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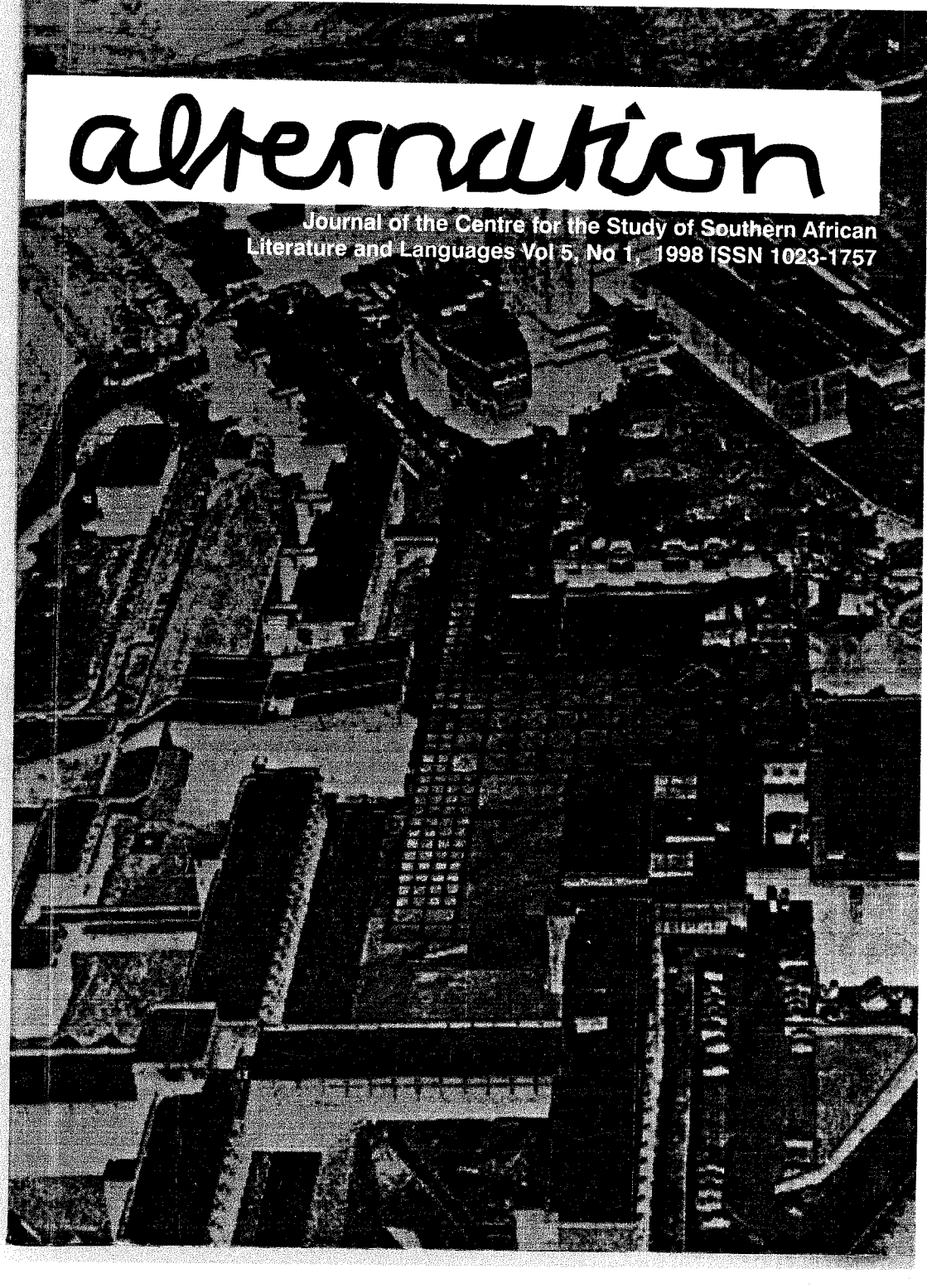

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COVER DESIGN
Clair Durow

CORRESPONDENCE ADDRESS
The Editor: Alternation, CSSALL, Univ. of DurbanWestville,
Priv. Bag X54001, 4000 DURBAN, South Africa
Tel/Fax: 27(0)318202245; email: cssall@pixie.udw.ac.za
CSSALL web-site: http://www.udw.ac.za:80/~stewartg/
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Guest Editor
Shane Moran

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The Editorial Board wishes to congratulate Kelwyn Sole on winning the Thomas Pringle Award for Best Literary Article published during 1996/1997 with his article ' South Africa passes the posts' (*Alter*nation 4,1 (1997) 116-151).

Introduction

> Freedom of expression
> Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes –
> (a) freedom of the press and other media;
> (b) freedom to impart information or ideas;
> (c) freedom of artistic creativity; and
> (d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.
> [*The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* 1996: Chapter 2: Bill of Rights, 16(1)]

I would like to thank the contributors to this issue of *Alter*nation for their patience. The production of this journal was tied up with the tendering procedures of the University of Durban-Westville (U.D.W.) whereby the printer who put in the lowest bid received the contract. Jannie Smit tirelessly dragged the journal through retyping and re-editing, mentoring the printer in the process.

The efforts of *Alter*nation to provide a platform for debate and medium of empowerment have taken place within a shifting institutional history. I would like to take this opportunity to sketch my impressions of this context and stress the importance of the current conjuncture.

With a legacy of active opposition to the apartheid regime, U.D.W. has moved through insurrectionary politics to arrive at the chill dawn of economistic pragmatism. Like many other South African universities U.D.W. has never produced an acceptable overall quantity of accredited research. The reality that university status depends on research production suggests that the future for some historically black institutions may include shedding university status altogether. In this environment the university community aims at building capacity and delivering on its Mission Statement:

1. To make university education accessible to all, especially to students who are financially and educationally disadvantaged, thereby opening up opportunities for their personal growth and empowerment.
2. To promote teaching and research in a context of social responsibility and academic excellence.
3. To encourage intercultural understanding and tolerance.

Here prospective learners are aware that access to an equitable higher education system on the basis of merit rather than privilege is a fundamental promise of the Freedom Charter. Broadening access to mature and intermittent learners pursuing vocational programmes other than degree qualifications is linked to the demand that the university democratise itself and clarify the specific outcomes of its learning programmes. This last component includes acknowledging that the skills for life-long learning and socially responsible praxis can be informed by unexpected areas of study. For example, the socio-political and moral critique drawn by Chris Hani from his B.A. in Latin and English – the struggle between the Patricians and the Plebeians, the industrial revolution in England and the limitations of Dickens' liberal analysis – illustrates the complexities involved in defining what is relevant. Despite these difficulties an historic opportunity presents itself for gearing the often anachronistic and elitist structures of the university to the needs of learners requiring the flexible skills necessary to fulfil the essential outcome of all genuine education and training: transformation of an unjust society.

In 1999 those South African universities that have incurred large student debts because of an admissions policy that sought to accommodate poorer students are facing the demands of fiscal rectitude. The challenge of institutional transformation has taken the expedient form of adapting imported models of curriculum development and giving real content to the language of increasing

choice for students who are 'customers', 'stake-holders', etc. Sententious monetarist rhetoric, with its shuttling analogies and doctrine of economic inevitability, often distracts from the integrity of these transformational processes and obscures the work of genuine reformers confronting the remnants of apartheid.

The cost-cutting neo-liberal education policies associated with the heady days of Reagan and Thatcher provide one limited but pertinent point of comparison from which to assess the originality of South African attempts to modernise higher education. While the U.S. tertiary education sector sharpened its market-driven ethos and a highly successful big business sector reasserted its primacy as the key social partner, in the U.K. polytechnics (technikons) modified themselves to become universities. The latter represented both the upgrading of the status of vocational studies and the recognition of the importance of academic research: interaction between the practical and the theoretical offers the best returns for a society investing in its future by integrating education and training. The excesses of the utilitarian wave effectively led to an acknowledgement of the value of a broad educational training that included all areas of culture, even those not immediately commodifiable.

One of the positive returns of educational neo-conservatism in the U.K. flowed from the demand that academics be productive in terms of publications; this often favoured younger academics and facilitated the removal of an inert senior strata. The negative aspect of Thatcher's revolutionary parochialism became clearer when the demand that academics (and everybody else) justify their usefulness targeted pedagogy. From the start incriminated in the conspiracy of teaching useless knowledge, the sullen obscurantist has to prove her innocence (usefulness). An attempt, of course, that simply confirms retroactively the validity of the initial charge since any proof must be adduced in accordance with the terms of the tribunal. This authoritarian ruse never fails to deliver the cutting of courses and facilitation of 'equitable' exits from the profession by demoralised personnel. Those with research capacity and/or business oriented skills find themselves most marketable, and students are left with the obstruction *in situ* of a sedimentary staff awaiting the 'renegotiation' of their contracts. At the administrative level the carapace of 'rationalisation' shelters both transient monetarists and those gambling on the possibility of restraining the fiscal fundamentalism of their cohorts. In this case the soft underbelly serves as a useful cushion against attack.

The inappropriateness of such a scenario in the developmental context of South Africa is clear, not least because the neo-liberal agenda presumes an existing reserve of cultural capital and (useless)skills waiting to be trimmed. Historically black universities have struggled to clear a space for a none racist and none sexist humanistic education that is unlikely to quickly regenerate if cut. In this waking nightmare the grave-diggers of apartheid would resurrect a revindicated 'Bantu Education' and set an old ghost walking again. A clumsily administered re-orientation of the university camouflages the mutation of strategic planning into institutional Darwinism. Febrile bureaucrats who were seldom regarded as academic luminaries themselves set the agenda within an institutional structure that instinctively reverts to autocracy - the hackneyed alibi for this lack of democratisation being the administrative need to institute democratisation efficiently. Approaches regarding accountability meet with the secretion of exculpatory references to apartheid and ritualised exhibitions of piety. Ultimately, state-directed impulses toward social responsibility and institutional transparency are digested by a culture of opportunism.

My reading of the majority of the contributors to this issue of *Alter*nation is that they attempt to look beyond the sterile prospect of pleading and pageantry that can characterise the contradictions of political liberation. Authors writing from Malawi, Northern Ireland, the U.S.A., and a range of universities in South Africa turn to the past and present to recover marginalised traditions that may still be useful in the struggle against multiple forms of domination. U.D.W.'s official commitment to foster research in all areas of the university should ensure that the contribution to this international dialogue by scholars of diverse backgrounds will not be lost.

Shane Moran
Guest Editor

Ngugi's *The Devil on the Cross*, the Body and Power

James Ogude

One of the striking features of Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* is the way it directs attention to the idea of human struggle and martyrdom—the sacrifice of the body. Except in this instance, Ngugi reverses the norm and it is the devil's body that is on the cross. This in itself should signal a shift in power relations because the devil that we tend to associate with the domination of other bodies has been subdued on the cross. But even with a superficial reading of the text, we soon realise that the devil has been rescued by its followers and its body (read the colonial and neo-colonial state) has been turned into a site for struggle. It is the use of the body as a site upon which power is re-enacted and undermined that interests me here. The paper aims at exploring Ngugi's use of the body as a site upon which the banality of power in a post-colony is dramatised in its stark manifestation. The paper argues that Ngugi uses the grotesque image of the body to portray the staging of power in a post-colony, while at the same time undermining officialdom or authority through parody. The paper concludes by drawing attention to Ngugi's failure to show how the masses, the oppressed, are implicated in their own oppression and how they mimic and emulate the absurd display of power by the rulers.

Achille Mbembe (1992), in a paper entitled 'Provisional Notes on the Post-colony', draws our attention to the nature of power and its actual performance in a post-colony. He characterises a post-colony simply as those societies which have recently emerged from the experience of colonisation and exhibit the violence which the colonial relationship par excellence involves. He argues that the

> post-colony is characterised by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and a lack of proportion [and] a series of corporate institutions and political machinery which, once they are in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence (Mbembe 1992:3).

The post-colony in fact becomes some form of a stage on which 'the wider problems and its corollary discipline' are played out (Mbembe 1992:3). It is this theatrical display of power that Mbembe calls the banality of power in the post-colony. He uses banality to mean

> those elements of the obscene and the grotesque that Mikhail Bakhtin claims to have located in 'non-official' cultures but which in fact are intrinsic to all systems of domination and to the means by which those systems are confirmed or deconstructed (Mbembe 1992:3).

Thus the grotesque and the obscene would seem to be some of the basic characteristics

that identify post-colonial regimes of domination.

The writing of Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* was in more than one sense a product of the post-colonial violence to which Mbembe draws our attention. It was written while Ngugi was in detention and marked the actual enactment of violence in a post-colony through the capture and isolation of the body under the guise of the Public Security Order inherited from the colonial regime. In *Detained* (1981a:3), Ngugi confesses that the novel was written 'with blood, sweet and toil'. Written in one of the largest prisons in post-colonial Africa, the Kamiti Maximum Security Prison, this novel helped Ngugi to keep his sanity. It is significant because it stands as a defiance to Kenyatta's regime which put him in detention so that his 'mind would turn into a mess or rot' (Ngugi 1981a:10) which is reminiscent of Gramsci's prosecutor who, under Mussolini's orders in 1926, asserted: 'We must stop this brain working for twenty years!' (Gramsci 1971:xviii). Having failed to control Ngugi, the Kenyatta regime sends him to solitary confinement which is, as Michel Foucault (1984:210) reminds us, 'certainly the most frenzied manifestation of power imaginable'. In writing this novel, Ngugi seems to have refused to succumb to the dictates of violence to which the Kenyan regime often resorts in silencing all its critics. The novel became Ngugi's weapon for preserving the body and for overcoming the state of fragmentation imposed by the regime. Wariinga, the heroine of toil and the harbinger of freedom, whose image looms large in the text, was conceived in cell 16 in 1978 (Ngugi 1981a:3). If the regime's aim was to break Ngugi and to reconfigure his body, in *Devil*, he turns this attempt upside down. Instead, it is to the obscene body of the post-colonial regime weighed down by its 'impotence', that Ngugi directs our laughter. But, first, the content of *Devil on the Cross*.

The novel deals with a group of six protagonists travelling together in a *matatu* taxi to Ilmorog. The protagonists discover that they are all mysteriously invited to a Devil's feast, where thieves and robbers of Kenya enter a competition for the election of the seven cleverest thieves and robbers. The characters are Wariinga, Wangari, Gatuiria, Muturi, Mwireri and Mwaura the driver. The narrative operates at two levels: the allegorical story illustrated by the competition or feast organised by the Devil, and the Story of Wariinga who is the pivot of the plot. Like *Petals of Blood* (1977), the novel takes place mainly in Ilmorog and partly in Nairobi. The novel is dedicated to 'all Kenyans struggling against the neo-colonial stage of imperialism' (Ngugi 1987:5). It is no wonder, then, that the major trope in *Devil* should be neo-colonial dependency, with the devil on the cross as the structuring symbol. This is best illustrated in Wariinga's nightmare in which the white colonialist devil is crucified by the masses, apparent reference to political independence, only to be rescued by the local comprador. Significantly,

> [t]he Devil had two mouths, one on his forehead and the other at the back of his head. His belly sagged, as if it were about to give birth to all the evils of the world. His skin was red, like that of a pig (Ngugi 1987:13).

This is significant because the physical features of the Devil draw attention to his

grotesque image, the same image that he gives to those that rescue him and in turn serve him. Significantly again, the Devil rewards his rescuers by fattening their bellies. It turns out that a 'Devil's feast' is arranged by the local 'thieves' to commemorate a visit by foreign guests—'particularly from America, England, Germany, France, Italy, Sweden and Japan'—as part of 'the International Organisation of Thieves and Robbers' (Ngugi 1987:78).

The creation of a Devil's feast, where national robbers and their foreign allies gather in order to reveal their tactics and motives, provides Ngugi with the space for erecting or deconstructing, through the grotesque and the obscene, the banality of power in a post-colony. Ngugi uses the Bakhtinian notion of the grotesque and obscenity by turning the rulers of post-colony into objects of ridicule. But he moves beyond Bakhtin's use of the grotesque and the obscene as vehicles of public ridicule solely confined to the province of ordinary people. It is to the local comprador bourgeoisie, who boast about their cleverness and their cunning on how to steal from the people as well as how to bow to foreign control, that the grotesque is restricted. He does this by exposing how state power—represented by the local comprador—dramatises its own magnificence through an absurd ceremonial display of their wealth as spectacles worthy of emulation by the ruled. It is in this feast that Ngugi erects the monstrous image of capitalism as a fetish. The worshippers of the fetish gather to preach before it, 'the fiction of its perfection' (Mbembe 1992:21). Each and every speaker that takes the stage demonstrates, in their blunt testimonies, that the post-colony has been turned into a stage for bizarre self-gratification; an absurd display of buffoons, fools and clowns in the feast of 'modern robbery and theft'. The feast becomes the privileged language through which power speaks, acts and coerces. The arrogance of the leader of the foreign delegation of thieves and robbers—he admonishes the local delegates 'to drink the blood of [their] people and to eat their flesh, [as the imperial powers have done to the Africans over the centuries], than to retreat a step' (Ngugi 1987:89)—is greed and power magnified to their full and logical extremes, reduced to their essences. Yet the actual idiom of this display, its organization and its symbolism focuses on the body: specifically the belly, the mouth and the phallus.

Ngugi's thieves display striking forms of deformity. His portrayal of the local thieves at the cave foregrounds the grotesque image of the body in which the belly and the mouth stand out. The satire on the comprador class conveys Ngugi's mockery of their borrowed power, and is best captured in the narrator's graphic description of Gitutu's body:

> Gitutu had a belly that protruded so far that it would have touched the ground had it not been supported by the braces that held up his trousers. It seemed as if his belly had absorbed all his limbs and all the other organs of his body. Gitutu had no neck—at least, his neck was not visible. His arms and legs were short stumps. His head had shrunk to the size of a fist (Ngugi 1987:99).

Gitutu's body is a body in the act of becoming: 'it is continually built, created, and

builds and [it in turn] creates another body' (Bakhtin 1968:317). It is a body that, figuratively speaking, swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world. In the words of Bakhtin (1968:317), the grotesque body 'outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus'. In this act of swallowing, Gitutu's body becomes monstrous—a typical grotesque hyperbole. His belly threatens to detach itself from the body and lead an independent life. His neck, arms, legs and head have been transformed into a grotesque animal subject.

The realisation of the grotesque image of the body by associating the parts or the whole body with the animal form is best illustrated again in the body of Gitutu and, to a degree, in the body of Kihaahu, whose grotesque feature is his mouth rather than his stomach. To do this, Ngugi uses names which are semantically fixed to the master code of the Gikuyu people. The names that are culturally positioned or grounded in a 'pretext' is inherent to the tradition of the Gikuyu, and in particular to some animal or inanimate object in the Gikuyu cosmos whose traits the characters personify or share. For the average Gikuyu reader the names are specific signs which they could readily interpret because of the shared typology of meaning between the signs and their interpreters.

The name 'Gitutu wa Gataanguru' shows the use of this mutually intelligible typology of meaning between the sign and its community of readers. 'Gitutu' in Gikuyu, Ndigirigi (1991:101) writes, refers to a 'big jigger' while 'Gataanguru' refers to 'a belly infested with tapeworms which produce a bloating effect'. His physical form resembles that of a jigger. Thus Gitutu's names within the context of the Gikuyu readership helps to concretise the grotesque image of Gitutu's body. There are clear grounds of comparison in which the physical features of Gitutu—'pot-belly', 'short-limbs' and 'tiny head'—are placed in stark juxtaposition to the physical features of a jigger. But more importantly, these features underscore the parasitical nature of jiggers and by extension the parasitism of the ruling class in the post-colonial state that Gitutu represents or parallels. As a parasite, Gitutu finds his host in the lives of workers and peasants that he exploits. Characteristic of this class, Ngugi seems to suggest, Gitutu eats more than he needs as he shamelessly confesses that his 'belly is becoming larger and larger because it is constantly overworked!' (Ngugi 1987:100). Ironically, he spends more time eating than working and his body has become a 'wasteland' or a 'shitland' which his name evokes: the appropriate breeding place for tapeworms. But, as if Gitutu's deformity is not a sufficient sign of elite greed, Ngugi's thieves seek true monstrosity, as in the case of Ndikita wa Nguunji who argues for additional human parts:

> So, seeing that I have only one mouth, one belly, one heart, one life and one cock, what's the difference between the rich and the poor? What's the point of robbing others?
>
> It was revealed to me that ... we should have a factory for manufacturing human parts .... This would mean that a rich man who could afford them could have two or three mouths, two bellies, two cocks and two hearts. If the first mouth became tired of chewing, and his belly could hold no more, then the spare mouth and belly could take over .... We could coin some new sayings: a rich man's youth never ends (Ngugi 1987:180).

Ndikita desires a world in which

> the rich few would ensure their immortality through the purchase of spare organs of the human body, thus leaving death as the sole prerogative of the poor (Ngugi 1987:10).

Yet Ndikita's desire to have spare organs serves to expose the insecurity of masculine authority; when Ndikita's wife becomes enthusiastic about the prospect of having two female organs, he is threatened. Nditika expresses horror at the idea of such equality between sexes and he urges his wife to espouse, instead, 'true' African culture, to heed tradition, which Nditika would like to interpret as meaning inferior status for women. As Eileen Julien (1992:149f) writes:

> Nditika would seem to need women as witnesses of his masculine prowess, yet he fears them and their sexual demands.

It is to serve his own masculine quest for privilege and power that he invokes the authority of 'tradition'. Thus, the unconditional subordination of women to the principle of male pleasure remains one of the pillars upholding the reproduction of the phallocratic system which turns post-coloniality into 'a world of anxious virility, a world hostile to continence, frugality, sobriety' (Mbembe 1992:9). Wariinga's body, for example, becomes the focus of a power struggle with far-reaching ramifications. Masculine authority seeks to imprison her body within the grip and grasp of the local thieves—the ruling elite of the post-colonial state. But it is not until Wariinga regains her agency as an active participant in the process of history making, that she develops from the victim type to the fighting type.

It is not enough, in the post-colonial context, simply to bring into play the mouth, the belly or phallus, or merely to refer to them, in order to be automatically obscene. 'Mouth', 'belly', and 'phallus', when used in popular speech and jokes, have above all to be located in the real world, located in real time. In short, they are active statements about the human condition, and as such contribute integrally to the making of political culture in the post-colony. Every reference, then, to mouth, belly or phallus is consequently a discourse on the world—the post-colonial world. Ngugi's use of the grotesque and the obscene points to this world, and his use of the grotesque image of the body is very much grounded in the ordinary politics of post-colonial Kenya. It is the kind of politics whose primary objective is to acquire power as the ultimate vehicle for economic success.

Most social struggles in Africa, Bayart (1993:239) is wont to remind us, only become useful if they lead to the accumulation of power:

> It is a truism that it is easier to get rich from a position of power than from a

position of dependency and penury.

When one acquires power and the economic success that goes with it, one becomes honoured and often one is not shy to perform one's success. Thus in a post-colony, 'material prosperity is one of the chief political virtues rather than [the] object of disapproval' (Bayart 1993:242). While writing *Devil* Ngugi must have been conscious of the fact that boasting about one's wealth in Kenya is part of the social norm. As Angelique Haugerud (1995:1) reminds us, 'Exuberant showmanship is one enduring face of Kenyan political life'. It is not unusual to come across politicians boasting about their wealth and with great admiration from the people. Very much in the early days of Kenya's independence, Jomo Kenyatta—the first president of Kenya—ridiculed the radical nationalist opponent, Bildad Kaggia, for failing to amass wealth for himself. 'Look at Kungu Karumba', Kenyatta told Kaggia. 'He has invested in buses and has earned money, but what have you done for yourself since independence?'[1] About two decades later, Mr Oloitiptip, one of President Moi's ministers, boasted to his political opponents in parliament in sentiments very similar to Kenyatta's when he declared:

> I've got money. I don't sell chickens .... I am able to spend 150 million shillings from my own pocket for the marriage of my son .... I have six cars, two big houses, twelve wives and sixty-seven children.

Turning to his opponents, he reminded them that they 'are not small men; they are men of big bellies like Oloitiptip' (*The Weekly Review* March 30 1984:1f). Forty years later the populist deputy J.M. Kariuki had absolutely no need to disguise his wealth in order to win credibility with the citizens—the 'wananchi' (see Odinga 1992:63). Thus the 'politics of the belly', to use Bayart's phrase, is very much in the imagination of Kenyans and is not just a fictive creation of Ngugi.

Ngugi's intervention lies in his insistence that the 'politics of the belly' ought to be the object of ridicule rather than emulation. The belly which the rulers in particular encode as a sign of success exposes the parasitic nature of the local comprador in a post-colony. Thus far from confirming their authority, the grotesque image of rulers like Oloitiptip, should serve to undermine the power of the rulers by turning them into pitiable objects of ridicule. After all 'the body itself is the principal locale of the idioms and fantasies used in depicting power' (Mbembe 1992:7). If Kenyans in their ignorance have associated 'the big belly' with power, then Ngugi is forcing them to debunk the myth, and to realise that the authority of the local rulers is borrowed.

It is, therefore, to the nature of the local comprador bourgeoisie that Ngugi draws our attention by using the grotesque mode in his depiction of them. Indeed grotesque characters, marked as they are by bodily deficiencies or deformation, would seem to offer Ngugi a perfect means of figuring the qualities that have tended to

[1] *The Times* 11 April 1966, Nairobi, as quoted in Odinga (1967:310). See also Ngugi (1981a:89) and his reference to Kenyatta's upraiding of Kaggia.

characterise either the local comprador or the ruling elite in the post-colonial state in Africa[2]. The use of the grotesque mode draws the readers' attention to the body as a site upon which power is contested. If the Kenyan government had intended to subdue Ngugi's body, he turns the butt on them. In *Detained*, he talks of his objective:

> I would cheat them out of that last laugh by letting my imagination loose over the kind of society this class, in nakedly treacherous alliance with imperialist foreigners, were building in Kenya in total cynical disregard of the wishes of over fourteen million Kenyans (Ngugi 1981a:10).

Yet, the full significance of the grotesque image in the text only makes sense when linked to a couple of sub-narratives in *Devil*.

The first is derived from Wariinga's nightmare. In the grotesque image of the Devil that Wariinga sees, Ngugi seems to suggest a linear and continuing relationship between the Devil (read colonialism) and the black elite (read comprador bourgeoisie) that takes over at independence. Ngugi further suggests that the desire of the comprador class which rescues the devil, thereby introducing a new form of colonialism, is to inherit the Devil's worst qualities. The second consists of three stories that Gatuiria relates to his fellow passengers on their way to Ilmorog in a *matatu*. Common to all the stories are the themes of avarice and conceit. The first story is about the peasant farmer that was turned into a beast of burden by an ogre (Ngugi 1987:62). The second story is about the black and beautiful girl who rejected all the men in her country and took to the first young man from a foreign country. The young foreigner turned out to be a man-eating ogre who tore off her 'limbs one by one and ate them' (Ngugi 1987:62). The third and last story that Gatuiria relates is about an old man called Nding'uri who had a soul that was richly endowed. He was well respected, hardworking and displayed neither desire nor greed for other people's property until, one day, 'a strange pestilence attacked the village' and destroyed all his possessions (Ngugi 1987:63). Nding'uri was forced to turn to the evil spirits. 'At the entrance to the cave', we read, 'he was met by a spirit in the shape of an ogre'. We are further told that the ogre

> had two mouths, one on his forehead and the other at the back of his head. The one at the back of his head was covered by his long hair, and it was only visible when the wind blew the hair aside (Ngugi 1987:64).

The thrust of the narrative is that Nding'uri surrenders his soul to the ogre who demands it in exchange for riches. Nding'uri is turned 'into an eater of human flesh and a drinker of human blood' (Ngugi 1987:64). And in a typical Bakhtinian conception of the grotesque image of the body—the body as a site for defecation—both laughable and revolting, we read that:

[2] This also resonates with Fanon's (1968:120) characterisation of this class as decadent and parasitic, uncreative and 'completely canalized into activities of the intermediary type'.

> From that day on, Nding'uri began to fart property, to shit property, to sneeze property, to scratch property, to laugh property, to think property, to dream property, to talk property, to sweat property, to piss property (Ngugi 1987:64).

If the first story by Gatuiria relates directly to the burden of colonialism on the colonised and points to the possibility of liberation from the shackles of colonialism, the second one relates to a colonial mentality—a form of cultural imperialism that locks the colonised within the orbit of dependency and leads to a fixation with all that is foreign. The third story captures the advanced stage in which the colonised now surrenders his or her being, integrity and pride to the coloniser in order to receive his protection and be schooled in the ways of the ogre. The third story is a narrative expression of the stage that Ngugi (1981b:119f) has characterised as the neo-colonial stage of imperialism. This is the stage that he satirizes in the Devil's feast by focusing our attention on the grotesque image of the comprador class that has given up its soul and betrayed the nation for property. There is, therefore, a parallel between Wariinga's nightmare and the story of Nding'uri. Just like the Devil's rescuers in Wariinga's nightmare, Nding'uri also gives up his soul—his freedom—in exchange for property.

Significantly, both the ogre and his worshippers like Gitutu and Kihaahu seem to have a similar bodily deformation; they both seem to share in the common traits of avarice and conceit. Thus every other layer of the narrative in the text serves to draw our attention to the grotesque image of the ogre, the Devil and his followers. The narrative layers serve to reveal the nature and values of the capitalist ogre and the comprador class that it gives rise to. The likes of Gitutu are born out of the ogre's womb and they continue to perpetuate its legacy, the legacy of neo-colonial dependency. A section of the African elite, Ngugi seems to be saying, never contributed in the struggle for independence, but were able to make it through sheer cunning and cheating, and by exploiting their history of collaboration to their advantage. This class, Ngugi suggests, cannot survive without the patronage of their foreign masters. Part of their fundamental weakness is that they are disposed to parasitism, selfishness, greed and naked exploitation of workers and peasants through cunning rather than creative entrepreneurship and hard-work. For Ngugi then, the grotesque at its best exaggerates and caricatures the negative, the inappropriate, the anti-human that the comprador class has come to symbolize in his works. To this end Ngugi is in agreement with Keorapetse Kgositsile's (1969:147) comment that black writers should deploy the grotesque to portray 'the undesirable, the corrupting, the destructive'. But as Bakhtin (1968:308) argues:

> A grotesque world in which only the inappropriate is exaggerated is only quantitatively large, but qualitatively it is extremely poor, colourless, and far from gay.

conclusion

In spite of Ngugi's scathing exposure of the so-called borrowed power in a post-colony, in choosing the comprador class as the sole object of his butt, Ngugi fails to draw attention to how the masses are themselves implicated in their own exploitation. By confining the display of power to the elite, and suggesting a hegemonic power structure controlled by foreign and local comprador, he fails to rise above the binary categories used in standard interpretations of domination. Within this structure, the dominated can only collaborate with or resist the rulers. And yet, as Bayart (1993:249) warns us,

> the production of a political space [in a post-colony] is on the one hand the work of an ensemble of actors, dominant and dominated, and that on the other hand it is in turn subjected to a double logic of totalitarianising and detotalitarianising .... The 'small men' also work hard at political innovation and their contribution does not necessarily contradict that of the 'big men'.

A linear narrative of the rulers versus the ruled; the oppressor versus the oppressed, which characterises Ngugi's discourse in a post-colony runs the risk of excluding

> heterogeneity from the domain of utterance and is thus functionally incapable of even conceiving the possibility of discursive opposition or resistance to it (Slemon 1987:11).

The point being made here is that in order to have an effective understanding of power relations in a post-colony we need to realise that it cannot simply be

> a relationship of resistance or collaboration but it can best be characterised as illicit cohabitation, a relationship fraught by the very fact of the [rulers] and [the ruled] having to share the same living space (Mbembe 1992:4).

This kind of relationship can only result in what Mbembe (1992:4) has called the 'mutual zombification of both the dominant and those they apparently dominate'. It is a relationship of conviviality in which both the ruled and the rulers rob each other of their vitality and, in the process, render each other impotent. But because a post-colony is also a regime of pretence, the 'subjects' have to learn to bargain in this market marked by ambivalence; they have to have the

> ability to manage not just a single identity for themselves [which binarism reduces them to], but several, which are flexible enough for them to negotiate as and when required (Mbembe 1992:4).

It seems to me that Ngugi's otherwise brilliant critique of the rulers in a post-colony deletes the ambivalent relationship and crucial contradictions between the ruled and the rulers. In a way, it also robs the ruled of any historical agency outside the grand regime

of resistance narrative. These issues, however, are beyond the scope of this paper (see Cooper 1992, and Ogude 1997).

Department of English
University of the Witwatersrand

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Ngugi's *Matigari* and the Politics of Literature

Glenn Hooper

The issue of art in the service of politics is a notoriously complex one. Although many are content with the concept of imaginative writing being harnessed to a political enterprise, not all are happy with the end result. In a review of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, for example, Homi Bhabha (1977) suggests that although the narrator avoids a form of 'romantic nationalism' that 'can lead to an idealized quest for identity, for a mystical pristine Otherness', the text's 'rambling narrative and wide cast of characters' are less than impressive. Bhabha continues:

> In spite of [Ngugi's] serious and intelligent commitment to the problems of neo-colonialism, [his] failure to find an appropriate and original form limits the power of his deep-thinking novel.

Despite Bhabha's reservations, and his belief that Ngugi's adaptation of the classic realist form for a socialist agenda is simply too ambitious, one aspect of the text's composition elicits approval: the fact that

> Ngugi achieves some of his most memorable effects in using the traditional mode of story-telling within the novel to awaken his characters to their own myth and history (Bhabha 1977).

While Bhabha's approval of the use of orature in *Petals* may critically redeem the text, it has an even greater bearing on the later *Matigari*. Published in 1986 *Matigari* is a much shorter novel than *Petals*, with consequently a greater degree of organisation and focus for the narrator and reader alike. Written originally in Gikuyu before being translated into English, *Matigari* values concision where *Petals* strove for a monumental, almost epic quality. More importantly, *Matigari* is keenly allied to the oral tradition, finding in indigenous culture a more formally satisfying method with which to engage with the specificities of post-independent Kenya[1]. Where *Petals*, in

[1] 'It is important that any society that wants to fully understand itself must give serious attention to its oral literature and artists. The artists play a major role in shaping and perpetuating the society's image of itself. They also record and transmit the cultural heritage. These same artists are an important media for the society's self-evaluation' (Kabira & Karega wa Mutahi 1988:4)

other words, used certain folkloric images or references—the character of Nyakinyua and the spiritually fantastic properties of theng'eta, for example—to tie the text to a non-western tradition, *Matigari* makes the oral tradition a central component of the text itself. The employment of oral motifs and structure, with the accompanying use of song and story-telling, not only privileges one set of, specifically non-western traditions over another, but posits a formally decisive movement towards aligning indigenous practice with radical politics.

In the course of this essay I wish to examine Ngugi's most explicit attempt to marry traditional and experimental forms, and to question how beneficial are his efforts at integrating orature within the fictional world of *Matigari*, particularly when the text gestures towards developments within postmodern writing also[2]. That said, although I wish to engage with the relevance of a postmodern reading of *Matigari*, I want to stress the limits of an overly postmodernist position, arguing that *Matigari* needs to be principally tied to the realities of Kenyan politics and not just to the formally experimental techniques of contemporary Euro-American writing[3]. Besides, Ngugi not only posits the superiority of an African aesthetic, making the oral tradition, song and story-telling, a central component of the text itself, but he invests these aspects of the text with a value that goes beyond aesthetic considerations only.

I

If there is a particular cultural and ideological source to whom Ngugi has consistently turned over the past thirty years it is Frantz Fanon. In Fanon's *Studies in a Dying Colonialism* the identification of the French language with complete authority can be linked to a long established critique by Ngugi of the denigration of African languages in favour of English, within the educational system, but also within the publishing industry upon whom Kenyan teachers are largely dependent. In *Black Skin, White Masks* the psychological assessments of relations between colonised and coloniser are

[2] Traditional values, views and expressions are never as conservatively understood within Ngugi's writings as we might imagine. As this essay will demonstrate, 'tradition' is taken as a method of positive retrieval, and as something that can be beneficially developed. If tradition carries reactionary connotations within other cultures, it serves to radicalise and reinvent in the works of Ngugi.

[3] For a highly subjective, if passionate, account of the complexities of Kenyan history, see Ngugi's critical works to date (*Homecoming* 1972; *Detained* 1981a; *Writers in Politics* 1981b; *Barrel of a Pen* 1983; *Decolonising the Mind* 1986; *Moving the Centre* 1993; *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams* 1998). In addition to charting the ongoing battles, periods of disillusionment, and difficulties of exile associated with vigorous campaigning, Ngugi outlines the political transformations of the last twenty-five years or so in considerable detail. For a sufficiently up to date general history that is somewhat critical of Ngugi, see Ogot & Ochieng' (1995:214-236).

taken as the basis for many of the concerns developed in Ngugi's plays, novels, and critical works to date. However, it is in Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* that Ngugi finds some of the most useful, and most appropriable, comments. Many people now think of *Wretched* as the text which challenged the ideology of nationalism, almost solely, but *Wretched* also talked about the complex and difficult task of establishing a national literature, and of the usefulness of the oral tradition in particular:

> On another level, the oral tradition—stories, epics and songs of the people—which formally were filed away as set pieces are now beginning to change. The storytellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental .... Every time the storyteller relates a fresh episode to his public, he presides over a real invocation. The existence of a new type of man is revealed to the public. The present is no longer turned in upon itself but spread out for all to see. The storyteller once more gives free rein to his imagination; he makes innovations and he creates a work of art (Fanon 1961:193f).

Fanon's emphasis on the commonality of experience, of the benefits to be gained from oral literature but, more significantly, of the importance of the storyteller helps to contextualise *Matigari* perfectly. For example, Ngugi (1987) dedicates the novel to 'all those who love a good story; and to all those who research and write on African orature'. There then follows a note on the English edition of the text, followed by a precis/poem, in which the reader/listener is advised on how best to approach the text:

> This story is imaginary. The actions are imaginary. The characters are imaginary .... May the story take place in the country of your choice!

The introductory note further informs us that the idea for the novel comes from 'an oral story about a man looking for a cure for an illness. Finally, the tale not only 'dispenses with fixed time and place', but is described as 'simple and direct', thereby suggesting a model that can transcend the difficulties of artistic and imaginative presentation for a peasant, frequently non-literate, audience.

While *Matigari* engages with several of the issues outlined in texts such as *Devil on the Cross* and *Petals of Blood*—such as the writing of history, the problems of identity, and the complexities of locale—the overall sense of the text is of a rather more refined project. Almost as though the criticisms levelled by figures such as Bhabha against *Petals* considerably altered Ngugi's narrative vision, *Matigari* seeks to engage with the complexities and challenges of postcolonial identity, but to do so by recourse to a smaller cast of characters and a tighter narrative order. In addition, Ngugi employs immediately recognisable historical icons with which to strengthen his strategy. By opening the first chapter of the text with the image of a returning 'Mau Mau' fighter, for example, Ngugi presses for a recognisable moment from the past, but one that has a

contemporary relevance also[4]. Matigari is presented as being in possession of an AK47, in addition to being attired in a variety of colours and fabrics suggestive of prolonged deprivation and hardship. He is suggestive, therefore, not only of those who took to the forests for the duration of the Emergency, but he actually conforms to historically verifiable fact. Robert Edgerton, for example, presents several examples of the outward appearance of 'Mau Mau' and, more importantly, of their effect on native and settler society alike[5]. However, the inclusion of a 'Mau Mau' figure in Ngugi's writing has consistently meant something more than a symbol of political insurrection; rather it represents a potentially regenerative force in the struggle against neo-colonial authority. Indeed, Ngugi has made strenuous efforts to rework the 'Mau Mau' image and its reputation for implacable opposition to colonial authority, and it is in this context that *Matigari* should be placed[6]. As might be seen from several of his critical references, in addition to his celebrated and notorious play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, Ngugi not only wants to bring 'Mau Mau' 'back', but to use them as a means of transforming, or at the very least challenging, a corrupt and degenerated polity.

With respect to the oral tradition, Ode Ogede (1992:76) has spoken of the 'lyrically balancing incantatory statements' of oral performance, and of the way in which they can 'confer a sing-song quality to the passage that thrills the audience whom it transports, as it were, in a hypnotic fashion to a land of miracles'. Something of the same quality that Ogede mentions is discernible in *Matigari* also, for example in the way that Matigari is lingeringly, almost lyrically introduced to the reader—"'What is your name?" Ngaruro wa Kiriro asked him. "Matigari ma Njiruungi". "Matigari ma Njiruungi?" "Yes, that is my name"' (Ngugi 1987:20)—or the way in which emphasis is added to the mystery of the character at the ends of chapters:

> Who was Matigari ma Njiruungi, a person who could make prison walls open? From that night Matigari's fame spread over all the country. He became a legend. He became a dream. Still the question remained: Who was Matigari ma Njiruungi? (66)

[4] 'The words "Mau Mau" have no literal meaning in Gikuyu or Swahili, there is no generally accepted origin of the name and, most important, the members of the movement did not apply the name to themselves. "Mau Mau" was the colonizer's name for the movement and will accordingly be placed in inverted commas. Any unqualified use of the name is implicitly an endorsement of a particular view of the movement—that propagandised by Kenyan whites during the Emergency' (Maugham-Brown 1985:16).

[5] 'As far as most whites were concerned, the Mau Mau were filthy, long-haired "vermin" who mutilated cattle and dogs, and brutally murdered women and children. They were held to be contemptible, too, because instead of dramatic tribal war regalia or modern military uniforms they dressed in shabby and dirty European clothing' (Edgerton 1990:108).

[6] In terms of his imaginative engagement with 'Mau Mau', the co-authored *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1976) is possibly his most explicit statement on the issue. But see also his essay entitled 'Mau Mau, Voilence and Culture', in the *Homecoming* (1972) essays.

At other points repetition is supplemented by the incorporation of phrases that add definition and emphasis, but which also hint at something potentially regenerative. For example, Matigari speaks of 'blowing the horn of patriotic service and the trumpet of patriotic victory', of 'blow[ing] the trumpet to call together the family of all the patriots who survived', and of 'hear[ing] now the sound of the trumpet and the sound of the horn of justice' (6,38,21). In each instance a different emphasis may be discerned, between victory, community and justice for example, but the cumulative effect is of a politically charged device which hints at the power of an oral tradition. Indeed, Ngugi has personally spoken of how language has a quite different function within Gikuyu culture, and of the way in which it is seen, not as 'a mere string of words', but as having

> a suggestive power well beyond the immediate and lexical meaning. Our appreciation of the suggestive magical power of language was reinforced by the games we played with words through riddles, proverbs, transpositions of syllables, or through nonsensical but musically arranged words (Ngugi 1986:11).

Balancing statements and repeated phrases, then, have an important role in *Matigari,* for they bind the text to the immediacies of lived oral tradition. But in some cases repetition and emphasis has a further structural relevance, one that manages to fuse the various strands of the text together, in addition to providing a focus for a specific set of issues. Consider, for example, section ten, part two of *Matigari,* in which a five line episode provides a whole battery of structural connections:

> The true seeker of truth never loses hope. The true seeker of real justice never tires. A farmer does not stop planting seeds just because of the failure of one crop. Success is born of trying and trying again. Truth must seek justice. Justice must seek the truth. When justice triumphs, truth will reign on earth (Ngugi 1987:84).

