



The Prison as Colonial Space

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The Prison as Colonial Space

Monika Fludernik*

Prison scenarios and metaphors of imprisonment abound in (neo)colonial and postcolonial literature. Unlike the mainstream novel in twentieth-century British and American literature, where the subject has receded into the background, imprisonment — for obvious historical reasons — recurs as a major theme in the literature of (former) colonial states. This state of affairs can be explained in several ways.

For one, mainstream British and American fiction reflects the current punitive climate in which mainstream 'white' society treats prison as the deserved punishment of criminals and assumes itself to be immune from an inside experience of imprisonment. In T.V. dramas like the Ben Matlock series, innocent clients faced with the threat of imprisonment are saved in the nick of time — thanks to Ben Matlock's genius and his detective team. Political imprisonment is allowed as a theme only where it concerns totalitarian governments abroad (see Margaret Drabble's *The Ice Age* or Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*) or in the non-mainstream literature of Afro-Americans, native Americans or the civil rights movement in general. Most twentieth-century treatments of the theme of imprisonment deal not with prison but with concentration camps and gulags.

Secondly, non-mainstream (post)colonial literature is much more 'realistic' and politically motivated, which makes for a consideration of resistance against (neo)colonial oppression and a celebration of 'martyrs' to the various causes that animated them. In many postcolonial societies, the sufferings of the heroes of national liberation movements have become part of the history of their country and have helped to create a (literary) tradition. In neocolonial societies some 'political' literature often banned in these states tries to castigate the political regime by revealing human rights abuses. The (post)colonial literature therefore focusses on *political* imprisonment, whereas mainstream literature — in the absence of political imprisonment — marginalizes the prison

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experience since it only concerns "the others," *i.e.* criminals. Crime and prison figure prominently in popular fiction (Stephen King etc.) and in film, but rarely appear in 'literary' works of acknowledged merit.

These facts indicate that the loss of popularity of the prison motif in English literature possibly coincides with, or at least follows, the abolishment of imprisonment for debt in 1869. Before this time anybody could end up in prison so that the experience was one almost to be expected — like disease, the loss of a child or a parent. After that point, "good" prisoners were only political prisoners or innocent people sentenced to prison in consequence of a legal error. The popularity of prison scenes in fiction therefore strongly correlates with their potential for empathy and that potential starts to disappear for the majority of readers as soon as they themselves seem to be secure from the threat of going to prison. Thereafter, only novels dealing with prison abuses and designed to campaign for a more humane treatment of prisoners address the general reader, and even these texts frequently try to elicit sympathy for their fictional protagonists by choosing an innocent person as the victim of prison abuse (an example would be *Convict 99* by Marie Leighton).

The third interesting aspect concerning the rarity of the prison scenario in the contemporary novel relates to a medial consideration. In contrast to the disappearance of the theme in fiction, imprisonment figures prominently in (American) film, and there are numerous British plays that are about prison or include prison settings.¹ The importance of the theme in drama clearly correlates with the political anti-establishment tendency of the named authors, whereas the American film industry frequently (but not entirely) leans towards sensationalist uses of the subject (escapes, violence), not infrequently in the context of an innocent protagonist who is put through hell by the criminals with whom he is thrown into proximity.

In (post/neo)colonial literature many novels, as we have noted, reflect (on) the historical reality of political persecution. Most prison literature in the twentieth century concerns political liberation movements across the globe. In India, novels treat the experience of imprisonment, from the Indian Liberation Movement under Gandhi (which sparked numerous literary representations of imprisonment) to the repressive measures by Indira Gandhi during the Emergency and the campaign against the Naxalite movement in the 1970's. In Africa, the anti-colonialist movements and the fight against neo-colonial regimes (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Soyinka) and the suppression of dissidents across Africa

1 To mention only three: Brendan Behan's *The Quare Fellow*; Edward Bond's *Lear* and *Olly's Prison*; Howard Barker's *Scenes from an Execution*.

figure in many now classic texts — and these almost regularly include prison scenes. Most prominently represented are abuses in South African prisons and governmental strategies against the Anti-Apartheid Movements. As a scholar of English literature, I am less aware of similar texts in Asia and Latin America, although the topicality of the issue is certainly given and human rights abuses have not much diminished in these areas.

