detention (86). The autobiography was therefore conceived of in functional terms.

### **Faltering Start in Childhood Memories**

In the first part of her autobiography, Mashinini recreates memories of childhood which epitomise her formative experiences. Her sense of community at this stage of her life, is, for the adult Mashinini, a parochial one. In looking back, she identifies the family unit as having been the locus of her development at this stage of her life. Mashinini's recounting of her childhood is ambivalent. On the one hand, she re-invents her childhood as a period of relative comfort and tranquillity. Her reconstruction of her childhood is underscored by the influence of her mother—in particular, the latter's love of beautiful ornaments (Mashinini 1989:5). She writes, of her childhood, that '... the memory of our little house in Toby Street always fills me with happiness, and with gratitude to my mother for creating such a home for us' (5). Mashinini's representation of her childhood resembles that of Ellen Kuzwayo in her autobiography, *Call Me Woman*, since both of these writers construct childhood as a time of relative comfort though, in the case of Mashinini, her parents were in fact impoverished.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the poverty in which she grew up, she writes of her childhood that '... we also went to the better schools ...'(3). Her childhood home is portrayed as a pleasant dwelling, where music, cleanliness and beauty are defining features<sup>3</sup>, the emphasis on beauty specifically accompanying a belief in middle-class mannerisms<sup>4</sup>. This romantic rendition of childhood is, however, mediated by her account of certain devastating occurrences.

Mashinini identifies her parents' divorce, her first marriage at the age of seventeen, and the destruction of Prospect Township and of Sophiatown, as crucial historical markers. These three experiences are seen retrospectively as threatening to Mashinini's sense of collective consciousness. They constitute, textually, impediments in the development of the author towards communal wholeness. The divorce of her parents underscores, in Mashinini's text, her sense of loss, of what

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<sup>2</sup> See Mashinini (1989:7) on documenting the impoverishment of her childhood.

<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Kuzwayo (1985:62) remembers her grandmother's immaculate cleanliness. Mashinini (1989:3,5,10,98) highlights her love of beautiful things.

<sup>4</sup> See Mashinini (1989:5), and Kuzwayo (1985:63) for their respective descriptions of the garments they wore in their childhood which, in both cases, single them out from other children.

could have been. The trauma of this episode is captured when she writes: 'The happiness of this home was shattered for me when my parents separated' (6). Kuzwayo also displays this sense of loss when she describes a similar episode in her life. She says, 'My whole life had tumbled away' (Kuzwayo 1985:107). In response to this sense of dislocation, the two women turn to marriage to 'normalise' their lives.

Following the rift between her parents, Mashinini sees marriage as an avenue to restore the lost equilibrium in her life. Marriage is looked to as a form of escape from the misery precipitated by her parents' divorce. The decision to marry is also motivated by economic necessity. In her autobiography, Mashinini looks back with regret at her attempt to recreate the family unit as a repository of moral values. Writing with the benefit of hindsight, Mashinini notes of her first marriage: 'I married so young, at the age of seventeen: I had no school to go to, and no stable home of my own' (7). In short, she had no institution to which to belong and was therefore cut off from the community.

What is notable in Mashinini's narration of her life-history is that her first marriage is dismissed as time wasted. Her childbearing experience (she gave birth to six children from 1947 to 1956) is never focused upon and is accorded only a paragraph in the autobiography. The same applies to the birth of her last-born, Nomsa, and the good fortune of her marriage to Tom Mashinini, her second husband. Even the premature death of three of her children is only mentioned in passing. Such silences reinforce on the picture Mashinini wants to paint of herself as a liberated woman with a public profile.