In this quotation, incidentally the entirety of section ten, the narrator uses a series of methods with which to document the realities of neo-colonial conflict. Encouraging commitment and perseverance, the text is a recapitulation of many of Ngugi's concerns: the pursuit of honesty and personal integrity, and the demand for justice and truth. In addition, it provides a rural, specifically agricultural image, so that the message may be deemed sufficiently concretised for a peasant audience; an important element in the case of orature since works that are rooted in 'social reality ... have the resonance and authenticity' of lived experience (Ogede 1992:73). More specifically, perhaps, the text may be said to have significant structural status, in addition to displaying some of the incantatory and balancing strategies referred to by Ogede. For example, 'the true seeker of the truth' and 'the true seeker of ... justice' not only echo one another, but are replayed and further echoed in 'truth must seek justice. Justice must seek the truth'. The effect of

the language, mesmerising for those who might hear it spoken, enhances the impact of the piece greatly. Furthermore, by dividing the quotation evenly into two halves we can see how carefully constructed an extract this is: the first half marked by its reliance on a series of negative assertions—'never loses hope ... never tires ... does not stop'—followed by a correspondingly emphatic list of positive assertions—'is born ... must seek ... will reign'. Even if the interchangeability of the ideas require a moment's thought from the reader, the overall effect is that of a poetic, almost musical form supplementing a politically committed and articulated view.

However, it is in terms of the overall structure of the novel that the extract's presence is most keenly felt. Positioned, not only at the precise midway point of a nineteen piece chapter, but effectively at the centre of the text itself, it clearly demonstrates its importance. It reinforces the notion that Ngugi incorporates verbal symmetry and patterning, not just for its own sake, but as part of what Neil Lazarus (1990:130) calls a 'resistive ethic'. The extract may be characterised by a series of alternating rhythms and cadences, beyond doubt a central aspect of an oral tradition, but its positioning in the overall scheme of the text locks it into a more sharply defined commentary about the political importance of structure. Ngugi wishes to present a coherent and compact model of revolutionary challenge, a tightly organised web of simple, but forcefully articulated images, and he consciously does so by positioning the most important ideas of the novel at the very centre of his text itself. Operating as the fulcrum of the novel, then, this section has particularly well defined energising abilities, both in terms of the individual units of which it is comprised, as well as in terms of its simple location. It addresses a series of metaphysically troubling issues, such as truth, justice and hope, but it translates those issues into the potentially unifying image of rural simplicity. For Ngugi, the farmer's determination to succeed, the emphasis on integrity, self and collective well-being, as well as the symbolic force of the life-giving seed, suggests a centrally important image of political regeneration and hope.

II

In a short story entitled 'The Fig Tree', first written and published by Ngugi in 1960, but not anthologised until 1964, a story of tribal and familial unification is told with reference to what the narrator calls 'the sacred Fig Tree' (Ngugi 1964:182). The story tells of how a young woman, unable to have children, decides to leave her family but, on the night of her departure and only a short distance from her village, is caught up in a violent storm. Forced to seek shelter within the 'sanctuary and peace' of the Fig Tree the woman discovers herself to be pregnant, realises more fully her 'responsibilities' to her husband, and returns to help 'unite and support the tribe, giving it new life' (Ngugi 1964:182f)[7]. Although the significance of an early short story might not seem

[7] It should be pointed out that Ngugi's representation of women has received less than

immediately apparent to the Ngugi canon, this particular tale, or at any rate the symbolic importance of the fig tree, has a direct bearing on *Matigari*. In terms of its relation to the short story, the fig tree has the power to give and sustain life, as well as act as a place of spiritual, almost religious importance. When Mukami, the young woman, has her attention drawn to the tree, her intention is rather simply and quickly to reach it:

> It was a matter of life and death—a battle for life. There under the sacred Fig Tree, she would find sanctuary and peace. There, Mukami, would meet her God, Murungu, the God of her tribe (Ngugi 1964:182).

By way of contrast, Ngugi's incorporation of the fig tree within the opening pages of *Matigari*, is far more politically developed. Here is how Matigari comes upon the fig tree:

> He walked along the banks of the river. Then suddenly he saw what he was looking for: a huge mugumo, a fig tree, right in the middle of a cluster of other trees. It was remarkable for its very wide trunk, and its four roots were visible, with one jutting out from the middle, and three others sticking out at the sides. He smiled to himself as he stood his AK47 against the tree and drew his sword from where it was hidden beneath his coat. He began digging the ground next to the central root. He covered the bottom of the hole with dry leaves (Ngugi 1987:3f).

While emphasis is being laid on the actualities of resistance, which ties the text to recent historical experience, the tree's broader associations affiliate the text with a different belief system entirely. For example, Jomo Kenyatta, in his *Facing Mount Kenya*, tells how Gikuyu tribal legend attributes particular significance to fig trees, and of how they appear in the earliest stories of bountiful nature being handed over to the Gikuyu by 'Mogai (the Divider of the Universe)' (Kenyatta 1962:5). Kenyatta also states that sacred trees were central to initiation ceremonies, and goes on to suggest that the

> mokoyo [fig] tree has a special significance for the Gikuyu people. It might even be suggested that the name of the people is derived from that of the tree, e.g. mokoyo, the tree; mogekoyo, a Gikuyu person (Kenyatta 1962:248).

In the case of Matigari, however, the fig tree takes on additional importance,

favourable critical attention. Elleke Boehmer (1991:188), for example, has written of how his ambivalent 'attitude towards women forms a significant part of a wider contradiction undercutting his populist nationalist programme for a new Kenya'. Boehmer (1991:192) 'acknowledge[s] that Ngugi's women characters remain pioneers in the field of Anglophone African fiction written by men', but she also documents his frequent difficulties in moving beyond stereotypical, sometimes simply offensive, representations since the publication of *A Grain of Wheat* in 1967.

especially where the narrator uses the tree to suggest not so much sexual fertility, as revolutionary fertility (the gun as 'traditional' phallus?), and where he invites the reader to regard Matigari's activity not so much as concealment or military caution, as impregnation (the gun/phallus bringing forth revolutionary fruit). What I wish to suggest about Ngugi's use of the fig tree, then, is that it finds itself not only the subject of constant discussion, as in *The River Between*, where it appears as 'a huge thick tree, thick and mysterious', a 'holy and awesome' sight, but as something which he frequently updates and employs as an accessible cultural referent (Ngugi 1965:19). In other words, the symbol locks Ngugi's two texts together and shows a developed political awareness, but it also functions at the level of immediate oral tradition, and as a means of providing the basis for what Edward Sackey (1991:390) calls the 'africanization of the novel form'. Basically, *Matigari* is a novel about one man's arrival and subsequent movements through the landscape of modern Kenya, his search for a home, and the radicalising influence he has on those with whom he has some degree of contact. However, in other respects it is about finding an appropriate medium to fully express those ideas, one that can successfully utilise traditional forms to a political end.

Barbara Harlow (1987:169), in *Resistance Literature*, discusses Zakariya Tamer's *Locusts in the City* in terms of its 'disorientated traveller', someone who finds the usual procedures of recognition and movement significantly altered, someone who finds himself 'a stranger in his own land. Topographical and architectural detail may be familiar, suggests Harlow, but the character's sense of unease, all the more apparent because of the patent familiarity of the surroundings, is fully established. In Elleke Boehmer's *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* (1995), a similar claim to Harlow's is made:

> From what we have observed, it becomes apparent that the many acts of remembering which characterize post-independence writing partake in an over-arching metanarrative of journeying and return ....

And later:

> A writer may also choose to focus on specific episodes in the greater narrative of journeying: the idyllic childhood and the dawn of self-consciousness; or the time following, of severance and departure, and the loss of roots, home, or motherland (Boehmer 1995:199-200).

I cite Boehmer's discussion of the 'postcolonial journeying tale', which includes Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock*, Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* and Wole Soyinka's *The Road*, as well as the image of Harlow's 'disorientated traveller', because they provide precisely the sort of context best suited for understanding *Matigari*. In Ngugi's text a character's arrival is marked, not just by a form of self-transformation in which the accumulated hardware of timeless resistance (swords and guns) is put to one side, but by his crossing over from one side of the country to the other. However, the effect of crossing the river, a baptismal and purificatory gesture

reminiscent of the initiation ceremonies for young men, tends to confirm the land of his birth as a territorially appropriated enclave. Like the frontiers that separate one nation state from another, Ngugi suggests that divisions not only exist, but exist to maintain control and to exclude a resisting, revolutionary politics from entry. As with the characters cited by Boehmer and Harlow, Ngugi's *Matigari* is both peripatetic, and confused, a native and an exile.

From the outset, then, the importance of oral structures, such as story-telling, songs, traditional metaphors and myths, is clear. Indeed, Matigari himself is drawn directly from myth, and from the sort of testimony that is the preserve of traditional society. In its original form the myth is 'about a man looking for a cure for an illness', and about his quest for relief from discomfort and pain. But in the newly updated version provided by Ngugi it is about a man's political suffering, and about his search for integrity and truth in contemporary Kenya. Based on a traditional text, but updated for a more contemporary purpose, Ngugi manages to draw the reader toward an established folkloric element, while at the same time giving it a more current usage. Moreover, Ngugi (1986:78) supplements these story-telling and mythological traditions by employing particularly communal gestures, galvanising records from what he has called 'a known tradition'. Indeed, the narrator's use of song is particularly important, given its emphasis within Gikuyu culture itself. For example, in the text's opening scene, as Matigari bends down to the river 'to wash his face and hands', he is reminded

> of the other waters in the past which had been just as cold. He remembered how, then, they had sung throughout the night in the open air (Ngugi 1987:4).

At several other points in the text references are also made to songs, with the stress usually on belonging and loyalty and plans for the future:

> We shall all gather, go home together, light the fire together and build our home together. Those who eat alone, die alone. Could I have forgotten so soon the song we used to sing? (Ngugi 1987:6)

And, of course, in the final episode of the text, with the emphasis on regeneration and the continuity of resistance, songs are also included:

> He recalled the night of the worker's strike. And suddenly he seemed to hear the worker's voices, the voices of the peasants, the voices of the students and of other patriots of all the different nationalities of the land, singing in harmony (Ngugi 1987:175).

In each case then the incorporation of song can be said to evoke mood and a participatory element from the audience, something that Ngugi has written of directly in several texts. For example, in his writing on African theatre he has spoken at length about the use and benefits to be gained from the incorporation of song:

> Song and dance as we have seen are central to nearly all the rituals celebrating rain, birth, the second birth, circumcision, marriage, funerals or to all ordinary ceremonies. Even daily speech among peasants is interspersed with song. It can be a line or two, a verse, or a whole song. What's important is that song and dance are not just decorations; they are an integral part of that conversation, that drinking session, that ritual, that ceremony (Ngugi 1986:45).

While the thrust of Ngugi's essay concerns song as a formally intrinsic aspect of African theatre, the sense of song having a central, almost pedagogical part to play in life and literature generally is well made. By punctuating his text in the manner that he does, in other words, he provides his narrative with additional interest, but also with a set of folkloric cadences that provide cultural depth. Moreover, song may also be regarded as a challenge to more western novelistic conventions, since it incorporates 'a living mythical framework' that endows the text with something distinctly separate and special (see Kirpal 1988:151).

Perhaps one of the most important uses of song, however, lies not just in its affiliation to an oral tradition but in its direct relationship to 'Mau Mau'. In Kenyatta's anthropological study of Gikuyu custom and folklore, songs are described as having very specific functions, such as the use of cultivation songs, praise and warrior songs, as well as the extensive range of initiation songs that mark the transition from childhood to adulthood:

> In every stage of life there are various competitions arranged for the members of the several age-groups, to test their ability to recall and relate in song and dance the stories and events which have been told to them, and at such functions parents and the general public form an audience to judge and correct the competitors (Kenyatta 1962:xvi).

However, Roger Edgerton also suggests that songs were a specifically central part of 'Mau Mau' resistance and culture, and he cites the 'Mau Mau' passion for singing before, during, and after their many compulsory meetings as a common occurrence. Referring to 'Mau Mau's' practice of especial commitment to what he calls 'song fests', Edgerton (1990:117) concludes

> there is nothing peculiar about the men of a revolutionary army singing songs about the reasons for their rebellion, although the amount of time they spent time doing so was certainly remarkable.

Given Edgerton and Kenyatta's dual emphasis within Gikuyu culture to the use of song, one can begin to understand better, I think, why Ngugi decided to include them in *Matigari*. They provide rhythm and texture, of course. But they also establish a relationship to 'Mau Mau' and to direct historical experience. In this way the narrator is able to demonstrate both an affiliation to cultural practices unbound by the dictates of historical provenance, as well as a commitment to the specificities of Kenyan,

specifically Gikuyu, resistance that is barely thirty years old.

III

In a recent essay by Helen Gilbert (1994:98f) on the subject of aboriginal drama and, in particular, its use of a 'linguistic innovation and structural repetition' that 'evoke[s] notions of performed speech or story-telling', it is suggested that the oral text should be seen 'as a mode of decolonization' and appreciated for its 'attempts to avoid hierarchies of value that privilege the literate'. While Gilbert's comments are more directly relevant to the 'native' cultures of Australasia, they are of considerable importance for our reading of *Matigari* also. As stated at the beginning of this essay, Ngugi employs traditional methods and ideas with which to produce a revolutionary novel capable of reaching as broad an audience as possible. As a starting point he uses an oral tale which he then embellishes and reworks, thereby allowing himself to simultaneously traditionalise and modernise his text. In addition, he employs certain motifs, and uses certain language techniques, to accompany what is a late twentieth century western narrative form concerned with the problematics of neocolonialism. Developing a rapport with an audience through the use of traditional symbols, then, is one of the primary concerns of *Matigari*. Fundamental to the writing of a text obliged to a living oral tradition, however, is how ideas and political motivation can be best communicated. In other words, it is all very well being aware of what *Matigari* is intended to signify, but as so much of the text involves his interaction and constantly updated transformations the question of how his story is to be told becomes increasingly important. In an essay on the development of contemporary postcolonial writing in India Meenakshi Mukherjee (1989:46) suggests that

> Ngugi tries to capture the quality [of oral culture] not only in the texture of the narrative but also in the structure of the novel, which gradually unfolds in a freewheeling manner. Anecdotes are linked with episodes either in a chain with contemporary situations, others as part of the realistic fabric of the narrative—all done in very broad strokes and not in the subtle and muted techniques of his earlier work.

Mukherjee goes on to suggest that since the earlier *Devil on the Cross* 'was read out in homes, in buses, in offices during lunch breaks and in public bars, and was reintegrated back into the oral tradition' its success as a fully hybridised medium, at once oral and literate, capable of mass appeal while operating within the parameters of sustained imaginative writing, was well established.

Interestingly, because the English translation of *Matigari* follows on from the original Gikuyu version we are able to see how *Matigari* fared in terms of its public reception, and able to establish its political impact also. First published in October 1986, *Matigari* became such a source of worry to the authorities, suggests Ngugi in the note to the English edition, that

> by January 1987, intelligence reports had it that peasants in Central Kenya were whispering and talking about a man called Matigari who was roaming the whole country making demands about truth and justice.

Although the reports soon made clear that the figure was more fictional than real, the confiscation of all copies of the novel still took place the following month. Because the novel was deemed to be subversive, and because its central character had apparently the power to infiltrate even the enclosed and impoverished areas of the Kenyan countryside, it had to be repressed. Of course, however hard the government might try to eradicate or make negligible the story of Matigari, its efforts to eliminate the text from popular consciousness entirely must be regarded as a failure; a failure because its existence as a written text had already been bypassed, and because its new life as an oral document had been absorbed within those communities most likely to benefit from its message within a relatively short period. In Ngugi's scheme of things, the power to move beyond the confines of the literate, to free up and publicise an account of revolutionary challenge without having to rely on the transfer of the printed word is not only the best answer to chronic and widespread illiteracy, but to the repressive measures of state supervision and censorship.

Ngugi strives for a text that, because of its immediate accessibility as a Gikuyu published novel, achieves greater political renown than if it were to be only published in English. In addition, the popular and easy appropriation of the text, the sense that its characters and their various difficulties can be widely discussed, suggests a text that has taken on a distinct life, one that has drawn from, and is now drawn back into, oral tradition. For instance, in the opening pages of *Matigari* one is introduced to a scene in which a sense of locale and history is established, and in which a central character, developed through the use of highly rhetorical language and motifs, is clearly presented. Emphasis is kept on the physicality of the man through a set of detailed and visualised descriptions, while the physical landscape is either subordinated or well muted. In keeping with the almost reverential quality of the scene, and as an effective method of drawing attention to the details of transformation and arrival, an effective silence is consistently maintained. The third person narration, in the ideal story-telling position, simply documents the scene, taking care to emphasise the importance of water, initiation procedures, and the quest for a sense of belonging.

But how does Ngugi invite his audience to empathise with this, and in what way can the story be told so as to allow for further, public retellings? Perhaps one of the most engaging methods of directly involving an audience is to ask questions; not direct questions, but rhetorical ones, such as can be found at the end of the first and second sections of the text. For example at the end of section one the narrator suggests that 'from that night, Matigari's fame spread over all the country. He became a legend. He became a dream. Still the question remained: Who was Matigari ma Njiruungu?' (Ngugi 1987:66). At the close of the second section we are told of how

> the songs spread like wildfire in a dry season. They spread through the villages. The people sang them day and night .... They would sing the song of Matigari ma Njiruungi .... But who was Matigari ma Njiruungu? (Ngugi

> 1987:127)

These questions may well have the effect of simply retaining interest, or of tying the various strands of the story together in ways that I have already discussed, but they also invite a form of interrogative and participatory involvement where the audience is concerned. And something of this technique is established in the opening scenes also, techniques that challenge and provoke the audience, thereby drawing them directly into the text. In other words, even where Ngugi presents one voice or one set of psychological considerations within the text, he still invites others to contribute[8]. At other times he simply establishes a democratic, non-hierarchical structure by providing multiple, frequently competing, voices; for example in the way that he uses radio sequences not only to heighten tension but to provide additional commentary from alternative perspectives. By splitting his narrative up, by creating a sense of what Derek Wright (1992:86), in a discussion of Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons* has called 'traditional communal intimacy', Ngugi builds oral structures directly into the text. Of course this was a strategy he had attempted with *Petals* also, with various characters taking it in turn to discuss their experiences, each experience seen as a uniquely articulated moment that would eventually collect around a central idea. But the process within *Matigari*, I think, is a much more developed and structurally intrinsic aspect of the text.

Direct appeals to story-telling and to its hypnotic, in some cases transhistoricising power, run throughout the novel:

> The man's eyes shone brightly. His melodious voice and his story had been so captivating that Muriuki and Ngaruro wa Kiriro did not realise that they had reached the restaurant. His story had so transported them to other times long ago when the clashing of the warrior's bows and spears shook trees and mountains to their roots (Ngugi 1987:22f).

In this particular instance story-telling would seem to be capable of reaching into the past, suggesting a continuity of resistance, in addition to providing a vehicle for statements of solidarity and communal feeling. In addition, Ngugi's deliberate referencing to an active and tribally unified opposition might be seen as a means of showing how politically repressed individuals can be successfully motivated by the use of story-telling techniques. At a more practical level, however, the activity of story-telling prepares the ground for the text's direct (re)introduction into oral culture. The easy identification made between the text and oral tradition helps define the novel as directly amenable to a story-telling environment and gives it a more performative

[8] 'In order for the [Kenyan] students to fully appreciate the genre, we encouraged them to fully participate in any performances that they came across. This helped them to understand how the audience can shape the narrative, and how time can help an artist to make an otherwise short narrative into a long complex one' (Adagala & Kabira 1985:89).

sense, one that renders it less fixed and less dependent on print media. In striving for a more committed oral contribution, then, writers such as Ngugi are not only stating their belief in the value of traditional forms and methodologies, but publicising their explicit opposition to the formal criteria established by western novelistic convention. In other ways, however, they are addressing the immediacies of post-independent African society, and find that by forging 'a connection with indigenous poetic traditions of folk tales, conversation and meaningful recounting of personal moments of experience' a truer and more relevant form is established (quoted in Ashcroft *et al* 1989:128).

For instance, at the beginning of the second section of *Matigari* Ngugi incorporates story-telling as a distinct and politically motivating tactic. Up until this point we have witnessed Matigari's arrival, his search for a home, his increasing disapproval of contemporary Kenyan life, and his subsequent imprisonment. Representing the undying spirit of revolutionary nationalism, Matigari clearly presents a newly resurrected force capable of personal and social transformation in a country of increasing corruption. But by the time we get to the opening scenes of the middle section, however, Matigari has become a much fuller figure; his fame has spread and, more importantly, is seen to have been spread by word of mouth: 'Tell us. Tell us about the man .... Tell us about Matigari' the young boys ask:

> The story of how Matigari had saved Guthera from the police dog had already reached them. They had heard how the police had already shaken with fear in front of Matigari (Ngugi 1987:69).

In an example such as this Ngugi directly addresses the issue of postcolonial history, seeking to reclaim what he has called, in a different place, the 'collective memory [of] ... a people' (Eyoh 1986:163). Moreover, by providing his audience with direct and uncomplicated approval of an oral tradition, he shows how the story of Matigari can be successfully transposed from locale to locale and—possibly the ultimate test for the text—from the imaginative to the real. Story-telling, in other words, is seen as both a shaper of action, as well as a part of it. It can be a provider of pooled, communal information, giving support and providing a forum for potentially radicalising ideas, but it can also create opportunity and its own momentum. It can be a reference point for indigenous culture, but its importance for this text lies in the way in which events are given additional emphasis with each subsequent retelling: 'Just wait till you hear the whole story!' (Ngugi 1987:71).

IV

If *Matigari* is marked by a proliferation of voices and multiple perspectives, it is important to remember that while the text's plurality might take it into the realm of experimentation, it is most satisfactorily read within the context of postcolonial writing. In a recent essay arguing for a distinction to be maintained between postcolonial and postmodern writing, Helen Tiffin (1991:vii) acknowledged the 'formal and tropological overlap' that exists between both forms, but suggested that

since the postcolonial text 'is conceived of as a set of discursive practices, prominent among which is resistance to colonialism', its essential independence from the postmodern must be established. Tiffin's argument should be seen not only as one which has witnessed the writings of figures such as Ngugi becoming increasingly appropriated for postmodernism, but one who regards these loosely structured forms as requiring more, rather than less, critical sophistication. Ngugi might employ song and oral testimony, and generally work with formally experimental techniques found within the Euro-American tradition, but his writing is of a consistently political nature. Moreover, to make little distinction between the two types of writing, or to allow the commonality of expression discovered at the level of form to suggest a more general, specifically ideological, similarity, is to advance some very dubious arguments indeed. To establish the similarities between postmodern and postcolonial writing as our principal and determining critical concern, I would argue, is to repress the historical and political specificities of imperial intervention.

We might be able to see how these arguments are better understood if we take the development of Matigari himself as an illustration of some of these issues. I have already spoken of Matigari's arrival, and of the way in which the opening scene is structured around him, but perhaps a more direct way of assessing the fundamental differences between postmodern and postcolonial writing would be to look at the supernatural and fantastic manner of his depiction. To begin with, our introduction to *Matigari* is one of physical-force nationalism, and of historical coherence. Ngugi has spoken himself of the filmic quality of the text, or at any rate of his sense of having 'visualiz[ed] the whole movement of [the] characters as if ... standing behind a camera'; so the very stylised, and historically verifiable sense of the character, is clearly and directly intended (Eyoh 1986:166). But a sense of supernatural agency, something that stretches the realistic frame of the scene out somewhat, follows on from this quite quickly, and suggests a different type of character entirely. For example, when Matigari is attacked by the young boys who live among the wreckage of an increasingly alienated and materialist culture, Matigari 'seemed to be protected by a powerful charm, because not a single stone touched him' (Ngugi 1987:17). A little later he is described as appearing as though 'he could see far into the future' (Ngugi 1987:19), and as moving easily between youthful and aged states. Gestures of self-transformation such as these might be compatible enough with an oral tradition more used to the surprise and challenge of fantasy, what Okpewho (1988:3) might call 'mystical rapture', but what relationship might they enjoy with the postmodern and, more importantly, what sort of reading and critical strategies do they require?

Ordinarily, our first inclination would be to establish links between Ngugi's use of supernaturalism or fantasy, and the manner in which it might be said to be employed by other writers, perhaps from other cultures. For example, T. Apter (1982:76), in *Fantasy Literature*, suggests that

> the transformation theme is utilised in modern fantasy to indicate, as does the double theme, doubts about our own identity, about that of others, and about the way in which our relations with others affect our identity. The modern use

> is linked to its mythic counterpart in which metamorphosis provides special powers of disguise and, frequently, of mobility.

However helpful such comparisons are Ngugi's use of fantasy still requires that the text, because of its political commitment and its broader intentions, be read differently. Obviously Apter's comments about conflicting or doubtful identities, the power of disguise, and the mobility allowed to characters of transformational properties make for instructive enough criticism. However, the motivation for the use of fantasy in Ngugi's case has to be seen as stemming from a desire for social instruction, and from a wish to make compatible traditional and modern forms.

What I wish to suggest about the development of fantasy in *Matigari,* then, is that while the text has all the appearance of comparable forms within the Euro-American tradition, its motivation and ultimate objectives are substantially different. Something of the interest in developing a character of supernatural qualities may be found in Ngugi's earlier *The River Between*, for example when Chege, an elder in the tribe, is said to have 'the gift of magic' and, more importantly, said 'to gain in stature and appearance so that Waiyaki [the protagonist] thought him transfigured' (1965:8). Like Matigari, Chege's reason for having been bestowed with these powers is not so he can act as a focus for the development of experimental techniques, but because he represents the apotheosis of Gikuyu wisdom and generosity, and because such attributes are best illustrated with reference to a non-realistic idiom. By the time of writing *Matigari,* of course, figures of supernatural and timeless significance have come to carry much greater and bolder responsibilities for Ngugi, but the fantastic qualities that a character represents are still intended for purposes other than mere literary affectation.

What the development of issues such as those of supernatural agency consistently reveal, it seems to me, are motivations that have a basis in lived, historical and political experience. Postmodern writing may well be the product of, or a response to, a crisis in western philosophy. And it may well articulate that crisis by celebrating non-linear forms and by leaving its narratives essentially open-ended but the crisis, if it can be called that, within the postcolonial text is rather different. In other words, the superhuman Matigari whose various metamorphoses suggest comparison with other forms of literary representation is there for the purpose of political instruction. The novel may well work within several representational domains, but its commitment to a specifically political and ideological ideal is undiminished.

Patricia Waugh (1993:49) describes postmodern art as mediating

> a sense of multiplicity, fragmentation, instability of meaning, dissensus, the breakdown of grand theories as either narratives of emancipation or speculation.

Waugh goes on to question the legitimacy of those for whom postmodernism is a non-committed and politically unaware practice, and she presents the example of Linda Hutcheon whose 'earlier non-political interest in modern uses of self-reflexive forms'

has transpired into 'a defence of postmodernism as a mode of intertextual, 'self-reflexive discourse', always inextricably bound to social discourse' as an interesting, perhaps acceptable, development. In addition, she cites the ideas of other critics who see postmodernism as problematising 'dominant values by contesting their codes of representation from within' and who, therefore, re-present and re-politicise the postmodern. Yet a difference still seems to exist between the writings (as opposed to theoretical speculations) of many postmodern writers, and figures such as Ngugi. For instance, Waugh (1993:51f) speaks of postmodernism as being 'a condition where the possibility of human agency has disappeared' and of how, in a brief discussion of Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, postmodernism thrives on the creation of 'provisional identities'. However, as principal elements of a mode of writing committed to political issues, comments such as these would find little acceptance in *Matigari.* Problematising identity, of course, is acceptable if it leads, as with *Matigari*, to an accumulation of transhistorical referents capable, in turn, of the reactivation of emancipatory politics. But it is not acceptable if it leads, as in *Petals*, to characters losing a sense of themselves and of their will to live. *Matigari*, it must be emphasised—and here is how the supernatural elements of the text may be said to differ substantially from the sort of gloss they might find in a postmodernist reading of the text—is rendered plural and fragmented, is seen as a figure of multiple and complex composition, because that is the best method of securing a sense of optimism and radical commitment from a reader. Difficulties may be discerned, of course, and so long as Ngugi continues to move between literate and oral traditions, linking fantasy and song to the more practical considerations of a revolutionary form, he will continue to be seen as appropriable to the postmodernist canon. But the emphasis on making those combinations and movements distinctly proactive, making them appear as a gesture of commitment and political integrity, will persist:

> 'Our people, let us share this bean, and this drop of wine'. Something in Matigari's voice made them listen to him attentively. There was a sad note about it, but it also carried hope and courage. The others now fell silent. His words seemed to remind them of things long forgotten, carrying them back to dreams they had long before. 'How are we going to see in this darkness?' (Ngugi 1986:56).

Department of English
St. Mary's College, Belfast

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The Use of Vernacular Languages in the Malawian Literary Industry

Gregory H. Kamwendo

> The threat to 'smaller' African languages can come from 'larger' African languages as well as from European languages, and is liable to do so if a government, anxious to promote one or more of its widely spoken languages, is tempted to discourage the study and writing of other languages of the country. A more positive approach is for the success of 'larger' African languages to be presented as an encouragement for the written development of other languages in a country (Dalby 1985:31).

Malawi's political history took a new turn in 1994 when the first post-independence multiparty elections were held marking the end of a one party dictatorship and the birth of multiparty politics. The thirty years of the one party state in Malawi (1964-1994) led to a number of negative developments such as peoples' loss of various freedoms and rights (e.g. freedom of expression). Very tough censorship laws crippled the country's literary industry and the language policy played a significant role in retarding the growth of literature in Malawi. English and Chichewa operated as the only officially recognised 'languages of the pen' in Malawi. I will examine the consequences of this post-colonial language policy for the Malawian literary industry, and suggest possible ways forward. Now that Malawi is economically and politically liberalised, efforts should be taken to promote creative writing in the once marginalised languages.

literary beginnings and post independence policy

The history of writing in Malawian languages starts with the nineteenth century arrival of Christian missionaries who realised that in order to achieve success in the evangelisation task they had to use indigenous languages. The missionaries set up bush schools in which African converts were taught the 3Rs with the aim of developing a group of Africans who could read religious literature and then preach to fellow Africans. Malawi's first printing house, Hetherwick Press, was set up at Blantyre Mission by Scottish missionaries in 1884. The missionaries became the first developers of the vernacular languages, codifying the vernaculars and producing orthographies, grammars and dictionaries. Some of the fruits of missionaries' work included translations into indigenous languages of the Bible, catechisms, hymn books, secular literature, and literary works in indigenous languages produced by the missionaries

themselves. Other works of secular literature were created by the educated Africans with the encouragement and support of missionaries. This marked the birth of the literary industry in Malawi (see Mwiyeriwa 1978a).

The language policy which the country pursued after independence crippled the production of literary works in indigenous languages. In 1968, Chichewa was made the only indigenous language with official status. Thus Chichewa, and English, became the two languages of the mass media. Chichewa also became the medium of instruction at primary level from standards 1-4 and the only indigenous language taught as a subject from the primary school to the tertiary level of the education system. English maintained its preindependence position as the language of government business, the judiciary, parliament, commerce, mass media, and the medium of instruction from senior primary school up to the tertiary level.

People of diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds were urged by political leaders to ignore their ethnic differences, and Chichewa came to be seen as a symbol of national unity and identity (Timpunza-Mvula 1992). People of various ethnic groups were called upon to identify themselves with one nation (Malawi), one leader (Life President Dr. Hastings Banda), one party (the Malawi Congress Party) and one language (Chichewa) (see Chirwa 1994). This political climate led to the development and promotion of Chichewa at the expense of other prominent indigenous languages such as Chitumbuka, Chilomwe, Chiyao etc. The idea of having Chichewa as a national language in the current author's view, was not bad in itself. However, what is lamentable is the fact that Chichewa's development was not accompanied by development of other indigenous languages. For example, the government set up the Chichewa Board whose functions included

> advising on the use of the Chichewa language throughout Malawi and promoting as well as giving guidance with regard to work on the Chichewa language in Malawi and neighbouring countries (*This is Malawi* 1972:6).

Yet other Malawian languages were not given such opportunities. The then Life President Banda took an active role in promoting 'good Chichewa' and gave public lectures on the subject. He often charged that missionaries and local nonnative speakers of Chichewa (e.g. Yaos, Lomwes etc.) had spoilt the Chichewa language. It was not surprising, then, that in 1975, the University of Malawi elected him to an honorary Chair of Chichewa in recognition of his services to the national language (*This is Malawi* 1975:17).

No other indigenous language received support from the government and the president. The prominent position acquired by Chichewa meant that other indigenous languages were reduced to languages of the home. To this end, Mwiyeriwa's (1978b: xiv) claim that 'the emergence of Chichewa as a lingua franca has not meant the liquidation of other languages' is far from telling the truth. Alex Chima argues that in the thirty years of Malawi's one party dictatorship, Chitumbuka together with so many other Malawian languages were severely marginalised by the government's policy of granting official recognition to only one indigenous language. He adds:

> while I agree that such a policy may have economic and other attractions, its rigid enforcement has struck me, with many other Malawians, as sad, being dangerously monoculturalist and ethnocidal. This could have become a tragic case of induced cultural extinction and the elimination of people's right to function in their own language and culture (Chima in Turner 1996:iii).

literary drought in indigenous languages

Lack of government interest in the promotion and development of indigenous languages other than Chichewa means that when you go into a bookshop or library in Malawi, you discover that the first thirty years of independence (1964-1994) have been a disaster as far as literature in indigenous languages is concerned. Kamthunzi, one of Malawi's prominent writers turned to writing in Chichewa after discovering that not much had been produced in this language. He claims that it makes sense for him to write books in Chichewa since his target audience comprises the ordinary man and woman in the village who are often literate in Chichewa and cannot understand a text in English. His dream is:

> If these books would ever taste the blessing of being translated into other languages, I would opt for other Malawian languages like Chitumbuka Chiyao or Chilomwe before any foreign languages (Kamthunzi 1994:47).

According to a survey conducted by Writers and Artists Services International (*WASI*), the period 1900-1988 witnessed the publication of 142 literary works mainly 'in three languages: English is the most frequent; followed by Chichewa the national language and Tumbuka' (Turner 1990 27). Much of the literary production in Chitumbuka was done in the period before Malawi's independence. The Livingstonia Mission of the Church of Scotland in the Northern Region of Malawi contributed significantly to the development of Chitumbuka as well as encouraging the growth of secular literature in the language. As for other languages such as Chiyao, Chisena and Chilomwe, literary works remain non-existent; one, therefore, cannot talk of a novel in Chiyao, a short story anthology in Chilomwe, or a collection of poetry in Chisena in Malawi.

This situation has given rise to a situation under which there is now in the Chichewa language

> an unequalled growing body of literature which includes essays, poems, plays, newsletters, books and fully fledged novels. This volume of literature is increasing at such a geometrical progression that one would assume that Chichewa is the only authentic literature of national importance. Unfortunately, there is no corresponding literature in any other languages (Timpunza-Mvula *et al* 1995:4).

When we turn to the oral literature side, the situation is still the same: Chichewa has the highest list of recordings of oral traditions such as folktales, epics, proverbs, fables, riddles, etc. In the preindependence era, due to the cultural and linguistic liberalisation

policy of the time, researchers had the freedom to collect and record oral traditions from any ethnic/linguistic group of their choice. However, under the one party state, academic freedom (which includes freedom to carry out research) was tightly controlled, and research on oral traditions mainly centred on the Chichewa language.

democracy and linguistic liberalisation

In 1994, Malawi changed from a one party state to a multiparty state, with a new constitution which includes a Bill of Rights. In addition to the right to freedom of expression the new constitution recognises that:

> Every person shall have the right to use the language and to participate in the cultural life of his or her choice (Section 25, chapter IV: *Malawi Constitution*).

People are now free to operate in the language of their choice. Linguistic liberalisation has also translated into the introduction of Chiyao, Chisena, Chitumbuka and Chilomwe languages on the national radio. Furthermore, the same languages have been proposed as media of instruction in the first four years of primary education in Malawi which should provide one of the motivations for producing literary works in as many languages as possible.

Despite this linguistic liberalisation, the Malawian writer and publisher remain glued to the two 'traditional' languages i.e. English and Chichewa. Whilst the new government does not confine writers and publishers to English and Chichewa, there are a number of obstacles that writers and publishers face. Unless the following obstacles are removed, Malawi cannot adequately enjoy the fruits of its linguistic liberalisation.

technical problems

Only Chichewa has had its grammar and orthographic principles developed and reviewed by a languagedeveloping body, the Chichewa Board. However, the work is far from being satisfactory. For instance, at the time the Chichewa Board was being dissolved in 1995, the much awaited Chichewa dictionary had not been finished. So even Chichewa poses problems to those who want to use it in writing. Malawian poet and critic, Anthony Nazombe, is quoted as saying that he opted for English as the language of his literary output because Chichewa's

> rules, spellings and so on, keep on changing, so you cannot be sure whether you are writing correct Chichewa. This has inhibited me, and I have refrained from writing in Chichewa. I feel more comfortable in English (in Lindfors 1989:34).

Nigerian writer, Cyprian Ekwensi (1988:96) has a similar problem:

> For years and years, there has been a standing controversy about which

> Igbo is the right one to speak and write. Dialects and orthographies vary fom district to district and clan to clan.

There is urgent need to develop standard orthographies and grammars of other major languages of Malawi. This will alleviate writers' problems when using these languages. It is pleasing to note that in April 1996 the University of Malawi established a Centre for Language Studies (replacing the Chichewa Board) whose mandate is to develop and promote Malawian languages. Among the initial projects of the new Centre is the review of the existing orthographies for Chiyao and Chitumbuka.

prestige and economic considerations

There are some writers who feel that it is prestigious to write in an international language such as English. Writing in an international language affords them the opportunity to be known across their country's borders. While this is true, we should bear in mind that it is the quality of the literary work that makes a writer popular or unknown beyond his/her homeland. Njabulo Ndebele has argued that

> Tolstoy did not write in English. Nor did Ibsen, nor Thomas Mofolo. Yet their works are known the world over (in Lindfors 1989:50).

It is often argued that it is economically more rewarding to write in an international language than in an indigenous language because an international language guarantees a wider readership, and hence more to be pocketed from royalties. What is needed in Malawi is that writers should lobby for reasonable royalties from publishers. The current rates of royalties are just too low to motivate the writer's interest. Special incentives should be set aside by government and publishers for writers who opt for indigenous languages. One way of boosting creative writing in these neglected languages is to organize writing competitions which carry with them reasonable and attractive prizes. On a recent trip to South Africa, the author of this article came across a call for entries in the 1996/97 Kagiso/First National Bank Novella writing competition. Top winners were assured of having their works published. In Malawi, unfortunately, writing competitions do not offer much in terms of money. What the author found particularly striking about the Kagiso/First National Bank competition was that the competition was open to all the eleven official languages of South Africa. The case in Malawi is that often writing competitions are restricted to English and Chichewa. Organisers of writing competitions in Malawi should open up to the following semiofficial languages: Chitumbuka, Chiyao, Chilomwe and Chisena.

publisher's lack of interest in indigenous languages

Chichewa is the only indigenous language that has been of interest to publishers and sponsors of writing competitions For example, both Popular Publications and Dzuka Publishing have a Chichewa series. The Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Radio One has some programmes devoted to literary items eg. 'Writers' Corner' is a

programme in which literary works in English are critiqued; 'Nzeru Nkupangwa', a programme on Malawian culture airs some poetry and short stories in Chichewa; 'Mlakatuli' is a programme on MBC devoted to Chichewa poetry. 'Theatre of the air' covers radio drama in English. There is need to have similar radio programmes featuring creative writing in the other major languages of Malawi.

Some interest in publishing both literary and nonliterary works in indigenous languages has started to be noticed. On the nonliterary scene, Manchichi Publishing House of Zomba launched a Basic Chiyao Reader, written in simple grammar and with simple structures, progressing from one syllable words to sentences of several phrases. The same publishing company has started translating already published literary works:

> In the absence of any original creative writing in Chiyao so far we have started with translations from published sources. These translations are of two kinds: original writing from Chichewa or English and written t'olkstories in either of the two languages (Manchichi Publishing Company Catalogue 1996:5).

negative attitudes towards indigenous languages

Clearly, negative attitudes towards indigenous languages are detrimental to the growth of literature in such languages. It is unfortunate that thirty years of independence have not freed some Malawians from linguistic imperialism or linguistic chauvinism. There is a tendency to degrade local languages, and go for foreign languages (especially the language of the former colonizers). Often we

> hear people brag that they only read the English articles in the bilingual newspapers, finding the vernacular portions rather unpalatable (Mwiyeriwa 1978b:xxiv).

When an indigenous language is on the verge of 'death', very few people express concern. However, when the position of English is about to be threatened, loud cries are heard. Recently, the Ministry of Education directed that as from the 1997 academic year, vernacular languages will be used as media of instruction in the early phases of the primary school (grades 1-4). You just have to read the papers and listen to the radio to have a feel of people's concerns that the policy will lead to a lowering of standards in English. Whether this is a genuine fear or not is not the crucial matter here, but what is important to note is that those who express such fears seem not to care about indigenous languages.

In conclusion I would like to join with those warning that national languages should not be developed 'at the dire expense of regional languages' (Ngugi 1986:72f). When will African languages be elevated? Why do Africans question efforts aimed at elevating the status of their indigenous languages?

Centre for Language Studies
University of Malawi

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Racial Governmentality: Thomas Jefferson and African Colonisation in the United States before 1816

David Kazanjian

> Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free. Nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government (Jefferson 1821).

> But to return to the colonizing trick. It will be well for me to notice here at once, that I do not mean indiscriminately to condemn all the members and advocates of this scheme, for I believe that there are some friends to the sons of Africa, who are laboring for our salvation, not in words only but in truth and in deed, who have been drawn into this plan—Some, more by persuasion than any thing else; while others, with humane feelings and lively zeal for our good, seeing how much we suffer from the afflictions poured upon us by unmerciful tyrants, are willing to enroll their names in any thing which they think has for its ultimate end our redemption from wretchedness and miseries; such men, with a heart truly overflowing with gratitude for their past services and zeal in our cause, I humbly beg to examine this plot minutely, and see if the end which they have in view will be completely consummated by such a course of procedure. Our friends who have been imperceptibly drawn into this plot I view with tenderness, and would not for the world injure their feelings, and I have only to hope for the future, that they will withdraw themselves from it;—for I declare to them, that the plot is not for the glory of God, but on the contrary the perpetuation of slavery in this country, which will ruin them and the country forever, unless something is immediately done (Walker 1829).

The Americas and Africa have long been connected by circuits of appropriation and exchange. In this paper I offer an interpretation of how one such a circuit—Thomas Jefferson's plan to deport African Americans from the United States and to resettle them in West Africa—constitutively articulates emerging forms of nationalism, racism, and liberal egalitarianism. I take up *Alternation*'s commitment to interdisciplinarity by reading Jefferson's writings with Michel Foucault's studies of governmentality and thus testing the boundaries between 'history' and 'theory'. In turn, I hope that this interpretation of Jefferson's colonisation proposals will resonate with current South African debates over discourses and practices of race, nation, and equality. I also hope that this essay's own appropriation of 'history' and 'theory' can become part of the

ongoing circuits of exchange—historical, theoretical, political, intellectual—between the U.S. and South Africa which also have a long history[1].