In this essay I want to concentrate on a particular figuration that recurs in South African prison memoirs and prison novels. This topos — a traditional topos in English literature for the Renaissance — figures society as being homologous to a prison. The topos is therefore called the ‘World as Prison’ topos and it contrasts with the ‘Prison as world’ topos in which prison shares features with the world at large. South African writing provides a particularly rich source for discussing the similarities between the prison world and the world of apartheid. Prison, in South African literature, is a condensed version of the apartheid system. It exemplifies colonialism and turns prison into colonial space imbued with the power structures that are operative outside. After briefly outlining the literary topos I will explain more fully how South African literature deploys it and then move on to the interpretation of two literary texts: André Brink’s *Looking on Darkness* (1974) and an extract from Breyten Breytenbach’s *Mouiroir* (1984).

Literary Models

Both autobiographical and fictional texts deploy a number of topoi that originate in medieval and early modern literature. A particularly well-known topos is that of mental and spiritual freedom in contrast to the body which is ‘in chains’ or locked up. As Richard Lovelace put it in the seventeenth century,

Stone Walls doe not a Prison make,
Nor I’ron bars a Cage;
Mindes innocent and quiet take
That for an Hermitage;
If I have freedome in my Love
And in my soule am free;
Angels alone that sore above,
Injoy such Liberty.

(Lovelace, 1963, p. 79)

The religious and monastic connotations of voluntary self-imprisonment can be glimpsed in this stanza (“hermitage”; “soul”), but the freedom that the speaker invokes is one that no longer has a religious quality, the topos having been appropriated for love poetry. It is now the imaginative union with one’s body that transcends physical imprisonment, not the

prisoner's spiritual union with God in prayer. The lovers, like the personae of Donne's "The Canonization" are "canonized in love" and become (like) angels, unaffected (apparently) by earthly bonds. This topos of freedom in prison is sometimes referred to, though not that frequently, in (post)colonial prison texts, especially in the literature of the Gandhi movement.

A second, more important topos — the one we will have occasion to deal with in this paper — is the prison as world/world as prison topos. Traditionally, this also has a religious (and Stoic) origin in the vision of the soul imprisoned in the body (and this world) to be set free at death and reunited with the spiritual realm of spiritual freedom (one can appreciate how the first topos arose directly from this configuration).

Traditionally these preconceptions led to the negation and denigration of the body, in the monastic regime to the voluntary chastisement of the body as self-inflicted punishment for sublunary desires. As a consequence, when this topos came to be applied to real prisons — mostly by people imprisoned for their religion — the physical impact of imprisonment tended to be negated or welcomed as a purificational process. Thus, in *A Dialogue of Comfort*, Sir Thomas More entirely negates the horror of physical restraints in prison by comparing them to the pains of disease which "God the jailor" imposes on the old and the sick (More, 1976, p. 274):

God our chiefe gaylour as hym selfe is invisible / so vseth he in his punyshmentes invisible instrumentes / & therfor not of like fasshion as the tother gaolers do / but yet of like effect / & as paynfull in felyng as those / for he layeth one of his prisoners with an hote feuer, as evyll at his ease in a warm bed / as the tother gaoler layth his on the cold grownd / he wryngeth them by the browes with a mygrem / he collereth them by the neck with a quynce / he bolteth them by the armes with a paluesey, that they can not lyft their handes to their head / he manacleth their handes with the gowt in their fyngers / he wringeth them by the legges with the cramp in their shynnes / he byndeth them to the bed bord with the crik in the bakke / & layeth one there a long, & as vnhabable to rise as though he lay by the feet fast in the stokkes /

Some prisoner of a nother gaole syngeth & dawnceth in his ij fetters, & fereth not his fete for stumblyng at a stone / [while] goddes prisoner that hath his one fote feterid with the gowte lieth gronyng / on a cowch / & quaketh and crieth out yf he fere there wold fall on his fote no more but a quysshion / And therfor Cosyn (as I said) yf we consider yt well / we shall fynd this generall prison of this whole earth, a place in which the prisoners be as sore handlid as they be in the tother / And evyn in the tother / some make as mery to, as there do some in this that are very mery at large out of that /