Mashinini married her first husband, referred to in the autobiography only as Roger, when she was just seventeen years old. The source of Mashinini's decision to marry can be traced back to the exigencies of life for black women in the slumyards of Johannesburg in the 1940s and 1950s. Such was the situation in these areas that 'Many women maintain[ed] it [was] not safe to be without a husband who always gives a home some form of respect. A home without a husband is defenceless in urban townships' (Longmore 1959:72). Women therefore felt that they needed male protection to survive in the cities in the middle of this century. To make matters worse, home ownership in the townships was the prerogative of married couples (see Bonner 1988:395). It is in this light that we should appraise Mashinini's need for a spouse referred to in the first part of her autobiography. She initially went on a tireless search for her father who had deserted her, then later took refuge in marriage. Social dislocation was a common feature of urban life for black South Africans in the 1950s<sup>5</sup>. Many black families disintegrated, largely because of the poverty and squalor

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<sup>5</sup> See Bonner (1988:61,395), and Longmore (1959:61). The latter author was struck by the unstable nature of black urban marriage in her study of the Eastern Native Township covering the period between 1950 and 1957.

which had been pervasive in the cities since the 1920s<sup>6</sup>.

It is against this backdrop that we should understand the premium placed on marriage in this patriarchal milieu. Mashinini portrays her first marriage as a regrettable chapter in her life, characterised by wife-battering, endless domestic chores, 'and then you had this extra person to bother about—a husband'(14)<sup>7</sup>. Following the failure of her first marriage, Mashinini turns to political involvement to recreate her social bond.

### **Community as a Bearer of Self-Knowledge**

Emma Mashinini's conception of community is broadened following the failure of her marriage. Her walking away from her husband is depicted as the moment when she takes control of her life. No longer would she accept the socially sanctioned role of an acquiescent and submissive housewife<sup>8</sup>. Her divorce is represented, in the text, as a moment of release and it is after the closure of this episode in her life that she demonstrates greater initiative. Her life's course, as constructed in her text, is consistent with the life-stories of activists, in which '... the narrative shows how activism operates to mediate the construction of self with social, political and cultural processes' (Ginsburg 1989:62).

Mashinini's life becomes more purposeful as she takes up positions of responsibility at work and, more significantly, within the trade union. Her entry into wage labour further gives her life some sense of direction. Her gender identity is henceforth redefined in terms of work and activism. In narrating her involvement in these social institutions, Mashinini positions herself as a custodian of community values. She channels her energies towards activities which she sees as reinforcing her bond with the community. Eddie Webster (1985:14) remarks that 'production must be conceived not only as a material process—involving the instruments of labour—but also as a social process—involving activities whereby people transform both their circumstances and themselves'. Mashinini suggests in her autobiography that her subjectivity changed in fundamental ways following her entry into the labour market.

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<sup>6</sup> For the adverse effect of poverty on urban African families, see Longmore (1959:63,108), and Bonner (1988:398). Mashinini (1989:11) herself considers poverty as one of the factors which precipitated the break-up of her marriage, see Mashinini.

<sup>7</sup> Her description of her first marriage mirrors that of Kuzwayo, who writes of her first marriage to Ernest Moloto that 'My image of married life was far removed from the torture I was exposed to', in *Call Me Woman*, p.124.

<sup>8</sup> She asserts her independence, for instance, when she insists on buying a car in her own name, see Mashinini (1989:94).

It was in 1956 that Mashinini joined Henochsberg, a factory which manufactured uniforms for government forces. Her memory of Henochsberg, where she worked for nineteen years (from 1956 to 1975) is linked to her dual role as a worker and a mother. Each of these roles places strenuous demands on her, and her only break comes on Sundays when she goes to church. Cock and Emdon (1987:457) note that:

In reality, the link between the two roles operates to reinforce women's subordinate position in society. Women are viewed as less effective and competent mothers because their work role interferes with their mothering role, and as less effective and competent workers because their responsibilities as mothers interfere with their work.

Mashinini documents the untenability of her position when she provides details of her daily routine—from her poor working conditions to the demands of her household chores. In her own words:

You were working for a target. You'd know there was a target you had to meet, and at the back of your mind you were concerned about the welfare of your children. You would be torn in two, because you were at work and in your mind you were at home. This is the problem of the working mother: you are divided. You are only working because you have to (14).