In 1829, a free African American tailor named David Walker published one of history's most uncompromising critiques of, and calls for resistance against, U.S. white nationalism. In particular, the fourth chapter or 'article' of *David Walker*'s *Appeal, in Four Articles, Together with a Preamble, to the Coloured Citizens of the World, but in Particular, and very Expressly, to Those of the United States of America* offers a sharp critique of one of the most extensively discussed and debated policy proposals of the colonial and ante-bellum periods—a proposal that, by the turn of the nineteenth century, would commonly be known as 'colonization'. Although particular colonisation proposals differed from one another in some of their details, they were invariably some version of the following: a state and/or privately funded plan to appropriate a territory in Africa or the Americas and to forcibly deport, and/or advocate the emigration of, either the entire African American population, or just the free African American population, to that territory[2]. The appropriated territory was, in turn, to become a formally free and independent nation-state. In addition, for many colonisationists this new and independent nation-state was to become an informal political, economic, and ideological colony of the U.S.

Walker took particular pains to address a peculiar aspect of the colonisation movement, an aspect about which contemporary scholars have been strikingly silent. He insisted on addressing the fact that some colonisationists understood colonisation as emancipatory. That is, they understood colonisation as a practical means of rendering or realising the often illusive, modern ideal of 'freedom'. In Article Four of his *Appeal*, Walker writes about such 'liberal' colonisationists in the unusually panegyric terms of the passage quoted in my epigraph. Even if we detect a hint of Walker's famous sarcastic or ironic hyperbole in this passage ('Our friends who have been imperceptibly drawn into this plot I view with tenderness, and would not for the world injure their feelings ...'), we still must take seriously his concern that the ideals of 'salvation', 'truth', 'humane feelings', 'good', 'redemption', and 'the glory of God' had been conjoined with 'the colonizing trick'. He alerts us to the problem that such 'friends to the sons of Africa' understand colonisation as a 'deed', 'plan' or 'procedure'—that is, a utilitarian rendering of such ideals, a material realisation or representation of the illusive notion of 'freedom'. By rhetorically distinguishing unabashed pro-slavery colonisationists such as Henry Clay—whom he condemns elsewhere in the *Appeal* in

[1] See for example Rosenthal (1968), Booth (1976), Frederickson (1981) and Marx (1998).

[2] Winthrop Jordan (1968:566) notes that 'warhawk expansionism' between 1806 and 1816 precipitated a passionate belief in the destiny of the white settler colonisation of at least the entire North American continent, and made Africa and the Caribbean the only realistic sites for colonisation. The Monroe Doctrine, and Jefferson's approving response to it in a letter to Monroe, 24 Oct. 1823 (Jefferson 1899.X:277), serve as markers of this shift, although Jefferson seems to have believed in such continental destiny as early as 1786, as his 'observations for the article Etats-Unis prepared for the Encyclopedie' (Jefferson 1899.IV:180) indicates.

quite different and no uncertain terms (Walker [1829]1995:45-55)—from these 'friends to the sons of Africa', Walker refuses to interpret colonisation as simply a cynical or duplicitous ploy, as merely an ideological surface beneath which would lie more fundamental and self-evident economic and racialist interests of pro-slavery whites. Instead, Walker presents us with the difficult task of interpreting the conjoining—'imperceptibly', 'by persuasion'—of colonisation with an emerging, Enlightenment conception of 'freedom'. How, he seems to ask, might we perceive and formulate a critique of this powerful persuasion?

The articulation of 'freedom' with colonisation that so concerns Walker can be traced to an under-examined, early period in the history of the idea of colonisation—from the 1770s, when the first full scale colonisation proposals began to be discussed in the British-North American colonies, to just before the founding of the American Colonization Society in 1816—and in particular to the pro-colonisation writings of Thomas Jefferson[3]. Although some pamphlets advocating colonisation appeared before Jefferson first wrote of the proposal, his over forty years of persistent and detailed advocacy undoubtedly make him the project's intellectual founder[4]. In fact, early nineteenth-century texts that argue for and against colonisation widely represent him as one of the proposal's most influential supporters. As Walker's *Appeal* suggests, the colonial and ante-bellum periods in general, and Jefferson's foundational texts in particular, challenge today's predominant, historical understanding of colonisation as solely a pro-slavery deportation project—that is, as a mechanism for expelling free blacks and rebellious slaves who might 'incite' a desire for freedom among slaves. Pro-slavery forces did begin to control colonisation ideologically and organisationally after 1816, and by the mid 1830s would thoroughly dominate the movement; in addition, even before 1816 some colonisationists certainly envisioned colonisation as solely a deportation scheme. However, from its origins in the 1770s until approximately 1816, the project was in fact planned and supported by a complex and uneasy coalition of free and enslaved blacks (most of whom were northerners), white abolitionists (mostly northerners), and slaveholders who were vaguely 'troubled' by the existence of slavery (most of whom were Virginians such as Jefferson). The colonisation projects envisioned by these disparate interests were not simply

[3] This focus on Jefferson is also indebted to Walker, who in his *Appeal* critically examines Jefferson more than any other figure, although he does not discuss Jefferson's pro-colonisation writings in detail—not surprisingly, as most of these writings are in the form of personal correspondence. In fact, Walker issues an impassioned if masculinist call for all African American men to conduct such an examination of Jefferson themselves. Challenging Jefferson's racial theories, Walker (1995:14f) writes: 'Mr. Jefferson's very severe remarks on us have been so extensively argued upon by men whose attainments in literature, I shall never be able to reach, that I would not have meddled with it, were it not to solicit each of my brethren, who has the spirit of a man, to buy a copy of Mr. Jefferson's "Notes on Virginia", and put it in the hand of his son. For let no one of us suppose that the refutations which have been written by our white friends are enough—they are whites—we are blacks'.

[4] See Jordan (1968:542-551) for detailed descriptions of the earliest proposals.

deportation schemes, but rather multi-phase, decades long resettlement projects meant to establish a Christian nation-state of free African Americans in the image of, closely allied to, and even controlled by the U.S.

Despite Jefferson's role as a 'founding father' of colonisation, Jefferson scholars rarely even mention his long advocacy of and copious writings on the proposal. When his advocacy is discussed, it is inevitably placed in the context of the frequently examined relationship between his role as a 'founding father' of liberalism and his defence of racism or his role as a slaveowner. Most accounts of this relationship inevitably generate one of three positions. Firstly, Jefferson is said to be an enlightened liberal whose racism and slaveownership were unfortunate but aberrant or atavistic when one considers his entire legacy[5]. Secondly, Jefferson's racism and slaveownership are said to be moral outrages and thus signs of the limits or contradictions of his liberalism[6]. Thirdly, Jefferson is said to have been a benevolent but realistic or pragmatic slaveowner who did his best for his slaves and who grappled honestly with the overwhelming complexities of 'the peculiar institution'[7]. To the contrary, Jefferson's long and passionate advocacy of colonisation, and in particular the very language of that advocacy, suggest that colonisation was by no means inconsistent with or contradicted by what has been called Jeffersonian liberalism. Rather, any account of such liberalism needs to consider how Jefferson could incorporate into 'liberalism' both his distrust of strong, centralised government and his dogged advocacy of a massive, centralised, state-sponsored scheme to enumerate, deport, and resettle African Americans in Africa, and then to surveil and control that resettlement after deportation.

In this essay I argue that the racism and nationalism which characterise Jeffersonian colonisation are constitutive of the particular form of 'freedom' Jefferson embraced—the calculable or formal and abstract equality of subjects as citizens. When faced with the incomplete arrival of 'freedom' in the U.S. after independence, or what he persistently represented as the obscured and misdirected 'light' of the Enlightenment, Jefferson sought to capture that light and render a distinctly 'American freedom' through a distinctly modern, calculable logic of racial governmentality. That

[5] In the words of John Chester Miller (1977:277), 'he signally failed to live up to his own precepts'. See also Cunningham (1987:61f); Mayer (1994:83); Miller (1977:264-266).

[6] In the words of Paul Finkelman (1993:181): 'Scrutinizing the contradictions between Jefferson's professions and his actions ... [suggests that] the test of Jefferson's position on slavery is ... whether he was able to transcend his economic interests and his sectional background to implement the ideals he articulated. Jefferson fails the test'. See also Berlin (1970:176f).

[7] In the words of Dumas Malone (1948:267): 'If his judgement on the Negroes was unfavorable, that of his local contemporaries generally was probably far more so. His observations were less notable in themselves, however, than in the spirit in which he made them. His comments on the race were those of a scientific mind, softened by humanitarianism. Or, to put it more precisely, they represented the tentative judgment of a kindly and scientifically minded man who deplored the absence of sufficient data and adequate criteria'.

is, his colonisation discourse combined what Michel Foucault called 'governmentality' with a ritualised fantasy of racial purification by articulating formal, abstract equality with the racial and nation codification of populations. In turn, his colonisation discourse naturalised this articulation by representing itself as merely the technical, practical, and self-evident reflection of pre-existing, empirically verifiable racial and national formations. My reading thus suggests that we place colonisation firmly within the 'principle of reason' that founded, and continues to echo throughout, the U.S.

In what follows I offer a brief account of the historical specificity of colonisation discourse before 1816. I then situate Jefferson's advocacy of colonisation in his personal correspondence and published texts, within the wider context of his representation of the relationships between the U.S. and Europe, between the U.S. and African Americans, and between 'freedom' and racial-national codification.

the colonial and ante-bellum colonisation conjuncture

'Colonization' is, at first glance, a curious term for a proposal often represented today as a white nationalist scheme to deport African Americans. From the late sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, the words 'deportation' and 'transportation' were commonly used in English to describe forced expulsions of an individual, class, or group from a community, colony or nation[8]. On the other hand, the terms 'colonization' and 'emigration' had been used since at least the seventeenth century to describe the more or less voluntary efforts of Europeans to establish economic and political outposts around the globe. 'Colonization' thus suggests a degree of voluntary activity not suggested by 'deportation' or 'transportation'.

How, then, might we account for the widespread application of the term 'colonization' to U.S. proposals for the resettlement of African Americans? Firstly, these proposals were different from deportation/ transportation proposals because early colonisationists were far more concerned with the development of African Americans in their new location than they were with the details of the emigration or expulsion itself. They imagined colonised African Americans in a new African nation-state in the image of, and committed to the interests of, the United States[9]. Secondly, and perhaps

[8] For example, the British practiced the deportation/transportation of 'criminals' to various locations, and the early English colonists in North America deported/transported from their towns or communities people who did not conform to their moral, ethical, or legal requirements (Beatie 1986; Linebaugh 1992:17f; Smith 1965).

[9] We might say, ahistorically, that colonisation proposals were something of a hybrid of seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth-century deportation/transportation proposals, nineteenth-century British colonialism (in the sense that they involved establishing governmental and cultural replicas of the U.S. on other continents through settler colonialism), and high imperialism or neo-colonialism (in the sense that they involved maintaining governmental and cultural control over a 'foreign' population even after that population attained formal independence and control over their own territory). It is this hybrid status, and its unaccountability within the standard narrative of colonialism, imperialism, and neo-imperialism, that we must consider.

more importantly, colonisation is also distinct from other juridical realisations of 'race' and 'nation' from the period, such as anti-miscegenation laws, because its discourse of national statehood promised formal equality to African Americans in the form of emancipation and national autonomy in Africa. That is, at its inception colonisation was associated not with punishment or exile as much as it was associated with an emerging Enlightenment conception of 'freedom'. This aspect of colonisation is particularly pronounced in its early period, from the late eighteenth century until the early nineteenth century. In fact, pro-slavery forces did not begin to support the proposal in substantial numbers, and African American and white abolitionists did not begin to organise against it in substantial numbers, until after the founding of the American Colonization Society (ACS)[10] in 1816-1817 (Foner 1975:584; Foner 1983:291,295; Jordan 1968:566; McCartney 1992:17f; Miller 1975:54-90; Moses 1978:34-5; Moses 1996:13f). Between the 1770s, when the first North American colonisation proposals emerged[11], and 1816, black and white anti-slavery forces made up the great majority of colonisationists (Foner 1975:579-584; Jordan 1968:548f; Miller 1975:viif,3-20; Moses 1996:6-13).

This periodisation is certainly somewhat artificial and schematic—some pro-slavery forces did support colonisation before 1816, and after 1816 pro-slavery and anti-slavery arguments vied with each other for political and ideological control over the movement. My point is that during the period before 1816, when the term 'colonization' began to be applied to the expulsion and resettlement of African Americans, discourse on the proposal was predominately characterised by arguments for colonisation as a necessary and logical extension of emancipation, and thus

[10] The ACS was a private, pro-colonisation organisation—many of whose members were nonetheless government officials who helped secure some government funding for the Society—which was founded in 1816-1817 and which eventually directed the establishment of Liberia in Western Africa. The ACS took inspiration from the British Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, founded in 1786, and the British Sierra Leone Company, founded in 1791. See Asiegbu (1969) on the role of these British organisations in the establishment of the colony of Sierra Leone. On the origins and early history of the ACS, see Bancroft(1957); Foner (1975:584-593); Fox (1919); Shick (1980); Staudenraus (1980). For the history of the ACS after 1816, see Beyan (1991) and Shick (1980), on Liberia in particular; Foner (1983:255f,290-303), and for funding of ACS, Foner (1983:291-293); Fox (1919); Kinshasa (1988); McCartney (1992), chapters II and III; Miller (1975:54ff); Staudenraus (1980).

[11] Jordan (1968:542) dates the beginning of an ideologically coherent colonisation 'campaign' at the 1790s. He adds that the 'scattering of such proposals prior even to The Notes on Virginia [composed in 1781-1782, published in 1787], seem to have been highly miscellaneous in inspiration and purpose' (Jordan 1968:546). My analysis of Jefferson in this chapter will suggest that, by the 1780s, a coherent notion of colonisation has already taken shape. Foner (1975:580), who ignores the magnitude of Jefferson's contribution to colonisation, dates the origins of the debate among free blacks over colonisation at the late 1780s, but also provides evidence of free black colonisation proposals being discussed as early as 1773 (Foner 1975:579), as do Miller (1975:3-53); Moses (1996:6-11) and Shick (1980:3-5).

foregrounds the complicity between colonisation and emerging Enlightenment conceptions of 'freedom'. The sense of voluntary emigration carried by the word 'colonization' can, I would suggest, be read as a trace of this complicity. Though perhaps counter-intuitive in today's terms, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries colonisation's fusion of expulsion and emigration, of emancipation and racial separation was self-evident to many of its advocates[12].

As opposed analyses as those of Winthrop Jordan and Henry Noble Sherwood make this point explicitly—without, however, pursuing its wider implications. Writes Jordan (1968:548): 'What was striking in this proposal [in its early period] was that fervent equalitarianism led directly to Negro removal'; and writes Sherwood (1916:487; see also 507f): 'During the last quarter of the eighteenth century deportation was regarded not as a punishment for crime nor as a means to prevent an increase in the number of free negroes, but as the logical outcome of manumission'[13]. Jordan's suggestive adverb 'directly' and Sherwood's passive construction 'was regarded' both

[12] Davis (1994) and Stirn (1979) argue that even in the 1830s there was no sharp division between emancipation and colonisation.

[13] It should be noted that Sherwood (1916:507) is an apologist for white colonisationists in general, as when he argues that white leaders of the movement were committed to an essential and real freedom: 'The men identified with the movement were of a high order and had for their purpose the emancipation of a race and the civilization of a continent'. Sherwood is right, as was Walker, not to dismiss or repress the connection between 'freedom' and colonisation. But rather than celebrate the 'high', or essential and timeless, nature of the concept of 'freedom' at the core of colonisation, as Sherwood does, I will argue that colonisation produces a historically specified, discursively formed notion of 'freedom' itself epistemologically inseparable from racist and nationalist commitments. In his otherwise careful argument devoted to limning the historical character of U.S. white supremacism in relation to African Americans, Jordan (1968:548) to some extent echoes this Sherwood position when he claims that 'No one [of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century antislavery advocates in the North] denounced colonization as a proslavery instrument, as the next generation was to do, for the good reason that the project was supported only by men of genuine antislavery feeling'. Foner (1975:585) also criticizes Jordan for this comment, but fails to place it in the context of Jordan's entire argument about colonisation. Consider the passage immediately following Jordan's (1968:549) claim about 'genuine antislavery feeling': 'Indeed, by far the most heartfelt of the denunciations of colonization [during this early period]—and there seem to have been extremely few—came from the most vociferous proponent of slavery, William Loughton Smith.... Colonization was an emancipationist scheme calculated primarily to benefit the emancipators. Essentially it was a means of profiting white Americans by getting rid of the twin tyrannies of Negroes and slavery'. Each sentence in this passage offers a somewhat different account of the articulation of colonisation with emancipation. Following the Sherwood-esque claim about colonisationists' commitment to essential and true freedom, Jordan claims that true antislavery forces opposed colonisation, and then claims that colonisationists were disingenuous, self-interested profiteers. This shifting reflects Jordan's concerted, if not entirely successful, struggle to account for the problem at the centre of my essay.

beg the genealogical questions we must consider here: how did 'fervent equalitarianism' 'lead directly' to colonisation? How did colonisation come 'to be regarded' as 'the logical outcome of manumission'? How, in effect, did colonisation come to be valued 'directly', 'logically', and self-evidently as emancipatory? When Walker wrote of 'some friends to the sons of Africa' being drawn 'imperceptibly' into colonisation, he was referring, I would argue, to precisely this self-evidence that emerged before 1816. Our task, then, is to sketch a genealogy of this 'striking' self-evidence of 'emancipatory colonization'.

Walker's *Appeal* also urges an analysis of what can be called the imperial form of colonisation's articulation with emancipation. The full title of Walker's *Appeal*, as well as the persistently global terms of his analysis[14], illustrate the two interrelated levels, domestic and foreign, on which early pro-colonisationists operated. As I have mentioned, a crucial aspect of colonisation during this period was the concern of its advocates with the status and development of African Americans in their new location, particularly when that new location was imagined to be Africa. The emphasis of colonisation was not on returning Africans who had been taken from Africa to their 'homeland', as much as it was on establishing settlements of Christian African Americans in 'uncivilized' and 'undeveloped' regions of the globe. This imperial vision sought not only to form a racially and nationally particular, white American nation, but also to begin spreading that which was understood to be universal and exemplary about white America: its Christianity, its capitalist economy, and its governmental system of national statehood. Thus, colonised African Americans were represented not only as racially particularised subjects to be separated from white America, but also, paradoxically, as abstract bearers of American national form to be sent out as global agents of American universality and exemplarity among Africans from whom African Americans were also in some sense distinct. I will examine this dual role in more detail later in this essay. For now, however, I simply want to emphasise that the term 'colonization' also carries the trace of these dual, interrelated roles—racial 'purification' of a domestic space and imperial power over foreign spaces—and that these roles give colonisation a complexity that the terms 'deportation', 'transportation', or 'exile' fail to capture.

Unfortunately, most twentieth-century historians of colonisation have neither addressed the genealogical question of colonisation's articulation with emancipation, nor examined the imperial form of colonisation, nor considered the specificity of pre-1816 colonisation discourse in any detail[15]. Instead, they have been most concerned with determining whether post-1816 colonisation, considered in a domestic

[14] See for example, Walker (1995:1-3,7,12f,16-18,20,35-37,46,63,72f).

[15] Only Foner (1975:579-594; 1983:290-308) Jordan (1968:542-569) and Miller (1975:3-53) discuss pre-1816 in any detail, and only they struggle to evaluate the relationships among the mixed interests of colonisationists (though they still consider the interests to be discrete) and the curious connection between 'emancipation' and 'colonization'.

framework, could be characterised as either essentially radical and emancipatory, liberal and abolitionist, or conservative and pro-slavery. The question is not an easy one to answer, however, because the proposal brought together an odd, shifting, and uneasy coalition of free black, pro-slavery white, and abolitionist white advocates[16]. In the face of this complexity, most historical accounts have offered what might be called 'political interest' based explanations of colonisation. That is, they have explained colonisation by dividing its advocates into distinct groups—such as pro-slavery whites, black nationalists, and abolitionists—each of which is said to have viewed colonisation as an effective means of realising its particular political interests. These historical accounts differ only over which group tended to dominate the discussions over and the actual efforts at colonisation. As a result, colonial and ante-bellum colonisation has almost invariably been represented in one of two ways: firstly, as a proposal without substantial or genuine support among African Americans, which was a tool of pro-slavery or racially nationalistic whites who managed to dupe some naive free blacks and anti-slavery whites into co-operating with them, and whose real interest was to deport the free black population to keep them from 'inciting' a desire for freedom among enslaved blacks[17]; or secondly, as a proposal of early or proto black nationalists who, out of their desire for autonomy, worked tactically and warily with pro-slavery whites[18].

These historical accounts are not quite 'wrong'. There certainly were pro-slavery forces who advocated colonisation as a way to deport free blacks whom they saw as a threat to the slave system—especially, as I mentioned above, after 1816. Many

[16] The question of whether any enslaved blacks supported colonisation, and to what extent and in what manner, is of course extremely difficult to document, given their strictly subaltern position. There was certainly some support, given that some of the African Americans who went to Africa had been slaves, though certainly colonised slaves might have gone simply because it was their only means of attaining freedom from their masters. The efforts Walker went through to disseminate his *Appeal*, particularly throughout the South, would seem to suggest that he had indications of support among slaves for colonisation—support he risked his life to discourage. On these efforts, see Aptheker (1965:1,45-53); Eaton (1936); Harding (1981:92-94); Hinks (1994); Peace and Peace (1974).

[17] See Berlin (1970:172-188); Beyan (1991); Horton (1993); Kinshasa (1988); Mehlinger (1916).

[18] See Shick (1980); Moses (1996); McCartney (1992); Miller (1975); Stuckey (1972:1-29). Silger offers an extended study of the multiple 'motivations' of free blacks who emigrated after 1816 under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, without dismissing the importance of black opposition to emigration. There is another group of early twentieth century histories that offer apologia for colonisation. Thay argue that pro-colonisationists were well meaning and benevolent but technically unsophisticated enough to realize the proposal—see, for example, Bancroft (1957); Foster (1953); Fox (1919); Frederickson (1971); Opper (1972); Sherwood (1915); Staudenraus (1980). There is also much scholarship on colonisation and its white and black nationalist supporters from the mid nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries, though this period raises issues outside the scope of my study.

anti-colonisationists, as well as some colonisationists, pointed this out at the time. In addition, black colonisationists such as Olaudah Equiano and Paul Cuffe were well aware of these pro-slavery interests, and their tactical discussions of autonomy certainly influenced later black nationalists such as Martin Delany[19]. Nonetheless, these contemporary histories miss something of the texture of pre-1816 colonisation. Firstly, by reducing colonisation to the rational pursuit of self-evident interests by autonomous political actors, such explanations fail to consider what it was about colonisation that conjoined contradictory interests. Perhaps more importantly, however, such explanations also fail to consider carefully the articulation of colonisation with emancipation. By seeking to determine whether colonisation was genuinely emancipatory or not, these histories actually generalise and de-historicise 'freedom' by suppressing its historically specific articulation with colonisation. These historical accounts thus fail to address the questions Walker posed in 1829: what notion of 'freedom' is rendered by colonisation, and how does that rendering become self-evident to colonisationists? Jefferson's private correspondence and published writings can help us begin to formulate answers to these crucial questions.

'mutilated however in it's freest parts'—Jefferson's enlightenment in the eyes of Europe

Thomas Jefferson (1984:44) tells us in his 'Autobiography' that on February 7, 1779, as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates, he supported an amendment to a slavery bill calling for 'the freedom of all [slaves] born after a certain day, and deportation at a proper age'. In Query XIV of the 'Notes on the State of Virginia' (composed 1781-1782, published in 1787), entitled 'The administration of justice and description of the laws?', he offers an expanded description of 'deportation'—which in a few years he would refer to as colonisation—to an account of the same amendment:

> an amendment ... was prepared ... directing, that [slaves] should continue with their parents to a certain age, then be brought up, at the public expense, to tillage, arts or sciences, according to their geniusses, till the females should be eighteen, and the males twenty-one years of age, when they should be colonized to such place as the circumstances of the time should render most proper, sending them out with arms, implements of household and of the handicraft arts, feeds, pairs of useful domestic animals, &c. to declare them a free and independent people, and extend to them our alliance and protection, till they shall have acquired strength; and to send vessels at the same time to other parts of the world for an equal number of white

[19] Equiano eventually abandoned colonisation and spoke out against it, and Cuffe only began warily advocating it after years of struggling for the emancipation of African Americans in the U.S. On Equiano, see Equiano (1995:325-351). On Cuffe, see Harris (1972); Thomas (1986).

> inhabitants; to induce whom to migrate hither, proper encouragements were to be proposed ... (Jefferson 1984:264).

Between these 'Notes on the State of Virginia' and a letter written to Miss Fanny Wright just before his death (7 Aug. 1825) (Jefferson 1899.X: 343)[20], Jefferson wrote repeatedly in his published writings and private letters about his strong belief in and desire for colonisation, making it arguably his most consistently articulated policy proposal[21]. He would eventually add to and alter the plan—variously suggesting Africa, the West Indies and western North America as sites for colonisation, proposing different ways to raise money for the project, altering the requirements for emancipation, calling for 'Germans' or simply 'white laborers' to replace colonised blacks. Yet the essential structure would remain the same from the 'Notes' to the 7 Aug. 1825 letter: gradual, full emancipation of all slaves followed by their forced deportation from the territorial boundaries of the United States and their subsequent incorporation into a formally independent nation-state that would nevertheless be economically and politically dependent upon the United States.

Jefferson began advocating colonisation at a crucial moment in U.S. history, a moment during which elite U.S. nation-state builders were struggling to formulate in theory and formalise in practice the ideas and projects of the Enlightenment. In his writings, Jefferson consistently represents colonisation as part of this greater struggle to respond to the call of reason, to capture and render or represent the 'light' of the Enlightenment in philosophical, political and juridical concepts and institutions. In fact, Jefferson consistently embeds his representation of colonisation in a very precise rhetorical structure. He first figures 'freedom' as the light of the Enlightenment which has been passed from Europe to the U.S., but which has been inexplicably refracted and reflected, such that it has arrived impure and incomplete and has left slavery intact and unenlightened. He then worries about Europe watching over and judging the fate of this refracted and impure light, and responds to this worry by advocating colonisation as a technical, governmental scheme through which the U.S. could gain enough control over that light to purify it at home and pass it on to African Americans. Finally, he figures the future relationship of the U.S. to colonised African Americans as one of the

[20] All references to Jefferson's letters refer to Ford's (1899) multi-volume collected works, unless another author-date is given in the parenthetical citation. I will give the volume number first, followed by the page number in the volume. I will also give the date of the letter in parenthesess before the citation since there is as yet no complete or authoritative collection of Jefferson's letters.

[21] According to Wilson, Jefferson's enormous correspondence is estimated at approximately 19,000 letters (Onuf 1993:67), and thus constitutes his most important body of literature. In this essay I discuss just a few letters dealing explicitly and substantially with colonisation, and written between 1785 and 1825, as well as on the 'Autobiography' (Jefferson 1899.I:66-69) and the 'Notes on the State of Virginia' (Jefferson 1984), which also contain important discussions of colonisation.

U.S. itself watching over and judging the new nation-state. In the final three sections of this essay I will consider each step in this rhetorical structure. Let us begin, then, with Jefferson's representation of the relationship of Europe to the U.S.

Throughout his lifelong faith in the possibility of fully representing Enlightenment truth—figured persistently as the 'light' of the Enlightenment—Jefferson struggles with its refraction from the moment of its emergence in Europe, and with the possibility of its non-arrival or impure arrival in the U.S. A letter Jefferson wrote from Paris to English abolitionist Dr. Richard Price in 1785 can introduce us to the rhetorical texture of this ambivalent attitude toward Europe. The letter evaluates a pamphlet Price wrote about slavery in the U.S. by predicting the pamphlet's reception in various states and regions. Jefferson begins by positioning Price and himself as allies attempting to get a complete view of justice:

> In Maryland I do not find such a disposition to begin the redress of this enormity as in Virginia. This is the next state to which we may turn our eyes for the interesting spectacle of justice in conflict with avarice and oppression: a conflict wherein the sacred side is gaining daily recruits, from the influx into office of young men grown and growing up (7 Aug. 1785) (Jefferson 1899.IV:83).

The struggle for what elsewhere in the letter he calls 'emancipation' is figured here as something one can see, as a 'spectacle' the outcome of which will bring 'justice' into the light and into full view. At this point in the letter, Jefferson and Price see the same 'conflict'—both understand which is 'the sacred side' and which is the side of 'avarice and oppression'. This passage offers not an inkling of miscommunication or misunderstanding, nor any hint that some aspect of the 'spectacle' might be obscured, out of view, or other than what it appears to be.

Yet Jefferson cannot help but qualify his alliance with Price and Price's English abolitionism by the end of the letter:

> Our country is getting into a ferment against yours, or rather has caught it from yours. God knows how this will end; but assuredly in one extreme or the other. There can be no medium between those who have loved so much. I think the decision is in your power as yet, but will not be so long (Jefferson 1899.IV:84).

Suddenly, Jefferson looks warily, even anxiously at Price, registers his ambivalence about the 'ferment' and thereby figures a disjunction between himself and Price. 'Our eyes'—Jefferson's and Price's, the U.S.'s and England's—appear not to have 'turned' together to view the 'spectacle' from which 'justice' would emerge into the full view of Enlightenment, but rather to have turned toward, and even threateningly against, each other. Their 'love' seems to have exceeded 'sacred' bounds, to have seethed and perhaps to have been infected by England, but certainly to be on the verge of slipping, unspeakably, out of 'control'. Precariously perched between a controlled, homosocial alliance on track to Enlightenment and a volatile opposition threatening to become

'extreme', between a 'powerful' rendering of 'emancipation' and an anxious, fearful scene of watching and being watched, Jefferson here sets the terms for what will be a life-long, ambivalent relationship to the figures of Europe and Enlightenment.

A letter written just six months later to James Madison, again from Paris, expands upon this ambivalent mixture of admiration for and distrust of Europe, coupled with anxiety over capturing and rendering the light of the Enlightenment (8 Feb. 1786) (Jefferson 1899.IV:192-197). As if to foreground this very ambivalence and anxiety, the letter opens with an enumeration of letters exchanged and expected, an implicit acknowledgement of the unsure lines of communication across the Atlantic:

> Dear Sir,–My last letters have been of the 1st & 20th of Sep. and the 28th of Oct. Yours unacknowledged are of Aug. 20, Oct. 3, & Nov. 15. I take this the first safe opportunity of enclosing to you the bills of lading for your books, & two others for your namesake of Williamsburgh & for the attorney which I will pray you to forward (Jefferson 1899.I:1-7).

This recognition of the possibility of communicative misfire between Europe and the U.S.—that is, of the possibility that Madison may never even see this letter, that 'the first safe opportunity' may not be safe enough—resonates throughout the entire letter as a vague sense of impossibility.

Nonetheless, Jefferson places great weight on certain trans-Atlantic communications, particularly those involving structurally unequal exchanges of prestige, knowledge, technical skill, the arts and primary goods. He continues:

> I thank you for the communication of the remonstrance against the assessment[22]. Mazzei who is now in Holland promised me to have it published in the Leyden gazette. It will do us great honour (Jefferson 1899.I:7-11).

For the rest of the letter's opening paragraph he elaborates on the importance of honourable representations of the U.S. in Europe. After telling Madison of his 'great pleasure' that the Virginia Assembly has agreed in principle to federal regulation of their commerce[23], Jefferson writes:

> The politics of Europe render it indispensably necessary that with respect to everything external we be one nation only, firmly hooped together. Interior government is what each state should keep to itself. If it could be seen in

[22] The reference here is unclear.

[23] Jefferson must be referring to a 1786 decision that sent Virginia delegates to a meeting in Annapolis with delegates from Maryland, Delaware, New York and Pennsylvania to discuss interstate commerce. It was at this meeting that some of the country's most powerful politicians decided to call a constitutional convention in 1787 to revise the Articles of Confederation.

> Europe that all our states could be brought to concur in what the Virginia assembly has done, it would produce a total revolution in their opinion of us, and respect for us. And it should ever be held in mind that insult & war are the consequences of a want of respectability in the national character. As long as the states exercise separately those acts of power which respect foreign nations, so long will there continue to be irregularities committing by some one or other of them which will constantly keep us on an ill footing with foreign nations (Jefferson 1899.I:18-33).

The revolutionary tactics on which Jefferson places so much importance here are quite different from those of 1776—though both seem to be part of one process, one movement toward 'total revolution'. The task is now to fabricate a singular 'national character', the absence of which threatens not only armed conflict, but also 'insult'. This character is first and foremost an 'external' one, an outward appearance or surface which, though not substanceless, is nonetheless neither autonomous nor intensive. It is not autonomous because it only exists to the extent that it is 'seen in Europe', to the extent that it alters 'foreign' 'respect' and 'opinion;' and it is not intensive because an unspecified terrain of interiority, 'interior government', is reserved for 'each state to [keep to] itself'. The revolutionary goal is still, as it was in 1776, to differentiate an internal political, economic, and ideological space from an external one, to forge an 'independent union', and yet the very failure of that differentiation, the fact that it has fallen short of being 'total', calls forth new and different tactics. Jefferson holds out hope here that the business unfinished by the armed, political revolution, that which kept it from realising 'total revolution', could be completed on the level of organisation and representation. Yet the true test of that completion, the eyes in which it will be interpreted, ironically lie in a 'Europe' which threatens 'our states' and 'national character' with low opinion, lack of respect, insult, and war. The ambivalent exchange of glances figured in the letter to Prince now appear to represent not simply a mutual watching and being watched, but rather a powerful and threatening European surveillance and judgement.

Jefferson displaces this threatening sense of European observation and judgement to the next paragraph, in which he frets over the fate of a lost rough draft of his 'Notes on the State of Virginia':

> I have been unfortunate here with this trifle. I gave out a few copies only, & to confidential persons, writing in every copy a restraint against it's publication. Among others I gave a copy to a Mr. Williams. He died. I immediately took every precaution I could to recover this copy. But by some means or other a bookseller had got hold of it. He employed a hireling translator and was about publishing it in the most injurious form possible. An Abbé Morellet, a man of letters here to whom I had given a copy, got notice of this. He had translated some passages for a particular purpose: and he compounded with the bookseller to translate & give him the whole, on his declining the first publication. I found it necessary to confirm this, and it will be published in French, still mutilated however in it's freest parts. I am now at a loss what to do as to England. Everything, good or bad, is thought worth publishing there;

> and I apprehend a translation back from the French, and a publication there. I rather believe it will be most eligible to let the original come out in that country; but am not yet decided[24] (Jefferson 1899.I:37-58).

Despite his most rigorous efforts, Jefferson fails in Europe to control his representation of the U.S. One chance mishap, Mr. William's death, triggers a chain of chaotic events, sending his 'Notes' careening down a dangerous and circuitous path; the death, a lost text, a futile pursuit, the violence of translation, and the uncontrollability of mechanical reproduction overpower 'every precaution', all 'confidence' and 'restraints', and put Jefferson utterly 'at a loss'. The intensity of his concern evinces precisely the degree of both power and threat he grants to Europe—were France and England simply as inept and amateurish as these booksellers and translators, Jefferson would hardly concern himself with this 'trifle'.

However, no sooner has Jefferson laid out his anxieties and fears about a generalised European surveillance and judgement than he allows the unguarded desire for 'great honor' in the eyes of a Europe reading about him and Madison in the Leyden gazette, expressed in the first paragraph, to return and usurp the rest of the letter:

> I have purchased little for you in the book way, since I sent the catalogue of my former purchases. I wish first to have your answer to that, and your information what parts of those purchases went out of your plan. You can easily say buy more of this kind, less of that &c. My wish is to conform myself to yours. I can get for you the original Paris edition in folio of the Encyclopedie for 620 livres, 35.vols.; a good edn in 39 vols 4vo, for 380#; and a good one in 39 vols 8vo, for 280#. The new one will be superior in far the greater number of articles: but not in all. And the possession of the ancient one has moreover the advantage of supplying present use. I have bought one for myself, but wait your orders as to you (Jefferson 1899.I:59-73).

This almost giddy excitement about the consummate embodiment of the Enlightenment's promise, the 'Encyclopedie', seems to displace the anxiety and fear of the previous paragraph. Here, France is the unambiguous home of knowledge, source of Enlightenment, and fount of truth. Yet this excitement shares much with the previous anxiety and fear. It is as if, because Madison must still send for the 'Encyclopedie' from Paris, the U.S. must still be judged in 'Europe's' eyes. For it is on the 'superiority' of the 'Encyclopedie' that Jefferson's 'Europe' would base its right to surveil, interpret, and judge 'our states'. The Enlightenment has indeed passed from Europe to the U.S., and yet not fully; it is passing, in a sense, still arriving and not yet resting, in the absence of 'total revolution'.

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[24] Jefferson did, in fact, publish the first edition of 'Notes on the State of Virginia' in England, in 1787.

This anxious excitement becomes even clearer in the rest of the letter's third paragraph. Continuing from the passage above,

> I remember your purchase of a watch in Philadelphia. If it should not have proved good, you can probably sell her. In that case I can get for you here, one made as perfect as human art can make it for about 24 louis. I have had such a one made by the best & most faithful hand in Paris. It has a second hand, but no repeating, no day of the month, nor other useless thing to impede and injure the movements which are necessary. For 12 louis more you can have in the same cover, but on the back side & absolutely unconnected with the movements of the watch, a pedometer which shall render you an exact account of the distances you walk. Your pleasure hereon shall be awaited (Jefferson 1899.I:73-86)

Here, modern technology and craftsmanship are also placed firmly in Paris, to the implicit embarrassment of Philadelphia, the supposed home of the most enlightened of revolutions. The letter then proceeds to add politics and the arts to the list of Europe's claims to the light of Enlightenment. A long discussion of the statue Houdon, a French sculptor, is to make of George Washington (Jefferson 1899.I:87-110) is followed by a further recommendation that a bust of Count Rochambeau be placed in the 'new capitol' next to 'that of Gates, Greene, Franklin' in honor of his similar contribution (Jefferson 1899.I:137-145), and an excited description of 'one new invention ... a mixture of the arts of engraving and printing, rendering both cheaper' (Jefferson 1899.I:158-170)[25]. Jefferson also makes a recommendation that the Marquis de Lafayette be given land in the U.S. in honor of his contribution to the Enlightenment[26]. In fact, Jefferson justifies this gift of land on the grounds that 'the day [may] come when it might be an useful asylum to him' (122f). That this day, in which the U.S. would be the new home of such enlightened figures as the Marquis, has clearly not arrived—that it is still to come—is precisely the source of the letter's ambivalence over the traffic of Enlightenment from Europe to the U.S.

Jefferson's final comments to Madison, given in a post-script, only deepen this ambivalence:

> P.S. Could you procure & send me an hundred or two nuts of the peccan?

[25] Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, or Count Rochambeau, was a French soldier who served under Washington in the Revolutionary War. Sent to the U.S. in 1780, he got through the British blockade in 1781 and eventually commanded French troops in the battle that led to the surrender of Lord Cornwallis. Made a Marshal of France in 1791, he was then imprisoned and almost guillotined during the Terror, but Napoleon later restored his rank and estates.

[26] In recognition of Lafayette's many activities as a soldier in support of revolutionaries in the U.S. and France, and his troubles in France after the Terror, the U.S. Congress gave him a huge land grant in Louisianna in 1803, as well as $200,000 and a township in Florida in 1824.

> they would enable me to oblige some characters here whom I should be much gratified to oblige. They should come packed in sand. The seeds of the sugar maple too would be a great present (Jefferson 1899.I:173-178).

Still an economic satellite of Europe, sending primary goods to France and receiving knowledge, the arts, and political luminaries from the same, Jefferson's U.S. is very much still struggling to capture its share of Enlightenment, and Jefferson is still quite convinced that any such capture will need to be seen and judged by European eyes.

This European surveillance and judgement is particularly powerful to Jefferson precisely because it is inseparable from Enlightenment. The light of Enlightenment seems to figure and be figured by the watchful and judgmental gaze of Europe. The letter to Madison thus allegorises a fear inseparable from admiration, a surveillance inseparable from freedom, a sovereign judgement inseparable from truth. Jefferson seems completely subjected to this ambivalence, completely 'at a loss', as he writes about the missing copy of 'Notes on the State of Virginia'. Just as that missing text is bound to be 'mutilated however in it's freest parts' (Jefferson 1899.I:52f), so too does Jefferson seem to become most anxious at precisely the moments of his closest proximity to, and his deepest excitement over, Enlightenment.

figuring governmentality

Jefferson is not, however, content to oscillate perpetually within this ambivalent and paradoxical scene of Enlightenment and surveillance, of anxious excitement, of 'mutilating freedom'. Devoted as he is to his vocation of nation-state building, he works hard to capture and render the light by which he is simultaneously watched and judged. Consequently, as persistently as this ambivalence resurfaces throughout his correspondence, so too does a meticulous formulation of its resolution. Consider, for example, a letter Jefferson wrote to the Marquis de Lafayette in 1820 (20 Dec.) (Jefferson 1899.X:179-181). This exemplary speech act—in which a representative of the U.S. responds to a representative of France about the way Europe strikes the U.S. and the way both have been struck by the light of the Enlightenment—is shot through with moments of 'infelicity', or what J.L. Austin would call 'non-serious', 'parasitic', or 'non-ordinary' interruptions of ordinary, direct communication. On the one hand, Jefferson declares that he knows just what is 'going on' in France and in the U.S., evincing a confident tone which pervades the letter. And yet, in the process of trotting out many of the rhetorical conventions of Enlightenment discourse, Jefferson stages a figural drama in which the trope of national unity and power emerges to offer a coherent and felicitous resolution to the conflict among Enlightenment, European judgement, and slavery.

In his letter to the Marquis, Jefferson attempts nothing less than the task of representing the Enlightenment. The letter has five general sections: first, Jefferson's lament about his failing health (Jefferson 1899.I:1-9); second, Jefferson's concerns with the state of affairs in France, and Europe in general (Jefferson 1899.I:9-26); third, Jefferson's attempt to reassure Marquis about conflicts between Spain and the U.S. over

Spain's colonies in the Americas (Jefferson 1899.I:26-48); fourth, Jefferson's assurance that 'things are going well' in the U.S., and that the resolution of the Missouri's entrance into the union as a slave state will in fact further the cause of emancipation (Jefferson 1899.I:49-65); and fifth, a discussion of some diplomatic business, and a salutation remarking once again on his failing health (Jefferson 1899.I:66-83). From the tired and failing body of the opening lines, through mixed metaphorics to the 'anxiously wished' emancipation of the closing lines, the apparently confident and optimistic tone of the letter is coupled with parasitical ambiguity, discomfort and struggle.

This complexity is especially evident in its unwieldy metaphorics. In the second section, and in the span of less than 200 words, Jefferson shifts through six distinct tropes, moving from light to the wind to volcanic rumblings to bowels to explosions and finally to disease and infection, all in an effort to render the twists and turns of enlightened truth. He begins this section with the classic trope of light in a conventional panegyric to Europe and America's civilising mission:

> In the meantime your country has been going on less well than I had hoped. But it will go on. The light which has been shed on the mind of man through the civilised world, has given it new direction, from which no human power can divert it (Jefferson 1899.I:9-15).