The world-as-prison topos, once the religious meaning has disappeared, becomes the breeding ground of social criticism, and it does so in

analogy with the prison-as-world topos. In the latter formula, the prison is seen to be homologous with the world at large. In the Renaissance, the most common ground of comparison for this microcosm vs. macrocosm contrast lies in the social stratification of prisons of the 'old prison' model (Foucault 1979; Bender 1987). Since — before the invention of the penitentiary — prisoners were kept in jail for safekeeping before trial and these jails were run as hotels in which one had to pay for board and lodging, the inequalities of society at large came to be prominent inside prison as well. Rich prisoners could afford larger and cleaner rooms, have beds and other furniture, order food from outside, etc., whereas the destitute were reduced to starvation, dependent on charity, and forced to subsist in unhygienic and packed detention cells. In contrast to the penitentiary in which prisoners from all walks of life are punished equally and made to conform to uniform patterns of behaviour, pre-nineteenth-century prisons housed a cross-section of society so that prison in fact became like the world at large at least in terms of the distribution of privileges and the visible variety of occupations and trades. These conditions still apply in many third-world countries, where — architecturally and legally — Western models have been introduced but prisoners receive food, clothing and treatment in accordance with their social status and ability to bribe warders.

Once prison and world are conceived to be structurally the same, the equation can be looked at from the other side too: no longer is prison like the world at large, but the world at large can be interpreted to be just like a prison. Since prisons are very specific, marginal places in society, to say that the world is a prison has much more information value and requires specific descriptors. The prison as world comparison, by contrast, is fairly harmless, since prisons are *part of* society after all, even if marginalized spaces and sometimes conceived of as counterworlds or inverted worlds. To say that society is a prison, however, attributes a very salient quality to society, specifying and prominently evaluating its usually general, undefined nature. Thus, when Norman Mailer argues that American society is a prison in which the inmates have wall-to-wall carpeting, he really means to ascribe one attribute to society (exaggerated defensiveness) and to reduce the variety of social conditions to one of self-imprisonment through fear:

We do not live, however, in a world that tries to solve its prison problems [...]. We are all so guilty at the way we have allowed the world around us to become more ugly and tasteless every year that we surrender to terror and steep ourselves in it. The mugger becomes the size of Golgotha and the middle class retires into walled cities with armed guards. Here, the prisons have wall-to-wall carpeting, and the guards address the inmates as "Sir," and bow. But they are prisons. The measure of the progressive imprisonment of all society is to be found at the base — in the

state of the penitentiaries themselves. The bad conscience of society comes to focus in the burning lens of the penitentiary. That is why we do not speak of improving the prisons — which is to say, taking them through some mighty transmogrifications — but only of fortifying law and order. But that is no more feasible than the dream of remission in the cancer patient. To read this book is to live in the land of true and harsh perception — we won't get law and order without a revolution in the prison system.²

Similar and even metaphorical descriptors can be applied to society in accordance with the 'world as prison' topos. For instance — from the perspective of Afro-Americans — American society can be described as a society defined by slavery and chaingangs in which prisons serve as the most obvious and typical example of the condition of discrimination experienced by the Afro-Americans. Feminists, on the other hand, could argue that in patriarchal society women were imprisoned within patriarchal discourse which they internalized, allowing themselves to be brainwashed into accepting their inferiority, adopting the role models suggested to them and consenting to their lack of power to change things.

In the following discussion of South African literature these topoi of the prison as world and the world redefined as prison can be found abundantly and undergo a peculiar colonial inflection.

South African Prison Worlds

In this paper I refer exclusively to South Africa before 1991, concentrating on the situation as detailed in numerous prison autobiographies (Ruth First, Albie Sachs, Bosman, Zwelonke, Lewin, Naidoo, Dlamini, Pheto, Makhoere, Mbeki, Mandela, Kathrada, Bessie Head) and novels (e.g. Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, Brink's *A Dry White Season* and other novels of his). There is some criticism on these genres, too (Roberts 1985; Schalkwyk 1994; Sedlak 1996, 1999; Marx 2000).