Management at Henochsberg enforced the piece work system to obtain maximum productivity from their workers without an equivalent increase in the rate of pay. As Webster (1985:31) explains, the piece work system implies that:

In order to earn a subsistence wage workers must strain their labour power, which then provides the employer with a justification for cutting prices. Surviving today means working harder tomorrow for the same wage. The only way to avoid the piece work trap is for workers to combine and collectively reject it.

The strain work put on Mashinini can only be appreciated if it is acknowledged that 'Work and its effect move in a continuous circle from the family to the factory and the factory to the family. Domestic and public labour are inextricably bound with each other, and reinforce each other' (Institute for Black Research 1990:45). However, Mashinini does not portray herself as a passive victim of these factors. At work, she becomes a shop-steward and a supervisor. These positions of responsibility

are apparently thrust on her, since she represents herself as a self-effacing woman who accepts leadership positions rather reluctantly. In her own words, 'I have never sought to be elected to positions of such responsibility, but when they have been offered to me I have found great fulfilment in the work they entail' (29). Mashinini presents herself as accepting such challenges not to advance her personal interests but to benefit the larger community. As she reflects, about her past, '... during those days, in the factory I worked in, there was one strike after another. And this has followed me all my life. Wherever I am it seems there must always be trouble' (22). This citation highlights the significance of the title of her autobiography, *Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life*, with its emphasis on the turbulence of Mashinini's life. The narrative of the text revolves around her survival of the strikes referred to in the title.

She presents herself as a selfless person whose activities reinforce the spirit of community. She further portrays herself as a resilient woman who rises above all adversity. She is from the outset a rebellious spirit, ready to take on those who threaten her sense of community. In retrospect, she considers her efforts to force her father to be responsible towards her to be an assertion of her rights, as she avers: 'I think that was my first fight for human rights, my own right to have a father' (7). In a similar vein, she writes of herself that: 'I have always resented being dominated. I resent being dominated by a man, and I resent being dominated by white people, be they man or woman' (24). In the world of Mashinini's autobiography, these two memories of childhood serve to anticipate her political activism. She suggests that her rebellious spirit has had a long duration, and her involvement in trade union politics becomes a logical expression and culmination of her sense of defiance.

Significantly, her presence at the ANC conference held at Kliptown in 1955 is portrayed as a moment of awakening, 'an eye-opener' (24). Her autobiography is indeed a *Bildungsroman*, focusing as it does on the development of the author/protagonist from ignorance to 'true' consciousness. On several occasions, Mashinini contrasts her present awareness with her past consciousness. For instance, she records her gratitude when Mr Herman, her manager at Henochsberg, offered to assist her in funding her child's university education. In looking back, she writes, 'Now I would say back to a question like that, "It is the salary you give us that makes life impossible". But then it never occurred to me' (27). She highlights the extent to which she has developed from the person she was in the distant past.

Mashinini considers the trade union she founded in 1975, the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (CCAWUSA), to have been a crucial locus for her personal development. To enhance her political awareness, she had to acquaint herself with the relevant literature on Labour Law and related topics. She writes of this dimension of her life that, 'In a way, this was my university education, at last, my chance to study. And I was lucky to have a man like Morris Kagan to talk to me and

say, 'Here are the books. Read' (32). Mashinini thus regards activism as personally fulfilling. She has fond memories of the managing director of Allied Bank describing her as 'a very competent person' (44). That she has recorded this incident in her autobiography highlights the value she attaches to being recognised, especially by her adversaries. The knowledge Mashinini acquires enables her to steer her trade union in a positive direction. Leadership is never easy and constantly puts demands on her. As a leader, Mashinini portrays herself as morally unimpeachable. For example, we see her keeping scrupulous records of union funds (37). She implicitly contrasts her steadfastness as a leader with the inconstancy of two figures, Lucy Mvubelo and Johnny Rampeba. Mvubelo and Rampeba occupied crucial positions within their trade unions and were trusted by workers. However, they were bribed by their respective managements and started subverting the interests of their trade unions (see Mashinini 1989:13,34). Unlike these two, Mashinini portrays herself as rejecting an offer to be a manageress and preferring instead to establish a new trade union for commercial workers (29).