The last sentence couples the most lofty goals and desires with utterly ambiguous references and syntax. The source of the light of the Enlightenment—so often filled by God, as in the Declaration of Independence ('Laws of Nature and of Nature's God', 'endowed by their Creator', 'protection of Divine Providence')—is here passive and unknown, though implicitly non-human given the last phrase of the sentence. Also, the light's rays are immediately bent and refracted, their proper course almost indecipherable. Does the light pass from this unknown source to 'the mind of man' and then 'through the civilized world', or 'through the civilized world' and then onto 'the mind of man'? And what of the force and brilliance the light might lose as it passes 'through'? If the mind of man is struck second, how can we know that the light is pure and uncorrupted? The antecedent of 'it' in 'has given it new direction' is also ambiguous. It apparently refers to 'your country', i.e. France, and yet 'the light', 'the mind of man', and 'the civilized world' are also potentially 'given new direction' by the Enlightenment. If it is possible to give the light new direction, in other words if the light has the potential to be misdirected, then surely the source of that light or the light itself is imperfect—capable, at the very least, of being corrupted and misdirected by 'the mind of man' or civilisation through which it must pass. And if the source or the light itself is capable of being corrupted and misdirected, then how could we possibly determine what that truth is beyond the shadow of a doubt? How could 'the people' be represented in perfect accordance with 'self-evident truths' if those truths could always already be refracted?

Despite Jefferson's confidence in the progressive development of 'things' (Jefferson 1899.I:9) and the steady dilution of 'evil' (Jeffereson 1899.I:60f), this

second section of his letter suggests that the light of Enlightenment truth is always capable of being newly and more perfectly directed as well as misdirected. The light of truth emerges coextensively with imperfect non-truths, each new direction with other potential misdirections, every proper destination with improper arrivals. Jefferson's language suggests that the light itself, not God or Nature, has the non-human power to direct the truth of Enlightenment, to give itself a new and more proper direction, for he does not invoke an all knowing figure who directs the light as an implement or tool, as an official would a flashlight to illuminate 'what is going on'. The light sustains itself, it directs and misdirects itself.

Toward the end of section two of the letter, the tropic movement slips into the violent and unpredictable language of revolution. Jefferson lectures the Marquis about

> the volcanic rumblings in the bowels of Europe, from north to south, ... [which] threaten a general explosion, and the march of armies into Italy cannot end in a simple march (Jefferson 1899.I:17-21).

Here the source of Enlightenment remains underground, deep within the entrails of the earth, powerful because it is hidden from sight. And Jefferson adds to this the ambiguous power of disease and infection:

> The disease of liberty is catching; those armies will take it in the south, carry it thence to their own country, spread there the infection of revolution and representative government, and raise its people from the prone condition of brutes to the erect altitude of man (Jefferson 1899.I:21-26).

This last tropic movement brings the sureness of 'the light' down to the doubleness of revolution figured as that which both poisons autocratic evil and immunises the body politic, allowing healthy representative government to grow.

This wild tropic movement—from pure and impure light to invisible breeze to hidden rumblings to cathartic disease—captures precisely the difficulty of rendering enlightened representations of the 'good society'. With characteristic eighteenth and early nineteenth-century rhetorical verve, Jefferson gives us a representation of political truth that disseminates far beyond his confident tone. Perhaps most importantly, this letter exposes Jefferson to the possibility that the pure light of emancipation might be corruptible and diseased from the start.

But what of the context of this speech act, its addressee and its addresser? Jefferson delivers this ambiguous and unwieldy interpretation of political Enlightenment to the Marquis, but also as a representative of the U.S. he delivers it to Europe in general. That is, he expresses a need to respond to Europe. Jefferson certainly envisions Europe as One for the purposes of the Enlightenment ('The volcanic rumblings in the bowels of Europe, from north to south'). His tone is in part paternalistic—'In the meantime your country has been going on less well than I had hoped. But it will go on'—and in part panegyric or filial, since, as we saw in the letter to Madison, Jefferson understands by 'the civilized world' Europe first. This paternalistic/ panegyric attitude about Europe returns us once again to the 'infelicities' of the

sentence:

> The light which has been shed on the mind of man through the civilized world, has given it a new direction, from which no human power can divert it.

Now more than ever we wonder whether the U.S. or Europe is privy to the light. Certainly Jefferson thought of the U.S. as improving on, by breaking from, Europe. And yet he does seem to address Europe with a special reverence, as a rebellious child who can never fully leave his family behind.

In the next paragraph of the letter, however, Jefferson quite suddenly displaces the ambivalence figured with this wild tropic movement in general, and the 'disease of liberty' in particular, by offering a historically absurd but rhetorically confident allegory of American unity. He begins with a remark that counters section one's 'your country has been going on less well than I had hoped' (Jefferson 1899.I:10f): 'With us things are going on well' (Jefferson 1899.I:49). The 'things' to which he refers are the acquisition of Florida in 1819 and the pending entrance of Missouri into the Union as a slave state. Both events were fought over bitterly during the period, and ended up as victories for pro-slavery forces—thanks in part to Jefferson's support—since under Spanish control Florida had become a refuge for escaped slaves, and with Missouri on their side the slave states would hold their own against the free states in Congress and in Presidential elections[27]. Yet Jefferson offers a different picture:

> The boisterous sea of liberty indeed is never without a wave, and that from Missouri is now rolling towards us, but we shall ride over it as we have over all others. It is not a moral question, but one merely of power. Its object is to raise a geographical principle for the choice of a President, and the noise will be kept up till that is effected. All know that permitting the slaves of the South to spread into the West will not add one being to that unfortunate condition, that it will increase the happiness of those existing, and by spreading them over a larger surface, will dilute the evil everywhere, and facilitate the means of getting finally rid of it, an event more anxiously wished by those on whom it presses than by the noisy pretenders to exclusive humanity. In the meantime, it is a ladder for rivals climbing to power (Jefferson 1899.I:49-65)

The confident unity represented repeatedly by 'we' and 'All' make it possible to figure the U.S. as a powerful and sturdy ship riding the 'boisterous sea of liberty', and as an

[27] Both Miller (1975:231f) and Peterson (1960:191-193) represent Jefferson's support of Missouri's entrance into the union as a slave state as, in Miller's (1975:232) words, 'mark[ing] the strange death of Jeffersonian liberalism'. As I have been arguing, a close reading of Jefferson's correspondence suggests that we place such a moment firmly within the life of such liberalism.

expert or scientist knowledgeably formulating the elements of a 'finally' free solution: 'it will increase the happiness of those existing, and by spreading them over a larger surface, will dilute the evil everywhere'. These figures displace the difficulty of 'a moral question' with the calculable clarity of questions 'merely of power'.

If this representative of the U.S. must thus represent his country to a representative of Europe in the most coherent, confident, and powerful—if disingenuous—terms, then Europe must be something of a judge in Jefferson's imagination. That is, if Jefferson's enlightened country receives the light of the Enlightenment as refracted through its irreducible ties to Europe, then any development of the Enlightenment in the U.S. must be carried out under the watchful eye of Europe. The 'eyes' he and Dr. Richard Price focused on 'justice' are now trained on Jefferson himself. Subjected to this field of visibility, then, Jefferson figures a unified and powerful national identity as a coherent and felicitous response to the infelicities of refraction and surveillance he nonetheless rhetorically proliferates.

This moment in the letter to the Marquis represents a crucial transformation in Jefferson's work. This transformation is locatable not so much diachronically—say, in the year of this letter, 1820—as it is rhetorically at nodal points, reiterated ritually throughout Jefferson's correspondence from the 1780s through to 1820s—particularly his correspondence on colonisation, as we will see below—when the ambivalent oscillation of light, surveillance, and judgement gives way to a governmental problem, a problem of power and of knowledge:

> It is not a moral question, but one merely of power .... All know that permitting the slaves of the South to spread into the West will not add one being to that unfortunate condition, that it will increase the happiness of those existing ....

That is, the ambivalence of 'mutilation however in it's freest parts' and of the 'disease of liberty' gives way not to an ambiguous 'moral question', but rather to a confident and calculable figuration of national power and unity. Mobilising what J.L. Heilbron and his research group have called 'l'esprit géometrique' or 'the quantifying spirit' of the late eighteenth century[28], Jefferson's text here turns the 'moral problem' of slavery into a tactical problem of discrete, manipulable populations, the solution to which is

[28] These historians of science have argued that 'the later 18th century saw a rapid increase in the range and intensity of application of mathematical methods', a thesis that 'amounts to specifying the time and surveying the routes by which what may be the quintessential form of modern thought first spread widely through society' (Frängsmyr *et al.* 1990:1f). For an overview of their research, see Heilbron's introduction to the volume; for essays relevent to the Jeffersonian context considered here, see essays by Rider, Heilbron, and Johannisson (in Frängsmyr *et al.* 1990). For a kindred study of the U.S. in particular, which places important emphasis on Jefferson, see Cohen (1971). On Jefferson's faith in statistics and mathematics in general, see also Appleby (1993:7f); Stanton (1993:152f).

calculably and transparently knowable. Although the text suggests that 'All know' slavery is a calculable and transparent problem, it is in fact the calculable and transparent representation of slavery that produces the figure of a powerful 'All' who can know in the first place. That is, the 'All' who 'know' are themselves effects of the calculable rhetoric of the predicate phrase—

> that permitting the slaves of the South to spread into the West will not add one being to that unfortunate condition, that it will increase the happiness of those existing.

This predicate retroactively renders a problem transparently knowable to the confident, powerful, and unified subject 'All'.

Jefferson's correspondence proliferates detailed and systematic figurations of national unity in the face of his ambivalent fascination with and fear of European enlightenment, surveillance, and judgement[29]. He also makes clear that the proper object of this organised government is 'the people' figured very precisely as a 'population' of enumerable and manipulable units. Consider just two examples. In a letter to William Short (3 Oct. 1801), Jefferson justifies a tactical embrace of 'false principles' in U.S. foreign relations with Europe in the following terms:

> To be entangled with [Europe] would be a much greater evil than a temporary acquiescence in the false principles which have prevailed. Peace is our most important interest, and a recovery from debt. We feel ourselves strong, & daily growing stronger. The census just now concluded shows we have added to our population ... (Jefferson 1899.VIII:97f).

Tactical governmentality here functions for Jefferson as a method of managing or disposing the new 'American' nation considered as a multiform population concerned with growth, strength, peace, and 'national security'. Jefferson's persistent privileging of the census has been well remarked by scholars, and the letter to Short offers just one of many such references[30]. Yet the implication this persistence has for Jefferson's representations of 'the people' has been nearly unremarked. His public and private advocacy of and faith in the census as the most important raw representation of 'the people' offers a precise image of both the object and the subject of governmental organisation: a calculable image of abstract, discrete, and manipulable units.

In a letter to Baron von Humboldt (6 Dec. 1813), Jefferson reiterates his faith in the technical means of representing a coherent and enlightened 'American' population. Anxious this time about conflicts with Spain and the future of Mexico, Jefferson declares,

[29] Consider, for example, a letter he wrote from Paris to Joseph Jones (14 Aug. 1787) (Ford IV.1899:437f).

[30] For example, see Cohen (1971).

> But in what ever governments [the countries of New Spain] end they will be American governments, no longer to be involved in the never-ceasing broils of Europe. The European nations constitute a separate division of the globe; their localities make them part of a distinct system .... America has a hemisphere to itself. It must have its separate system of interests, which must not be subordinated to those of Europe. The insulated state in which nature has placed the American continent, should so far avail it that no spark of war kindled in the other quarters of the globe should be wafted across the wide oceans which separate us from them. And it will be so. In fifty years more the United States alone will contain fifty millions of inhabitants ... the numbers which will then be spread over the other parts of the American hemisphere, catching long before the principles of our portion of it, and concurring with us in the maintenance of the same system ... (Jefferson 1899.IX:431).

Full of imperatives and modal commands, this letter reads more like a manifesto than a personal communication with the 'dear friend' to whom it is addressed. And yet precisely the anxiety which gives to an opinion the syntax of a command suggests that however much Jefferson wants to see 'America' as unique, he cannot think the U.S. except in relation to Europe. Faced with this relationship, Jefferson offers a representation of the U.S. as a discrete 'system', within a separate 'quarter of the globe', made up of abstract and calculable 'inhabitants' or 'numbers'.

Such nodal points—represented in the letter to the Marquis by the figures of the 'All' who 'know', the well designed ship, and the clever expert or scientist; in the letter to Short by the figure of the enumerated American 'population;' and in the letter to the Baron by the figure of a discrete 'system' of abstract and enumerable 'inhabitants'—translate the ambivalence of light, surveillance, judgement, and 'mutilation however in it's freest parts' into an ordered, systematic practice of government. These nodal points indicate that Jefferson responds to the anxious ambivalence of Enlightenment by subjecting the U.S. to 'the quantifying spirit' of transparent, calculable, and tactical power, a subjection that paradoxically subjectifies the U.S. as an 'All' who 'knows' how to calculate 'the means of finally getting rid of' slavery. In effect, Jefferson turns the anxious ambivalence generated at the moments of his closest proximity to Enlightenment—his 'loss' at the verge of the publication of his 'Notes on the State of Virginia', his fear of the 'Notes' inevitable 'mutilation however in it's freest parts', and his cathartic infection with 'the disease of liberty'—into a representation of the U.S. as a powerful, unified population by subjecting 'America' to calculation and quantification.

Yet how can we account for Jefferson's turn from the ambiguities of light and vision, with which he seems to be plagued in his correspondence, to the rhetoric of calculation and quantification? As figured in the letters to the Marquis, Short, and the Baron, this turn raises the question of a power that simultaneously subjects and subjectifies, that is both productive and regulative, and that actively renders what it subjects. As sites of active, translative, transformative textual work, the nodal points in Jefferson's letters reflect less an oppressive, centrally controlled, and unidirectional ideology than the reflexive mode of power and knowledge Michel Foucault thematised

in *Discipline and Punish*. They raise the question, that is, of how a mode of power 'produces reality', 'produces domains of objects and rituals of truth' (Foucault 1979:194).

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1979:7) glimpsed this productive mode of power in the late eighteenth century realm of criminality, when 'the entire economy of punishment' began to be 'redistributed' in Europe with the 'disappearance of torture as a public spectacle' and the emergence of 'a new theory of law and crime, a new moral or political justification of the right to punish'. 'Punishment', Foucault (1979:9,18f) argues, went from being the most visible and spectacular aspect of criminality 'to become the most hidden part of the penal process' as 'a whole set of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic, normative judgments concerning the criminal [became] lodged in the framework of penal judgment'. Foucault's (1979:24) effort

> to study the metamorphosis of punitive methods on the basis of a political technology of the body ... in which punitive measures are not simply 'negative' mechanisms that made it possible to repress, to prevent, to exclude, to eliminate; but ... are linked to a whole series of positive and useful effects which it is their task to support

locates a reflexive mode of power in which punishment came to mean a multiform, systematic field of 'discipline' which itself would 'reform' and 'free'. Subjects subjected to discipline became subjects at precisely the moment of their subjection.

One of Foucault's central figures for this mode of power is Bentham's Panopticon, an 'architectural apparatus' for which

> power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so (Foucault 1979:201).

The Panopticon figures the 'composition' of 'mechanisms of power' in which

> a real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation ... [for h]e who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection (Foucault 1979:199-201,202f).

Thus, for Foucault (1979:200) the Panopticon is 'the architectural figure' for a mode of power that creates subjects as reflexive structures which allow power to take effect.

Already in the final chapter of *The History of Sexuality—Volume I*, Foucault begins to move from the panoptic modality of power in the sphere of criminality to other spheres by shifting from the 'microphysical' realm of bodies to the

'macrophysical' realm of populations[31]. That is, in the words of Colin Gordon, Foucault begins to suggest that

> the same style of analysis .... that had been used to study techniques and practices addressed to individual human subjects within particular, local institutions could also be addressed to techniques and practices for governing populations of subjects at the level of a political sovereignty over an entire society (Burchell 1996:4).

In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1980:136,138,136,139) argues that the seventeenth century marks a shift in mechanisms of power from the era of sovereignty, in which 'the sovereign exercized his right of life only by exercizing his right to kill, or by refraining from killing' and thus practiced a 'right to take life or let live', to the 'modern' era that witnesses a 'power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them', 'a power whose highest function was perhaps no longer to kill, but to invest life through and through'. This 'modern' era is thus characterised by

> an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'bio-power' (Foucault 1980:140).

Explaining this notion of 'bio-power', Foucault (1980:144) continues:

> ... a power whose task is to take charge of life needs continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms. It is no longer a matter of bringing death into play in the field of sovereignty, but of distributing the living in the domain of value and utility. Such a power has to qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize ....

Thus 'bio-power', in Gordon's (Burchell 1991:4f) words, refers to

> forms of power exercized over persons specifically in so far as they are thought of as living beings: a politics concerned with subjects as members of a population,

[31] As Ann Laura Stoler (1995:xi) reminds us, Foucault finished *Discipline and Punish* (1979) the same day he began the last chapter of *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction* (1980). Stoler cites James Miller on this biographical information, and Miller (1993:240f) quotes Daniel Defert as his source. It should be noted that long before Foucault's analysis of the Panopticon Karl Polanyi, in *The Great Transformation* (1957) exposed the metaphoric or transportable character of panopticism, suggesting that its deployment of power was not limited to the sphere of criminality and the institution of the prison. Polanyi argues that we examine this panopticism across a range of governmental discourses and practices, as does Foucault (1980:140) implicitly when he writes of a general 'panoptic modality of power' and explicitly when he develops this argument in his subsequent work, as we will see below. Of course, for Foucault, unlike Polanyi, in principle no warden or minister is necessary for 'control' to be 'effective'.

and in Ann Laura Stoler's (1995:4) words bio-power signifies 'the regulations of the life processes of aggregate human populations'.

In a series of lectures delivered in 1978 entitled 'Security, Territory and Population' and 'The Birth of Biopolitics', or as he later retitled them in one of the lectures, 'The History of "Governmentality"' Foucault reiterates this historical shift and develops his analytical shift. The emergence of a codifiable and calculable category of 'population', and the attendant professionalisation of knowledges which produced that codifiability and calculability, puts into effect a diffuse, active, and multi-directional form of power. Foucault suggests, in effect, that the problems which fields of knowledge such as statistics were said to address were themselves given a particular, 'problematic' form by those very fields of knowledge (Burchell 1991:98-100). The 1978 lecture on governmentality argues that the very idea of political discourse underwent a massive restructuring at precisely the historical moment in which Jefferson is writing. As he did in the last chapter of *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Foucault argues that the period between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries in Europe marks a shift in the idea of governing and government whereby political treatises giving governmental advise to the prince or king give way to political treatises which are not yet self-proclaimed works of political science, but rather are searching for a new model of legitimation for government. Foucault suggests that the idea of government 'explodes' onto the scene during this period as a problem in new and pressing ways. The new treatises de-emphasise the *a priori* and self-generating justification of the prince or king's legitimacy and his consequent sovereignty over a certain territory which contains his subjects. Instead, they theorise a multifaceted 'art of government' capable of legitimising itself via its ability to tactically govern 'things'.

The emergence of a 'government of things', Foucault argues, entails a shift in the object of government, from a territory containing inhabitants to 'things' with multiple and varied needs (Burchell 1991:93). Whereas the family previously served as a model for governing a state itself legitimated by the figure of the prince or king, the new treatises recognise a need for a more flexible and complex model of government, a model within which 'the family', for example, would be just one among many objects of address for the government. Foucault refers in particular to the metaphor of the ship—popular in this period of governmental treatises, as we saw in Jefferson's letter to the Marquis—as a figure for this new object of government:

> What does it mean to govern a ship? It means clearly to take charge of the sailors, but also of the boat and the cargo; to take care of a ship means also to reckon with winds, rocks and storms; and it consists in that activity of establishing a relation between the sailors who are to be taken care of and the ship which is to be taken care of, and the cargo which is to be brought safely to port, and all those eventualities like winds, rocks, storms and so on; this is what characterizes the government of a ship .... What counts essentially is this complex of men and things; property and territory are merely one of its variables (Burchell 1991:93).

This redefinition of government thus involves the emergence of 'a new kind of finality'

or a new goal of governing:

> for instance, government will have to ensure that the greatest possible quantity of wealth is produced, that the people are provided with sufficient means of subsistence, that the population is enabled to multiply, etc. .... In order to achieve these various finalities, things must be disposed—and this term, dispose, is important because with sovereignty the instrument that allowed it to achieve its aim—that is to say, obedience to laws—was the law itself; law and sovereignty were absolutely inseparable. On the contrary, with government it is a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even of using laws themselves as tactics ... (Burchell 1991:95).

By shifting his analytic focus from the study of structures and institutions (such as the state) with essential and inherent 'properties and propensities', as Gordon (Burchell 1991:4) writes, to practices and deployments of power with a 'plurality of specific aims', Foucault locates a governmental realm within which power operates diffusely and reflexively.

If we pry Foucault's analysis of diffuse and reflexive power in the realm of governmentality loose from its European context, and let it help us read Jefferson, we can in turn read Foucault's tendency to undertheorise the relationship of racism and of nationalism to governmentality. Foucault's study of a general panoptic modality of power allows us to interpret Jefferson's paradoxical figuration of power, as that which subjects and subjectifies, more precisely than a theory of oppressive and unidirectional ideology or theory of hegemony and counter-hegemony could. Jefferson's correspondence in effect dramatises subjection to a field of visibility characterised by the visible and unverifiable gaze of the Enlightenment which is simultaneously subjectification within a calculable pursuit of that light. That is, subjected to the visible and unverifiable gaze of Enlightenment, Jefferson rhetorically subjectifies 'America' by rendering it as a calculable and controllable population. The nodal points in Jefferson's texts which translate the ambivalence of 'mutilation however in it's freest parts' into an enlightened 'question ... merely of power' and calculable national unity can thus be interpreted as figures for what Foucault will call 'governmentality'.

Jefferson's preoccupation with Europe evinces his effort to define the conditions of possibility for governing the U.S. as a legitimate nation-state; he is concerned, in other words, with giving the U.S. the same status as the lofty European polities, but also with defining its essential difference. Responding less to a consistent critique of Europe than to a persistent anxiety over the meaning of Europe and of America, and to the exact nature of the difference between the two, Jefferson turns to this art of government to deliver the U.S. to the Enlightenment. Gone is the self-assuredness of absolute difference defined by revolution, so forcefully presented in the Declaration of Independence—a difference in kind. Having joined the world of burgeoning nation-states by the force of revolution, as a nation-state builder Jefferson begins to understand himself to be tactically facing differences in degree, differences to be interpreted by means of a new art of government. It is within this shift of interest, this

reformulation of emancipation by a revolutionary become nation-state builder, that we can locate Jefferson's letters on colonisation.

Jeffersonian colonisation and racial governmentality

Jefferson's discourse on colonisation addresses itself directly to the disposal of 'populations'. More than that, his discourse on colonisation paradoxically renders the very idea of a racially and nationally codified population as that which it seeks to address. In this section, by reading a crucial passage on colonisation from Jefferson's 'Autobiography' along with the many letters on colonisation echoed by that passage, I will trace a racial governmentality, addressed to 'the problem of population', running throughout Jefferson's writings. It is this racial governmentality that conjoins a discourse of emancipation and freedom with a discourse of racial and national codification. For as we will see, a power that, in Foucault's (1980:144) words, 'distributes the living in the domain of value and utility', that 'invests life' with qualifiable, measurable, appraisable, and hierarchisable value, can be said to render a freedom both conditioned upon and limited by the articulation and calculation of 'race' and 'nation'.

Writing in 1821 about a debate in the Virginia House of Delegates in 1779, Jefferson offers an extremely condensed summation of his pro-colonisation discourse in this passage from his 'Autobiography':

> The bill on the subject of slaves was a mere digest of the existing laws respecting them, without any intimation of a plan for a future & general emancipation. It was thought better that this should be kept back, and attempted only by way of amendment whenever the bill should be brought on. The principles of the amendment however were agreed on, that is to say, the freedom of all born after a certain day, and deportation at a proper age. But it was found that the public mind would not yet bear the proposition, nor will it bear it even at this day. Yet the day is not distant when it must bear and adopt it, or worse will follow. Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free. Nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government. Nature, habit, opinion has drawn indelible lines of distinction between them. It is still in our power to direct the process of emancipation and deportation peaceably and in such slow degree as that the evil will wear off insensibly, and their place be pari passu filled up by free white laborers. If on the contrary it is left to force itself on, human nature must shutter at the prospect held up. We should in vain look for an example in the Spanish deportation or deletion of the Moors. This precedent would fall far short of our case (Jefferson 1984:44).

As we have seen throughout this essay, Jefferson is again concerned with the fact that slavery in the United States is 'held up' for the world to see as a most glaring challenge to the promise of universal freedom. The reference to Spain tells us that the United

States somehow exceeds Europe, even when analogies suggest themselves; and yet the very act of referring to Spain suggests that Jefferson is looking to Europe again and finding no light or suggestion of a solution, but rather surveillance and judgement of the 'prospect held up'[32].

How, then, does Jefferson respond to this 'prospect held up'? In the 'Autobiography' passage, he articulates a dilemma: 'Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free'. The fact of emancipation for slaves has the structure of something already written in the future, something that 'will have been'—the structure, that is, of the future anterior. Jefferson is familiar with this structure, for he made use of it as the tense of revolution when he wrote, in the Declaration of Independence: 'we ... solemnly publish and declare, That these United colonies are, and of right ought to be Free and Independent States'. Both the Declaration of Independence's 'are and ought to be' and the 'Autobiography's' 'written in the book of fate that these people are to be free' figure what Derrida has called the 'fabulous retroactivity' of the people inventing themselves in the very utterance of their independence: we will have been free once we say 'we are free' (Derrida 1986:10f).

Jefferson is, however, not willing to consider this means of emancipating the slaves—in fact, we know he was terrified about the prospect of a black revolution. In the 'Autobiography' passage, he prophecies that 'worse will follow', and that 'human nature must shutter' if colonisation is not adopted and slavery 'is left to force itself on'—a fearful prophecy that resonates throughout his writings. In the 'Notes on the State of Virginia', for example, he recognises that two discrete revolutionary possibilities exist in the colonies, and registers his terror of one:

> The whole commerce between master and slave is a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other ... of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labour. And can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are a gift of God? That they are not to be violated but with his wrath? Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep for ever: that considering numbers, nature and natural means only, a revolution of the wheel of fortune, an exchange of situation is among possible events: that it may become probable through supernatural interference! The Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest (Jefferson 1984:288f).

Here, Jefferson figures freedom for enslaved African Americans as the inevitable but

[32] Many of Jefferson's letters on colonisation mark this scene of comparison with, and surveillance and judgement by, a generalized 'Europe'. For example, see a letter to St. George Tucker (28 Aug. 1797) (Jefferso 1899.VII:168).

terrifying effect of a just and wrathful God and 'the wheel of fortune'. Paradoxically, the previous turn of that wheel made possible his own claim to the 'my country' for which he trembles at the inevitability of another turn. Jefferson thus prophecies emancipation as a race war, a 'contest' pitting white Americans against justice, the Almighty, and African Americans. In a letter to Monroe (14 July 1793), Jefferson again evokes that other revolution which he cannot countenance:

> I become daily more & more convinced that all the West India Islands will remain in the hands of the people of colour, & a total expulsion of the whites sooner or later take place. It is high time we should foresee the bloody scenes which our children certainly, and possibly ourselves (south of the Potommac) have to wade through, & try to avert them—We have no news from the continent of Europe later than the 1st of May (Jefferson 1899.VI:349-350).

Here, the Haitian revolution authorises Jefferson's prophecy of a dangerously revolutionary response to freedom's non-arrival in the U.S. His vision of 'bloody scenes' seems to prompt him to listen to Europe in the very next sentence, and the silence with which he is met suggests that Europe too is poised to watch and judge the 'bloody scenes' to come. As in the 'Autobiography' passage, Jefferson commits himself to 'averting' this prophecy.

Yet again, in the letter to Tucker mentioned above (28 Aug. 1797), Jefferson writes about two mutually exclusive revolutions:

> You know my subscription to it's[33] doctrines; and to the mode of emancipation, I am satisfied that that must be a matter of compromise between the passions, the prejudices, & the real difficulties which will each have their weight in that operation. Perhaps the first chapter of this history, which has begun in St. Domingo, & the next succeeding ones, which will recount how all the whites were driven from all the other islands, may prepare our minds for a peaceable accommodation between justice, policy & necessity; & furnish an answer to the difficult question, whither shall the coloured emigrants go? and the sooner we put some plan underway, the greater hope there is that it may be permitted to proceed peaceably to it's ultimate effect. But if something is not done, & soon done, we shall be the murderers of our own children. The 'murmura venturos nautis prodentia ventos' has already reached us; the revolutionary storm, now sweeping the globe, will be upon us ... (Jefferson 1899.VII:167f)

Jefferson here shifts the grammar of his commitment to 'justice' away from the 'fabulously retroactive' 'are and ought to be' of the Declaration of Independence and the 'Autobiography' passage. Instead, Jefferson offers, on one hand, the prophetic

[33] Jefferson refers to Tucker's abolitionist pamphlet entitled 'Dissertation on Slavery'.

threat of the Haitian revolution and, on the other hand, the practical and technical terms of 'something ... soon done', a 'compromise between the passions, the prejudices, & the real difficulties', and a 'peaceable accommodation between justice, policy & necessity'. Emancipation is here not the effect of revolutionary force, it is not rendered by the 'fabulous retroactivity' of a speech act the utterance of which invents the utterer. Rather, 'emancipation' is a practical question to be 'furnish[ed] an answer'—'whither shall the coloured emigrants go?'—and a 'mode', 'plan', 'provision', or 'operation' to be put into 'ultimate effect'[34].

In the 'Autobiography' (1821), the 'Notes on the State of Virginia' (1781), and the letters to Monroe (14 July 1793), and Tucker (28 Aug. 1797), we can trace a concerted refiguration of 'freedom' from the future anteriority of the Declaration of Independence to the problem of a fearful prophecy, on the one hand, and the solution of colonisation as a practical, governmental project on the other. Rhetorically, then, the very refiguring of the Declaration's 'fabulous retroactivity' as, in the case of slavery, a prophetic problem to be practically solved, gives the danger Jefferson is seeking to 'avert' a form quite different from the 'long train of abuses and usurpations' to which the Declaration of Independence responded with a claim to the 'right ... to throw off such a government'. Derrida (1986:9f) has argued that the 'fabulous retroactivity' of a revolutionary declaration is an ethical act because it embraces and maintains the undecidability and underivability of its 'right'. The Declaration of Independence thus maintains within itself a trace of the unfoundability of its foundation, a trace one can read in the conjunction of a constation, 'are', and a prescription, 'ought to be'[35]. In his writings on colonisation, however, Jefferson can be said to 'avert' that ethical scene by figuring the futurity of justice at once prophetically and practically. That is, for this prophecy to figure a strictly decidable, solvable problem, a problem avertable given enough effort and 'foresight', the prophecy itself must have been given a form susceptible to being strictly decided and solved. In effect, the solution formulates the problem. What, then, is the form of that formulation? What is the problem colonisation produces?

In lieu of a revolutionary solution, Jefferson attempts to derive emancipation from a governmental system, a technical, utilitarian art of government: 'the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government', he says in the 'Autobiography' passage cited in this essay's epigraph. This solution, this art of government meant to capture freedom, involves the practical manipulation of discrete, racially and nationally calculable and codifiable population units; consequently, this art of government must

[34] See also a 1820 letter to John Holms (22 April) (Jefferson 1899.X:157f).

[35] For Derrida's (1990) argument that in the process of retroactively bestowing upon itself its own legitimacy, the founding act of a constitution cuts or violates the existing law and thus commits the consummate ethical act, an act conditioned upon a strictly impossible judgement to reject the law and thus characterised by incalculability. On incalculability in general, see Derrida 1988, especially pages 114-118.

itself render the calculable and codifiable racial and national form of the population to be manipulated. Again in the 'Autobiography' passage, he writes of 'indelibly' separated 'races'—colonised African Americans, imported 'white laborers'—the 'indelibility' giving the population units a visible and discrete form subjectable to manipulation. In a letter to Monroe (24 Nov. 1801) he asks, 'Could we procure lands beyond the limits of the US to form a receptacle for these people?' (Jefferson 1899.VIII:104), and, answering himself in the next paragraph, writes:

> The West Indies offer a more probable & practicable retreat for them. Inhabited already by a people of their own race & color; climates congenial with their natural constitution; insulated from the other descriptions of men; nature seems to have formed these islands to become the receptacle of the blacks transplanted into this hemisphere (Jefferson 1899.VIII:105).

This question and its answer not only 'objectify' African Americans, but more precisely render them as abstract, 'naturally' and 'practicably' manipulable units of a discrete population.

The famous letter on colonisation to Jared Sparks epitomises the 'problem of population' Jefferson imagines himself addressing with his proposal (4 Feb. 1824; Jefferson 1899.X:289-293). He begins: 'In the disposition of these unfortunate people, there are two rational objects to be distinctly kept in view' (Jefferson 1899.X:289). Immediately, the clarity and practicality of the solution is the measure of its feasibility. But this clarity and practicality reflects the calculability of 'the problem' itself:

> And without repeating the other arguments which have been urged by others, I will appeal to figures only, which admit no controversy. I shall speak in round numbers, not absolutely accurate, yet not so wide from truth as to vary the result materially. There are in the United States a million and a half of people of color in slavery. To send off the whole of these at once, nobody conceives to be practicable for us, or expedient for them. Let us take twenty-five years for its accomplishment, within which time they will be doubled. Their estimated value as property, in the first place, (for actual property has been lawfully vested in that form, and who can lawfully take it from the possessors?) at an average of two hundred dollars each, young and old, would amount to six hundred millions of dollars, which must be paid or lost by somebody. To this, add the cost of their transportation by land and sea to Mesurado, a year's provision of food and clothing, implements of husbandry and of their trades, which will amount to three hundred millions more, making thirty-six millions of dollars a year for twenty-five years, with insurance of peace all that time, and it is impossible to look at the question a second time. I am aware that at the end of about sixteen years, a gradual detraction from this sum will commence, from the gradual dimunition of breeders, and go on during the remaining nine years. Calculate this deduction, and it is still impossible to look at the enterprise a second time (Jefferson 1899.X:290f).

The letter continues incessantly in this vain. While this discourse certainly borrows

from that of the 'business' of slavery, and represents African Americans as non-human commodities, this de-humanisation also overlaps and interacts with a certain 'populizing' discourse:

> The establishment of a colony on the coast of Africa, which may introduce among the aborigines the arts of cultivated life, and the blessings of civilization and science. By doing this, we may make to them some retribution for the long course of injuries we have been committing on their population. And considering that these blessings will descend to the 'nati natorum, et qui nascentur ab illis', we shall in the long run have rendered them perhaps more good than evil (Jefferson 1899.X:290).

African Americans are no more granted 'humanity' in some general or simply positive sense in this passage than they are only reduced to commodities, as in more traditional pro-slavery discourse, in the previous passage. Rather, Jefferson's discourse here invests African Americans with a common, racial identity on the level of their existence as aggregate, abstract beings—on the level, that is, of their existence as a racial population. It is this discursive production of a calculable black population which allows Jefferson to blend the de-humanising force of the traditional discourse of slavery—'The estimated value of the new-born infant is so low, (say twelve dollars and fifty cents) that it would probably be yielded by the owner gratis'—with the Enlightenment discourse of universal freedom—'By doing this, we may make to them some retribution for the long course of injuries we have been committing on their population'.

What is more, colonisation takes on an imperial form in this letter when he writes to Sparks that 'a colony on the coast of Africa' will grant 'retribution' both to 'aborigines', in the form of 'the arts of cultivated life, and the blessings of civilization and science', and to 'people of color in [U.S.] slavery' in the form of 'an asylum to which we can, by degrees, send the whole of that population from among us' (Jefferson 1899.X:290). On the one hand colonisation discourse gives deportation value by positing a hierarchical racial difference between African Americans and white Americans in the process of representing African Americans as objects of expulsion; on the other hand, colonisation discourse also gives U.S. colonialism in Africa value by positing an abstract equivalence between colonised African Americans and white Americans in the process of representing African Americans as abstract bearers of American imperialism. That is, on one hand, colonised African Americans are racially different from and subject to white Americans, and thus equated with 'aborigines', on the level of racial particularity, on the other hand, colonised African Americans are also represented as equivalent to white Americans, and thus different from 'aborigines', on the level of formal and abstract equality. Colonisation discourse renders this paradox consistent, self-evident, and 'rational'[36].

[36] The Sparks letter is not unique in its representation of colonisation as the governmental disposal of a calculable population. See, for example, a letter to Monroe (2 June 1802) (Jefferson 1898.VIII:152f).

These manipulable representations are echoed again in an analogy Jefferson draws repeatedly between colonised African Americans and 'imported' 'white laborers' or, often, 'Germans'. In the 'Autobiography' passage he writes that 'their [colonised African Americans'] place be pari passu filled up by free white laborers'. This analogy simultaneously constructs an abstract equivalence between 'free white laborers' and colonised African Americans, and codifies a racial and national difference between white and black populations. Jefferson thus again figures the paradox, however 'certain', 'that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government'. That is, he calculates what, precisely, 'the two races' share 'equally', or what form of being 'free' is common to both, and what, precisely, their governmental difference—'the two races ... cannot live in the same government'—consists in[37].

In sum, I am suggesting here neither that Jefferson is a benevolent liberal who could not quite overcome antiquated prejudices, nor that Jefferson's representation of colonisation as genuinely emancipatory is simply a false ideological surface masking a traditional, de-humanising and objectifying discourse of slavery. Rather, I want to suggest that we read both his liberal language and his more traditionally objectifying language as overlapping and interacting to produce a hybrid, liberal racism driven by the governmental investment of subjects with life as populations to be enumerated, regulated, and manipulated—'we shall in the long run have rendered them perhaps more good than evil', Jefferson writes to Sparks.

Finally, colonisation discourse allows us to read a historically specific system of racialisation and nationalisation into Foucault's conception of 'modern technologies of power', a conception which, as many critics have argued, had little to say about racial and national forms[38]. In particular, colonisation discourse allows us to interpret what Foucault (1979:138) called the 'modernity' of these technologies. For Foucault, 'modernity' does not refer to a simple, progressive development from sovereignty to bio-power. In fact, the *History of Sexuality* suggests that different configurations of power necessarily overlap:

> ... in actual fact the passage from one [regime of power] to the other did not come about (any more than did these powers themselves) without

[37] See also letters to Dr. Edward Bancroft (26 Jan. 1789) (Jefferson 1899.V:66-68); Rufus King (13 July 1802) (Jefferson 1899.VIII:162f); and J.P. Reibelt (21 Dec. 1805) (Jefferson 1899.VIII:402f).

[38] Stoler has argued recently that the lectures which Foucault gave in 1976 at the Collège de France—only some of which have been published and even fewer translated—confer upon race and racism a much more central role in the deployment of governmental power and knowledge. I have not been able to examine these lectures. Stoler's (1995:69) own reading of these lectures intriguingly suggests that Foucault's account of racialisation 'is no scapegoat theory of race. Scapegoat theories posit that under economic and social duress, particular sub-populations are

> overlappings, interactions, and echoes' (Foucault 1980:149)[39].

One of his few accounts of 'race' actually takes note of such 'overlappings'. In the last chapter of *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Foucault (1980:138) suggests that the shift from an 'ancient' regime of power organised by sovereignty to a 'modern' regime organised by 'a power to foster life'—or what he would eventually call governmentality—produced racism in the modern sense (Foucault 1980:149f). Foucault (1980:147f) writes, 'racism in its modern, "biologizing", statist form ... took shape' in the mid nineteenth century with a shift in the mechanisms of power from 'the symbolics of blood'—in which 'blood constituted one of the fundamental values' and 'power spoke through blood: the honor of war, the fear of famine, the triumph of death, the sovereign with his sword, executioners, and tortures; blood was a reality with a symbolic function'—to 'the analytics of sexuality'. That is, through new 'technologies of life' concerned with disciplining the body and regulating populations, 'sex' was produced as a crucial field for the deployment of power:

> Sex was a means of access both to the life of the body and the life of the species. It was employed as a standard for the disciplines and as a basis for regulations .... Through the themes of health, progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body, power spoke of sexuality and to

cordoned off as intruders, invented to deflect anxieties, and conjured up precisely to nail blame. For Foucault, racism is more than an ad hoc response to crisis; it is a manifestation of preserved possibilities, the expression of an underlying discourse of permanent social war, nurtured by the bio-political technologies of "incessent purification". Racism does not merely arise in moments of crisis, in sporadic cleansings. It is internal to the bio-political state, woven into the weft of the social body, threaded through its fabric'. Yet Stoler does not specify this 'manifestation', 'expression', 'nurturing', 'internally', 'weaving', or 'threading' beyond these diverse figures. In fact, in a footnote she compares Foucault's rejection of scapegoat theories with David Roediger's work on whiteness—work whose mechanism of racialization shares much with scapegoat theories. Stoler does effectively point out that Foucault's concentration on mid nineteenth century, European state-sponsored racism, and his representation of it as a precursor to Nazism as 'the most cunning and the most naïve ... combination of the fantasies of blood and the paroxysms of a disciplinary power' (Foucault 1978:149), blinded him to the complex and uneven discourses and practices of earlier racial forms (Stoler 1995:28). The racial governmentality of Jefferson's colonisation proposal, as one of these earlier, uneven discourses and practices, thus urges a rereading of Foucault's account, as I indicate below.

[39] This is not to say that Foucault's uneven and speculative mode of argumentation never gives in to a traditional discourse of modernisation. At times, he even defines modernity as the Western overcoming of sovereignty and non-Western forms of power: 'It is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them. Outside the Western world, famine exists, on a greater scale than ever; and the biological risks confronting the species are perhaps greater, and certainly more serious, than before the birth of microbiology. But what might be called a society's "threshold of modernity" has been reached when the life of the species is wagered on its own political strategies' (Foucault 1980:143).

> sexuality; the latter was not a mark or a symbol, it was an object and a target ... sexuality, far from being repressed in the society of that period, on the contrary was constantly aroused (Foucault 1980:145-148).

However, this shift also involved 'overlappings, interactions, and echoes' between the two mechanisms of power, the older 'symbolics of blood' and the newer 'analytics of sexuality':

> it was then that a whole politics of settlement (peuplement), family, marriage, education, social hierarchicalization, and property, accompanied by a long series of permanent interventions at the level of the body, conduct, health, and everyday life, received their color and their justification from the mythical concern with protecting the purity of the blood and ensuring the triumph of the race ... (Foucault 1980:149).

For Foucault, then, governmentality's racial form involved displacing the symbolic, sovereign value of blood and revaluing 'blood' as one term in an array of terms to be calculated, codified, and manipulated in the interest of a concern with the value of sex—a concern, that is, with practices of disciplining bodies and regulating populations. Thus 'racism' is not simply an atavistic remnant of feudalism, nor is it in contradiction with newly emerging, regulatory conceptions of equality. Rather, 'race' is revalued through its interaction with 'equality' just as 'equality' is revalued through its interaction with 'race'. However, because Foucault's account situates 'race' as one term in an array of terms to be calculated, codified, and manipulated, it also fails to specify the form in which 'race' in particular overlaps, interacts, or actively relates to formal equality. Foucault leaves open the question of the precise form or modality of overlapping, interaction, and active relation between 'race' and formal equality. As a result, the specific histories and discourses of 'race', a term he introduces so suddenly in the last chapter of *The History of Sexuality*, are never examined.

Foucault offers a somewhat more extended though still cryptic account of this interaction in *Discipline and Punish*. In an effort to relate his study of 'technologies of power' to Marxian studies of 'the economic take-off of the West' and 'the techniques that made possible the accumulation of capital', he argues that technologies of power can be understood as 'methods for administering the accumulation of men', and that they

> made possible a political take-off in relation to the traditional, ritual, costly, violent forms of power, which soon fell into disuse and were superseded by a subtle, calculated technology of subjection (Foucault 1979:220f).