In many respects, prisons in South Africa were like South African society at large. The prison-as-world topos applies, most basically, to the fact that South African prisons were stratified on the basis of racial categories, just as the world outside. In fact, apartheid applied even more forcefully inside prisons than outside, with whites, coloureds and blacks receiving different types and qualities of food and clothing. Among whites, too, the political prisoners were treated as closer to the non-white

2 Mailer in Abbott, *Belly of the Beast*, 1982, p. xv.

prison population and received fewer privileges than the purely criminal population of thieves and murderers (Bosman, Lewin). Even more importantly, the racist power-structures from outside prison were reinforced inside by military drill, forcing blacks to acknowledge their subordinate position of racial inferiority. Thus, as Naidoo details at length, prisoners were forced to address the (mostly Afrikaans-speaking) warders as *Baas* ('master') and were beaten for using the English "Sir," which assumes a position of equality with the guards. Social division inside prison was additionally emphasized by the political differences between the A.N.C. and the P.A.C. and by the warders' support of criminal gangs which were designed to terrorize the politicals (see, especially, the accounts from Robben Island).³

Having detailed how much prison structures were modelled on apartheid segregational politics, the topos of the prison as world can easily be inverted to yield an indictment of South African society as a carceral system of unjust laws and racial discrimination. The prison expresses in exemplary fashion what South African society suffers from — a system of the excessive and inhumane use of governmental power, of apartheid as a regime of contempt for the racial other, of the non-white person's intrinsic lack of self-determination. This equation becomes particularly convincing as soon as the deliberately contrived prison regulations, which served as a strategy of continuous harassment and chicanerie, are compared with the pass laws and many other illogical, inconsistent rules and regulations affecting non-whites outside prison. As has frequently been observed, the pass laws were designed to be impossible to obey in order to render every black person liable to arrest and persecution. The attenuated legality of such laws and of the prison regime clearly became a human rights issue since standards of decency and due process were being infringed. For the non-white South African there was no escape from the prison of apartheid, nor from the power of the regime.

The imputation of these specifically carceral qualities of the prison to society at large acquires a distinctly colonial flavour when the basic ground of the metaphor is taken to be the unjust use of law and force. This becomes particularly obvious in those memoirs and novels where the (white) dissidents are of British and/or Jewish background, and the humiliations of such prisoners by the Dutch *boere* ('guards') additionally

3 Robben Island became a metaphorical site of the apartheid system for the Anti-Apartheid Movement. As J. U. Jacobs writes, prison memoirs of Robben Island "provide an interpretation of the Island as an extreme instance of the apartheid state with its totalising master-narrative predicated on an exclusivist, ethnic nationalism" (Jacobs, 1992, p. 78).

acquires the quality of a historical retaliation. Here the prison allows warders a satisfaction denied to their ethnic group in public life.

In English literature the first texts suggesting that society at large might be described as a prison do so implicitly by means of metonymy. These are texts from the eighteenth century in which many scenes have an implicitly carceral character because they are juxtaposed with scenes that are set in prison. A good example of this constellation is William Godwin's *Caleb Williams* (1794), in which the eponymous hero is in prison only twice, but throughout most of the novel feels imprisoned or is under the surveillance of Falkland and his minions. Similarly, in Charles Dickens' *Little Dorrit*, there are only two prison scenes, but many additional locations are explicitly described as carceral (Mrs. Clennam's house, the Grande Chartreuse) and many situations on hindsight acquire a metaphorical quality of imprisonment: luxury (in Amy Dorrit's siblings, in her father's status after release from debtor's prison), psychological obsession with society's rules of decorum (Tattycoram and Miss Wade).