Apart from using the trade union to create a sense of community, Mashinini also invokes sentiments of nationalism to buttress her sense of belonging. In her recollection of the 1976 Soweto uprisings, she specifically outlines her relationship to Tsietsi Mashinini, a student leader who was a driving force behind the riots (38). This self-positioning suggests that Mashinini had her finger on the pulse of the national upheaval which characterised the 1976 riots. It is a device which nationalises Mashinini's individuality.

Even Mashinini's personal experiences are sometimes imagined within a nationalist paradigm. In trying to account for her first husband's mood swings, Mashinini writes: 'I know that Roger felt very moody sometimes after work because they may have screamed and shouted at him for some mistake that anyone could have made' (11). She therefore generalises her marital problems as symptomatic of the problems faced by black people in general.

In a different context, Mashinini exalts the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress as the legitimate bearers of community values. Her description of these organisations conveys her unequivocal support for them: 'There have been two organisations for my people and they have been banned. These are the Pan-African Congress, the ANC and now the UDF' (119). She also defends the need for trade unions to embark on nationalist campaigns<sup>9</sup>.

Sometimes Mashinini's sense of community becomes gendered, as when she advocates the creation of female solidarity networks. A ready example is when she writes:

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<sup>9</sup> See Mashinini (1989:119), where she insists that until the ANC and the PAC are unbanned, the trade unions will promote the national struggle.

Women in the townships are very lonely because their husbands tend to leave them at home when they go to soccer matches, or to the movies, or to taverns to have a drink with the boys. The stokvel meetings change from one member's house to another and you are to serve tea or drinks (17).

Mashinini positions herself at the core of female forms of social bonding. Informal organisations of women, it has been illustrated, are critical to the proper functioning and maintenance of group cohesion in women's organisations.<sup>10</sup> It is regrettable that Mashinini does not dwell much on such informal networks, as they might have shed more light on crucial moments in her formative experiences. She mentions, for instance, that she was invited by friends to attend the adoption of the Freedom Charter by the ANC in 1955 (23). However, these friends remain anonymous, and the role they played in the ANC unclear. Furthermore, the reader is told that Lucy Mvubelo was instrumental in procuring employment for Mashinini, but we are not told how the two women met.

The concept of community in Mashinini's text is, in other instances, racialised to refer to black people in general. This racial presentation of community highlights the common experience of racial segregation experienced by black people. For instance, Mashinini points to the racialisation of the labour force, as when the position of cashiers in retail stores is made exclusive to whites (37). In response, she deploys a reverse discourse<sup>11</sup>, for example, when she defends the need for CCAWUSA to retain its black racial identity. This focus on the racial imperative of struggle is often underpinned by the principles of the Black Consciousness Movement. For example, she observes that:

Most of my people have damaged skins, just because we thought that if we were light we'd have the same privileges as the whites. When you are working side by side with someone with a lighter skin in a factory and you find they're given preference, it's hard not to believe a lighter skin is better for you. Now black consciousness has saved us from hating the colour of our skin (9).

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<sup>10</sup> See Karen Brodtkin Sacks (1989:85-96), where she points at the factors behind the mobilisation of women workers at Duke Medical Centre. Sacks highlights the decisive role played by 'center women' in reinforcing the spirit of oneness among the workers. Informal networks in this case, bolstered the trade union organisation.

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall (1992:255) observes that 'the discourse of anti-racism ha[s] often been founded on a strategy of reversal and inversion, turning the "Manichean aesthetic" of colonial discourse up-side down'.