This partly analogical and partly historical characterisation of the relationship between 'the economic' and 'the political' leads Foucault to sketch another partly analogical and partly historical relationship between two forms of power—the micrological and disciplinary, on the one hand, and the macrological and formal, on the other. The former form of power he calls 'technologies of power', and the latter he alternately calls 'the

great juridico-political structures of a society', 'an explicit, coded and formally egalitarian juridical framework, made possible by the organization of a parliamentary, representative régime', '[t]he general juridical form that guaranteed a system of rights that were egalitarian in principle', 'the will of all', 'the formal, juridical liberties', '[t]he "Enlightenment"', 'the contract [as] ... the ideal foundation of law and political power', 'the general forms defined by law', 'the law', and 'the juridical norms according to which power was redistributed' (Foucault 1979:221-223).

These two forms of power are intimately related for Foucault. The former seems to emerge out of the latter, in the same way that the 'political take-off' emerged out of 'the economic take-off'. Yet the two also seem to articulate together in a manner about which Foucault resists being precise. 'The "Enlightenment", which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines', he writes at one point (Foucault 1979:222), suggesting that the two forms or modes of power emerge coextensively. Elsewhere he writes that

> the panoptic modality of power—at the elementary, technical, merely physical level at which it is situated—is not under the immediate dependence or a direct extension of the great juridico-political structures of a society; it is nonetheless not absolutely independent (Foucault 1979:221f),

thereby giving the disciplines a certain priority since they are more 'elementary', 'technical' and 'physical'. A few sentences later, he writes that formal egalitarianism is

> supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian and asymmetrical that we call the disciplines (Foucault 1979:222).

The disciplines 'provide, at the base, a guarantee of the submission of forces and bodies' for egalitarianism, continuing 'to work in depth' on and for egalitarianism (Foucault 1979:222). The disciplines are 'integrated' into the formal law, but exist 'as a sort of counter-law' or 'intra-law' on a different 'level' from the formal law, the 'infinitesimal level of individual lives' (Foucault 1979:222). This 'intra-law' or 'counter-law' is 'the same type of law on a different scale', 'more meticulous and more indulgent' than formal law (Foucault 1979:222). Foucault's figuration of this relationship as one of level, scale, size, fundamentality, physicality, depth, interiority, and interpenetration reflects the speculative and historically general perspective of his own discourse. While his account of 'infra-law' and 'formal law' suggests that the two modalities of power articulate actively and coextensively, he remains tentative about the form of that articulation. How might particular discursive articulations of power, such as Jeffersonian colonisation, work to conjoin these two modalities, the disciplinary and the formal? What might the specificity of such a particular, discursive articulation tell us about the relationship between the disciplinary and the formal? Is that relationship always indiscriminately one of level, scale, size, fundamentality, physicality, depth, interiority, and/or interpenetration, as Foucault seems to suggest, or

could Foucault's diverse figures actually obscure the specific interaction of the disciplinary and the formal mode of power in particular instances? What might a specific perspective on a particular discursive articulation of that relationship tell us about the relationship between regulation or control and formal egalitarianism that Foucault's general perspective does not tell us?

Foucault adds another figure to his already formative constellation when, in the midst of his account of the relationship between these two modes of power, he describes the disciplines as 'the other, dark side' of formal egalitarianism (Foucault 1979:222). The specificity of this figure could certainly be obscured or dismissed as incidental, since it comes in the midst of a stream of other, quite diverse figures, as we saw above. Yet the dismissal of a distinctly racial figure—the 'otherness' of a 'darkness' which simultaneously opposes, threatens, and supports formal egalitarianism—as incidental actually mirrors the very dismissal of race and racism as incidental aberrations from the tradition of enlightened freedom which we saw above in scholarship on Jefferson and slavery. Although one could hardly imagine Foucault articulating an interpretation of racism as incidental to enlightened freedom—in fact, as we have seen he argues quite the opposite at the end of *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*—Foucault's general perspective on, and diverse figurations of, the relationship between micrological and macrological modalities of power have precisely the effect of making the racial figuration of the former as an 'other, dark side' seem incidental. When he figures that 'other side' as a 'dark side', he implicates his study of this relationship in a history of racial formation—a history from which he nonetheless shies. I would like to use Jefferson's governmental discourse of colonisation to pry Foucault's racial figure loose from its apparent incidentality and suggest a more precise interpretation of the racial form of governmentality.

Unlike ethnocentrisms that represented hierarchical cultural differences as differences in 'cultural strength', differences in degree that could be assimilated and incorporated, the discourse that gives value to Jefferson's 'indelible lines of distinction', from the 'Autobiography' passage with which I began this section, codifies a difference in kind. Jefferson's art of government articulates 'race', 'nation', and 'equality' by offering a solution—the enumeration, emancipation, deportation, and resettlement of African Americans—to a problem—the conflict between formally and abstractly equal populations with hierarchically ordered racial particularities —retroactively created by the terms of the solution itself. Colonisation is thus not only an utilitarian response to racial conflict; rather, colonisation is embedded in a discourse which also produces that very conflict as one between racially codifiable and calculable population units whose formal and abstract equality conditions and is conditioned by their hierarchically ordered racial and national particularities. Colonisation paradoxically responds to and creates the racial calculability of populations. As a specific governmental discourse, colonisation can thus be said not simply to interact with formal equality, nor to interact in the form of a relationship of different levels, scales, sizes, depths, or colors. Rather, colonisation articulates a supplementary relationship between formal equality and racial codification, and in turn enables the imperial form of U.S. citizenship—its simultaneous exemplarity and exceptionality.

Yet colonisation discourse does more than respond to and create the racial calculability of populations. One of the most distinctive aspects of Jeffersonian colonisation is that which distinguishes it most radically from a project to deport or transport African Americans out of the U.S. As he says in the 'Autobiography' passage quoted above, Jefferson does not adapt to a U.S. context the kind of deportation practiced by the Spaniards against the Moors. Rather, he expresses a need to surveil and to regulate colonised African Americans after deportation, and he represents that need as absolutely necessary, self-evident and realistic—a representation that many abolitionists shared with him up until the 1820s.

The 1824 letter to Sparks mentioned above exemplifies Jefferson's concern that the U.S. keep watch over African Americans long after their deportation and emancipation. When Jefferson writes that by establishing

> a colony on the coast of Africa, which may introduce among the aborigines the arts of cultivated life, and the blessings of civilization and science ... we shall in the long run have rendered them perhaps more good than evil,

the 'rendering' to which he refers also includes a continuing system of surveillance and control:

> In the disposition of these unfortunate people, there are two rational objects to be distinctly kept in view. First .... Under this view, the colonization society is to be considered as a missionary society, having in view, however, objects more humane, more justifiable, and less aggressive on the peace of other nations, than the others of that appellation .... The second object [of colonising African Americans], and the most interesting to us, as coming home to our physical and moral characters, to our happiness and safety, is to provide an asylum to which we can, by degrees, send the whole of that population from among us, and establish them under our patronage and protection, as a separate, free and independent people ... (Jefferson 1899.X:290).

In this letter, colonisation displaces older, missionary practices due to the former's 'rational', 'more humane, more justifiable, and less aggressive' objectives. These objectives paradoxically involve, on the one hand, granting colonised African Americans formal equality and independence—treating them as a 'free and independent people'—while, on the other hand, maintaining a system of regulation and control over them—

> to provide an asylum to which we can, by degrees, send the whole of that population from among us, and establish them under our patronage and protection, as a separate ... people.

Yet this passage secures the modernity of those objectives—their quality of being 'more humane, more justifiable, and less aggressive' than missionising—by repeatedly

declaring their visual self-evidence: 'are ... to be distinctly kept in view', 'Under this view'. The self-evident rationality and modernity of colonisation thus depends on the declarative reiteration of its clarity or 'distinctness'. This rhetorical reiteration of colonisation's self-evidence turns the paradoxical conjunction of formal equality with control and regulation into a 'rational' formula for freedom[40]. This regulatory sentiment is echoed in a letter to Doctor Thomas Humphreys:

> I concur entirely in your leading principles of gradual emancipation, of establishment on the coast of Africa, and the patronage of our nation until the emigrants shall be able to protect themselves ... (8 February 1817) (Jefferson 1899.X:76f).

Jefferson's vision of continuing regulation and control casts America's proposed 'gift' to African Americans as less an ethical and just act which expects no return, than an unequal exchange in which formal equality would be paid for in perpetuity by the maintenance of a system of hierarchical racial and national particularity.

Jefferson also represents this conjunction of formal equality with continuing regulation and control in economic terms. For example, in the letter to Rufus King mentioned above, from 13 July 1802, he writes:

> We might for this purpose [of paying for the colonisation of slaves from the U.S.], enter into negotiations with the natives, on some part of the coast, to obtain a settlement, and by establishing an African company, combine with it commercial operations, which might not only reimburse expenses but procure profit also ... (Jefferson 1899.VIII:161f).

Similarly, Jefferson writes to Monroe on 2 June 1802,

> ... and if leave can be obtained to send black insurgents there, to inquire further whether the regulations of the place would permit us to carry or take there any mercantile objects which by affording some commercial profit, might defray the expenses of the transportation (Jefferson 1899.VIII:153).

By bringing independent African Americans in Africa into the economic orbit of the U.S. as a peripheral nation-state, these continuing 'commercial operations' would construct and maintain both a separation of Americans from Africans, and a continuing dependency of Africans on Americans.

The fact that colonisation must continue beyond deportation, that it must proceed 'in such a slow degree' as he says in the 'Autobiography' passage, suggests that it not only produces and responds to, but also maintains the very terms of the crisis it represents. Colonisation can be said to demand the iteration and reiteration of the calculable difference, the production and maintenance of a difference in kind, between

[40] See also an 1815 letter to David Barrow (Jefferson 1899.IX:515f).

discrete, racialised populations. That is, when Jefferson argues that the U.S. must keep a watchful political and economic eye over the new African American state, it seems that colonisation must continue to work trans-Atlantically after deportation so that it can maintain this calculable difference. Colonisation thus institutionalises its claim to complete the emancipatory promise of the U.S. revolution in a continual, systematic, trans-Atlantic ritual of racialisation. This iterative and reiterative aspect of African colonisation indicates again, as I mentioned earlier, that imperial U.S. citizenship does not demand the assimilation of difference to a homogeneous national norm, but rather depends on the active production of a particular kind of difference—the calculable racial difference of a population. Yet this reiterative aspect of colonisation also indicates that imperial U.S. citizenship is not animated simply by the desire to rid America of racial others. Rather, African colonisation schemes precisely sought to keep alive the very racial distinction they calculated in the first place through post-deportation surveillance and control. Colonisation's reiterative art of governmentality continually conjoins the formal and abstract equality between populations with the racially and nationally codified particularities of those populations.

Thus, colonisation's governmentality consists not only in centralised power and control (buying slaves and land, deportation), but also, and more importantly for Jefferson, in a systematic, reiterative, decentralised, diffuse political reason, a calculation of society whereby people would come to be understood as discrete, calculable members of a racially and nationally codified population. In effect, colonised African Americans are to be objects of an experiment in Enlightenment governmentality; they are to be rendered, represented, and maintained 'free' by the U.S. When Foucault (1980:152) writes in *The History of Sexuality* that

> I do not envisage a 'history of mentalities' that would take account of bodies only through the manner in which they have been perceived and given meaning and value; but a 'history of bodies' and the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested,

the 'manner' of 'investment', in the case of colonisation, is this reiterative and calculable political reason. In Jefferson, then, colonisation can be understood not as an aberration of liberal principles of freedom, but rather as a liberal, governmental articulation of formal and abstract equality with racial codification by means of a well-regulated, diffuse, and responsibilised society. This results not in a withdrawing of government from civil society, but in a dispersion of governmentality across a society itself created by governmental political reason. When he writes in the 'Autobiography' passage that

> Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that [our slaves] are to be free. Nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government,

he suggests that formally and abstractly, as population units, African Americans and

white Americans are equally free. White nationalist racism 'is no less certain', however, because the freedom of these population units is conditioned upon the production and maintenance of their 'indelible' racial codification and hierarchicalisation.

Department of English
Queens College, CUNY

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De Mist, Race and Nation

David Johnson

The 'Future of the Past' Conference at the University of the Western Cape in July 1996 drew vigorous prescriptions from a range of eminent scholars as to how a post-apartheid history-writing should proceed[1]. Rather than engage in detail with those arguments, this article is offered as an attempt to re-read one particular historical figure—Jacobus Abraham De Mist—through the dramatically-adjusted lenses of the 1990s. My argument is that while a concern with race filtered commentaries on De Mist during the apartheid years, his writings might now be re-read with an eye to how he understood nascent forms of nationhood.

Writing about literary criticism, Mikhail Bakhtin (1986:7) has described criticism as a dialogue between different cultures:

> We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and semantic depths .... Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched.

Extending Bakhtin's suggestive formulation to the writing of history, new questions in the present might be raised for a particular past moment, and the hope is that this past moment might in turn reveal to us new aspects and semantic depths in our present. To apply this to the writings of De Mist: we in 1990s South Africa seek answers in the Cape Colony of 1802 to our present concerns.

Two central questions in contemporary South African debates over the nature and forms of nationhood structure my discussion of De Mist's principal work, *The Memorandum Containing Recommendations for the Form and Administration of Government at the Cape of Good Hope* (1802). The questions are:

1) what is the relation between revolution and the post-revolutionary political settlement?

2) what is the relation between the nation-as-political-community and an expanding capitalist economy?

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[1] These contributions have been collected in a special issue of *South African Historical Journal* 35 (November 1996).

Before moving on to these questions, however, it is necessary to set out briefly the interpretations of De Mist from the apartheid era.

De Mist under apartheid

Born the son of a Reformed minister in Zalt-Bommel in 1749, Jacob Abraham De Mist went to high school in Kampen and to university in Leiden. At Leiden, he was strongly influenced by the patriotten movement, and also commenced his lifelong association with freemasonry. Upon graduating, he returned to Kampen first to work as an attorney and then to serve as secretary to the government in Kampen. With the revolutionary upheavals in the Netherlands in 1795, he rose rapidly, being elected to the National Assembly in 1797. His political allegiances in office were moderate: he defended the traditional Dutch legislative bodies and procedures, and in particular supported autonomy for the provinces. Outflanked in 1798 by a radical caucus in the National Assembly, De Mist after a short spell in comfortable incarceration moved on to a senior position in the state bureaucracy. In 1800, he was selected to serve on the Aziatische Raad, the colonial governing body, and it was this appointment that saw his deployment to the Cape in 1802. After the Cape was returned to the British in 1805, De Mist remained in the Dutch colonial administration, serving in other parts of the Dutch Empire until his death in 1823.

De Mist was for the most part treated kindly by historians writing during the apartheid era. By far the most influential interpretation of his three years at the Cape version has been the one reproduced in school history textbooks[2]. De Mist and his Batavian colleague Governor Jan Willem Janssens are described in these textbooks as Enlightenment figures thwarted by the intractable realities of life at the Cape. A.N. Boyce (1960:115ff) in *Legacy of the Past Std VII* notes that '[b]oth men were firm believers in the principles of the French Revolution—liberty and equality—nevertheless they were practical men and able administrators', and he concludes with the judgement: '[t]he commissioner and the governor were anxious to improve conditions in the colony, but their ideas were too advanced for the conservative burghers'. A.P.J. van Rensburg et al (1976:61) in *Active History Std VIII*, which was written specifically for black school syllabuses, make a similar assessment:

> Liberals as they were, they nevertheless believed in strong government, and though much attracted to the ideas of equality and brotherhood, they were shrewd and practical men.

In a later edition of *Active History* for the new standard five syllabus, Van Rensburg *et al* (1989:197,199) repeat these generous judgements of De Mist, making the remarkable claim that the new districts established by De Mist 'did not include the land of any Black nations', and

[2] For a summary of how South African history textbooks recorded nineteenth century South African history, see Elizabeth Dean *et al* (1983:52-64).

conclude that 'Jacob de Mist did much to improve the political and judicial conditions at the Cape'.

While the textbooks hover between praising De Mist's European refinement and condemning his liberal idealism, University of Cape Town philosophy professor A.H. Murray is unequivocal in his embrace of De Mist's efforts to find enlightened and rational solutions to the perplexing challenges of the Cape[3]. Murray's work on De Mist approaches hagiography, as he praises De Mist's modernising impulse so sensibly tempered by respect for tradition: 'he preached the freedom of Law and Order; liberty, equality and fraternity were for him not political institutions but moral duties incumbent on man' (Murray n.d.:14), though at the same time

> [h]e was a political fundamentalist in upholding the old principles and the continuity of historical institutions. De Mist was prepared to adapt the old vessels to the new conditions, but he navigated by the old lights (Murray n.d.:18).

Also exemplary for Murray is De Mist's pluralism, which he describes approvingly as an early form of apartheid:

> [De Mist] advocates that a separation should be maintained strictly between the native peoples of the Cape settlement and the farmers, thus acknowledging the treaty rights and the sovereignty of tribes .... In spite of his support of free trade and the fact that he had recommended a small amount of free trade with the natives in the Memorandum, there is no mention here of interpenetration and of mingling of populations for the purpose of markets and commerce and to spread the light of civilisation. Indeed the policy of separation was so basic to De Mist's plans that trade between sections of the population is directly forbidden in an instruction. Natives employed in the colony, and particularly native children, were to be returned to their homeland (Murray n.d.:119).

De Mist's resistance to extending the franchise is also applauded by Murray. After quoting a statement by De Mist criticising public political meetings, Murray notes that 'De Mist's times did not allow for indiscriminate universal suffrage!' (Murray n.d.:121). In his conclusion, Murray argues enthusiastically for the continuing benign influence of De Mist:

> South African political experience marches on after 1806, when the English take over the Colony at the Cape, but never, in all its vicissitudes, loses sight of De Mist either in principles, institutions or policy .... De Mist's institutions

[3] Also sympathetic to De Mist is G.D. Scholtz (1967:383f), and from an earlier period J.P. van der Merwe (1926). Educationalist E.G. Malherbe (1925:79) is even more effusive, describing De Mist as 'one of the ablest administrators and educational reformers who ever set foot in South Africa'.

> and ideas were carried into the hinterland by the Voortrekkers from the eastern parts of the Colony during the third decade of the century. Continuity was maintained and the principles of De Mist's political philosophy were woven into the texture of the political institutions and procedures which are incorporated into the Republic of South Africa (n.d:137).

Sharing Murray's fear of 'interpenetration and mingling', Sarah Gertrude Millin in two of her novels of the 1950s presents De Mist as an Enlightenment man, who is nonetheless sensitive to the imperatives of racial purity[4]. In *King of the Bastards* (1950:169), De Mist is described as 'an eager friendly man whom it irked to be haughty', and he weeps at the sight of starving Bushmen pastoralists. In *The Burning Man*, Millin creates the following conversation between De Mist and Janssens, in which De Mist explains how the two of them differ from the missionary Johannes van der Kemp:

> '[Van der Kemp] has leapt over our heads on our own path. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity: he is, while we are not, absolute in his requirement of Liberty, Equality, Fraternity. We clap eyes on the savages of the land and our senses recoil from accepting them as our free and equal brothers, or, indeed, as our brothers at all. Considering European politics, van der Kemp may be reactionary and we the revolutionaries—'
>
> 'Assuming he remains an Orangeman—'
>
> 'They say he does. But humanly he has crossed the boundaries which still contain us' (Millin 1952:257).

De Mist's position is endorsed in the novel, as Van der Kemp suffers endless hardships because he transgresses the racial boundaries which contain De Mist and Janssens.

A more critical picture of De Mist is presented in the work of historian W.M. Freund. In a chapter on the Cape governments from 1795-1814, Freund (1989:325) notes that many historians have extolled the Batavians, but suggests that they in fact achieved very little, with '[b]oth De Mist and Janssens ... quickly disillusioned with the Cape'. In his unpublished Ph.D., Freund gives due emphasis to De Mist's political conservatism:

> He was no democrat. He was the son of the regenten, and, rejecting democracy and monarchy, he naturally opted for oligarchy (Freund 1971:138).

As regards De Mist and Janssens's racial attitudes, Freund summarises as follows:

> In their view of the non-white colonial peoples, Batavian officials interspersed sentimentality, sympathy for unfortunates and a paternalism

[4] For a critical discussion of Millin's novels of the 1950s, see Michael Green's *Novel Histories* (1997:115-137) and J.M. Coetzee's *White Writing* (1988:136-162).

> that masked a real lack of regard for the potential of non-white individuals as citizens .... This attitude, which parallels exactly the feeling of the contemporary white South African who expressed a preference for the 'raw native', shows the strength, even in Janssens, of the belief in the virtues of the men unspoiled by western culture (Freund 1971:272f).

He concludes that De Mist's reforming zeal was moderated as in the course of his experiences in the Cape, with the result that

> the powerless non-whites continued unable to participate in administration and justice and remained at the disposal of their white employers and masters (Freund 1971:275).

Taken together, these versions of De Mist produced during the apartheid era share an understandable pre-occupation with race. With a substantial degree of consensus, the history textbook writers Murray and Millin all see De Mist as the exemplary European confronted by obdurate Africa. His racial attitudes—often extrapolated by elaborate conjecture from his writings—are used to justify the policies of segregation and apartheid. Freund's criticisms of De Mist's racial attitudes by the same token might be read as an attack on the apartheid ideology dominant in South Africa at the time[5]. In Bakhtin's terms, the 1960s and 1970s in South Africa were dominated by questions of race, and in looking back at De Mist, these different writers accordingly raised questions, at times obsessively, about the connections between racial ideologies in the Cape of 1800 and South Africa in the 1960s. In the next section, I look at De Mist afresh, with nation rather than race functioning as the organising trope[6].

[5] Freund writes at this time in detail about notions of race at the Cape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in his 1976 article 'Race in the social structure of South Africa, 1652-1836'. Freund's main argument is that modern forms of racism cannot be traced unproblematically back to the eighteenth century, and to illustrate this argumant he cites numerous examples of black people in positions of authority at the Cape in this period. His Target is I.D. MacCrone's *Race Attitudes in South Africa: Historical, Experimental and Psychological Studies* (1937), but much of his argument applies with equal force to the likes of Murray and Millin.

[6] Historians of the Batavian period in the past ten years have re-assessed De Mist's generation in a more critical light. Whereas historians of an earlier generation like I. Leonard Leeb (1973) were sympathetic to the Batavian reformers, recent histories have paid particular attention to the connections between the Dutch Enlightenment and slavery and racism, and have also called into question the democratic credentials of the patriotten movement. On the relation between the Dutch Enlightenment and slavery, see Johannes Menne Postma's *The Dutch in the Atlantic Slave Trade 1600-1815* (1990), and Gert Oostinidie's collection *Fifty Years Later*, especially the contribution on the Batavians at the Cape by Robert Ross (1995:179-191). Allison Blakely's *Blacks in the Dutch World* surveys the Renaissance and Enlightenment roots of racism in Dutch culture (1993:1-38). On the limits of Dutch republicanism in the eighteenth century as understood by the patriotten movement, see Martin Prak (1991:73-102), Wayne te Brake (1991:15-23), Wyger R.E. Velema (1997:437-443), and Margaret C. Jacob and Wijnand W. Mijnhardt's collection *The Dutch Republic in the Eighteenth Century. Decline, Enlightenment and Revolution* (1992). What all these historians emphasise is the need to distinguish between the exclusive Dutch notion of citizenship of the eighteenth century, and the revolutionary concept of republican citizenship after 1789.

De Mist in the 1990s

De Mist's claim on our attentions in South Africa in the 1990s rests upon his abilities as a lucid and fastidious commentator on the emergent and competing definitions of nationhood in Europe after the French Revolution. He has a direct appreciation of the connections between European nationhood and colonial expansion, and his political experiences in the Netherlands bring a distinctive perspective to bear on the community at the Cape. Furthermore, he lived through a particularly interesting period of Dutch history. Simon Schama wryly summarises the sequence of calamities for the Netherlands during this period:

> Between 1780 and 1813, after all, the Netherlands was despoiled of its colonies, routed at sea, invaded four times (twice unsuccessfully); driven to the edge of bankruptcy; and finally forced to drain the dregs of its misfortune by becoming mere departments of the French Empire (Schama 1977:16).

Throughout these perilous times for his nation, De Mist was never far from the action.

As regards the first question, namely how De Mist understood the relation between revolution and post-revolutionary settlement, it is clear that it was the French Revolution which dominated his thoughts. Though by nature a conservative man, De Mist saw in the French Revolution and its aftermath certain benefits:

> for although, in common with all loyal countrymen, we deplore the misfortunes, losses and humiliations which were our portion during the late war, and although none can have a greater horror of all so-called revolutionary measures than we, yet we feel that this is perhaps the most important, if not the happiest outcome of periods of anarchy, or epochs of war and peace, that at such times, as if by an electric shock, the whole order of things is changed, and sweeping reforms which have been needed for many years are immediately instituted, whereas fifty years of peace and prosperity would not have brought them within reach (De Mist 1920:170f).

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, De Mist therefore approved the salutary 'electric shock' effects of the French Revolution, not only because his own personal elevation owed much to the Revolution, but also because by 1802 it was clear to him that its most radical impulses had been contained. It was also a consequence of the Revolution that the Cape government had been transformed from the Company's inefficient administration to 'the more advanced forms of Republican government' (1920:171), a process he saw the new modernising Batavian government accelerating. Indeed, while the value of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' in the post-revolutionary settlement is duly acknowledged, it is the modernising effect of the French Revolution—the 'electric shock'—that appeals most strongly to De Mist's Enlightenment sensibility.

As regards De Mist's attitude towards revolutions more generally, he is on occasions sympathetic towards rebel causes. In the case of the Graaff-Reinet and

Swellendam settlers challenging the authority of the Dutch East India Company (V.O.C.), De Mist is forgiving[7]. The blame for settler uprisings 'is solely due to the *ill-conceived intentions and bad statesmanship*' (De Mist 1920:177 e.i.o.) of the Company Directors, and the actions of the rebels are therefore justified:

> Was it, then, so very unnatural that designing persons—only too many of them, alas!—are to be found both at the Cape and in the Motherland—tried to advance their own interests by means of the discontent of the colonists, and instigated disorders, risings and rebellions? We thoroughly condemn these deeds, but it is the duty of an efficient Government to investigate the cause for such a general wave of dissatisfaction .... First restore the happiness of the community by establishing just laws and institutions, and then punish the transgressors (De Mist 1920:178).

An efficient political system (including a modern legal system and the freedom to trade) are seen as the appropriate means to redress for the legitimate grievances of the settlers. In much the same way as the French bourgeoisie and populace were justified in feeling frustrated by the despotic bumbling of the *ancien regime*, so too for De Mist did the settlers have every right to demand a modern form of government attuned to their needs.

While he defends the settler rebels in their dealings with the Company, De Mist is less sympathetic when they plunder their Xhosa neighbours. He is critical of the 'cattle stealing and petty thieving, which the settlers of Graaff-Reinet have lately become accustomed to perpetrate against their Kaffir neighbours', and sees it as inevitable that the Xhosa should have changed from being 'docile and peace-loving' to being 'a nation whom we should fear because we have embittered them' (De Mist 1920:246). Accordingly, he also shows sympathy for the rebellious feelings of the slaves[8] and native inhabitants[9] towards white settlers and colonists. Slaves, he argues, must be well-treated, with 'a higher code of morals ... instilled into the masters' (De Mist 1920:252), and further, responsibility for the conflict between white settlers and native inhabitants lies historically entirely with the former:

> On what grounds did these poor creatures deserve the persecution and ill-treatment meted out to them by the Company's servants from the very founding of the colony? From the caves of their fathers, they watched a foreign nation take possession of their coasts, offering not the slightest

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[7] The histories of Dutch settler uprisings during this period are traced by Hermann Giliomee (1975:31-37,51-54,70-80). Also interesting in this regard is Giliomee and Andre Du Toit (1983:230-242). Ross (1981:8-10) explores the connections between the uprisings in the Cape and those in the Netherlands and the Thirteen Colonies.

[8] The most recent studies of slavery at the Cape are Robert Shell's *Children of Bondage* (1994) and Nigel Worden and Clifton Crais's collection *Breaking the Chains* (1994). For more detail on the Batavians at the Cape, see Worden's earlier work *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* (1985).

[9] There were a number of violent Khoisan rebellions during this period, which are scrupulously traced by Shula Marks (1972) and Susan Newton King (1981).

> *opposition; they gradually retreated before the advance of the strangers, and provided them with cattle, sheep, and goats; but all this could not sate the white man's* greed. Covetous, as we might suppose, to emulate the Spaniards in America ... the colonists hounded down these timid wretches, destroyed their kraals and villages, stole their cattle, seized the men and boys and reduced them to a state of subjection and slavery (De Mist 1920:253f).

In order to accommodate the aspirations of the slaves and native inhabitants, De Mist argues for their gradual integration into the colonial order. In particular, rather than plundering their resources, he argues that efforts should be made to draw them into the colonial economy:

> the inhabitants of that remote district could gradually be civilised .... If no weapons or gunpowder be sold to these people, what harm could there be in teaching them the use of knives, shears, pins, hammers, large nails, thread, ribbons, pipe, tobacco, and all sorts of small wares and women's ornaments .... [A]n increase of the necessaries of life helps in the progress of civilization. By means of barter and exchange, the Kaffirs can be taught to trade in elephants tusk and furs (De Mist 1920:246).

Slaves and native inhabitants rising up against colonial rule in the Cape are never accorded the same stature by De Mist as the revolutionaries in France, or indeed the settler rebels. However, like both the French revolutionaries and the settler rebels, they too can find their place in a modern, post-revolutionary settlement if they learn the lessons of free trade and assimilate the 'civilised' ways of the European[10].

The central place De Mist allocates to free trade in cementing his post-revolutionary settlement is of course of direct relevance to the second question posed in re-reading his *Memorandum,* namely how does he understand the relation between the nation-as-political-community and the expanding capitalist economy? Under the V.O.C.'s rule at the Cape, a mercantilist economic dispensation had dominated a supine political order, but with the V.O.C. going insolvent in 1795, a new form of colonial governance was needed. De Mist (1920:183) recognises this opportunity for innovation:

[10] It is quite clear from these passages that Murray's interpretation of De Mist's policies is inaccurate. Rather than anticipating the sequence of policies from indirect rule to segregation to apartheid (as Murray suggests), De Mist's assimilationist impulse should be seen as a precursor of the Cape system of direct rule introduced by Sir George Grey later in the century. In De Mist's benign version of this policy, there is the gradual assimilation of an elite of the local inhabitants into the ranks of the Dutch citizenry. What direct rule meant in practice in the Cape was something quite different. Mahmood Mamdani (1996:66) explains that direct rule legitimised the 'appropriation of land, destruction of communal autonomy, and establishment of the "freedom" of the individual to become a wage worker'. The very few Africans who were 'civilised' in the coloniser's terms enjoyed European legal rights; for the vast majority, their legal status as second-class subjects was enforced.

> upon restoration [of Dutch rule] everything starts afresh, and never did a more favourable opportunity offer itself for the substitution of an improved system of government in place of the former constitution.

For De Mist, there were two fundamental pressures to consider: first, the monopolistic practices of the V.O.C. had been undone as a result of free trade, and the new political order therefore had to embrace the modernising energies of free trade in order to survive; and second, the political revolutions in France and the U.S. had made an equal citizenry (in whatever limited form) a sine qua non for any modern nation, and demands for equality in the Cape likewise had to be welcomed as markers of progress and modernity.

Looking first in more detail at De Mist's attitude towards the principle of free trade, it is clear that he sees future governments at the Cape no longer confined to protecting the interests of the Company and its employees; rather, the economic interests of all who lived in the Cape would have to be served[11]. The *Memorandum* accordingly embraces the principle of free trade enthusiastically:

> That in future the political government of the Cape should be wholly distinct from the commercial government, which has hitherto regulated affairs in that Colony; and that the inhabitants at the Cape, under reasonable conditions should be allowed the unrestricted exercise of their trades and occupations, in so far as these can be reconciled within the interests of the Mother Country (De Mist 1920:190)

Although the final qualifying clause retains the allegiance to Holland, his commitment in these passages to free trade echoes precisely the defining principles of the new economic order being established at the same time in the Thirteen Colonies.

As regards the need for a novel political system to supersede the Company's imperfect efforts at political administration, De Mist approves the political forms of republican democracy. What distinguishes De Mist's position from the likes of Jefferson, however, is the continuing attachment to a metropolitan power. In an important passage, De Mist sets out the relationship between Batavia and the Cape, giving due attention to the overlap of political and economic rights:

> the Cape should primarily be considered as a distant portion of the Batavian Republic, the welfare and prosperity of which are included in our own, and which, with all the other portions of our Republic, is subject to one and the same government. It is only distinguished from the other integral members of this community by the fact that owing to the distance separating its inhabitants from this Republic, it cannot participate in the decisions and

[11] The tension between mercantilist and free trade ideologies continues under British rule. For a useful summary of the conflict between Governor Charles Somerset (defender of mercantilism) and John Fairbairn (proponent of free trade), see Trapido (1992:35-39).

> deliberations of the State Parliament. It must be regarded as having made a reciprocal contract with the rest of the citizens of the Netherlands, which, on the part of the Colony, is embodied in the condition *do ut facias*, and on the part of the Motherland *facio ut des*, that is to say, *we will protect and help you if you will bring your produce to our market and provide our ships with whatever they need.* But these citizens, on the other hand, are privileged by possessing not only the same definite rights of freedom in citizenship and religion as are enjoyed by all citizens of the Republic, but also many other advantages, such as smaller taxes, the benefits of mutual free trade with the mother country, facilities for acquiring freehold properties and other privileges which we have not the space to enumerate (De Mist 1920:186 e.i.o.).

De Mist acknowledges that the symmetry between a capitalist economy based on the principles of free trade, and a political community based on an elastic definition of nationhood stretching from Amsterdam to the Cape and beyond, cannot be achieved without some effort. He is especially aware of the constructed nature of national identity, and of the need for ideological labour to be directed to this end:

> It will be the work of years to transform the citizens of Cape Town once again into Nederlanders, and unless the national spirit is regenerated, and a pride fostered in national morals, customs, dress, manufactures, etc., etc., it will be in vain to hope that any good will result from political reforms (De Mist 1920:201).

In the Cape, the settler community, the native inhabitants, and the slaves had proved fractious and difficult to control, a state of affairs De Mist attributes to the combination of mercantile monopolies and antiquated political institutions. His fervent belief is that a re-negotiated political identity based on Dutch citizenship, in conjunction with a laissez faire capitalism, would produce a more efficient dispensation.

[12] There is a vast literature on the relation between race and nation. Three of particular interest for this period are Eteinne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein's *Race, Nation, Class. Ambiguous Identities* (1991), David Goldberg's *Racist Culture. Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (1993:21-40,78f), and Martin Thom's *Republics, Nations and Tribes* (1995). Wallerstein offers the following distinction, emphasising the economic dimension of definitions of race and nation: 'The concept of "race" is related to the axial division of labour in the world-economy, the core-periphery antinomy. The concept of "nation" is related to the political superstructure of this historical system, the sovereign states that form and derive from the interstate system' (Balibar & Wallerstein 1991:79). Martin Thom's (1995:119) central focus is on the shift from the city-state to the nation after the French Revolution: 'the prestige of the ancient city became tarnished in the aftermath of the French Revolution, and ... the imagined qualities of the noble savage were transferred to the Germanic tribes, the massed origin of the Christian nations'.

conclusion

The relation between 'race' and 'nation' in all contexts is a complex one[12]. In De Mist's own time, both terms mutated in important ways, as Nicholas Hudson (1996:258) explains:

> Yet over the period of the [eighteenth] century, 'race' gradually mutated from its original sense of a people or a single nation, linked by origin, to its later sense of a biological subdivision of the human species. 'Nation' began to be used as a subdivision of 'race' or, even more commonly, as a term denominating a cultural or a political group of a certain sophistication.

And in the mid-nineteenth century, Hudson continues, they changed fundamentally once again:

> ['Race'] meant an innate and fixed disparity in the physical and intellectual make-up of different peoples. 'Nation', in turn, was more than a group of people living under the same government. It was the very 'soul' of personal identity, the very lifeblood churning through an individual speaking a particular dialect in one of Europe's innumerable regions. From the often violent coupling of 'race' and 'nation', re-fashioned in these new forms, were spawned the most virulent forms of nineteenth-century racism, and finally the political barbarities of our own century (Hudson 1996:258).

Although De Mist refers to issues of race, his more direct concern in the *Memorandum* is with questions of nationhood, and he deploys the late eighteenth-century sense of 'nation' as denoting a 'cultural or political group of a certain sophistication'. His desire to transform the citizens of Cape Town—he does not distinguish between them on the basis of race—into Nederlanders, is symptomatic of this understanding of nation. The apartheid-era apologists for De Mist, however, read back the nineteenth-century coupling of 'race' and 'nation' to the start of century, and produce an ahistorical encounter between past and present, in which (to return to Bakhtin's terms) the racism of apartheid merges with the quite different racism of the Dutch Enlightenment. In the process, De Mist's distinctive articulation of nation and race, his ideas on post-revolutionary negotiated settlement, on nation-building, and on unrestricted capitalist trade, are submerged.

Finally, as to whether De Mist's *Memorandum* answers questions in our present, a couple of suggestions. First, the *Memorandum* shows quite clearly the ability of a conservative imagination to contain the radical idealism of a revolutionary moment, and the intellectual resources used by De Mist to effect such containment remain potent: democratic citizenship (with exclusions occluded), free market economics, and a relentless rhetoric of modernisation and progress, are coded as continuous with (never as distortions of) the revolutionary impulse. Second, De Mist's simultaneous commitment to the political discourse of nationhood and the economic imperatives of free trade produces contradictions which continue to resonate. His efforts to nurture a Dutch national spirit at the Cape while at the same time promoting free trade came to naught as a more powerful imperial power displaced the Batavians.

Whether the current South African government's political discourse of rainbow nationhood can sustain the contradictions generated by its own economic policies of internal structural adjustment and increased free trade remains an open question.

Department of English
University of Natal

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Current Trends in the Production of South African History

Martin Legassick and Gary Minkley

The future's clear skatties, it's the past that's uncertain[1].

One of us is regarded as one of the founders, in exile, of 'revisionist' historiography in the early 1970s, and dropped out of the academy for ten years in the 1980s[2]. The other's formation was in the 1980s, initially under the influence of 'structuralism' in the economic history department at UCT, subsequently practising 'social history'. This paper gives our reading of the state and trajectory of the contemporary production of history in South Africa. It is the first time we have worked jointly, and this paper represents an unfinished dialogue between our different pre-conceived ideas on the question. We are more concerned with raising issues and problems for discussion than with providing complete answers. We try to situate the contemporary production of history against the background of a past trajectory: of the birth in exile and subsequent rise to hegemony of revisionism-radicalism-Marxism (some academics accept one label; others another) in the English-speaking academy, and (within that) the rise to hegemony in the 1980s of 'social history' as promoted by spokespersons of History Workshop[3].

[1] Eva Bezuidenhout (Pieter Dirk Uys) at the launch in Darling of Lester Venter's *When Mandela Goes: The Coming of South Africa's Second Revolution, Cape Times*, 3/10/1997.

[2] The implicit reasons for Legassick's leaving the university were spelled out in his 'Academic Freedom and the Workers' Struggle', written as the T.B. Davie Memorial Lecture which the University of Cape town invited him to return to South Africa to give in 1979. When he was refused permission to enter the country by the government, UCT at first agreed to distribute the lecture *in absentia*, but the Acting Principal subsequently wrote that 'the university has received legal opinion to the effect that we would risk prosecution if we were to publish your lecture'. Thus only extracts have hitherto been published — in some student newspapers.

[3] Jubber (1997:157) writes recently of 'the theoretical hegemony of Marxist theory over the past three decades'— i.e. since 1967! In South Africa this is a vast exaggeration. In English-speaking white South African universities, the hegemony of liberalism only began to be challenged by Marxism in the 1970s, and Marxism could be said to be hegemonic at the earliest in the 1980s—and was being challenged by the start of the 1990s. A piece in 1990, in fact, writes of 'the ideas of the revisionist historians ... rapidly *becoming* hegemonic within the academies in the 1980s' (Witz & Hamilton 1991:190 e.a.).

Politically, the 1990s has been a dramatic decade for South Africa, opening with the unbanning of the ANC, CP and PAC and proceeding to the establishment in 1994 of an ANC-dominated government following the first democratic elections in the country. With this abrupt transition from white minority rule to democracy, one might have expected a huge upheaval in both academic and popular historical perception: a rush to uncover and re-understand the history of society from the point of view of the oppressed majority. The major point we want to make about the recent and present production of history in South Africa is that there has been no sudden 'rupture' or 'explosion' since 1990, at least in academic historiography. Nothing, in other words, corresponding to the birth of African history in the 'decolonisation' period of 1956-1966, or to the rise of the Dar-es-Salaam school associated with the growth of 'socialist' states in Africa, or to the rise of nationalist Indian historiography alongside the struggle for the independence of India.

This paper takes this point as one that requires explanation, and our discussion of past and present historiography will be oriented around attempting to provide this. We are at the same time conscious of gaps in our knowledge and treatment of the subject.

the social context of 'revisionism'

The cutting edge of South African history writing, as situated among exiles and in predominantly white (English-speaking) universities, moved from liberalism to 'revisionism'-radicalism-Marxism at the start of the 1970s. In doing so, it could be said to have 'skipped over' an African nationalist phase. Or perhaps those who participated in the revisionist paradigm shift assumed (as certainly did the one of us involved) that there already existed a nationalist historiography, and that the real issue was to burrow below this. It is perhaps significant that this was the period in which 'black consciousness' was the dominant political ideology among black students. It is also significant that academic history writers in South Africa have remained, and remain, predominantly white (and male). Ironically, this nationalist historiography was most familiar as presented by white writers, for example, in Eddie Roux's pioneering *Time Longer than Rope* (1948), later to be given more substance in the four volume collection edited by the Americans Thomas Karis and Gwen M. Carter, *From Protest to Challenge* (1972-1977) of documents collected in South Africa in the early 1960s[4]. The

[4] Few academics in the 1960s had read works by Plaatje, Molema or Dhlomo, etc. but, in comparison with Roux's sweep, those are partial histories. Roux's work established a periodisation for the history of African nationalism that has not been seriously challenged by subsequent writers. Significantly, it entirely omits any treatment of the 'mineral revolution', a main topic of revisionism. 'Africanist' ideas affected some white South African academic historians in the 1960s (e.g. Leonard Thompson and John Omer-Cooper), but these could hardly claim to be nationalists. Lodge (1990) highlights the relative absence of historical consciousness in ANC writings and attributes this to the 'ambivalence' of the ANC's 'nationalism' ('nativist' or non-racial). More work needs to be done to trace the content and historiography of African nationalist writing.

same is true of the 'materialist'—in fact, more strictly nationalist also—histories produced by members of the Non European Unity Movement: Hosea Jaffe ('Mnguni' *Three Hundred Years*) and Dora Taylor ('Nosipho Majeke') *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest*) were also both white.