In André Brink's novel *Looking on Darkness* (1974), the same processes apply. Contiguous settings and scenes operate as an implicit statement on South African society. By contrast, the extract from Breyten Breytenbach's text *Mouroir* (1983), a novel which he wrote during his incarceration and which can be compared with his autobiographical version in *Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1983), serves as a simile or parable from which inferences about South African society will be developed during interpretation.⁴

Looking on Darkness

The protagonist of this novel, Joseph Malan, finds himself in prison awaiting execution. He has killed his white lover, Jessica Thomson, in a suicide pact in which he did not keep his own side of the bargain. While in prison, he writes the memoir that we are reading, although he keeps destroying everything so that the warders cannot confiscate it. His 'story' starts with the history of his family. The family can be traced back to the union between Leah, a slave who is raped by a Huguenot and gives birth to Adam, the first of the Malan males. The account of several generations of this family in chapter 2 of the book is a history of discrimination, abuse and torture. Each generation of Malans suffers from floggings, from impossible circumstances of injustice and persecution, and from the loss of basic human dignity. Each generation of Malans experiences

⁴ Compare also Roberts (1986).

some kind of slavery, *de facto* slavery on a farm or metaphorical slavery — as cleaning woman for a white family, working for a starvation fee, or being kept from marrying the person one loves.

Joseph Malan's father had an affair with a white woman (Joseph is already the third in his family to do so since his great-grandfather Braampie married a white woman, passing for white until little Jacob was born and destroyed his career). Joseph's father Jacob was sent to prison for pretended rape (the woman was saving her reputation by accusing him), and Joseph himself even goes to England and has an affair with Beverly, a white woman.

Joseph becomes an actor and establishes himself in London, but he returns to South Africa and tries to run a theatre company performing political drama. His co-organizer is called Jerry, and as we later find out, a member of the A.N.C. who is involved in illegal arms deals. The tours and the playing turn increasingly disastrous as the police systematically sabotage them by applying the pass laws, interfering with actors, with their one car, and with permissions to stage their plays. The net clearly draws more and more closely round Joseph as two of his best friends die in detention. When Joseph falls in love with Jessica and they eventually decide there is no more future for them in South Africa, they plan a suicide pact. Having run away from the dead Jessica, Joseph gives himself up to the police. He is tortured extensively but does not give Jerry away since he does not know anything about his A.N.C. activities.

As this brief summary indicates, Joseph Malan breaks out of the prison of a South African farm to acquire an education and become an actor, and he escapes to England. When he returns to South Africa, the prison starts closing in on him, first by means of the rules and regulations of the pass laws, and all the administrative obstacles put in the way of his theatre group; later prison takes hold of his friends and finally of him when his last attempt to break out by means of a love affair has been foiled — he cannot marry Jessica or live with her in South Africa. In the novel prison is therefore the place that haunts Joseph's family and finally catches him. Imprisonment is the state to which all non-whites are reduced in apartheid society, the plot seems to suggest. All society in South Africa is a prison which leaves black South Africans no real avenues of escape. Moreover, the series of life stories of Joseph's ancestors implies that the present situation is one of a kind with the history of abuse and injustice heaped on earlier generations of Malans (and black South Africans).

Looking on Darkness deploys the prison as world/world as prison topos in a double manner. On the one hand it shows that South African society is a prison for black South Africans; on the other hand, it documents that South African prisons operate much like society at large since the abuse that Joseph suffers inside prison is not much worse than

what his ancestors suffered on the white man's farms and in the white man's wars.

Joseph Malan also accesses the second prison topos of "freedom in prison" in chapter 6 of the novel when he meditates on passages of St John of the Cross and martyrdom. In the face of impending death Joseph Malan is free. He does not wish for anything in this life any more and is looking forward to meeting Jessica again, whom he addresses in the final monologue of chapter 7. Like Lovelace's protagonist he is finally free in his love, but only because Jessica is dead and the merely imaginary consummation of that love no longer constitutes a threat to apartheid society.

Whereas *Looking on Darkness* portrays South African society as contiguous with the institutions of slavery and imprisonment and elaborates the metaphorical equation between the two terms of the comparison on the basis of metonymy, Breyten Breytenbach's text starts with a description of prison which soon emerges as the comparatum of South African society. Prison is a metaphor for the apartheid state.