Mashinini's observation here is supported by the conclusions reached by Frantz Fanon. Fanon uses the concept of 'hallucinatory whitening' to describe this attempt by colonized blacks to pass for white. In his celebrated study of the psychology of colonised subjects, Fanon (1967:11) notes that:

For several years certain laboratories have been trying to produce a serum for 'denegritation'; with all the earnestness in the world, laboratories have sterilized their test tubes, checked their scales, and embarked on researches that might make it possible for the miserable Negro to whiten himself and thus to throw off the burden of that corporeal malediction.

Mashinini invokes the Black Consciousness philosophy to caution blacks against trying to escape their blackness. Her reference to 'my people' clearly has racial resonances. Her racial conception of community is undergirded by an unwritten code of conduct. Following her release from prison, Mashinini lives in fear that she may be called to testify against her comrades. The idea of being a state witness fills her with dread because, as she points out, 'the community can never accept you having been a state witness' (94). As a custodian of community values, she feels bound by a particular ethic which she believes strengthens her social bonds.

## Enemies Within

On several occasions, the community constructed in Mashinini's text is subjected to both internal and external threats. Her sense of community is undermined by beliefs and practices she finds inimical. Most notably, she considers sexism and violence to be inconsistent with the development of a community spirit. She indicts her colleagues within the trade union movement for their practice of excluding and marginalising women. She attacks in particular the sidelining of women unionists, as displayed by the absence of female representation in the executive committee of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). She takes issue with the COSATU logo, highlighting its masculine image (118). Here, she reflects the reality that the marginalisation of women, even where they are in the majority, has been a blot in the history of resistance movements in South Africa<sup>12</sup>. Mashinini wishes to purge her community of such forms of intolerance.

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<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, the usurpation and ultimate disintegration of the structures established by women in Crossroads, in Josette Cole (1989:63-69). Female interests were also marginalised in the 1950s within the ANC, in spite of the conspicuous role women played in ANC campaigns of the time. See Lodge (1983:146).

A more serious threat to the existence of community solidarity, according to Mashinini, is that of violence. Writing in the turbulence of the 1980s, Mashinini reserves a chapter in her book to grapple with internecine violence within the black community. Whilst it is easy for Mashinini to moralise against State violence, such as the bombing of Khotso House and of COSATU House and the violence perpetrated by the right wing, (122-125) she is unable to explain violence which is turned inward. She considers such violence detrimental to the development of community spirit, and puts the ultimate blame on the state. She is at pains to shift the responsibility away from the community, as she argues:

The authorities have skilfully manipulated black people, creating ethnic divisions by encouraging malicious rumours, and turning black against black rather than against their real enemy, which is apartheid (123).

This kind of rationalisation, however, fails to sustain Mashinini when she suffers a personal loss with the murder of her son-in-law, Aubrey Mageza. Following this devastating experience, Mashinini admits that: '... for a time I was in a moral conflict .... My concern for the increasing violence among my own people grows daily' (126). Her sense of community is, therefore, jeopardised by this endemic violence, and precipitates a crisis in Mashinini's imagined sense of community. She is more assured when she engages external enemies of her community.

### **External Threats**

Early in her narrative, for example, Mashinini describes the destructive effects of the forced removals she experienced as a child in the 1950s: 'That vibrant community of Sophiatown also disappeared, a few years later, when Sophiatown was declared a white area' (4). In this instance, she perceives the development of Sophiatown as a community as having been destroyed by the policies of the Apartheid State. However, the symbolic sense of community survives such adversities. More serious, is Mashinini's imprisonment which precipitates a serious breakdown in her relational sense by assuming an intensely personal form.

### **Prison and Narration**

Detention triggers a collapse in Mashinini's moral universe, and her imprisonment takes on a starkly racial character, since she suffers her ordeal at the hands of white policemen and white prison warders. In a different context, Barbara Harlow notes of prison experience that:

Critical to the ideology of the prison apparatus is the elimination of any collective or relational sense on the part of its victims, a sense which the political prisoners struggle to maintain as part of their strategy of resistance (Harlow 1987:151).