The significance of revisionism lay in importing ideas of class into academic discourse on South Africa. In this, revisionism could be said to have merely 'made respectable' a common currency of the liberation struggle[5]. Lodge (1990:171) has argued how, since the 1950s in the ANC, 'the ideas supplied by Marxism' have been more attractive to historical writers than pure nationalism. With respect to the CP, of course, its 'Marxism' has often taken the form of barely-disguised nationalism[6]. However, the trend-setting work in the liberation movement has tended to be written by CP or other Marxist voices containing ideas of class as well as of race. Directly or indirectly, it was these ideas which underpinned the birth of revisionism. It is perhaps not accidental that Harold Wolpe's (1972) well-known materialist explanation of segregation in terms of the articulation of modes of production harks back to analysis by the early CPSA activist David Ivon Jones[7]. Moreover the fullest history of the debates over 'class and race (nation)' within the liberation movement—H.E. and R.J. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950* (1969)—appeared shortly before the onset of revisionism. Though their concluding chapter contains its own version of the liberal argument of the incompatibility of apartheid and capitalist economic growth (shortly to be assailed by the revisionists), the revelations of a history of controversy

[5] This presents a genealogy for revisionism rather different from that argued by Bozzoli and Delius (1990); they hint at this particular genealogy at several points in passing, but do not develop it.

[6] This is not a critique of the theory of 'colonialism of a special type' which, if not fetishised, is of utility in characterising many aspects of segregationist and apartheid South Africa. (Here we differ from Colin Bundy's 1990 critique of CST.) The CP's 'nationalism' comes in deducing from CST that what is required is a 'two-stage revolution', i.e. a 'national democratic revolution' conceived as separate from the taking of power by the working class. It is equally possible to deduce from 'CST' the idea that the working class must lead all the oppressed *to achieve national liberation and democracy* by taking state power and establishing a worker's democracy—achieving the same *ends* as articulated by nationalism, but by class *means*. After all, as Lenin wrote, 'To throw off oppression is the imperative duty of the proletariat as a democratic force, and is certainly in the interests of the proletarian class struggle, which is obscured and retarded by bickering on the national question. But to go beyond these strictly limited and historical limits in helping bourgeois nationalism means betraying the proletariat and siding with the bourgeoisie' (cited by Comrade Mzala in Van Diepen 1988:52).

[7] See Jones (1921:5): 'This, then, is the function of the native territories, to serve as cheap breeding grounds for black labour—the repositories of the reserve army of native labour—sucking it in or letting it out according to the demands of industry. By means of these territories Capital is relieved of the obligation of paying wages to cover the cost to the labourer of reproducing his kind'. See also Bunting's election address in the Transkei in 1929 (in J. & R. Simons 1983:413).

within the movement of resistance over the analysis of South Africa undoubtedly influenced revisionists.

In parallel with revisionism in the academic arena went class analysis in the liberation movement. Joe Slovo's 'South Africa—No Middle Road', published in 1976, is a well-known example of this:

> Since race discrimination is ... the *modus operandi* of South African capitalism, the struggle to destroy 'white supremacy' is ultimately bound up with the very destruction of capitalism itself ... it is just as impossible to conceive of workers in SA separated from national liberation, as it is to conceive of true national liberation separated from the destruction of capitalism (in Davidson *et al* 1976:118,161)[8].

The pervasiveness of such class analysis is illustrated also by the following passage published in 1978 by Thabo Mbeki, today regarded as the ANC's high priest of Africanism and rapprochement with capitalism:

> To understand South Africa we must appreciate the fact and fix it firmly in our minds that here we are dealing with a class society. In South Africa the capitalists, the bourgeoisie are the dominant class. Therefore the state, other forms of social organisation and official ideas are conditioned by this one fact of the supremacy of the bourgeoisie .... The condition of the black workers in South Africa, the place in society allocated to us by the capitalist class, demands that we must assert our right to revolution .... Consider the circumstances in which we might position black capitalism as the antithesis to white capitalism ... black capitalism instead of being the antithesis is rather confirmation of parasitism with no redeeming features whatsoever, without any extenuating circumstances to excuse its existence (Mbeki 1978:7)[9].

The concern of revisionism (initially at least) was with the *interrelationships* of race and class. Revisionism in our view reflected the reality that without deploying *both* concepts it is impossible to get to grips with the history of South Africa. In addition, as writers from Bozzoli (1983a) to Bradford (1996) have reminded us (and as we return to below) it is equally impossible to get to grips with this history without the concept of gender. Revisionism became divided into 'structuralist' and 'social history'

[8] Or: 'National liberation in its true sense must therefore imply the expropriation of the owners of the means of production (monopolized by a bourgeoisie drawn from the white group) and the complete destruction of the state which serves them' (in Davidson *et al* 1976:141). Other examples of 'movement' works influenced by revisionism are Wolpe (1988) and Pampallis (1991)

[9] He argues that the 'methods and practices of primitive accumulation' have not been transitory (as in Europe) but are endemic to South African capitalism.

camps—but through the 1980s it was probably 'social history' that had the dominant influence.

The period of revisionism's hegemony, from the late 1970s and 1980s, coincided with the rise of a revolutionary social movement in South Africa demanding national liberation, democracy, and an end to capitalism. It was the consonance between ideas on the ground and those of 'revisionist' academics (all white) that lent apparent force to social history. In the townships and the workplaces, the general understanding was—in the words of an NUM resolution—that apartheid and capitalism were 'two inseparable evils that must be smashed[10]. Equally, an early Eastern Cape consumer boycott leaflet was titled 'Industry and Government—two sides of the same bloody coin'[11]. Surfacing sporadically in written sources is this interconnection made in the popular mind. At a 1985 Johannesburg May Day trade union meeting, *The Star* reported:

> Most speakers spoke in Zulu and identified capitalism as the enemy of the black working class in South Africa .... A speaker from [FOSATU] ... brought most of the audience to its feet when he said capitalism was the enemy of the workers, and sang and hummed: 'Capitalism, capitalism is our enemy' (*The Star* 2/5/1985)[12].

Thami Mali, one of the organisers of the two-day November 1984 Transvaal stayaway, asked what the goals of the struggle were, said oneperson, onevote in a unitary South Africa

> 'but that's not enough. It must be a 'workers' state' based on the principles of the Freedom Charter'
>
> 'So you want a socialist South Africa'
>
> 'Exactly', he replied (*Sunday Express* 11/11/1984).

[10] See *South African Labour Bulletin* 12,3 (1987) 48. Some of the rest of this paragraph is taken from a forthcoming review article by Martin Legassick in *JSAS*.

[11] *Work in Progress* 39, October (1985) 15. Incidentally, these quotations call into question the following claims of Witz and Hamilton (1991:190): 'the focus on classes and class analysis, which was at the heart of revisionist scholarship, failed to tap in successfully to many popular perceptions of oppression in South Africa. In the 1980s racial oppression remained the central focus of anti apartheid struggles, despite their strong anti-capitalist rhetoric'. This, in our view, privileges 'race' too much: in much popular consciousness, national oppression was seen as the work of the white bosses and state.

[12] E.g. see also Moses Mayekiso, MAWU General Secretary, *FOSATU Workers News* (October 1983); Thozamile Gqweta, President of *SAAWU*, *The Worker* (October 1984); *Izwilethu* (June/July 1984), official publication of CUSA.

The *Financial Mail* in 1985 reported an opinion survey that 77% of blacks in selected urban areas expressed a belief in socialism (*FM* 20/9/1985). Another such survey conducted at this time showed that more than three quarters of shop stewards interviewed favoured socialism over capitalism; 90% in the Eastern Cape (Orkin 1986:52). The position of workers organised in COSATU was reflected in General Secretary Jay Naidoo's (1986:35) speeches:

> apartheid racism has gone hand in hand with our exploitation and suffering at the hands of the bosses .... Despite the desperate attempts by organised business to distance themselves from the present discredited regime we have learnt one important lesson, that the root and fruit of the apartheid tree is the exploitation of workers in South Africa ... the alliance between big business and the apartheid state is soaked in the blood of the workers[13].

A COSATU delegation told the ANC and SACTU in exile in 1987 that:

> The general feeling among workers is against reform and in favour of restructuring and creation of a new society reflecting the interests of workers ... the majority of workers want fundamental change ('Meeting with COSATU 7/3/1987'—Confidential minutes, ANC Collection, Mayibuye Centre—cited in Adams 1998:105)[14].

All these sentiments signified a widely apparent organic, revolutionary, crisis of South African society. Professor Colin Bundy's (1987:71) inaugural lecture at UCT analysed whether or not a 'revolutionary situation' existed in South Africa, and concluded that 'some but not all of the preconditions for revolutionary change exist'. 'Bluntly', he continued, 'something has got to give. Restructuring is unavoidable. But what form will it take?' (see also Bundy 1989). The 'form' that restructuring in fact took—to the surprise of many activists—was the so-called 'miracle' of a negotiated settlement. In retrospect some might argue that this represented the consummation of the revolution—or perhaps of its 'first stage', though the SACP, with its slogan of 'deepening democracy', implies that the first stage is not yet reached. We would argue rather that the revolution is *incomplete, stalemated. The Revolution Deferred* is the title of a recent book by Martin Murray, though nowhere in the book does he explicitly refer to or explain the title[15]. Completion of the revolution would involve the working class

[13] E.g. see also *SALB* 12,4 (1987) 33-35; 12,5 (1987) 60.

[14] Significantly, at this stage the ANC delegation (including both Joe Slovo and Thabo Mbeki) 'strongly argued' against putting forward 'the socialist perspective', i.e. they were for separating the struggle for national liberation from the struggle against capitalism and for workers' power.

[15] Murray (1994:141 e.a.) writes: 'During the 1980s, the popular upsurge aginst white minority rule and the apartheid system spilled over into a genuine grassroots rebellion against the logic and the rules of the capitalist marketplace .... Yet with the onset of multiparty negotiations in the post-1990 period, the profound political realignment through which political parties sought literally to reinvent themselves in the changing circumstances of pluralist electoral competition favoured a *Thermidorian*, or moderating thaw in the locus of thinking about the future'. Murray refers to the 'unanticipated resilience of the capitalist economic order'. 'Thermidorian', however, implies a post-revolutionary 'moderation' rather than the deferring of a revolution.

taking up the incomplete democratic and social tasks in a struggle for workers' power. Just as the social context of the 1980s affected the climate of historiography, so does the 'uncompleted revolution' context of the 1990s.

Coasting with the tide in the 1980s, social history has attracted powerful compliments. Terence Ranger (1991:5), though critical of aspects of its 'radicalness', has celebrated its achievements as 'dynamic and committed and honest'. Shula Marks (1986) has called the rewriting represented in the work of revisionist scholars a 'revolution in our understanding of South African history'. Eric Foner (1995:166), the celebrated United States historian, has described South African social history as having produced 'some of the world's finest historical scholarship' in this vein. He argues that the social historians have 'rewritten South African history to emphasise the experience of black labourers in rural areas and in urban mines and industries' and that 'it gave voice to those excluded from traditional accounts, often through oral histories that allowed ordinary people to relate their lives and express their aspirations'.

The consonance of popular revolutionism and radical history-making in the academy in the 1980s introduced some heady ideas. It was believed that academic history, as social history, could become popularised: translated into the conception of history held by 'the masses'. The atmosphere was captured by Colin Bundy (1990:139f) in the following terms:

> the ivory tower has already been breached by popular pressures: grappling irons promise further to scale its walls, and its base of academic autonomy is being undermined .... South African radical historians inhabit a present that makes comprehension of the past seem particularly important. Their society's history does not present itself meekly for examination. It intrudes, fierce and feverish, baring its deformities, and demanding immediate attention.

The attendance at Wits History Workshop 'open days', the support of the NECC for 'people's history' projects, etc. all encouraged such a belief.

The turn to negotiations in the 1990s and the resultant demobilisation of a mass movement has transformed the conditions for the 'popularisation' of history. With politics in the 1990s now more concerned with the 'pacting of elites' rather than eruptions of the masses, once again 'history' is made 'from above' rather than 'from below'. The ANC has become transformed from the vehicle through which the masses sought transformation of society in the 1980s into the staunch defender of neo-liberal capitalism in the 1990s. In parallel, there has been a huge erosion in popular interest in academic presentations of the past. As Paul Maylam (1995) observed at the 1995 *SAHS* conference at Rhodes, social history has largely been confined to the site of the professional historian and the university. Leslie Witz and Ciraj Rassool (1992) have described how, despite near 'missionary work' of popularisation, social history has remained 'on the margins' of popular and public domains. Shula Marks (1996) has commented on the 'disappointed expectations' as a result of the limited recognition in school history curricula and textbook of 'the [real] historiographical advances of the last thirty years'. As to the character of the 'popular history' being presently made, we return below. For the moment what we are concerned with is the effects of the 1980s

beliefs in popularisation on the construction of history in the academy[16].

Consciously or not, the urge to 'popularisation' of revisionist history constituted an intervention in the political arena. In this respect, in our view, spokespersons of History Workshop can be criticised for a belief in the 'uplifting' role of the intellectual qua intellectual[17]. In a reflective piece at the end of the 1980s Bozzoli contrasted the 'Gramscian' concept of this role from what she regarded as the 'Althusserian':

> Forging an alternative set of historical interpretations would challenge hegemony on a high level; but making these new interpretations popular would provide the already-conscientized masses with greater insight and understanding of the structural conditions they confronted. The essentially Gramscian aim of raising the capacity of the mass of the people for self emancipation—so that the popularisation of history involved a process of empowerment of the people themselves—ran against the Althusserian idea that emancipation would come from above and from 'theory'. Gramscians stood somewhere between a belief in the subordination of the intellectual to the movement, and one in the subordination of the movement to theory (Bozzoli 1990:241f; see also Bozzoli 1983:8).

What Bozzoli here calls 'Althusserian' is that mis-interpretation of Lenin's *What is to be Done?* which is held by Communist Parties and many Trotskyist grouplets: the idea that workers are capable only of 'trade-union consciousness' and that 'socialism' must be brought to them from outside by intellectuals[18]. In fact Bozzoli's characterisation of the 'Gramscian' approach does not entirely escape this[19]. Moreover, an 'intellectual' is

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[16] In these paragraphs we have benefited from reading Rousseau (1994; 1995) and Greenstein (1996). In the original version of the paper we also offered some criticism of Rosseau and Greenstein's standpoint which we have dropped from this version because it is not central to the argument: we still hold to the essence of our critique of them however. Subsequent to writing the draft of this paper we read Tshidiso Maloka's as yet unpublished 'Writing for Them: "Radical" Historiography in South Africa and the "Radical" Other', which makes telling points.

[17] As with other critics of Wits History Workshop, we direct our attention to the 'manifestoes' of its chief spokesperson of the 1980s, Belinda Bozzoli, in her introductions to collected volumes. This of course begs the question as to how far the pieces in the collections live up to the prescriptions of the manifestoes: see Minkley (1986).

[18] See Legassick (1991:17f) where it is argued that the history of the twentieth century shows rather non-socialist 'intellectual' leaders of working-class organisations crushing 'socialist' struggles by the working class. Bozzoli (1983:34) criticises the view that 'inadequacies in leadership, organisation or "line" are to be blamed for the usual failure of the oppressed classes to develop "proper" class consciousness'. Legassick's view differs in that (a) it is not a question of a 'failure' of the oppressed classes to 'develop "proper" class consciousness'; and (b) as Trotsky pointed out, 'leadership is not at all a mere "reflection" of a class', but is likely to rise 'above' accountability to the class and thus to lag behind it in consciousness.

regarded by the Communist Party, the Trotskyist grouplets, and Bozzoli alike as *someone in a university* rather than, as Lenin intended in *What is to be Done?* as a cadre schooled in the Marxist party, a worker-intellectual[20]. The 'academic' can masquerade as the bringer of 'objective truth' (which is in reality only an interpretation) because of her or his claim to inhabit a privileged 'site of knowledge'. The party-activist 'intellectual', on the other hand, is compelled to reveal his or her 'party-sanship'—though this does not thereby preclude her or him from expressing truth(s)[21]. For whites, however, purely on the basis of a position in the university, to claim to be asserting 'truth' to the populace has strong elements of a patronizing paternalism.

The second criticism that can be, and has been, raised of History Workshop's 'popularisation' politics is that it came to privilege class over 'race'. It is true (and conceded by Bozzoli) that there was a tendency to 'workerism'[22] in the History Workshop of the 1980s[23]. In the early 1980s the proponents of History Workshop may

[19] Ordinary people's testimony, she suggests, will narrow the 'cognitive gap' between 'those who write about capitalism and those who bear the brunt of it' (Bozzoli 1983:16). Implicit in this is the idea that those who 'write' about capitalism are somehow immune from detrimental effects from it: 'above it'?

[20] Gramsci, equally, would not have regarded an 'intellectual', particularly an organic intellectual, as someone within a university, but primarily as a party cadre. His writings are of course disguised in non-class, non-party language because written in prison; and he may also have been affected by the Stalinist distortion of the meaning of Lenin's *What is to be done?*

[21] Any history is a mere interpretation of the world. But this does not preclude it from corresponding to some reality of the past, or of the experience of 'ordinary people', as seems to be implied by some post-modernists. The tests for 'truth' lie in the subjection of any individual interpretation to collective criticism. As Engels once put it: 'the sovereignty [i.e. objectivity] of thought is realised in a number of extremely unsovereignly-thinking human beings; the knowledge which has an unconditional claim to truth is realised in a number of relative errors; neither [absolutely true knowledge, nor sovereign thought] can be fully realised except through an endless eternity of human existence' (*Anti-Dühring*).

[22] We use the term 'workerism' here because it was current in the 1980s as a term of critique by pro-SACP elements, not because we regard it as an accurate characterisation of a position. We would criticise the term for amalgamating a critique of economism with a critique of those standing for the political independence of the working class (not to be confused, as the SACP does, with a 'hostility to alliances with the middle class': political independence of the working class is quite compatible with an alliance with the middle class for democracy and socialism). Thus it amalgamates a legitimate critique of a conservative tendency (economism) with a critique of a revolutionary tendency. See Fisher and 'Monroe' (1988:47-53)

[23] N. Rousseau (1994:116f), however, argues that Bozzoli and Delius shift ground in their 1990 piece, deflecting the charge of 'workerism' 'onto the structuralists and one or two other renegades who maintain a hard proletarian stance'. She also argues that the 'theoretical and political importance of race appears virtually for the first time in [revisionist?] academic South African historical studies in this particular article'.

well have gone along with many other white (and black) intellectuals who believed that a workers' party could emerge immediately which would supplant the ANC[24]. Many of those (whites) who held this belief were shattered by the emergence of COSATU and its rapprochement with the ANC in 1985-1986, and made switches in which can be seen the seeds of later more dramatic abandonment of socialism[25]. For Bozzoli, the explanation lies in the nature of South African popular culture which is 'nationalist':

> popular culture is not straight-forwardly class conscious. It is mainly constituted through community, regional, ethnic, local, gender, or racial categories. For a complex variety of reasons, only rarely does 'class' form the significant element in cultural formations .... black popular culture tends to engender and sustain ideologies of a nationalist, populist, 'motherist', or racially-defined character (Bozzoli 1990a:239; see also Bozzoli 1987).

She adds: 'This is not, of course, to deny the analytical value of class as a concept'[26].

Where, in our view, this conception of Bozzoli's errs is in failing to see that the 'culture' of the working-class is never of a 'pure class' character[27]. 'Workerism' erred in identifying the 'working-class' with the working-class at the point of production. The Communist Party critique of 'workerism' erred equally on this point, failing to regard the overwhelming majority of women, youth and men in the townships and countryside as part of the working class (see Fisher & 'Monroe' 1988). But the standard for judging the character of the culture of this broader working class cannot be a comparison with the character of class culture in Europe. The black working class in South Africa is a colonised working class, subjected to national and gender oppression as well as class exploitation. Its culture reflects all these concerns. To try to put the culture of the working class in South Africa into a 'racial' bag, a 'national-democratic-two-stage' bag (the SACP) or a (mostly) 'nationalist' bag is to impose preordained limits on it.

[24] Among black worker-intellectuals who believed this at the time were Moses Mayekiso, James Motlatsi (then vice-president and now President of the NUM) and Cyril Ramaphosa. Comrades in the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC had discussions with all these, putting the position that the ANC could not be by-passed, and that the need was for its transformation into an organisation led by the working class. All subsequently joined the ANC.

[25] See for example Alec Erwin's (1985) confused article which—to paraphrase its circumlocutions—argues for transformation politics through the leading role of the working class in the ANC but in fact accepts the 'nationalism' of the ANC. Compare, on this point Rousseau (1994:99f footnote 47).

[26] Bozzoli and Delius (1990:38), by the way, are incorrect when they write that 'Legassick ... subsequently came to reject any consideration of nationalism far more consciously when he moved into Trotskyist politics'. As a supporter of the Marxist Workers' Tendency of the ANC, Legassick was concerned with analysing, and struggling for, the best path to end national oppression in South Africa because national oppression was at the forefront of popular consciousness: see issues of *Inqaba ya Basebenzi* 1-27 (1981-1990)

[27] Thus, Rousseau (1994:101ff) criticises Bozzoli's privileging of the concept of class in the face of this popular 'nationalist' culture.

The new conditions of 'uncompleted revolution' remove a material underpinning of revisionist ideas. Anti-capitalism and ideas of class have become very unfashionable in official society. But what is to take their place in historiography? Does not this transition from the revolutionary climate of the 1980s to the bland climate of 'reconciliation' of the 1990s go part way to explain why the transition has not (as yet anyway) been associated with any breaks or explosions in historiography? A commentator on the 'Future of the Past' conference held at UWC last year wrote how:

> The Mayibuye Centre was concerned to criticise the professional history-producing establishment, including their colleagues in the History Department, for not writing the history of 'The Struggle' and for not labouring at the 'rockface' of the political struggle (Hamilton 1996:146).

But what *kind* of history of the struggle is being demanded in this critique? Is it a popular history 'from below'? Or is it a triumphalist nationalist history? Or a 'reconciliation' history?

There are certain common features between the approach of South African social historians and the 'subaltern studies' school in India. Both have stressed 'history from below' and popular agency. Both have expressed themselves hostile to nationalism and to a triumphalist nationalist history of 'great men'. To say this, however, disguises their differences. 'Subaltern studies' arose in a quite different context. It represented a challenge from 'within the nation' to the hegemony of nationalist (and 'Marxist' which were in fact nationalist) ideas in post-colonial Indian historiography[28]. South African social history arose while society was still 'colonial' to challenge first liberalism of the 'colonisers' and then a nationalist presentation of the history of the colonised. It might be considered merely a branch of the 'historiography of the colonisers'. In this case, particularly under conditions of an 'uncompleted revolution', the historiographic break might express itself as a nationalist reaction to it. At the same time, the challenge 'from below' represented by social history to 'nationalist ideas' cannot be wished away. To move from a concern with nationalism to a concern with subalternity seems a logical progression. To return from concern with subalternity and conflict to concern with nationalism and/or reconciliation seems a rather harder road to travel: more difficult, perhaps impossible.

recent 'social history' writing: its strengths and limits

At the same time academic history production in South Africa has continued to generate a range of new and divergent works. In recent years there has been a revitalisation of 'precolonial' studies; intense debates and new analyses of early colonial histories in southern Africa; reassessments of the role and importance of

[28] See the essays collected in Prakash (1995)

mining and the mines in South African history in a number of new works; a spate of historical and political biographies; and a growing literature on the forms of rule and nature of opposition to apartheid, amongst others. We can do little justice to the range of topics, critiques and fields of attention that are visible within and about this growing South African historiography. Instead we will focus on what are variously regarded as three of the best histories produced in the post 1990 period.

In doing so we hope to illuminate aspects of: (a) the relationship to subaltern perspectives within these histories; (b) the visibility of any theoretical shift comparable to the shift marked by class in the 1970s; (c) the implications these analyses have for a potential route back to concerns of nationalism.

The three books we wish to focus on are Charles van Onselen's *The Seed is Mine*, Isabel Hofmeyr's *We Spend our Years as a Tale that is Told*, and Tim Keegan's *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order*. All three are embedded in South African revisionist social history. As such, they are concerned with rewriting the past to emphasise the experiences and give voice to those previously excluded from traditional accounts, in order to provide a more inclusive, representative and subaltern perspective, while also attempting to detail what this meant for various forms of rule. At the same time, though, each of the three books moves beyond a social history 'from below' approach in different ways.

The first, Charles van Onselen's *The Seed is Mine* is an appropriate starting point. It has been received as the 'classic' of South African social history, as a 'singular work' and one 'without compare in South African studies' (Bundy 1997:364, 367). It is the massively detailed history 'from below' of a South African sharecropper in the twentieth century and the product of nearly fifteen years of collaborative and individual research and production (Nasson 1996). Despite having emerged earlier as a historical subject in the work of Nkadimeng and Relly (1983), Kas Maine has been put on the historical map by this biography, facilitated through the research work of the currently-named Institute For Advanced Social Research with Van Onselen as Director.

In this sense *The Seed is Mine* represents a kind of 'flagship' of the social history approach that has emphasised experience, hidden history, and subaltern black agency in the making of the South African past, and is produced by someone widely regarded as South Africa's 'premier historian' (Bundy 1997:363). The strength of the book is also seen to reside in its distinctive method and processes of historical recovery, in order to present this 'living slice' as a 'whole' (Nasson 1996:3). Thus Van Onselen begins this extraordinary book with an equally extraordinary context: that Kas Maine's life, with one minute exception, does not appear in the supposed mainspring of national memory—the State Archives. It is a history without official record and of a family with no documentary existence. Of course, as Van Onselen shows over the next 535 pages, memory and the past have many other mainsprings, enabling the production of this monumental 'history from below' and thus equally demonstrating the possibilities and necessities of its method. It is a work rich in thick description primarily reliant—at least on the surface—on the detailed collection and analysis of oral history and memory.

The book then, recreates the life of Kas Maine within its class context of the rise (late nineteenth and early twentieth century), brief zenith and subsequent

disintegration (after the 1930s) of a class of black sharecroppers in the southwestern Transvaal. He is a Samuel Smiles hero, a self-made man—brought down in the end by apartheid. This trajectory is closely intertwined with the history, nature and production of white owned and worked land, and ultimately with the development and encroachment of white capitalist relations of production in agriculture. This is the narrative thrust of *The Seed is Mine*, although it is simultaneously a narrative in which Kas Maine and his productive wishes, strategies, entrapments and forms of independence are mapped in all their specifics of locality and change.

In addition though, as Bundy has suggested, there is also a second story intertwined with it and resting on the concern with the sharecropping family as a 'social entity' (Bundy 1997:366; drawing on Van Onselen 1996:9). Here is Bundy's description:

> Kas Maine may have been heroic in his versatility as farmer, stock-breeder, artisan, mechanic, trader, speculator, and traditional healer. Yet many readers will wince at his record as husband and father: flogging his daughters, estranging his sons, marginalising his wives. What van Onselen makes possible is an understanding of how two sets of demands—economic viability and domestic pliability—colluded and collided (Bundy 1997:367).

It is in these intersections between productive structure and peasant agency, and between sharecropper and patriarch, that Van Onselen parts company with much South African social history. The categories of 'history from below' and of subaltern agency and experience as distinctive and 'autonomous' are problematised. The book details how relations of kinship and paternalism were painful and violent, but also intimate and searing in their interactions between different categories of black and white people on the Highveld. This meant that experience was a 'painful *shared* experience', mutually determining in many respects and that a South African identity, including racial identity emerged out of a nexus of complex relations between trust and betrayal, compassion and humiliation, love and hatred. Thus Terry Ranger (1997:384) suggests that Van Onselen's biography enables us to see that 'Kas lives most of his life as an Afrikanerised black on the land of Africanised whites'. Relationships between farmers and sharecroppers are much more fully integrated than in the conventional social history. There is little place, moreover, for simple racial stereotype when the most oppressive landlord in the book is black.

The major new insights in *The Seed is Mine* are primarily those of content around the shared and interconnected nature of rural experience. At the same time, Van Onselen (1996:vi-vii) argues that 'the field ha[s] barely given way to the factory, the peasant to the proletarian, and the patriarch to his family': these changes, in other words, are recent. This effectively inserts a 'peasant's voice' onto the centre stage of the history of twentieth century and apartheid South Africa. Revisionism (including, arguably, earlier work by Van Onselen (1976) admittedly on Rhodesia and not South Africa) constructed the migrant mineworker as the central subject of racial and class division of the society and its history. Now, for Van Onselen, it is rather the mutual experiences of the sharecropping peasant on the Highveld that is the 'very gastric juice of South Africanism' and which should be the model or social vanguard of 'South

Africa's adolescent nationhood' (Nasson 1996:3). It is a book larger than itself, a model of the South African past, standing for that past. Its past moreover—in contrast to the old norm of social history—is consistent with the idea of reconciliation. This rests not on a history of simple racial separation, exclusion and the repression of imagined difference (and thus on forgetting) but also on a history of social assimilation, inclusion, 'cultural osmosis', of 'paternalism and violence', of a shared, albeit uneven past of an 'inescapable inter-racial milieu'[29]. The message of the book is thus ambiguous as regards the present of reconciliation. On the one hand it has a past premised on a reading of power relations and conflict that also involves social assimilation (within and beyond the categories of race). Making that past visible makes the politics of reconciliation a much more deeply embedded historical project than is conducted by the TRC, for example. On the other hand, however, the book emphasises the dramatic shaping impact of a complex rural class conflict and transition to agrarian capitalism 'from below'. These conflicts of class would be displaced and silenced if all-embracing racial definitions (as defined by apartheid and resistance to it, and assumed in the TRC discourse) were taken as the categories to be reconciled.

Two areas are important in examining the production of academic history in South Africa. The first relates to methodology: of how peasants (and Kas Maine) speak in the book. The second relates to the ways that the empirical research is combined with theoretical analysis of social and economic change. As regards the first there is a significant paradox. Kas Maine's memory and his feats of remembrance validate the whole book as a subaltern 'peasant' voice of the past and of history. Yet Maine's voice is not made explicit in the book, and neither is his or others' remembrances made explicit as memory. As importantly, though, Kas Maine's memory and his voice is seen to exemplify 'history living on in the mind' where he 'never once ceased to amaze with the accuracy, depth and extent of his insights into the social, political and economic structures that dominated the south-western Transvaal'.

This shows, by the way, a different sense in which the book can be taken as reconciliation history. Colin Bundy (1997:369) has suggested that in its combination of fine empirical research with analysis rooted in theoretical understanding of economic and social change, *The Seed is Mine* has 'outstripped or transcended the either/or [structuralists vs social historians] antinomies of the 1980s'. The evidence of memory then, not only tells the peasant or subaltern story but also that of structures, providing the means to 'transcend the either/or antinomies of the 1980s scholarship'. What is startling, however, is that this is done without an engagement of memory, without

[29] The notions of 'cultural osmosis' and of paternalism and violence are drawn from the titles of two prior van Onselen articles (1990; 1992) which predate the book and discuss some of its theoretical and methodological underpinnings. The notion of a reconciliationist history is our own, and is contrasted to the growing representations presented in official versions aimed at achieving political reconciliation, as in the TRC, for example. The terms 'inescapable inter-racial milieu' is Nasson's (1996:4) , talking about van Onselen's analysis of sharecropping in more distant decades where Afrikaners were Africanised and Africans Afrikanerised through processes of social assimilation.

making the positions of historian-writer, interviewer-researcher, and interviewed-source explicit or problematic.

More generally, the biography, despite the far more suggestive concern with issues of how 'peasants speak' hinted at in an earlier article by Van Onselen (1993), does not substantially engage issues of the social constructions of language, memory and history. The conventional approach to 'memory as evidence' remains firmly in place. *The Seed is Mine* is not just the story of Kas Maine, but it is suggested that it is how Kas Maine himself would tell it—it is representative of his subaltern viewpoint and interpretation. Yet because of the nature of expression and translation of that memory, Kas Maine's actual voice is silenced. Maine hardly makes it onto the 535 pages 'in his own voice', i.e. in extended quotations of his own words, yet the evidence from his memory enables a significant rewriting of the past.

In addition, Van Onselen (1996:8) argues that

> Kas Maine's odyssey was but a moment in a tiny corner of a wider world that thousands of black South African sharecropping families came to know on a journey to nowhere.

In this sense Kas Maine also stands for the subaltern voice of all sharecroppers. Personal memory or memories also stand for collective ones. The paradox that this is really Van Onselen's story, his voice, his practice of writing history involving memory as evidence which is almost obsessively sifted, checked, ordered, referenced and cross-referenced, evaluated and processed by him—the professional historian—into the remembrance of real collective subaltern experience of structure and of agency should also not be forgotten.

If Van Onselen provides one model of contemporary history writing, then Isabel Hofmeyr's work provides a significantly different model. Her book, *We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told* (1993) is also enormously reliant on forms of oral history and of engaging varying forms of subaltern agency and dominance. It also broadly covers a similar periodisation, and is also focused on the Highveld. It is, however, about a chiefdom, rather than an individual sharecropper. Hofmeyr is therefore concerned with broader patterns of oral historical narrative and with the nature and form of orality, literacy and intellectual meanings of the past in range of formats, including those of memory, manuscript and monument.

The study provides three crucial thresholds against which the wider study of orality and literacy in Makopane or Valtyn is explored[30]. Rather than drawing the local

[30] The first threshold is that of the conversion of the chiefdom into a rural location in the 1890s, together with the advent and impact of missionaries and the literacy they brought in this period. the second threshold of chance occurred from the 1930s, with the advent of direct intervention in the form of 'betterment', under the institution of the literate bureaucracies of the native Affairs Department in particular. Up until the 1950s this was haphazard and half-hearted, but thereafter, as the third threshold of coercive apartheid social engineering emerged, the intrusion of white political authority into the 'heart' of the chiefdom was marked. This was finally effected by a series of forced removals in the 1960s.

into the general (Kas Maine standing for the experience of sharecropping and Maine's experience that of South African history told large) Hofmeyr argues that any interaction between orality and literacy needs to be sought in the details of each particular context. Thus literate government bureaucracies, schooling and religion were 'oralised' in important ways, while the chiefdom, and various agents within it, both constructed, appropriated and transformed the meanings of writing and of identity. In other situations, though, opposing notions of literacy and orality provided 'metaphorical banks of images through which both historical life and political life [we]re conceptualised' and acted upon, as in the cases of legitimating chiefly rule and of engaging forced removals. Thus a central argument is that while it was overall the 'barbed wire (representative of a 'literate' intervention) that caged the spoken word' the interweaving and confrontations between orality and literacy, and of the oral performance politics of chiefdoms and the control of literate institutions, was a major source of political conflict on the Highveld (Hofmeyr 1993: 9-15; Chs 3 & 4).

Hofmeyr's work moves significantly beyond the boundaries of social history in her analysis of the form and power of language in shaping meaning and determining subaltern subject positions in a South African locality. Equally, she demonstrates the importance of new theoretical insights around concerns with language, intellectual histories and identity formation. These combinations of 'oral and written technologies of the intellect', although emphasised as within particular sets of social and political sites and struggles (of household, gender and place, for example) are also engaged by Hofmeyr as within the constitutive and 'cognitive' nature of language. The implications this has for subjectivity, agency and popular and political consciousness are variously explored in the book as are the relationships and encounters between memory, tradition and history in the construction of local meanings, power and identity in the articulations of pasts and presents.

Two aspects stand out in Hofmeyr's account. The first is the reflexive nature of the presentation. There is a conscious attempt to continually relate her position as author and researcher, the narratives of her informants and the evidence of differing pasts in a manner that is explicated on the page[31]. The result is an engagement with history and memory that allows several different but interrelated dramas to unfold, while the meanings and terms of their construction also remain visible, and part of the process of history making. This also means that, secondly, Hofmeyr is able to challenge notions of tradition and of modernity, for example, through an analysis that situates 'oral' and 'written' worlds in differing cultural and intellectual contexts. In the process the very notions of modernity and tradition are rendered problematic, and once read through the different categories of orality and literacy, 'tradition' becomes visible as

[31] It should be noted that the appendices of the book, containing lengthy segments of oral narrative, forms a significant part of the overall work, as part of her more reflexive and more serious engagement with taking these historical narratives seriously. At the same time, there are also lengthy sections within her text itself, where these issues are explicitly addressed.

lived modernity, and as complex and changeable. Her work also shows how 'the traditions of modernity' are equally present as variously violent, exclusive and conflictual, but also interwoven and interdependent in settler and chiefly worlds. At the same time, the nuanced interweaving of concepts makes problematic any easy or simple dichotomous conceptions of nationalism and political reconciliation.

It is to these concerns of 'orality' and 'literacy' as the central organising concepts of the book that we wish to draw attention. Hofmeyr demonstrates that any interaction between orality and literacy (rather than using notions of explanation between tradition and modernity) needs to be sought in the details of each particular context and that the impact of literacy has no automatic consequence and cannot be predicted. As the case studies illuminate, the relationship between the spoken and the written was simultaneously complexly interwoven in practice, and symbolically oppositional *in the idea* of orality (supposedly for tradition) and that of literacy (supposedly for the modern). She argues, though, that by the 1960s, historical tales had been transformed under social and political pressures, but also by the combination of oral and written historical accounts. In this context, and within the substantive changes between male and female, and between historical and fictional storytelling, the 'radical attrition of memory' has currently taken place, alongside the amplitude of a previously marginalised and patronised craft of storytelling.

Hofmeyr thus provides a rich and nuanced account of the ways in which words—spoken and written—have eloquence and power, but also of the ways they are socially constructed and undergo thresholds of change, decline, attrition and amplitude. She highlights the social conditions that control texts and audiences, but also shows that attention to narrative structure is necessarily central to revealing the substance of ideas, differing intellectual traditions (chiefly and settler) and the different and changing meanings of the past entailed in different dominant and subaltern, and modernist and nationalist accounts. Thus, for example, she is able to combine text and context in an exploration in the production of local or 'indigenous' forms of knowledge in the Mokopane or Valtyn chieftancy through looking at the oral historical narration dealing with the 'story of the cave of Gwala' (the siege of Makapansgat in 1854). She argues that these historical tales are drawn from 'the intellectual traditions underpinning chieftancy' and are 'complex investigations into the meaning of chiefship as a system of political authority and as a symbol of the entire social order' but also that the interaction between oral and written accounts of the siege, and between chiefly and settler accounts were by no means separate entities. They influenced each other in significant ways so that the 'neat distinction between chiefly/oral and settler/written is not possible' (Hofmeyr 1993:14).

> Hence, somewhere along the line, most written (settler) documents were based on oral testimony .... Equally, chiefly versions of the story appropriated into themselves fragments from the written accounts. In terms of their implicit forms of interpretation, the two traditions also intersect in interesting ways ....

But they have also changed in relation to the changing fortunes of the chiefdom, and in

relation to the changes in the production, form and content of the storytelling. The story of the South African past, then, which draws on Hofmeyr's approach to social history and subalternity, is also much more mutual and interconnected than previously imagined, and the possibilities of a radical nationalist break in academic history production is equally rendered as problematic if her work is held up as a model.

Focused through the concepts of orality and literacy, then, Hofmeyr's study has significant other implications. Not only does she suggest the need to attend to the orality of all written sources[32], and thus the entire documentary bias that still ranks the written over the spoken in history, but also that to explore subaltern memory, identity and agency requires new cultural contexts and forms of analysis where language, translation and the 'evidence of experience' are engaged as material, social and narrative constructs. Thus, she says,

> while there has been a lot of work that is based on oral historical information, this scholarship has tended to mine testimony for its 'facts' without paying much attention to the forms of interpretation and intellectual traditions that inform these 'facts' (Hofmeyr 1993:9).

A third very different work that examines the tensions of rule is that of Tim Keegan's *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (1996). While Hofmeyr's work is situated in the meeting ground between text and context and between that of orality and literacy—and between social history and literary studies—and Van Onselen's between the structures and agency of 'history from below', Keegan's study sets out explicitly to synthesise revisionist writing on nineteenth century South Africa in opposition to liberal historiography. Keegan's book has a number of strengths and as the best syntheses are, is strikingly original: he traces the origins of modern SA racism and the racial state into the early period of integration of the Cape into the British Empire, re-assesses the relationships between Dutch slavery and British colonialism, tracks regional and imperial dimensions that have not been previously explored and compared, and reviews conventional interpretations of such key moments as the Great Trek. Here, for example, he presents a strong argument, backed with evidence, to show the deep involvement of leading English-speaking settlers in producing what are conventionally regarded as Afrikaner apologia for the Trek. This is breathtakingly daring! Moreover, the liberal tradition is revealed as not only being Janus-faced, but as deeply embedded within the violent construction of racialised and subaltern subjects.

At the same time, however, Keegan's work reflects some of the tensions of this kind of synthesis. It is largely a 'history from above'. It is about how the structures of dominance: of accumulation, the colonial state and settler society were developed and how these structures of dominance necessarily and increasingly shaped the racialised

[32] Hofmeyr (1994; 1995) has engaged these issues in relation to oral history in South Africa in two important papers.

agency of white settlers, trekkers, administrators, politicians and intellectuals and the racialised encounters of agency.

It is no criticism to say that what the book also highlights are the relative silences of nineteenth century accounts of subaltern and 'indigenous' agency in the construction of colonial society. In this sense, while Keegan's book suggests and explores the competing agendas for using power and the competing strategies for gaining and maintaining control of the colonial racial order, as well as the differing ways in which a range of settler subjects became 'agents of empire', the related absence of engagement with those identified as 'the colonised' is problematic. Keletso Atkins' (1993) work on colonial Natal, for example, argues that a distinctly African work culture influenced and constrained the apparently dominant work culture of developing capitalism at this time. This made for a colonial encounter that was always contested, moving and changeable, and not only for the colonised but also the colonisers. Hamilton's (1993:78) work on Shaka also points to the 'historically conditioned dialectic of intertextuality between "western" models of historical discourse and indigenous traditions of narrative'. As Greenstein (1995:226) has argued further, for Hamilton this means, amongst a range of arguments that 'colonialism' is not a separate entity that simply acts upon indigenous societies and forms colonial subjects, but that it is rather itself implicated in and inspired by indigenous voices, and vice versa. Equally she argues that the 'subaltern' and the 'rulers' are formed by various engagements that interact, constrain and modify each other, and cannot be seen as either autonomous agents or subjects simply defined 'from above' or 'from below'.

There is a further problem that the synthesis around structure apparent in Keegan's *Colonial Order* highlights, when read in conjunction with works like that of Helen Bradford's 'Women, Gender and Colonialism'; the problem of gender-blindedness or 'androcentrism'. It is not good enough to argue that a

> general history would pay at least as much attention to the ruled as to the rulers, to women as to men. This book is preoccupied with structuring forces, with the forces of imperialism and colonialism, and less so with the peoples who experienced their effects. Thus it gives greater attention to the powerful than the powerless, the colonizers than the colonized, to men than to women. It might seem to some that the perspectives and worldviews of dominant actors are given privileged status over the experiences and perspectives of the victims and the powerless. I offer no excuses, as the investigation of structuring forces is of profound significance (Bradford 1996:viii).

Bradford has demonstrated just how different rule, power and structure might be analysed when the agencies and relations of gender are taken necessarily seriously.

