

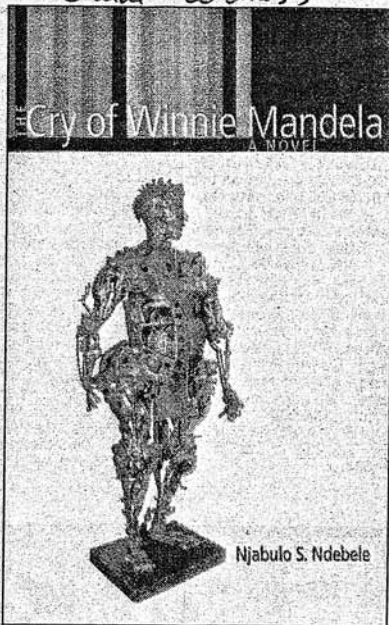
STORIES OF FOUR WAITING WIVES

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The Cry of Winnie
Mandela
Njabulo S. Ndebele
David Philip

TO start his book, Njabulo Ndebele briefly tells the stories of four South African women, obliged by circumstances to wait for their husbands. They are fictional creations, one the wife of a migrant labourer, the second a woman whose husband is studying overseas, the third the South African-based wife of an exile and the fourth waiting vainly for her man to be faithful to her.

Telling their stories and comparing them to history's most famous waiting wife, Penelope, takes the first part of the book and is lively and engrossing. And then they hold imaginary conversations with Winnie Mandela, another who famously waited while her husband was



imprisoned. This section too is interesting in that it is a meditation on the state of the nation and how compromises and adaptations have been made since 1994.

But it is when Ndebele puts words into Winnie's mouth that the book raises questions — and becomes a somewhat laborious read. After all, Winnie Mandela is real, she is still alive and she is highly controversial. It is quite usual to mix real characters with fictional but here, this strange creation of a high-profile, real woman, turned into a

figure of the imagination by a male author, gives the reader an uncomfortable feeling of being too obviously manipulated. I wonder what the lady in question thinks.

Margaret von Klempner