This 'relational sense' is critical to Mashinini's self-invention in her autobiography. It is whilst in prison that Mashinini experiences a sense of isolation and breakdown in her sense of community. Cut off from the world whilst in solitary confinement, she writes of this experience that:

I had spent so much time with white police, surrounded by white people. It was a white woman who had refused me chewing-gum, and a white woman who had put those bracelets on me (92).

The racialisation of Mashinini's representation of prison experience stands in contrast to her emphasis on non-racialism in the rest of her autobiography. Her moral outrage here is directed at everything white. Whiteness becomes a symbol of moral decadence, while blackness implicitly represents the forces of good—the source of her moral strength. In detention, Mashinini writes that she was:

... glad to see a black person, even a black police person ... with my envy of white people, now to be surrounded by them made me realise again how stupid that was, to envy that skin or hair. It was no privilege to be among them. It was a misery and a deprivation (69).

Whites are to Mashinini, in this instance, morally depraved. However, as Stuart Hall (1992:254) points out, 'You can no longer conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject'. Mashinini is trapped within the ideological framework of her tormentors. Paul Gready (1993:489) uses the concept of 'the power of writing' to describe the discursive contestations between prisoners and the authorities in South Africa. In his terms, Mashinini has, in the above instance, been 'rewritten within the official "power of writing"' and her sense of self has been subverted.

She cannot, however, reconcile her subverted self with the ideals for which she has striven. To compound matters further, she describes herself as having noticed apprehensively, whilst reading the graffiti on the prison wall, that previous occupants of the cell had been morally debased criminals. She is shaken, and her assumed role as a custodian of community values is undermined. As she writes, '... it began to torture me, because I thought I was not a criminal' (86). This disintegration of her

moral world precipitates her mental breakdown, and sometimes assumes an intensely personal form, as when she cannot remember the name of her youngest daughter (86).

It should be clear, then, that imprisonment has a devastating effect on Mashinini. She becomes very ill and suffers memory lapses after her release. To retain the moral high ground and to re-establish her sense of community, she insists on being the ultimate victor. She refuses to concede defeat when she ignores her doctor's advice to retire from the trade union. In her own words, '... to have [retired] before, when I came out of detention, would have been to tell the government that they had won' (115). Her refusal to capitulate thus becomes her first act towards the restoration of her sense of self as a worthy member of the community.

This paper has charted the premium placed by Mashinini on the need to sustain community values: her sense of community in her autobiography is ubiquitous. The argument has been that Mashinini uses community as a fluid concept to refer to different social categories. She invokes past experiences as precursors of present-day struggles. Her activism is seen as a fulfilment of childhood proclivities. Her narration is teleological, as she posits continuity in otherwise disparate experiences.

Mashinini sees herself as a crusader for the maintenance of positive community values. She portrays herself as a resilient woman who survives the harsh treatment she suffered in prison. To recreate her moral universe, Mashinini remembers episodes from the past which vindicate her moral values. For example, she has pleasant memories of black women workers striking for an unfairly demoted white woman at the Germiston branch of Checkers supermarket in 1983 (117). Furthermore, she has a particularly fond remembrance of the victories won by CCAWUSA under her leadership. She feels vindicated, for instance, when employers who had previously refused to negotiate with her come to the Union headquarters in a desperate effort to settle disputes with their workers. She mentions three instances in which previously intransigent employers solicit her intervention in labour disputes (see Mashinini 1989:36,46,101). To further buttress her sense of triumph, Mashinini recounts with relish the presence of black activists at the funeral of her former colleague and mentor, Morris Kagan (32). Finally, Mashinini writes passionately of her visit to Neill Agget's grave, in the company of Liz Floyd:

Here we were two women together: myself, a black woman and Liz Floyd, a white woman I've always respected and honoured. But with this friend we shared, this dead friend, we became as one (105).

This episode is portrayed in Mashinini's text as a realisation of the non-racial ideal. Her tone is triumphant as she celebrates her victory over the segregationist policies of the Apartheid State.

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