A similar set of criticisms apply to Van Onselen's biography, despite Terry Ranger's (1997:384) praise of it as a 'landmark in African gender studies'[33]. Yes, there

[33] This is based on a very particular reading of gender—at least from his cursory comments in a brief review. Not only does it appear to equate gender with 'women', but also to equate successful gender studies with the presence of 'women' as 'rich and rounded categories' and as historical agents in this sense.

is discussion of 'family' and of 'women', but there is very little on masculinities, on sexualities and on gender that moves beyond the descriptive, or the silence of memory and the acceptance of particular forms of agency as representative of 'how it was' for women. Hofmeyr's work is very different. The important focus on gendered aspects of space, storytelling and intellectual traditions are just part of a much wider frame of engagement with the agencies of gender in her work. In the process agency becomes visibly more problematic, part of the necessary trouble of place and the politics of identity. However, as Bradford and others (e.g. Bozzoli; Mager; Van Der Spuy; Marks; Manicom) have argued, and despite significant historiographical interventions that have demonstrated the importance of these agencies and structures of gender relations, South African social history remains markedly androcentric in many respects.

the retreat to examining 'whiteness'

Captured under a broad sense of retreat, a growing number of white historians have in the 1990s increasingly focused on the theme of 'whiteness'. This has a number of dimensions. In the first place, it was a theme to which early revisionism drew attention:

> White society has its own history of military conquest and class struggle, and essential to the class project of leading white classes—farmers, mine owners and industrialists—has been the establishment of a consensus which overcomes these. Their common whiteness and prejudice against blacks, though it has clear historical and objective roots, is also an ideological and cultural form which has had to be forged and fought for (Bozzoli 1983:19).

Equally, it represents a defensive response to more recent developments. One aspect, reflected in critiques by a range of black intellectuals and academics, has related to the question of who speaks for whom and that 'Africans need to be able to speak for themselves'[34]. The failure to reflect on and rethink the implications of the practice of history by predominantly white historians and the associated ways many inherently reproduce and/or are accused of reproducing the power relations in the larger society in their practices and methods of research 'from below' has facilitated this retreat. It seems safer to have white subjects as objects of study, then to negotiate the varying forms of power and knowledge production that are currently so visibly racialised.

Others, faced with the politics of reconciliation and a perceived decline in radicalism in the period of transition have interpreted ideas of 'forgetting the past'[35] to mean a shift away from explicitly political history and the necessary audiences this entailed. Put differently, the 1980s politics of history, of the mission of popularisation,

[34] This was a theme which surfaced at the Natal gender conference in 1991. See also Leroke (1994).

[35] N. Mandela (in *Mayibuye* Interview 1995).

has given way in some circles to a more cultural and introspective historical engagement within the relative security of 'whiteness'.

Thirdly there has been the influence of post-colonial studies, read in a relatively narrow sense as a space for the re-engagement with the pasts of colonial and racial South Africa, and particularly with the ways that racial ideas of dominance were formed, articulated and disrupted. This has meant, in some instances, a relatively unimaginative focus on the agents and agencies of white rule and racial discourses, without any conscious dealing with the construction of the 'whiteness' of such agents[36].

Strikingly absent from this recent work, in fact, has been attention to the questions of 'whiteness': as race and as social construction. Few studies have sought to unravel the very raced hierarchies of whiteness. To speak of 'whiteness' in this sense means more than just a focus on race or on how white people thought of their relationships with black people or men, for example. It rather refers 'to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination'. Naming whiteness should also displace it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of dominance:

> Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility (Fine *et al* 1996:viii).

This is so because whiteness has come to be more than itself: it appears to embody objectivity, normality, truth, knowledge, merit, motivation, achievement and trustworthiness, it accumulates invisible supports that contribute unacknowledged to the already accumulated and bolstered capital of whiteness. These contexts are not being systematically explored within this move to 'whiteness' by South African historians—or only to a limited degree and in very particular circumstances, mostly implicitly, and read through a binary opposition to 'blackness'.

Among the work that has moved in this direction is that on the construction of Afrikaner nationalism, particularly that focussing on women (although here the emphasis is on 'Afrikanerness' rather than 'whiteness'), by Dan O'Meara, Isabel Hofmeyr, Elsabe Brink, Marijke du Toit; work on the critique of liberalism by Paul Rich; on aspects of colonialism and liberalism by Clifton Crais; Tim Keegan, Andrew Bank; and on the mechanics of apartheid by Aletta Norval. What is especially lacking is systematic examination of the history of the construction of 'whiteness' among English-speaking whites. Clive Derby-Lewis, murderer of Chris Hani, for example, was involved with the Stallard Foundation—named after the infamous Col Stallard, the SAP member who chaired the 1922 Transvaal Local Government Commission which proclaimed that black presence could be tolerated in the towns only to serve the needs of

[36] This was the case, for example, with a number of the papers at the UWC conference on gender and colonialism, January 1997.

whites. Stallard, an MP from 1929 to 1948 and leader of the Dominion Party between 1933 and 1939, was a graduate of Oxford and a pillar of the church: a

> Victorian in the best sense of the word. As soldier, lawyer, politician, patriot and statesman he maintained a rigid code of life in which strict discipline and integrity were dominant features[37].

What examination of this white masculine—WASP—tradition has thus far been made by today's male WASP historians?

where are the black historians?

In their analysis of the tradition of radical history, Bozzoli and Delius (1990:16) comment that 'black historians and social scientists have been few in number'. They blame this largely on the 'miserly and ideologically loaded provisions of black education', including the 'tribal colleges' where conservative Afrikaner historians exerted a stultifying influence. They point out also that black intellectuals have to some extent been excluded from libraries and archives, and inhibited from publishing:

> This stultifying context helped ensure that the genres of autobiography, fiction, journalism, photography and historical fiction have been the most common means through which the black intelligentsia has found its voice.

Writing in 1990, they however conclude optimistically that '[w]ithin the next decade, it seems certain that the racial composition of South African historians will undergo a marked change'[38].

From the perspective of 1997, it seems that they were unduly optimistic. While there may be more black postgraduate history students, the numbers of black history staff members at universities does not seem to have altered dramatically. Surveying the country, what one notices more than anything is an *absence* of black historians. Why is this? Specifically, how far does this fact remain a product of white

[37] A quote from Harry Lawrence in an obituary to Stallard, *Argus* 14/6/1971. See also *Argus* 21/5/1971; 13/7/1971; *Die Burger* 5/6/1971; 14/6/1971; *Cape Times* 14/6/1971. Born in 1871, he arrived in South Africa with the military in the South African war of 1899-1902 and remained. In the 1960s he was 'still using a high-backed tin sitz bath brought into the rondavel bedroom on his farm Hopewoolith at dawn by a retainer bringing 4 cans of tepid water and the colonel's tea'. In view of this his reported comment is interesting: 'Civilisation is not something turned on like hot water from a tap'. Shortly before his death *Die Burger* reported that he was 'bitter teleurgesteld oor die verval van die Britse Ryk, wat hy toegeskryf het aan Harold Wilson en die feministiese beweging' (he was bitterly disappointed over the collapse of the British Empire, which he attributed to Harold Wilson and the feminist movement) [!].

[38] For other comments on the absence of black historians see, for example Freund (1988/1999), Worger (1991), and Rousseau (1994:Ch 3).

racism? Mahmood Mamdani (1997), reviewing William Makgoba's book on Wits, writes:

> a colonial power does not easily tolerate the development of a native intelligentsia ... Post-apartheid South Africa ... has a vibrant *native* intelligentsia, but that intelligentsia is, in the main, not to be found in the academy. Conversely, the university is one of the most racialised institutions in South African society—as racialised as big business. The only difference is that while big business is sensitive to this fact, universities are not. The university is proud of its exclusivity, considering it an inevitable consequence of the pursuit of excellence.

Do there remain pressures to exclude black historians from the academy?

On the other hand, to what extent is it a matter of choices. Historically, for whites, a career in the university has offered far fewer rewards than in business (or the civil service): it has been a case of 'madness' (or having an axe to grind) that has created white academics. Equally, for the black graduate in post-apartheid society the opportunities in business offer far greater rewards. Beyond that, activists of the 1980s, seeking to 'serve the community', find more productive outlets in national, provincial, or local government. At UWC we find the best third year history students tend to move to development studies to do honours. Two anecdotes. A postgraduate history student at UWC was interested in doing his M.A. on the reasons for the paucity of black historians. In 1995 he was elected to the Tygerberg council from Khayelitsha. He has become a statistic for his own undone research!! Even closer to home, a vocal participant in the seminar to which these papers were initially given, black historian Tshidiso Moloka, has left UCT to become an adviser to Gauteng premier Motshekga.

To evaluate reasons for the absence of black historians one would need in the first place to establish the postgraduate pool from which black history staff could have been recruited and then discover the reasons why they have not been. Over the 1980s, for example, there have been several black interviewers associated with the Oral History project at the University of the Witwatersrand, yet they have not continued in history. One wonders why not[39]. Even such a survey would not be sufficient. There are the questions of how the postgraduate pool is selected and how it selects itself.

One wonders, too, how far it is the syndrome of the 'uncompleted revolution'—the lack of radical change in the face of the expectations of radical change. In the 1960s and 1970s black South African social scientists such as Archie Mafeje (1971; 1988) and Ben Magubane (1971) had a project: combating colonialist notions of 'tribalism' and 'pluralism'. Where is the equivalent project today? There appear to be very few black historians championing a nationalist rewriting of South African history. Where are the historiographic equivalents of such 'Africanists' as Thami Mazwai (in journalism) or Mzi Khumalo (in business)?

[39] On these issues see for example, Nkomo (1994) and Rassool (1997).

A cursory survey of papers to the recent *SAHS* conference in Pretoria (July 1997) reveals 15 and a half (one joint) papers by blacks, out of 66 delivered (23,5%)—probably higher than has been the case in the past[40]. The titles—we have not seen the papers themselves—suggest detailed localised studies rather than significant reinterpretations. In the Western Cape, a significant pole of attraction for black historians (and social scientists more generally) appears to be the reinterpretation of coloured identity, though others have also turned away from nationalist as equally from social history to pursue topics such as medical history, the study of representations and biography.

the new official public history

If there has been any 'break' in the production of history since 1994, it has been in the public sphere. This has broadly entailed two seemingly contradictory processes. On the one hand there is the relative silencing of history, perhaps more particularly social history, in the schools as the result of Curriculum 2005 which dissolves history into the 'Human and Social Sciences Learning Area' for grades 1-9. On the other hand, there is the presentation of a 'new history' in such institutional presences as the TRC or the Robben Island Museum. Simultaneously this 'new history' has also become visible in the growth of political biography in a range of forms, including that of television. Yet the one major television attempt to produce a comprehensive visual history of South Africa, in 26 one-hour episodes, with significant revisionist input, by a company called Pula, collapsed, apparently sabotaged by a black nationalist reaction[41].

We will mainly focus here on aspects of the drama of the TRC and on the moment of the opening of the Robben Island Museum in order to illustrate our argument. The TRC has been seen to reflect a massive official recording of counter-memories to apartheid silencing for the first time. This apparent new history generated through the TRC relies primarily on personal memory and the telling of remembrance to counter what are seen as official and documentary 'black holes' in South African history. The TRC is therefore seen to be a vehicle for the new histories and everyday stories of ordinary South Africans to be told, of revealing new pasts, submerged underneath systemic racism and apartheid.

The TRC's public relationship to the past has been complex and changing over time in the period of its existence. It is itself seen as a historical event or series of changing events, and has unfolded around dramatic hearings which mark these differences and changes over time. At the same time the TRC has also been periodically identified as a significant producer of new South African official and public histories.

[40] Even so, the total number of papers given is certainly lower than at the previous conference at Rhodes.

[41] See Memo from Phil Bonner and André Odendaal to Historical Consultants for Pula Film history, 10/8/1995; 'Urgent need for revision of history', *Saturday Argus* 26/8/1995.

The TRC thus constitutes a moment and a space where the field of history appears to be open to reinterpretation and meaning. Clearly the TRC has many different parts with different meanings and implications for history production. Giving testimony and participating in the public space of the hearings does provide a profound sense of 'giving voice' to previously marginal and silenced accounts of the apartheid past. In important respects these activities elevate subaltern accounts into those of society as a whole. These accounts then have the potential to break down divisions between subaltern and elite accounts, particularly where those divisions are drawn in racial terms. In this sense the TRC served to directly open up public historical discourse to members of formally oppressed communities in ways that also move beyond the institutional sites of professional historical production.

The official collection of personal testimony within the TRC also provides for the construction of a national archive of subaltern experience on a scale that is enormously significant for the future production of history. Here people have spoken about their own historical initiatives and meanings as active historical agents in a past that will potentially attain the fullness of a national history. Official, public and academic relationships to this archive and understandings of this national history will however vary.

At the outset of the TRC, the media depicted the TRC as performing the larger role of new national and subaltern historian. 'From the outset, the principal aim of the commission has been to unearth South Africa's hidden history during the three decades which followed the banning of the liberation movements', said *Business Day*. Other newspapers produced similar interpretations. The TRC, they claimed would now 'tell the whole story' in the 'search for truth' by incorporating previously 'silenced voices'. This would open up the rewriting of South African history in ways which will 'set [ordinary black people] free from the prisons of uncertainty in which the ghastly events of the past have confined them for too long'. The TRC at the outset, then, was seen to represent

> South Africa's real history ... it's most important look at the past painful 50 years ... [f]or the first time, all South Africa has the opportunity to learn the uncensored truth about its history[42].

Through its collection of testimony at the various hearings around the country, history was being primarily rewritten through 'devastating testimony', 'police brutality tales',

[42] *Business Day* 12/4/1996, 6/5/1996; *City Press* 6/5/1996; *Mail and Guardian* 10-16/5/1996; *Argus* 4-5/5/1996; *Sunday Times* 5/5/1996; *Sunday Independent* 5/5/1996; *Sowetan* 10-16/5/1996, for example. Radio broadcasts on SAFM provided extensive coverage of the TRC, using a broadly similar framework of hidden, ordinary, real and new, often with inserted voices to give the feel of this register—one which is reproduced as well in the daily live broadcasts on Radio 2000.

'speaking the unspeakable', through ordinary words. The range of codes and moods is unusually explicit and connective in these accounts: hidden, ordinary, oral, marginal, real, objective and 'new'—told and heard for the first time. There is more than an ironic echo here to the explanations of social history 'from below', but in a way which simultaneously ignores the existing contributions of this social historiography to having already detailed important aspects of this so-called hidden history. Instead the public and official spaces of the TRC are represented as the key sites for the emergence of this new history at this time.

This early representation of the TRC hearings and activities as the new 'real' and 'hidden' history, though, also needs to be qualified in various ways. The TRC itself, has explicitly argued it will be 'writing a history of a certain kind' which was to 'capture the perspectival nuances of the drama [of human rights violations]' in as 'comprehensive an account as possible'[43]. The TRC's framework is the period 1960-1994 and its focus, then, is not simply the entire past of this period, but to obtain

> as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights committed during the period ... emanating from the conflicts of the past[44].

This 'history of a certain kind' is also influenced by the concern to 'promote national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the conflicts and divisions of the past'[45]. This meant that the TRC accounts of the past would need to acknowledge '... some kind of compromise between those who want amnesia—to forget the past—and those who are saying "let us have revenge, retribution"'[46]. All these are constraints on the TRC's mode of representation of the past.

Over the period of the TRC's existence there have been a range of further contests which have influenced a range of changing focuses of attention from within the TRC, imposing further such constraints. These have involved families of victims, perpetrators, political parties, legal and judicial challenges and 'outsider' critiques and refusals of active participation in the process. The shift of TRC and public attention from victim to amnesty hearings, recently highlighted by the Winnie Mandela and PW Botha cases, has also meant a shift from ordinary narratives of the past to more legal, interrogative and statist 'top-down' accounts which are increasingly concerned with conspiracy, silence and evasion about the past. This seems a far call from the initial media conceptions which celebrated hidden histories of ordinary people telling the whole story.

More particularly for our concern here, this means that the potential official

[43] Charles Villa-Vicencio, Director of Research at TRC Workshop, UWC, 3 April 1996.
[44] Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, *Government Gazette* 26 July (1995) 2.
[45] *TRC Regional Workshops Document* nd:1.
[46] Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *Weekend Argus* 20/21 January (1996).

version of framing and constructing a new national history from within the TRC is open to very different versions and subject to a range of interpretations and possibilities. Despite these tensions and focuses, however, the TRC has continued to be identified as a key official site and publicly represented body which will frame and construct a new national history. The history of the TRC and the versions of history presented within the TRC are multilayered as much they are unfinished. It is therefore appropriate, in this context, to suggest that the TRC enables two further contradictory processes to become apparent. On the one hand it already provides a moment, or series of moments from the public outside, when we can rather

> hold up to view the always ambiguous and always incomplete relationship among sites and moments of production of historical knowledge, the sites, events and experiences represented in that knowledge, and the texts whereby those productions of knowledge become available to inspection (Cohen 1994:xxii).

But, and this is a significant qualifier, the forms of official and public history-making being articulated through and around the TRC, and in other arenas of public history around museums, monuments, heritage and tourism, as exemplified by the Robben Island Museum, for example, simultaneously *appear* to be much less about these ambiguities, hesitancies and range of sites and productions. Here, the face of history continues to appear as much more narrow, more contained and more directed into the particular domains of re-fashioning modernity, narrating the new nation, re-writing the past as reconciliation and re-defining citizenship. What might this version of the past look like?

Consider the recent opening of the Robben Island Museum on Heritage Day. The dominant image was one of an address by Mandela against the backdrop of five faces from left to right: Govan Mbeki, Nelson Mandela, Steve Biko, Robert Sobukwe and Walter Sisulu. The *Cape Times* caption accompanying the photograph (which was also the dominant television image) read:

> Shaped in Struggle: Let us recommit ourselves to the ideals in our Constitution—ideals which were shaped in the struggles here on Robben Island and in the greater prison which was apartheid.

Linked to the image were two headlines: 'Stop Depicting our People as Lesser Beings' and 'Mandela slams racist museums'. The official report, though, despite these headlines, had a more muted message—that 'with democracy [Mandela said] we have the opportunity to ensure that our institutions reflect history in a way that respects the heritage of all citizens'[47].

[47] *Cape Times* 25 September (1997). TV coverage, 24 September 1997.

During the years of apartheid, Mandela continued, 'people responded to the denial and distortion of their heritage with their own affirmation—as indeed Afrikaners had done in an earlier period'; others worked 'the history of their communities into everyday artefacts'; others celebrated 'their heritage outside of the country's museums and monuments, in song and in ceremony, in festivals and in carnivals, in the selling of their wares and in buying items associated with their heritage'. Here, history as heritage was apparently cleansed of the history of resistance, in the words of the primary symbol of resistance in South Africa! Elsewhere local historians sought to insert 'their history' into the new Robben Island Museum. The District Six Museum, representing 'all the people who experienced forced removals' drew out 'the strands of our heritage' by tracing ex-District Six residents who had been imprisoned or associated with the Island as part 'of the same story' of Robben Island being nationally imagined on Heritage Day. Still elsewhere, in the Castle, various symbols and reflections of the colonial past, which visually could have been mistaken for the meeting of the dioramas of the Natural History and the Cultural History Museums (from the uniforms of civilized violence to the eroticised nakedness of tribe) took place in a spirit of 'our multicultural and multilingual society'[48]. These traditional, pre-new South Africa, apartheid South African images of the past thus became visibly and publicly part of the way that the Robben Island Museum could 'respect the heritage of all our citizens' (as Mandela said).

Of course, there are multiple strands to these depictions: we wish to emphasise only a few here. The claiming of the heritage of Robben Island as the 'prison of apartheid' under the watchful gaze of an elderly male leadership is significant. Its portrayal of national figures of resistance and of symbolic leadership as being a relationship between men in nationalism traces a particular fictive map of the new nation. Under the custodianship of this experienced leadership, representing and standing up for 'the people' in the 'prison of apartheid', a model is provided to 'shrug off the chains of the past'[49] and to embrace the heritage of citizenship on an equal footing, 'not as lesser human beings'[50]. At the same time the violence of apartheid, as symbolised most dramatically by Steve Biko[51], is presented as part of collective experience of the five men: they know (and knew) and they symbolise the brutality of the apartheid past and resistance to it. The fact that Biko was never imprisoned on the

[48] *Cape Times* and *Cape Argus* 24,25 September (1997); Television coverage 24 September 1997.

[49] A. Odendaal, Interim Director of the RIM, *Cape Times* 24 September (1997).

[50] Nelson Mandela in his Heritage Day speech at the opening of the Robben Island Museum, *Cape Times* 25 September (1997).

[51] Steve Biko was also symbolically important in representing the violence of apartheid through the almost simultaneous TRC amnesty hearings detailing his torture and murder at the time; as well as when taken together with his also current public memorialisation in the Eastern Cape as such a symbol.

Island, or that Biko and Sobukwe represent different political traditions, is forgotten through the promotion of this kind of national unity. It is a unity, a national re-interpretation and national agency framed by national reconciliation. This version of past and heritage of struggle lays emphasis on perpetrators and victims in the prison of apartheid, and draws lines between good and evil as symbolically contained and 'experienced' in the new figures of power. The leaders are/do represent the people/ the majority, their experiences those of the majority, their prison that of apartheid, and their sense of the forgiven past and reconciled present encapsulating the 'new democracy' and as the markers of citizenship and the new nation.

At the same time it is these official knowledges and memorialisations—in a new sense of occupancy and definition of 'the public'—that are being marked as the 'real' place of 'black history' as against 'the kind of heritage that glorified mainly white and colonial history'[52]. In this respect, this public history speaks for the 'innocent majority, unable to speak English and unversed in the language of politics'[53] as well as for the histories and participants in apartheid resistance and conflict. It is a history reliant much more on a public rewriting than it is on an academic one. And this is so despite the role of such key institutions as the Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture. Set up to focus on 'all aspects of apartheid, resistance, social life and culture in South Africa' at the University of the Western Cape in 1991, and incorporating the visual and archival holdings of IDAF (International Defence and Aid Fund), it has subsequently played a central role in the planning and implementation of the Robben Island Museum as well as in various formats of historical production in the 'new' South Africa[54]. This production, though meant to focus on hidden histories, and recover hidden pasts of resistance and subaltern agency, has tended to disavow academic history production as marginal and to significantly facilitate the generation of a new official national history along the lines elaborated above.

Department of History
University of the Western Cape

[52] Nelson Mandela, Heritage Day speech, *Cape Times* 25 September (1997).

[53] The phrase is taken from a TRC hearing report, *Argus* 4-5 May (1996).

[54] *On Campus*, UWC, Vol 3, No 19, 21-27 July (1995); Mayibuye Centre *Annual Reports* 1995; 1996. See in particular Rassool (1997a:5-7) for a critical context.

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Alex la Guma's Politics and Aesthetics

Jabulani Mkhize

Alex la Guma persistently reiterated his belief that the situation in South Africa was bound to change and that he would, hopefully be part of a 'post-apartheid South Africa'. His socialist and nationalist 'post-apartheid' vision is summed up in the following words taken from his last published article written under the pseudonym 'Gala'[1]:

> Can we not look into the future and see the barriers fallen away under the hammer-blows of progress as our people, having emerged victorious over racist tyranny, national oppression, ethnic or community divisions, commence to build a new life? Can we not dare to bring within the boundaries of our community Marx's and Engels's even longer-term view of the world of the future? .... Flourishing under the warm sun of the equality of all peoples, our culture, art and literature will intermingle as our liberated peoples will do, blossoming into a South African culture; we shall then read a South African literature, not what is described today as merely literature 'from' South Africa or 'South African Writing' ('Gala' 1985:42).

Regrettably La Guma was not able to witness the realisation of his dream for a non-racial and democratic South Africa, albeit achieved not through a revolution but by way of a negotiated settlement. He died of a heart attack in Havana, Cuba, in 1985 at the age of 60[2]. A sense of the contribution he made to international and South African culture and politics can be gauged from the honours he received before his death:

[1] I am indebted to Brian Bunting who informed me about La Guma's pseudonym, 'Gala', which, he explained, was derived from the author's name and surname. Using this information, I was able to deduce La Guma's other pseudonym 'Arnold Adams'.

[2] Before his death he was contemplating writing an autobiography and a travelogue on Cuba, where he had been a representative of the ANC since 1978 (Chandramoham 1992:194). According to Blanche la Guma, La Guma was also busy working on a novel to be called *The Crowns of Battle* or *Zone of Fire*. There are conflicting accounts on this unpublished novel. According to Blanche la Guma, La Guma indicated to her shortly before his death that he had 'all his ideas' on *Crowns of Battle* or *Zone of Fire* 'in his head'. 'He died before he started [writing] the book', Mrs la Guma wrote in a letter to the author. On the other hand, Cecil Abrahams states in a letter to the author (dated 6 June 1994) that, in the end, La Guma abandoned the idea of *Zone*

> The Soviet Presidium awarded La Guma the Order of Friendship; the Republic of Congo gave him the President Nguesso Literary Prize; the French Ministry of Culture awarded him the much coveted title of Chevalier des Arts et Lettres; and the Soviet Writers Union set a special evening to pay tribute to him and to celebrate the publication of a half a million copies of his selected works (Abrahams 1991:vi).

This catalogue of achievements marks the recognition of La Guma's political and cultural development and underlines the need for an in depth study of his legacy.

There is a general agreement amongst critics on the existence of a close relationship between Alex la Guma's politics and his fictional writing. Yet there are different opinions amongst them on whether this relationship strengthens or weakens his work. Thus, on the one hand, there are commentators who have embraced La Guma as a revolutionary writer whose works justifiably furthered the ideological ends of the Movement while, on the other hand, there are those critics who have been somewhat sceptical of the aesthetic merits of such politically informed literature[3]. The most vociferous of the latter critics, Njabulo Ndebele (1991:85), who has in a number of essays taken issue with South African literature that has 'located itself in the field of politics', has, for example, aligned La Guma with what he calls 'the tradition of spectacle'—the exponents of which he has accused of being guilty of 'the dramatic politicisation of creative writing' (Ndebele 1991:40). It could, however, be argued that in using La Guma as an exemplar of the spectacular tradition, Ndebele seems to have overlooked the fact that La Guma was informed by an equally significant but radically different aesthetic tradition from the largely (liberal) Arnoldian—one that seems to inform his own aesthetics of the ordinary. It is precisely this alternative tradition which La Guma represents that this essay attempts to recuperate.

rediscovering a tradition

In a paper read at the First Pan-Cultural Festival in 1973, a paper which the exponents of the African Renaissance in present day South Africa might find useful, Alex la Guma

of Fire. Kenneth Parker (1986:9) corroborates Abraham's argument that at the time of his death La Guma was working on *Crowns of Battle* and even goes further to indicate that the title comes from the lines: 'Let the heroes display proudly their crowns of battle' from the Zulu epic *Emperor Shaka the Great* by Mazisi Kunene. Abrahams (1992:225) explains elsewhere that this novel had been 'planned extensively and two rough chapters had been written'. In the same letter Abraham's indicated to me that he was working on the unfinished manuscript of this work with the aim of bringing it out for publication (letter to the author). Mrs. La Guma does not, however, appear to be aware of the manuscript.

[3] A good example of the commentators that embrace La Guma as a writer of the Movement is Comrade Mzala's (Jabulani Nxumalo's) (1986:89) 'Death of Alex la Guma: Writer and Freedom Fighter'.

emphasised the need for cultural workers to reclaim the African cultural heritage and urged the liberated African countries to ensure that everyone had access to education because, in his words, '[k]nowledge is the weapon in the struggle for final emancipation' (La Guma 1973:99). Although La Guma uses 'Africanist' terms, the central thrust of his argument is, nevertheless, not at odds with his Marxist beliefs. The notion of education that La Guma seems to have had in mind here is what Norman Geras (1986:137) has called 'the *education* of the proletariat' (e.i.o.) in terms of which 'the proletariat transforms and educates itself in the process of its revolutionary struggle to overthrow the capitalist society'. This process of self-education of the proletariat, Geras (1986:138) is quick to point out, 'in no way contradicts the Marxist theory of the party'[4]. La Guma is speaking from his position as a member of the Communist Party, as an 'organic intellectual' (in the Gramscian sense) who is supposed to provide guidance to the working class. For La Guma there was no contradiction regarding the reciprocal relationship between the working class and the party on behalf of which he wrote and organised:

> The main distinguishing feature of a true democratic cultural revolution is its mass, nation-wide character. The strength and vitality of the revolution is derived from the awakened creative energy of the masses and their aspirations for new life, enlightenment and culture. Real progress cannot be decreed from above; living creative progress is the product of the masses themselves. We must raise the lowest sections of the population to the state of making history (La Guma 1973:99).

In these words, La Guma not only made clear his belief in the pivotal role of culture in the struggle for liberation, but also summed up what may be regarded as the guiding principle of his revolutionary philosophy throughout his life. For not only did La Guma, as a cultural worker, attempt to ensure that 'the lowest sections of the population [are] raise[d] to the state of making history' by way of his writings, but, in his role as a political activist, he also identified with the interests of (and fought on behalf of) this constituency in his unwavering dedication to the liberation struggle in South Africa. For La Guma 'the lowest section of the population' is undoubtedly the proletarian masses, a fact which not only becomes obvious in the working class bias of most of his novels but also has a great deal to do with the influence of his father[5]. Although La

[4] 'For Marx and Lenin, the party is nothing other than the instrument of the working class, its own organization for struggle; it is not, for them, yet another external agent of liberation above or superior to the masses' (Geras 1986:138).

[5] La Guma appears to share the Lukácsian conception that 'the fate of the revolution depended upon the ideological maturity of the working class' (Frisby 1983:86).

Guma informs us that both his parents were politically conscious people, it was largely his father's political activities which influenced his social and political outlook. Against this background, then, one cannot look at La Guma's cultural and political development without examining his father's role in the South African liberation struggle.

James la Guma was a member of the ANC since the 1920s, the South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO) in the 1950s, a member of the ICU in 1919 and by 1926 its permanent secretary. His commitment to working class interests was, however, not confined to his involvement in the activities of the ICU. La Guma was a member of the Communist Party South Africa (CPSA), a party which was formed in 1921, which he joined in 1925 and was in the executive of the party by 1926 as well as the secretary of the Non-European federation of Trade Unions in 1928, in addition to his position as secretary of the ANC branch in Cape Town. Jack and Ray Simons (1983:267) describe him as 'one of the first coloured radicals to abandon the concepts of liberalism for Marxist theory and class struggle'.

La Guma was elected to attend the International Congress of the League Against Imperialism and for National Independence as a representative of the Party in Brussels, Belgium, in 1927 together with Josiah Gumede of the ANC and D. Colraine, a representative of the South African Trade Union Congress. It was at this congress that the South African delegation drafted a resolution which demanded 'the right for self-determination through the complete overthrow of the capitalistic and imperialist domination' in South Africa (La Guma n.d.:22)—a resolution which the Brussels Congress adopted. The resolution may have served as an impetus for La Guma's subsequent attention to the national question in South Africa. After addressing meetings in Germany following the conference, La Guma and Gumede left for Moscow, where La Guma discussed the South African National question with members of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), especially with Nikolai Bukharin, then a prominent party member.

La Guma's first visit to Moscow after the Brussels conference is of particular significance both in terms of his contribution to the South African liberation struggle as well as the impact it might have had on his son's political and literary development later in his career. La Guma's encounter with Bukharin is significant in this regard. Bukharin was not only an important party thinker according full support to Stalin's New Economic Policy of the time but, as editor of an official Party newspaper, *Pravda*, he also played a significant role in promoting proletarian literature through his support of the Proletkult. This brief encounter with Bukharin must have had an impact on La Guma—who is described by his son as having been an avid reader of working class literature—and later on his son's reading tastes as well.

Of particular significance with regard to this visit to Moscow, however, was La Guma's submission of a statement on the South African situation to the Communist International (Comintern), in which he argued for the establishment of a 'Native

Republic' as a precondition for the realization of socialism[6]. La Guma's analysis of the South African situation received the blessing of the executive of the Comintern, which then submitted the adoption of the slogan, '[a]n independent native republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' government with full guarantees of the rights of minorities' for discussion by the CPSA (La Guma n.d.:48). This proposal was, however, vehemently rejected and criticised by some members of the party, with S.P. Bunting being the most vociferous. After a lengthy debate amongst members of the party in Cape Town, the 'Black Republic' thesis, as it was later called, was endorsed by the CPSA in 1929. Commenting on La Guma's pivotal role in the formulation and subsequent adoption of the Black Republic policy the Simonses (1983:398) argue:

> Only a person who combined a firm adherence to Marxist theory with a passionate belief in national liberation could conceive the prospect of African rule as a necessary first stage to the achievement of a classless society. Such a person was James La Guma.

The Black Republic thesis, which was based on Lenin's 1920 thesis on the national and colonial question, in terms of which the national liberation struggle against imperialism is seen as the first stage towards socialism, was to have a profound impact on the relationship between the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party (as the CPSA was later known) at a later stage in the history of the struggle. For in the words of Francis Meli (1989:79), it underlined the crucial

> relationship between African nationalism and socialism, by stating that the concept of class struggle must of necessity incorporate the principle of national self-determination for Africans and other nationally oppressed blacks.

[6] Jack and Ray Simons (1983:398f) sum up La Guma's argument in the following works: 'First establish majority rule, he argued, and unity, leading to socialism, would follow'. The party should therefore concentrate on strengthening the movement for national liberation, and at the same time retain its separate identity and role as a socialist party. Communists should 'build up a mass party based upon the non-European masses', unite landless whites and natives behind an energetic agrarian policy, give expression to the demands of African workers and dispel their illusions that the British acted as the demands of African workers and dispel their illusions that the British acted as intermediaries between them and their Afrikaner oppressors. The 'native republic slogan would act as a political catalyst, dissolving traditional subservience to whites among Africans and racial arrogance towards Africans among whites'. The phrase 'dissolving traditional subservience to whites among Africans and racial arrogance towards Africans among whites' immediately calls to mind Steve Biko's assertions in *I Write What I Like*. It is perhaps such statements in James la Guma's argument that prompted Joe Slovo's conclusion that the Black Republic thesis foreshadows Black Consciousness in SouthAfrica [Amakomanisi:The South African Communist Party 1921 - 1986 (video cassette)]. The ideological thrust of the 'Black Republic' thesis is, however, different from the terms of Black Consciousness.

Most significantly, the 'Black Republic' thesis, which underscored the collaboration between British imperialism and 'the white bourgeoisie of South Africa' (Bunting 1981:91), was a precursor to the 'colonialism of a special type' (CST) theory, which formed the central thrust of 'The Road to South African Freedom', the programme of the South African Communist Party (SACP) adopted in South Africa in 1962. In terms of the CST theory, 'the oppressing white nation [occupies] the same territory as the oppressed people themselves and [lives] side by side with them' (Bunting 1981:299).

In the words that clearly signal the official justification of the alliance between the SACP and the ANC, the programme also states that the South African Communist Party set out as 'its immediate and foremost task' the attempt to work for a united front of national liberation and 'to strive to unite all sections and classes of oppressed and democratic people for a national democratic revolution to destroy white domination' (Bunting 1981:286). James La Guma's position is clearly indicated in the following words which conclude the introduction of the programme:

> The destruction of colonialism and the winning of national freedom is the essential condition and the key for future advance to the supreme aim of the Communist Party: the establishment of a socialist South Africa, laying the foundation of a classless, communist society (Bunting 1981:286).

The Simonses (1983:450) refer to La Guma as 'the chief architect of the black republic policy': this intellectual role which clearly underscores his highest achievement as an 'organic intellectual', was bound to have a significant influence on his son, especially with regard to his perspective on national liberation and class struggle in South Africa.

early activism

As can be seen, then, Alex la Guma was born in a home where working class politics and the national liberation struggle were a major preoccupation, and was encouraged from the beginning to think in class terms and to see the situation of Coloured people in the national context. At one level, it was the existence of 'an atmosphere of working class activity and ideas at home' (La Guma 1991:16) which aroused La Guma's curiosity as a child and helped develop his political consciousness:

> I do not remember my parents ever sermonising me as [a] child, but one was always being advised to devote oneself to 'something useful', or 'to lead a useful life'. A picture of Lenin hung in our living room. Very often people came to visit and I would hover on the outskirts of the conversations, listening to chats about politics, trade-union work, or the 'Party' ('Gala' 1982:50).

La Guma recalls enquiring from his mother about the picture of Lenin on their living room wall and being informed that his father was 'a follower of Lenin' and that 'Lenin had been the leader of the great change in Russia which had done away with poverty so that people no longer need to be poor'. When he probed further, La Guma goes on to tell us, his mother told him that '[his] father and others like him used the teachings of Lenin

to show workers in the country that they could achieve happiness for themselves and their children' (La Guma 1993:168). La Guma recalls how as a young 'schoolboy artist, [he] was asked to help paint posters, decorate the banners or illustrate the leaflets which his father's work demanded' ('Gala' 1982:50). He was already part of the marches and demonstrations even before he entered high school in 1938. As a high school student at Trafalgar in Cape Town, La Guma relates with obvious cynicism how he discovered that they were taught by 'politically conscious' teachers. La Guma informs us:

> After classes we were invited to attend lectures of a 'political nature'. There I heard long and dull discourses about the 'permanent revolution' as well as dire criticisms of and outright attacks on the Soviet Union. This was offensive to me, for in our family we had always been taught to cherish and admire the Socialist Sixth of the World. I soon gave up attendance of these 'activities' which also went under the guise of 'cultural programmes' ('Gala' 1982:51)[7].

Like his father, La Guma became an avid reader from an early age. Writing under a different pseudonym, 'Arnold Adams', La Guma outlines some of the sources of his cultural and political development:

> I read *The Iron Heel* and saw in Jack London's 'people of the abyss' my own community ground down under the weight of poverty, oppression, ignorance. Could it be that the oppressed people all over were the same? In *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* I saw our own working men. These books moved me more than the set books we were given to read (at) school. I wasn't interested in *The Adventures of Maurice Buckler* or *Mica Clarke* ('Arnold Adams' 1971:59)

La Guma read very widely, covering the classical Russian writings of Tolstoy,

[7] The position being rejected here was the Trotskyian version of the 'permanent revolution' as espoused in South Africa in the 1940s by the leaders of such organisations as the All-Africa Convention (ACC), the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) and, significantly, the Cape African Teachers' Association. This version of the theory of the 'permanent revolution' rejects the national democratic phase of the revolution and espouses instead, the idea that the revolution has to be 'socialist in character' and immediately establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. The following characterisation of this vision is one with which La Guma would have agreed: 'Trotskyism in South Africa (as elsewhere) had the following characteristics: It opposes the democratic revolution as a distinct phase in the struggle for socialism; it is unable to get to grips with the national question; its theoretical dogmatism prevents it from coherently distinguishing between the "form" and "content" of class struggle, and its abstract view of politics encourages élitist and anarchist styles of organisation' (Dialego 1988:69). For an inside perspective of this version and a different view on the policies of the CPSA see Hosea Jaffe's *European Colonial Despotism*, especially chapter seven and eight. In chapter seven he provides a critique of the Black Republic thesis and in chapter eight he credits the 'Trotskyite' organisations as having provided 'the most sustained, intense and widespread political education of the oppressed people ever conducted in South Africa' (Jaffe 1994:166).

Dostoyevsky, Gorky, Sholokov and American writers such as Farrel and Steinbeck[8]. The working class bias of most of Alex la Guma's novels later in his literary career can, therefore, be attributed partly to his early exposure to this literary tradition.

La Guma was at that stage a fifteen year old matric student but, as he tells us, he was more interested 'in seeing the defeat of Nazism than [he] was in his examinations' (La Guma 1991:17). The result was that La Guma dropped out of school (in order to join the army) before he could complete his matriculation and, having enrolled at the Cape Technical College, he passed matric in 1945 when he had already started working:

> You wanted to get through school in order to enter a more dynamic world. After high school I turned away from further education because it appeared that life held more serious things than more certificates based on knowledge that had little to do with reality ('Arnold Adams' 1971:59).

La Guma's opportunity to enter 'a more dynamic world' came when he was employed as a factory worker by the Metal Box Company in Cape Town. Although La Guma was initially romantic about the prospects, it was while he was working for this company that he learnt about the hardships of being a worker—an experience that facilitated the emergence of his interest in working class issues. La Guma recalls what he felt about the situation of the workers then:

> I could see how the workers were exploited, and how they suffered. I came to know the day-to-day problems they had, the hopeless condition of their families and other slum dwellers. Those outcasts of South African society were poor, they were backward, they were unconcerned. Many of them died inside themselves like trees eaten by worms beneath the bark. I was amazed at their tolerance, their resignation. I couldn't understand why they didn't want to do something about it, why they didn't change these conditions but drifted along without a murmur, year after year (La Guma 1984:71).

This is an interesting observation in so far as it underlines what the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács has called the reified consciousness of the workers in terms of which the 'capitalist social order' is internalised by the worker without interrogation becoming, as it were, his 'second nature'[9]. The remedy to this reified conception of capitalist order,

[8] See for example La Guma (1991:18). As James Matthews, his fellow writer who worked closely with La Guma in Cape Town before the latter fled the country, told me in an interview: 'Alex was influenced by every writer who had a profound feeling of the social deprivation of others'. La Guma's wide reading habits were also confirmed by his wife, Blanche, in an interview with Chandramohan (1992:199) as well as in a letter to the author dated 10th March 1994. In her words: 'Alex was an avid reader, amongst authors whose works he read was Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Gorky and others too numerous to mention'.

[9] In the words of Lukács: 'In every aspect of daily life in which the individual worker imagines himself be the subject of his own life he finds this to be an illusion that is destroyed

as La Guma himself later realises, lies in the development of a 'proletarian class consciousness' amongst workers themselves. The Marxist-Leninist underpinnings of La Guma's politics is clear from the following account of his relationship with fellow workers:

> At lunch time I found myself talking to the workers. I seemed to have become a great talker. I talked about lots of things, I remember. International news, South African politics, the colour-bar. Some of the workers viewed me with curiosity. They asked me whether I was a communist. Certainly I was a member of the trade union. Was I a communist? I must have been telling them things, explaining situations, in the manner of a communist ('Arnold Adams' 1971:60).

La Guma here was (perhaps subconsciously) not only identifying the 'proletariat as a redeemer' of its own situation within the capitalist system but also instilling in the workers a self-consciousness that Lukács identifies as the first step towards overcoming reification (see Zitta 1964:175f).

As a member of the trade union committee at the Metal Box Company, La Guma was in the forefront in the organisation of a strike for better wages and better working conditions. He recalls 'a somewhat juvenile talk [he] gave on the meaning of class struggle' during the course of the strike ('Gala' 1982:51). As a result of his involvement in this strike action, La Guma lost his job. Although La Guma later 'realised' that the situation was 'much more complicated' than he saw it (La Guma 1984:71), this experience was, nonetheless, significant in his development. After his dismissal from the Metal Box Company, La Guma found work in the art department of Caltex Oil Company in Cape Town. Blanche La Guma, his wife, tells us that it was while La Guma was working for Caltex that 'he took a correspondence course in journalism which was to serve him well in the future' (La Guma 1991:7). It was also while he was working at Caltex that La Guma started recruiting members for the Communist Party and, interestingly, this (apparently spontaneous) recruitment drive preceded La Guma's official membership of the party. The young La Guma finally joined the Young Communist League in 1947 and became a member of District 20 of the Communist Party by 1948:

> One day I realised that while I had been encouraging my mates to take more interest in those things which were keeping them in that position of

the immediacy of his existence' (Lukács 1971:165; see also Johnson 1984). Lukács (1971:172) goes on to point out: 'the process by which the worker is reified and becomes a commodity dehumanises him and cripples and atrophies his "soul"—as long as he does not consciously rebel against it'. It is important to note here that Lukács later renounced this 'messianic' role accorded to the proletariat as a way of coming to terms with Leninist theory (see Lukács's 1967 preface to *History and Class Consciousness*; Novack 1978:120f; Jones 1977:50f).

> indignity as second class people in their own Motherland, I could do more myself ('Arnold Adams' 1971:61).