The luxuries and dangers of solitary confinement in "MaxSec"⁵

The passage is taken from Breytenbach's *Mouiroir* and is entitled "MaxSec (Beverly Hills)," the reference being to the maximum security prison of Pretoria Central. This prison within a prison, "the cherry on top of the cake" as Breytenbach calls it in *Confessions* (1994, p. 133), contains extra security features over and above the "huge manned gates and strategically positioned television cameras [that] sweep the terrain so that 'control' can at all times watch the staff and the visitors moving about their business" (*ibid.*, p. 132). Beverly Hills, the maximum security section of the prison, sits on an incline behind the other buildings of Pretoria Central with a view on Pretoria if only there were any windows from which to see it (p. 133). There is a high wall encircling the grounds and between the walls and the prison buildings the area is "immaculately kept with lawns and shrubs and a few wild deer they allow to roam there" (p. 133). When Breytenbach was released, they were adding supervision cameras in all cells and corridors inside.

C-section for white prisoners is framed by a cat walk that covers all corridors — the floor is a grid — and from which the warders can look into all cells. The catwalk is open to the big yard so that the cold "winter wind will fill the cells at night with its bitter cold" (p. 135). For

5 For literature on Breytenbach see especially Reckwitz (1989, 2000).

additional security "at least one warder [is kept] locked up in every subsection" (p. 136) for nonstop surveillance of the prisoners.

Breytenbach's parody of these conditions of incarceration focusses on the dreams of Brigadier Murphy who is obsessed with security and haunted by the possibility of an escape:

1. He gets up after a restless night. Brigadier-General Murphy. Slicks down his yellow hair. Looks in the mirror, into his red-rimmed eyes. Worms the moustache around. He has a secure establishment in his care. All gates mastered, guards posted in the watchtowers. Dead areas locked at both ends and key-carrier cooped up within. But safe enough? Those minds, those hearts. What if...? Bastards!

So he has high walls built around the no-go terrain, with TV-controlled steel-plated double gates the only egress. Now it is truly a maximum security. (Young deer let loose to roam over green lawns between wall and fort. He has a weakness for life.)

(Breytenbach, 1984, p. 109)

The prison governor, who has a weakness for deer, regards the prisoners as dogs who might corrupt the warders. He now installs the catwalk. So far, the fictional prison of the parody looks quite similar to the real Beverly Hills of Pretoria Central. Brigadier-General Murphy's state of mind represents the obsessions of the South African prison administration who in fact installed these security features:

2. He gets up after the nightmares of half-sleep. What if? One never knows with these traitors and terrorists, these rapists and assassins. HQ was adamant about that: "Let one, just *one* bandit get away and you might as well run with him!" The perspiration is chilly on his back. They are always scheming, these dogs; they have visions of freedom; turn away and they start digging, climbing, feinting, *thinking*, corrupting the boere.

He has the roof torn from the prison to be replaced by a grid of steel, a catwalk permitting the armed guardians to keep a constant eye on their charges. Now, ah, this boop is breakproof. (p. 109)

The worry continues. Murphy "surfaces, gagging from the tortures of sleep" to order even more security features:

He has an electronic eye installed in every cell. We shall have surveillance twenty-five hours a day. Snoop lenses sweep the corridors, eliminate the blind angles. Tape recorders are connected to the toilet bowls. From the ramparts he goes to the catwalk. Squints down at the vestiges of humanity below. There's a rash around his neck, just inside the collar, itching terribly. "I want those courtyards covered by wire netting immediate-ly! You think the sly sonsabitches can't scale four metres of sheer wall? And if a helicopter were to — Jesus Christ!" (p. 110)

He installs cameras (as in the real prison) but he additionally starts to exceed the real features of Pretoria Central. Tape recorders attached to

the toilet bowls provide a first hint of the insanity that has started to sweep over Murphy.

When we get to paragraphs 4, 6 and 8, the absurdity of Murphy's security measures provides a clear indication of the parodic nature of this text:

4. He orders, reviews, refines. Every prisoner must be escorted by a guard-with-dog at all times of the day or night [...].

6. The warder-with-dog shall get into the bath with the prisoner. Yes, man, of course the State will issue you with overalls for the purpose! [...].

8. Listen. The dogboer-and-dog shall spend the nights in bed with the convict, man on man, a second warder with FN and baton and whistle and walkie-talkie outside the locked, mastered, bolted, padlocked, padlocked, padlocked, steel-reinforced cell door and inside grill. Changing of the shift at midnight. (p. 110)

In this scenario the warder and dog take the place of the prisoners (earlier referred to as dogs) in their cells, in their bath, in their beds. The boere *become* prisoners, become dogs themselves. The absurdity of such concepts of security is underlined by the pretense that imprisonment serves the aims of rehabilitation. Says Murphy:

Ah, but it's good to run a rehabilitation centre fulfilling its first and foremost function: to keep the wards of the State in safe-keeping. (p. 110)

The warders and their wards benignly refer to safe-keeping and a paternalistic relationship between the inmates and their guardians. This social fiction has of course been thoroughly discredited by that point.

Murphy's nightmares intensify as security has reached unprecedented levels of perfection:

9. The night was an agony. Behind his eyelids, even with orbs staring into the dark, he visualised all the horrors. The headlines. The sanctions. The total breaking. *Today, at noon, an escapee from Maximum Security...* oh sweet dear compassionate cruel merciless God. What if? What the fuckin' hell if, for instance...! He is an old wreck, crushed by responsibility, by the spectre of overthrow.

He has the prisoners, the blind worms, taken out into the central courtyard, stood against a wall, one by one, murmuring, shot.

Now the prisoners are in maximum security, sir.

10. He struggles up, suffocating through layer upon layer of not having slept at all. (pp. 110-111)

The prisoners, no longer dogs but "blind worms," are destroyed. At the completion of Murphy's desires for complete security, however, the nightmare and his sleeplessness do not cease. And now, we presume, this condition will never cease since the prisoners are irretrievably dead.

The parable can be read differently, however, as a record of one night's nightmares in which Brigadier-General Murphy oneirically follows South African prison policy through to its logical conclusion. That logical conclusion consists in the denial of all human rights to the prisoners, transforming them from dogs into worms and crushing them into eventual non-existence. To the reader the story demonstrates a correlation between increased security and increased fear, between the obsession with security and the overtaking of insanity, the institution of control as a galloping process of losing control.

From this insight it is no big step to recognising the text as a parable of the apartheid system which is, precisely, motivated by unreasonable fear of the other, by strategies of control and incarceration and by their logical lethal endpoint — that of national socialism's genocide. The logical outcome of this system of insanity is complete insanity. The cure turns out to exacerbate the causes of the disease. A spiral of violence results in damage to the perpetrator of violence. The boere have created a prison for the other only to find themselves securely locked inside their prison with their inmates.

Conclusions

In this paper I have tried to explicate how recurring topoi of the literature of imprisonment are utilised in anti-colonial literature where they establish a homology between colonial (or racist) society and the prison regime. Colonial society, particularly instantiated here by inference to the former apartheid state of South Africa, creates prisons of oppression both in society at large and, in condensed form, within their prison systems. Whereas the condition of incarceration more obviously affects black South Africans, the metaphorical imprisonment of white South Africans is hinted at already in Brink's portrait of an impossible love affair between a white woman and a black man.

The world as prison/prison as world topos surfaces explicitly in Brink's novel when Joseph Malan compares himself to the protagonist of Calderón's *La vida es sueño*:

Everything had become as confused to me as Segismundo's two worlds in the Calderon play: Prince of Poland, brought up in a dungeon, clothed in animal skins, and then suddenly, in his sleep, taken to the palace where he is allowed to rule for a single day before being drugged and taken back to the mountain and waking up in the dungeon — all he can really conclude is that everything has been a dream. Unless the palace was reality and this dungeon is the dream?
(Brink, 1993, p. 199)

The passage in a sense prefigures the scenario of Breytenbach's parable since Brigadier-General Murphy's nightmares and real-life conditions of

maximum security imprisonment merge with one another in the hazy medium of bad dreams. In Breytenbach's caustic parody of the prison regime, the subjection of an imprisoning society to the conditions of its security measures is underlined even more clearly. Breytenbach's text additionally suggests that the apartheid policy is a mental aberration on the part of white South Africans, that it is insane, a nightmare that has taken over reality and now subjects everybody to its obsessive lethal logic. The prison — more so than in traditional texts employing the topos — in Breytenbach's parody becomes a true figure of colonial/racist society and establishes a homology between prison worlds and the apartheid state.

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