One may, of course, argue that, given his home background, it was inevitable that La Guma should join the Communist Party. La Guma himself indicates that his family background had a great deal to do with this move: 'perhaps I was influenced within the circle of our family—certainly that had something to do with it' ('Gala' 1982:51). 'On the other hand', La Guma continues to point out, 'there were [other] independent experiences which made me as an individual more and more aware of the necessity to change the face of our country' ('Arnold Adams' 1971:57). Some of the motivations for joining the Communist Party which La Guma cites include the appalling conditions of life under which the predominantly working class community of District Six lived; his own reading of working class literature which sensitized him to the plight of the workers in other parts of the world as well as the potential revolutionary role that could result in workers changing their situation; his experiences as a worker which provided him with a first hand practical encounter with the conditions of the working class in his own country; lastly, the working class internationalism demonstrated by the Party during the war when it interpreted fascism as a threat to the working class all over the world and gave its full backing to the Soviet Union[10]. Having joined the Young Communist League, La Guma began getting some lectures from his father 'on the honour and importance of being known as a Communist' (La Guma 1993:168). Joining the Young Communist League (YCL) also provided La Guma with the opportunity to delve deep into the theories of Marxist-Leninism. La Guma tells how as members of the YCL they 'read Lenin's works and debated youthfully and fervently'. Two years after La Guma had joined the CPSA, however, the organisation had to disband, pre-empting the banning of the Party by the government. The Nationalist government, nonetheless, declared it an illegal organisation in 1950 and La

[10] It is perhaps important to note that even before the Soviet Union became involved in the war, at a time when the CPSA still held the belief that the war was only the concern of the imperialists, Jimmy la Guma, his father, did not endorse this initial party position. According to Alex la Guma, his father maintained that the second World War was an antifascist war being waged against Hitler and Mussolini who were not only 'implementing imperialist ambitions, but were also attacking the working class of Europe and its vanguard'. 'Internationalism demanded that the workers of Europe be defended' concluded James la Guma (La Guma 'A biography' n.d.:67). This interpretation of events by his father had a bearing on La Guma's interest (at the age of fifteen) in joining the army as well as on his consciousness about the need for international solidarity with the working class: 'Nazism was overrunning Europe. I knew about the stupid system that turned my own people into strangers in their country. We were continually reminded that we were "Non-Europeans Only"; in Europe they were butchering Jews and gypsies, and Hitler called us "subhumans". We were all one, because we were all being persecuted, and they were fighting in Europe. I wanted to fight the Nazis, but when I left home to join the armed forces the recruiting officer found me underweight and too skinny' ('Arnold Adams' 1971:59).

Guma was 'listed under the Suppression of Communism Act as a known communist' (Abrahams 1985:7).

La Guma continued being involved in politics, however, even after the banning of the Party, participating more in local and nationalist campaigns rather than working class activities. When a Coloured People's Convention was called in 1953 and the South African Coloured People's Organisation was formed, La Guma was one of the founder members. The South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO), a national coloured organisation, was formed to mobilise and unite all Coloureds to resist the Separate Representation of Voters Bill of 1951, which was aimed at removing the Coloureds from the common voters roll, and to align itself with the ANC's campaign against apartheid and for equal rights for all South Africans (see Lewis 1987:269). La Guma became a member of the executive of SACPO in 1954 while he was still working at Caltex, but, after some time, he resigned from this company to become a full-time organiser for SACPO. In November the same year, La Guma married Blanche Herman, who was to share his political and cultural activities. In 1955 La Guma became chairman of SACPO and was instrumental in organising SACPO for the historical Congress of the People held in Kliptown in June 1955. While La Guma and several other SACPO delegates were on their way to Kliptown, they were arrested in Beaufort West and released without being charged only after the conference had ended. SACPO members, nevertheless, vowed to carry the Freedom Charter to every corner of the land in their capacity as members of the Congress Alliance, which adopted the Charter in 1955. After its 1959 December conference the South African Coloured People's Organisation changed its name to the South African Coloured People's Congress (or CPC) to fall in line with the Congress Movement under the auspices of the African National Congress.

journalism, detention and exile

The period from 1955 to 1962 was a significant phase in both La Guma's political career and his writing career. Firstly, in 1955 La Guma was asked to join the staff of *New Age*, a newspaper that served as the mouthpiece for the ANC and the SACP, at its headquarters in Cape Town[11]. It was after joining the staff of this progressive newspaper that La Guma 'really started to write seriously' (La Guma 1991:19). Secondly, as chairman of the South African Coloured People's Organisation, La Guma played a leading role in challenging the government's 1955 Race Classification Bill and the South African Act Amendment Bill which effectively removed Coloureds from the common voters roll. He was also in the forefront in the struggle against the decision of

[11] In joining this progressive newspaper as a reporter, La Guma was once again following the path of his father who, in the 1930s, was an editor of *Liberator*, a monthly journal of the National Liberation League in which Alex la Guma himself assisted as a juvenile artist.

the Cape Town City Council in April and May 1956 when the municipality decided to segregate buses (see Abrahams 1985:8). In December 1956 La Guma and other leaders countrywide were arrested and charged with treason. Since the history of the 1956 Treason Trial is well documented, it suffices to point out here that the central argument of the State against the accused revolved around suspicions of the existence of a conspiracy to overthrow the existing government by force as well as the allegation that the Freedom Charter was a communist inspired document, and that the trial dragged on until 1961 when, as a result of insufficient evidence, the accused were acquitted.

As one of the accused in the Treason Trial, La Guma wrote extensive reports for *New Age*. On May 2, 1957 La Guma was assigned a regular column entitled 'Up my Alley' by *New Age* (see Abrahams 1985:12). It was La Guma's work with *New Age*, specifically his new column, through which he established himself as a chronicler of liberation, that paved the way for his literary career. As Andre Odendaal and Roger Field indicate in a recently published collection of La Guma's articles and reports, 'many of the themes in his short stories and novels are first encountered and developed in the early newspaper articles' (La Guma 1993:xviii). It was largely as a result of his political work and perhaps partly because of his biting journalism that people who called themselves 'the Patriots' made an attempt on his life on May 15, 1958. According to Blanche La Guma's account of the incident:

> When the matter was reported, the police showed no interest. Only when he received an unsigned note reading 'Sorry we missed you, will call again—'The Patriots'—did they come to the house to inspect the hole made by the bullet into the wall. That was two days after the event (La Guma 1991:10).

Immediately after the Sharpeville incident of March 1960 the South African government declared a State of Emergency and arrested many political activists all over the country. La Guma was one of those detained and he spent five months firstly in Roeland Street prison and then at a special prison in Worcester in the Cape before he was released:

> In the multi-racial, multi-national community of political detainees lay the guarantee of a future, free South Africa ... we have come out of the jails stronger, more determined than before (La Guma 1993:147f).

In 1961 when Nelson Mandela, the then leader of the African National Congress, called a national general strike in protest against South Africa becoming a white republic, La Guma went underground and helped organise the Coloured people in Cape Town to rally around Mandela's call. He was detained for ten days for his involvement in the campaign. Following his release in June 1961, in August the government imposed a five year banning order on La Guma under the Suppression of Communism Act. In 1962 La Guma was, according to his wife, 'the first person to be placed under twenty-four hour house arrest' (La Guma 1991:13). This restriction order prohibited him from attending public gatherings and effectively forced him to resign from *New Age*. In

October 1963 both La Guma and his wife were detained under the 'Ninety-day solitary confinement clause'. After Blanche's release from jail, she was also served with a banning order. Her husband continued to be under house arrest after his release. La Guma was again arrested under the '180 days solitary confinement clause' in 1966 and upon his release he was instructed by the African National Congress to leave South Africa with his family and settle in exile in London. La Guma told Cecil Abrahams:

> It was felt that after having spent four years under house arrest and going for the fifth year with the prospect of another five years ... one could be more constructive outside. So we came to Europe to carry on what we were doing on another front (La Guma 1991:25).

The period from 1962 to 1965 was significant with regard to La Guma's writing as he used the restriction orders to get down to the business of writing fiction. Apart from a number of short stories, La Guma wrote a novella, *A Walk in the Night*, which was published by Mbari in Ibadan Nigeria in 1962. Between 1962 and 1963 La Guma wrote *And a Threefold Cord*, which was subsequently published by Seven Seas Publishers in East Berlin in 1964 while La Guma was in prison in Roeland Street. On his release from prison, La Guma wrote *The Stone Country*. As can be seen, then, the period from 1960 to 1965, the larger part of which La Guma spent under twenty-four hour house arrest, was indeed a period during which La Guma 'did most of his writing' (La Guma 1991:12; Abrahams 1985).

During the period of exile in London, La Guma continued with his political work—addressing anti-apartheid gatherings as a representative of the ANC in the United Kingdom in 1966 and 1967. He also retained his membership of and worked for the SACP (which had been established as an underground movement in South Africa in 1953). Because of the secrecy that Party members maintained during the period of repression this has not been recorded in earlier biographical accounts[12]. For the purpose of survival, Blanche La Guma worked at London hospitals, while La Guma worked for a private radio agency owned by Dennis Duerden. While working for Duerden, La Guma wrote a number of detective stories 'based on a fictitious African detective named Captain Zondie' (Abrahams 1985:17). When the private radio agency closed down La Guma found work as an insurance clerk at Abbey Insurance Company in London, a firm for which he worked from 1968 to 1970. La Guma's period in exile was also marked by a number of important developments with regard to his cultural productivity. As early as 1969—three years after his arrival in London—La Guma was awarded the first Lotus Prize for literature by the Afro-Asian Writers Association, a prestigious award which he accepted from Prime Minister Indira Ghandhi at New Delhi

[12] I am indebted to Barry Feinberg, La Guma's comrade in an SACP unit in exile, who brought this to my attention in a conversation I had with him at Mayibuye Centre on 24 March 1994.

in India in 1970. This award must have served as an impetus for La Guma's production of his next work, *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, a novel on the underground activities of ordinary people who have decided to wage an armed struggle against racial capitalism. This novel was, according to La Guma, conceived and drafted in South Africa although it was fully written in London (see Abrahams 1985:18). Perhaps more significantly, La Guma's period of exile afforded him an opportunity to attend and address numerous conferences in different parts of the world, and, thereby, share ideas with other literary figures the world over. For La Guma, on the one hand, this exposure did not only broaden his cultural horizon but also provided him international recognition as an author of undoubted repute. For readers and researchers interested in La Guma's work, on the other hand, La Guma's conference papers and essays published in exile are most valuable since they provide useful information on La Guma's conception of the function of literature as well as his argument on the relationship between culture and politics.

Soon after his arrival in London, La Guma was invited to participate in the Scandinavian-African writers conference in Stockholm in 1967. At this conference La Guma shared ideas with other African writers such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka, both of whom were generous in their accolades for his literary talent. It was at this conference that La Guma for the first time made statements on his ideas on literature and commitment in an open debate. In the same year, and immediately after the conference in Stockholm, La Guma was invited as a guest at the Fourth Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in Moscow. As Abrahams (1985:17) points out: '[t]his visit to the Soviet Union was the first of many to come'. These regular visits to the Soviet Union afforded La Guma an opportunity to have constant contact with the Soviet Writers Union and must have had an impact on his aesthetic commitment to socialist realism (at least in theory). In 1975, after a six-week tour of the Soviet Union at the invitation of the Writers Union, La Guma wrote a book entitled *A Soviet Journey*, a travelogue in which he records his impressions of the Soviet Union, which was published by Progress Publishers in Moscow in 1978. Although La Guma had regular contacts with the Soviet Writers Union, he seems to have spent a great deal of his time on his cultural activities with the Afro-Asian Writers Association. La Guma's links with this association began during the first year of his arrival in London when he was invited as a guest speaker at the Third Congress of the association in Beirut. Perhaps in recognition of his talent as a cultural worker, the members of the Afro-Asian Writers Association elected La Guma as deputy secretary-general at its Fifth Congress at Tashkent in the Soviet Union in 1975. He was initially appointed acting secretary-general in 1977 (when the Egyptian secretary-general of the association died in Cyprus) and was eventually appointed secretary-general of the same association in 1979 (Abrahams 1985:19). In 1979 La Guma, who had been instructed by the ANC to represent its interests in the Caribbean, Central and Latin America and was operating from Cuba, produced his last published novel, *Time of the Butcherbird*. This novel, according to Jan Carew (1986), was later used as a text for Soviet students studying

English literature and philosophy[13].

It has been argued that the exposure La Guma received during this period, which inevitably drew his attention to the need to address an international audience as well, may have inadvertently led to apparent contradictions between his politics and the aesthetic construction of his work, as exemplified in *Time of the Butcherbird*[14]. According to this view, this contradiction may be attributed not only to La Guma's condition of enforced exile, which deprived him of the benefit of writing on an 'intimately known community', but also to his changing 'aesthetic ideology' (Maughan-Brown 1991:32f)[15]. Drawing on the statement made by La Guma in an interview with Robert Serumaga in 1966, in which La Guma indicates his attempt to achieve a 'universality of opinion' by moving beyond a set of apartheid-created 'compartments', Maughan-Brown (1991:35,34) detects in La Guma 'an element of aesthetic back-tracking', the evidence of which is provided, *inter alia*, by what he perceives as La Guma's residual belief in the 'universals of traditionalist criticism'.

One cannot dispute the traces of a liberal humanist aesthetic in some of La Guma's extra-fictional statements. However, La Guma's use of 'universality' in this context seems to have a lot to do with the writer's will to transcend the barriers of race in his writing—hence La Guma's reference to the failure of writers to 'project (themselves) across the colour line' earlier in that interview—and as such it may be seen as La Guma's reflection on the charterist position (or the pluralism of the ANC as some people have called it). It could also be argued that La Guma conflates universality with revolutionary internationalism as can be inferred from his assertion that the writer 'tries to spread out, extend his views, extend his opinions and get opinions from other sources so that he doesn't become confined to his ivory tower'; or the argument that 'universal ideas could still be expressed' even if one is writing 'within a particular environment'[16]. Viewed from this perspective, then, Maughan-Brown's (1991:34) assertion that once 'the concept of universals is accepted, the whole question of the

[13] In an interview both Apollon Davidson and Vladimir Shubin confirmed that La Guma's writings were popular in Russia.

[14] Feinberg stated to the author that La Guma's later novels were aimed at eliciting international solidarity because it was felt that an international awareness campaign would bring more supporters to the cause. La Guma indicated in a letter to Jane Grant that his target had not really been an international audience. 'I never actually have a foreign readership in mind, but wrote, and continue to write, the way I believe the story or novel should be written according to the gospel of Alex la Guma' (La Guma in Grant 1978:49).

[15] Some 'anomalies' that Maughan-Brown notes in his critical essay on *Time of the Butcherbird* were identified earlier by Mbulelo Mzamane (1985:39f).

[16] In a letter to Grant (1978:50) La Guma makes this explicit: 'the revolution is international, and if my characters act out their parts on the South African stage, I hope they are also saying something to non-South Africans'.

legitimacy of literature's serving historically specific political ends is thrown back into the melting pot' is somewhat problematic. Moreover, to make reference to 'La Guma's assertions about the relationship between culture and politics after his exile' or 'aesthetic back-tracking on the part of La Guma once he was established in exile' seems to imply that La Guma may have made assertions on this relationship before his exile. Evidence suggests that it was not until La Guma was in exile that he started throwing some light on his aesthetics—a factor that seems to have been overlooked in Maughan-Brown's essay. Against this background, then, I would argue that if there are any traces of some tenets of liberal humanist aesthetics in some of La Guma's statements, these are overshadowed by La Guma's consistent and heavy reliance on Marxist aesthetics of realism, which is informed by what Lukács—in a reference to Maxim Gorky's writings—calls 'proletarian humanism'. This brings us to the place of La Guma's fiction in the South African realist debate.

the South African realist debate

La Guma's work has always been at the centre of the realist debate in South Africa—a clear indication that he is known as one of the writers in South Africa who is seen as consciously working within a particular realist tradition. This debate was initiated by Lewis Nkosi (1979:221) who argued, in his 1967 essay, that there was a lack of tradition—'indigenous' or 'alien'—in South African literature written by Blacks. Instead what one gets from black South African writing, Nkosi (1979:222) went on to argue, is 'the journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature' without any effort being made to 'transmute these given social facts into artistically persuasive works of fiction'. Nkosi does provide an indication of a tradition he would prefer South African writers to follow and that is the experimental line of modernism which, he feels, would rescue black fiction from the 'straightforward' documentary realist narrative. Amongst those artists who, according to Nkosi, have failed to 'transmute given social facts into artistically persuasive works of fiction', is Richard Rive in whose novel, *Emergency*, Nkosi (1979:222) finds a failure 'in characterisation and imaginative power to do justice to the desperate human situation with which he is dealing'. However, Nkosi is generous in his accolades for Alex la Guma who, despite the fact that he 'tills the same apartheid plot which other writers have so exhaustively worked up' distinguishes himself 'as a true novelist' by his optimism ('his enthusiasm for life as it is lived') (Nkosi 1979:226). Nkosi (1979:227) finds in La Guma's work, *A Walk in the Night*, 'distinct Dostoevskian undertones'. In short, unlike Rive's failure 'in characterisation and imaginative power to do justice to the desperate human situation' in *Emergency*, Nkosi admires La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* despite its employment of a realist narrative which the central thrust of Nkosi's essay seems to be aimed at undercutting.

In his intervention in this realist debate, J.M. Coetzee picks up this point more cogently. Coetzee argues in his 1971 essay, 'Alex la Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer' that 'the Western line of experimentation' (which Nkosi clearly favours) would seem to 'perpetuate a rift between the writer and society at large'

(Coetzee 1971:6). The writer, Coetzee correctly suggests, 'should not choose his tradition at random, but rather choose it with some sense of social implications for his choice' (Coetzee 1971:6). This is precisely what La Guma is doing, Coetzee points out in his brief but illuminating examination of *A Walk in the Night* in which he convincingly shows that this novel 'exemplifies a conception of literature radically different from Nkosi's' (Coetzee 1971:7). According to Coetzee, La Guma's novel is informed by a critical realist tradition which is exemplified in La Guma's truthful depiction of the Coloured situation and the gesture towards 'potentialities for heroic action' (Coetzee 1971:11,10) as captured in the symbolism of the 'dawn' of a new situation. Coetzee continues this line of argument in another essay, 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma'. David Attwell (1993:12) captures Coetzee's (1992) argument thus:

> In 'Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex la Guma' Coetzee goes on to argue, via George Lukács's studies of realism, that La Guma is a critical realist who politicizes his art by gesturing toward a revolutionary transformation of history encoded in characterization and symbolism: thus, La Guma arrives at narrative solutions that have an implicitly progressive social hermeneutic.

In a word, then, La Guma is a social realist who is conscious of the ideological implications of working within this tradition.

Seventeen years after the publication of Nkosi's essay, this debate was taken up by Njabulo Ndebele. Following Nkosi, Ndebele argued in 'Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction', an essay that has since become seminal in South African critical debates, that 'what we have (in South African black fiction) is creative writing's almost obsessive emulation of journalism' (Ndebele 1991:45). This apparently heavy reliance on an obsessive documentation of oppression has, according to Ndebele, inevitably led to the production of an aesthetic of 'anticipated surfaces rather than one of processes', an art which lacks the potential for a transformative impact on the reader's consciousness because it is grounded on political exposition. Such kind of fiction thrives on an aesthetic effect based on 'identification' and 'recognition' (Ndebele 1991:45), Ndebele argues. Ndebele takes the debate much further in his later essay, 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary', suggesting that writers should 'rediscover the ordinary' by exploring a wide range of human experience, thereby avoiding 'the representation of the spectacle' (Ndebele 1991:37) as embodied in narratives which are preoccupied with a documentation of oppression. Rediscovering the ordinary, it turns out, also includes an effective use of subtlety so that the reader's imaginative faculty is challenged and, in this way, the transformation of his/her consciousness is assured.

Curiously, Ndebele provides La Guma's story 'Coffee for the Road' as an example of the 'spectacular' and cites amongst other things, 'the complete exteriority of everything', 'the dramatic contrasts all over the story' and the 'intensifying device of hyphenated adjectives' as pointers to the 'spectacle' in this story (Ndebele 1991:43). There are no grounds to doubt the persuasiveness of Ndebele's argument in this regard;

however, one may argue that Ndebele's argument seems to have overlooked the fact that La Guma's documentation of minute details in this and other stories is indicative of his indebtedness to a naturalist tradition within realism. Moreover, one wonders at the randomness of Ndebele's choice of this particular story by La Guma! The same technique (the documentation of minute details) is used much more effectively in *A Walk in the Night*, which Ndebele does not make reference to because, one suspects, it would put into question the validity of his argument with regard to La Guma.

This debate invokes the 1930s debates between Lukács and Brecht amongst others which were triggered off by Lukács's attack on Bloch's expressionism[17]. In the local version of the debate it would seem that Nkosi subscribes to Brecht's argument in terms of which the use of the experimental line of modernism is seen as compatible with the realistic aesthetic. For example, Nkosi (1979:223) has a lot of praise for Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me On History* because it 'shows a dedication to a superior form of realism which succeeds partly because the author is alive to the fact that reality itself is elusive to the process of Time as an orderly sequence of events'. Coetzee, it has been shown, employs Lukács in his defence of La Guma's oeuvre. Unlike Nkosi, who displays some bias towards modernism, Ndebele does not seem to be suggesting that the writers should dispense with the realist tradition per se; instead, he postulates a return to a realist aesthetic in terms of which individual characters in a text grapple with the problem of 'internal' contradictions of their identity. Michael Vaughan (1990:194), for example, has shown how Ndebele's own fictional work, *Fools and other stories*, is not only written in the realist tradition but is also targeted at the development of an 'intellectual leadership'. La Guma's project, on the contrary, was directed elsewhere. Here is La Guma on this point:

> Having read South African literature, I discovered that nothing satisfactory or worthwhile from my point of view had been written about the area from which I sprang. So I think there was a conscious effort on my part to place on record the life in the poor areas, working class areas, and perhaps for that reason most of my work is centred around that community and life (La Guma 1991:9).

La Guma here clearly identifies himself with, and regards his point of view as consistent with, that of the working class: in a word, his ambition was to create a South African working class (proletarian) literature—at least in terms of content (the question of whether he also had the working class as his virtual readership is another matter). It is thus no surprise that in line with his attempt to 'put on record' the lives of the poor working classes, La Guma perceives his role as a writer and his 'function as that of an historian of the people' (La Guma 1991:21). It should be clear, then, that the ideological

[17] For this debate see *Aesthetics and Politics* (1971). A summary of these debates is also provided in Johnson's *Marxist Aesthetics* (1984), Lunn's *Marxism and Modernism* (1982), Bisztray's *Marxist Models of Literary* (1978) and Ramanujam's *Quest for Reconciliation* (1993).

function which La Guma assigns to literature is radically different from the ideological function that Ndebele's realist project envisages[18]. La Guma's aesthetic is best approached through the work of Lukács.

Lukács argues that realism embodies an objective approach to the social world and that realist fiction provides a convincing picture of historical and social change. In the words of Lukács, the basic premise of the realist school is the recognition that Man is *zoon politikon*, a social animal. According to this view, derived from both Aristotle and Marx,

> the individual existence [of characters] ... their 'ontological being' ... cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment. Their human significance, their specific individuality cannot be separated from the context in which they were created (Lukács 1963:19).

In Lukács's terms, then, the cornerstone of realism is the acknowledgement of the individual's fate as being inextricably bound to his/her social and historical environment. It is this recognition of the merging of the private and public domains, the individual and the historical, that constitutes the notion of 'typicality', a crucial concept in Lukács's aesthetics of realism, in terms of which individuals are seen as 'social units' who are actively involved in the socio-historical forces that shape their future. In Lukács's own words:

> What characterizes the type is the convergence and intersection of all the dominant aspects of that dynamic unity through which genuine literature reflects life in a vital and contradictory unity all the most social, moral and spiritual contradictions of a time (Lukács 1978:78).

In short, a socio-historical perspective and a broad readership willing to be conscientised are the necessary conditions for the realisation of realism.

There is no doubt that a socio-historical perspective plays a vital role in La Guma's fiction. One pointer to this trend can perhaps be seen in the development from one novel to another that marks La Guma's craftsmanship and establishes his authority as a social realist. This progressive development provides a fictionalised analysis of the historical development of the political struggle in South Africa in terms of the gradual development of political consciousness in La Guma's characters. As La Guma (1991:38) himself points out, in these novels he 'hoped' to portray 'truthfully' what went on in the lives of the poor and the working class and 'at the same time to indicate

[18] In relation to Udenta's (1993:9) aligning of La Guma with revolutionary aesthetics it is perhaps important to note here that in a reading of Albie Sachs's seminal paper 'Preparing ourselves for freedom' and Ndebele's essays, Maughan-Brown (1993:161) argues that Ndebele's 'radical politics' is somewhat at odds with 'the more conservative aesthetics underpinning his cultural programme'.

the developing sense of revolt which was fermenting all the time within the communities'. La Guma's broader project then, the one that can perhaps be identified as a crucial feature of his social realism, was to present the working class as both 'objects and subjects of history' (Lunn 1982:79). Related to the trend of development in La Guma's novels is the sense in which central protagonists in each novel can be described as 'typical', not as 'abstract personifications of historical trends' nor as 'symbolised abstract functions of class struggle' as in naturalism, but in the Lukácsian sense in which characters become an embodiment of the general social conditions and yet individuals in their own right. The point in question, argues Lukács (1963:8), is the organic, indissoluble connection between a person as an individual and as a social being, as a member of a community.

The crucial question, however, is this: where does La Guma's social realism fit in to the terms of Lukács's paradigms of different categories of realism? Is La Guma a critical realist or can La Guma be classified as a socialist realist who is influenced by the Soviet aesthetic of heroic figures who serve as leaders of the revolution? In short, where does La Guma's South African realism fit into metropolitan realist forms?

the Soviet connection

La Guma had already written a number of short stories as well as three novels when he started writing essays on literature. For this reason these essays may perhaps be regarded as a reaffirmation of the theory that informs La Guma's writing of his own works. The issue of whether in reality La Guma's theory is compatible with his practice, is, however, a different matter. Suffice it to say here that, although these essays were not written primarily as a series of studies in aesthetics—but are drawn from various sources such as conference papers, interviews, extended reviews of other artists' work and essays in response to particular theoretical positions adopted by other artists—they, nevertheless, help to provide some indication of the central thrust of La Guma's aesthetics. My intention in this section is to explore the ambiguities and complexities of La Guma's aesthetic position by showing how they are a result not only of his Marxist beliefs but also of his indebtness to Russian realist aesthetics (particularly Gorky's) rather than to Lukács.

If there is one aspect which emerges clearly in La Guma's aesthetics, it is his expressed conviction that the social world is not only knowable but can also be represented 'as it is'. In an interview with Cecil Abrahams, La Guma (1991:29) made the following comment with regard to his writing: 'when I portray the life of South Africa I try to show it as it actually is'. 'Life', La Guma (1976:50) argues elsewhere, is 'the stimulation of artistic endeavour'. Indeed in all his extra-fictional statements La Guma has articulated this belief in the potentiality of fiction to capture the quality of human life in its profundity. This view is epitomised in the often quoted statement made by La Guma at the Afro-Asian Writers' Conference in Moscow in 1968: 'One cannot separate literature from life, from human experience and human aspirations' (La Guma 1970:238). It is this belief in the inseparability of literature and life which is central to

La Guma's aesthetics.

La Guma's belief in the inseparability of literature and life, one may argue, should not come as a surprise. As a member of the Communist Party La Guma was expected, among other things, to subscribe to a materialist conception of the world in terms of which the source of all events and actions is to be found in material causes—in real life. (It should however be added that not all empiricists are Marxists.) It could therefore hardly be expected that he would provide an idealist explanation of the source of fiction. It is therefore no coincidence that La Guma's works draw on the author's observation of life around him. In an essay written for the *Literary Gazette* in Moscow in 1980, in which La Guma makes comments on his own writing and political work, he makes this clear: 'I had seen many things around me which had never been dealt with in South African creative writing, and I was convinced that this was real material for a writer' (La Guma 1991:37). It was on the basis of his observations, then, that La Guma hoped to 'portray truthfully the lives' of people who are the subject of his fiction.

La Guma's conception of the relationship between literature and life, and the explanation that he provides of the nature of this relationship, are clearly suggestive of his indebtedness to the fundamentals of Marxist theory. This can clearly be seen in the following statement made by La Guma at the Afro-Asian Writers' Congress in Tashkent in the Soviet Union in 1975:

> When we talk of the relationship between art and life, we mean that unity between what is reflected and the manner in which it is reflected, and this is the quintessence of art (La Guma 1976:50).

What immediately comes to mind as one reads this statement is Lenin's reflectionist theory of literature which is also endorsed by the middle-period Georg Lukács. One is in fact tempted to suggest that there are obvious shades of Lukács in this statement, as can most obviously be seen in the underlying belief that art 'reflects' social reality, a crucial aspect in the Marxist theory of realism. It will, however, be shown that La Guma's view of the relationship between literature and life is defined in non-problematic terms, which distinguishes it from the Leninist model of reflection in terms of which literature is not simply a crude reflection of reality but its mirror in which contradictions and ambiguities are embodied. As Kulikova points out:

> Lenin noted specifically that reflection is not a simple, direct, 'dead-mirror' action, but a complicated, dichotomous, ziz-zag-like one, which contains the possibility of departing from real life (Kulikova 1976:187).

The dialectical nature of the process of reflection is summed up in Lenin's own words:

> The *reflection* of nature in man's thought must be understood not 'lifelessly', not 'abstractly', not devoid of movement, not without contradictions, but in the eternal process of movement, the arising of contradictions and their solution (in Kulikova 1976:187).

Although it is believed that La Guma may have had access to the writings of Lukács on the theory of realism at some stage in his literary career—a belief largely based on the knowledge that La Guma read widely, especially when it came to Marxist theory—there is no substantial evidence in any of his essays to suggest that Lukács's works may have had a direct impact on his aesthetics[19]. What is clear, however, is that La Guma read the writings of Lenin, Georg Plekhanov, 'the founder of Russian Marxism' (Lichtheim 1970:57) and, perhaps most significantly, Maxim Gorky, the Russian pre-revolutionary author who since the 1934 congress of the Union of Writers became known as the father of socialist realism, and that this writer's theories on literature had a profound impact on La Guma's aesthetics[20]. As La Guma himself acknowledged in his 1968 address to the delegates of the Afro-Asian Writers' Congress: 'When we talk of literature in its true sense, we cannot exclude the contributions of Gorky. Maxim Gorky wrote a vast amount about literature' (La Guma 1970:237). It is therefore no coincidence that La Guma makes frequent reference to Gorky in redefining and defending his aesthetics in some of his essays.

In his 1968 address to the Afro-Asian Writers' Congress La Guma draws extensively on Gorky's essay written on the occasion of the establishment of World Literature Publishers in 1919[21]. He begins his address by quoting at length Gorky's definition of literature which reads in part:

> Literature is the heart of the world; all the joys and sorrows, dreams and hopes, despairs and wreaths of it, all the emotions of man as he faces beauties of nature, all his terrors as he faces nature's secrets, lend it wings .... One might call literature also the all seeing eye of the world, an eye whose glances pierce the deepest secrets of the human spirit .... [All] literary creation in prose or in verse shares the unity of the emotions, thoughts and ideas common to all men, the unity of the sacred striving of man towards happiness and freedom of the spirit, the unanimous hope for better forms of

[19] Brian Bunting, in an interview with the author, speculated that La Guma might have read the writing of Lukács because he read a lot of Marxist literary theory including the writings of Christopher Caudwell.

[20] La Guma's acknowledgement of the influence of Gorky on his writing and his aesthetics can be found in 'What I Learned from Maxim Gorky', 'Answers to Our Questionaire' (Anon 1987) and in Kondratovich's (1977) 'Writers in the Struggle for Peace'. In 'Answers to Our Questionaire' La Guma specifically states that Gorky 'introduced [him] to working class literature and the spirit of socialist humanism that goes with it'. It also needs to be stressed that Lenin, Plekhanov, and Gorky at times disagreed. So La Guma had to choose from them what he thought was best for his own discourse. See Lenin (1967), particularly his critical letters to Gorky as well as Gorky's literary portrait of Lenin where he records his own impressions of both Lenin and Plekhanov (Gorky 1982:279-325). In chapter 7 Robin (1992) outlines and compares Plekhanov and Lenin's contribution to the theory of realism.

[21] See 'Vsemirnaya Literature' (World Literature) in Gorky's *On Literature* (1982:153).

life (La Guma 1970:237).

La Guma quotes Gorky at length here not only to reaffirm his belief in the inseparability of literature and life, but also to endorse what Lukács (1972:218) has called Gorky's 'humanist conception of the mission of literature'—that is, the notion that literature has to facilitate the progress of humanity. Accordingly, La Guma argues:

> Literature, art, culture, civilisation, these are not abstract conceptions as some would imagine. They define the direction and basis of our actions at a particular time. They must therefore be understood and interpreted in their revolutionary paths as the ethos which drives man forward or retards his progress according to the dynamism of that civilisation (La Guma 1970:239).

The key phrases here are 'define the direction and basis of our action at a particular time' and 'the ethos which drives man forward or retards his progress according to the dynamism of that civilisation'. For they cogently capture Lukács's theory of realism in terms of which a socio-historical perspective is crucial to realist fiction's depiction of society as a progressive force. It is by being rooted in socio-historical reality that literature performs its function, which is, according to La Guma, to raise the consciousness of the readers to the vitality of life. Following Gorky, therefore, La Guma argues:

> One of the greatest values of literature is that by deepening our consciousness, widening our feeling for life, it reminds us that all ideas and all actions derive from realism and experience within social realities (La Guma 1970:238).

The idea of the indissoluble link between literature and life recurs in La Guma's essays and in different ways demonstrates some affinity between La Guma's ideas and Gorky's. Nowhere, however, is Gorky's influence on La Guma's aesthetics more pronounced than in the latter's provocative essay, 'Alexander Solzhenitsyn: "Life through a crooked eye"'—arguably the most significant essay in terms of one's understanding not only of La Guma's aesthetics but also of his politics. For one thing, La Guma not only defends the Soviet Union and its socialist practices (during the 1960s and 1970s) but most significantly he also employs Gorky to reaffirm his commitment to the aesthetics of realism in general and declare his unequivocal support for socialist realism in particular. But, for the moment, the question is: what prompts La Guma, an avowed South African Marxist, to write an essay on Alexander Solzhenitsyn, a dissident Soviet writer and a voçiferous critic of Stalin and the Soviet leadership of the 1940s who was arrested, kept in prison camps, exiled, a writer who not only denounced socialist realism but ultimately repudiated Soviet society, Marxism and socialism and became a convert to Christianity?

La Guma's essay was primarily prompted by the publication of Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Prize Lecture of 1972 by the *South African Outlook*, a local journal associated with the missionary establishment, which through its control of Lovedale Press made

publications by black writers accessible to readers. La Guma (1974:69) sees the publication of this lecture by *South African Outlook* as a demonstration of this journal's complicity in the 'anti-communist and anti-Soviet campaign' waged by the Nobel Committee. He questions the criterion used by the Nobel Committee in awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature to Solzhenitsyn in 1972 and, having provided several examples of writers who deserved the prize but never gained it, accuses the Nobel Committee of using the Nobel Prize 'as an act in the "cold war"' (La Guma 1974:78)[22]. La Guma goes on to argue

> The award of the prize to Alexander Solzhenitsyn in 1970 came only as a logical conclusion of the Nobel Committee's policy not so much on the merits of the literature, as on its attitude to the Soviet Union, to the ideas of socialism (La Guma 1974:78).

By making a comparison of the reception of Solzhenitsyn's fiction in the Western mass media, on the one hand, and that of the Soviet Union on the other hand—the former bestowing accolades on Solzhenitsyn for his 'talent' and the latter complaining about his 'obsession with prison-camps' and his distortion of Soviet life (La Guma 1974:76)—La Guma seeks to demonstrate that Solzhentsyn's works 'show that he is far from concerned with the realities of Soviet life' (La Guma 1974:77). Against this background, then, La Guma concludes: 'Seeing Soviet life through a crooked eye got him the Nobel Prize for 1970' (La Guma 1974:77).

It is not our concern here to comment on the demerits or merits of Solzhenitsyn's fiction. What is important for us is rather to point out that La Guma's scathing attack on the ideological content of Solzhenitsyn's fiction and the Nobel Committee's award of the Nobel Prize to this Soviet dissident writer provide ample evidence of La Guma's unwavering support for the Soviet Union and his uncompromising adherence to socialist ideology. This is best exemplified in the following statement La Guma made with regard to Solzhenitsyn's fiction:

> to give the impression that prison-camps form the general experience of Soviet people is, to say the least, a gross distortion of the realities of Soviet life. No honest person who has visited the Soviet Union can claim that he experienced the atmosphere of oppression, concentration camps and secret police as Solzhenitsyn would have it. The common problems of the Soviet Union people today are those concerned with the transition from socialism to communism, and that is what most writers in the USSR are concerned with (La Guma 1974:74).

[22] In an earlier article Brian Bunting said: 'Dr. Zhivago—a good book with a bad philosophy' (*New Age* November 16, 1958:6). He also points out that Boris Pasternak's novel was valorized in the west because this was 'an issue in the cold war' rather than anything else, and sees the award of the Nobel Prize for literature to this author as smacking of ideological bias. Interestingly, Bunting also employs Gorky in his critique of Pasternak's work.

It was perhaps this attitude towards the Soviet Union that prompted Lewis Nkosi, who was with La Guma during the latter's first visit there in 1968, to allege:

> Alex la Guma is a man fiercely and humourlessly committed to his ideology—communism. I was surprised to discover how conservative and uncritical he was in his commitment. Indeed there are many independent Marxist thinkers who would be irritated by his brand of pious regard for everything Soviet policy-makers are doing as almost beyond any questioning (Nkosi 1975:110).

To back up his argument Nkosi cites La Guma's 'implicit endorsement' of the trial of two Soviet writers, Yuli Daniel and Andrei Sinyavsky, who had been prosecuted for smuggling their manuscripts out of the country. For Nkosi, on the contrary, it was 'strange' that, in his words, 'any artist interested in creative freedom, least of all (La Guma) ... who had himself been prosecuted and his works proscribed' (Nkosi 1975:110), would adopt such an attitude towards the fate of the other writers[23]. La Guma's critique of Solzhenitsyn six years later can therefore be seen in the context of La Guma's general attitude to the critics of the Soviet Union in general and dissident writers in particular.

The most crucial part of La Guma's essay on Solzhenitsyn for our purposes here is his critique of Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Lecture itself entitled, 'The Role of Writers in Society'. For it is precisely Solzhenitsyn's aesthetics, and his conception of the role of a writer, which eventually become the main target of La Guma's critique. Briefly summarised, for Solzhenitsyn art is of divine origin: 'there are no doubts about its foundations ... we received it from Hands we were unable to see', he argues (Solzhenitsyn 1972:142). Although Solzhenitsyn explains the source of art in spiritual (idealist) terms he insists on the responsibility of a writer to his society. He is, however, quite emphatic on the freedom of the artist: 'Let us concede that the artist *owes* nothing to anyone' (Solzhenitsyn 1972:145). Implicit in his emphasis on the freedom of the artist is his rejection of writers having to play a politically partisan role by espousing a particular ideology. This is a clear demonstration of Solzhenitsyn's condemnation of the officially sanctioned practice of socialist realism with its emphasis on the exaltation of the heroic figures of the revolution. According to Solzhenitsyn, the writer has a moral rather than a political responsibility to his community and this is in line with the mystical terms in which the origin of art is explained in Solzhenitsyn's aesthetics. In Solzhenitsyn's own words: 'The writer is not an outside judge of his compatriots and

[23] Solzhenitsyn has since returned to Russia and, in a dramatic turn of events, in an article which appeared in *Moscow News* (22 February 1987) it was reported that the trial of Sinyavsky and Daniel was 'now officially viewed as a mistake' (See Anon. 'Staggering Admission' in *Index on Censorship* 5 1987:1-5). 'Andrei Sinyavsky' is the pen-name of Abram Tertz who, like Solzhenitsyn, was critical of socialist realism and Stalinist repression. See his novel *The Trial Begins* and his accompanying critique entitled 'On Socialist Realism'.

contemporaries, but an accomplice in all the evil perpetrated in his country or by his people' (Solzhenitsyn 1972:147).

La Guma interrogates Solzhenitsyn's mystical or idealist conception of the origins of art. He points out that for Solzhenitsyn art is something that is 'above, separate from, people' and then argues, if it is true that 'we received [art] from Hands we were unable to see' (as Solzhenitsyn suggests), therefore 'we must conclude that even if there was no humanity, no mankind, no people on earth, Art could still be there' (La Guma 1974:70). Instead, La Guma offers a materialist explanation of the origins of art, arguing that all art 'came from human endeavour'. 'If talent was not exercised, then we would not have art', La Guma argues (La Guma 1974:70). Having said this, La Guma reiterates his belief in the indivisible link between literature and life and employs Gorky to back up his argument: 'What the imagination creates is prompted by the facts of real life, and it is not governed by baseless fantasy, divorced from life, but very real causes' (La Guma 1974:71). On this basis, therefore, we may conclude that La Guma turns to Gorky primarily because he shares with Gorky a materialist conception of the world from which the idea of the inseparability of literature and life stems.

The assertion from Gorky (cited above) leads La Guma to the following definition of art: 'art is a representation of life' (La Guma 1974:71). If art is a 'representation of life' as La Guma suggests, then, what is the role of the artist? For La Guma, the task of the 'real artist [is to search] for truth and to depict [that] truth' (La Guma 1974:75). This conception of the task of the writer has some affinity to Lukács's theory in so far as it is suggestive of La Guma's heavy reliance on the honesty of the writer in his pursuit of 'truth'—and, as such, would seem to downplay the role of ideology in this pursuit. For Lukács (1978:84), following Marx and Engels, the honesty of the writer, we know, means portraying 'reality as it actually is' even if, in the process, one has to transcend one's 'most cherished preconceptions and most intimate personal aspirations'. This is where La Guma parts company with Lukács: for La Guma, the search for truth is consistent with and perhaps too closely linked with the principle of partisanship of literature as espoused by Lenin in 'Party Organisation and Party Literature'. For this reason, La Guma (1974:71) expands his definition of art:

> But, further, art is a representation of life also modified by the personality of the artist; for the artist has a character, an outlook on life, the world around him, and through his art he hopes to modify the personality of others.

Once again, La Guma's indebtedness to Marxist aesthetics of realism can be seen not only in his definition of art as a reflection of social reality but also in his acknowledgement of the role of ideology in this representation of reality. However, La Guma's use of the term, 'personality' instead of ideology could be seen as rendering visible the (at times) *ad hoc* nature of his theory.

La Guma's conceptualisation of the role of ideology in literature, one suspects, is attributable to his interpretation of Lenin's principle of partisanship as well as his somewhat mechanistic version of the theory of reflection. Earlier, in this essay, La Guma employs Gorky in reaffirming his belief in the Aristotelian dictum that man is a political animal. Later, in the same essay, La Guma reiterates his conception of the

relationship between literature and life as well as the consciousness-raising function of literature: 'Literature and art not only reflect the life of the people, but they also help mould the human mind' (La Guma 1974:74). He then goes on to argue:

> The idea of the individual link of literature and art with the interests and struggle of social classes and, in socialist society, with the life of the entire people, was theoretically substantiated by Lenin who propounded the principle of partisanship of literature. Artistic creation cannot remain outside the struggle of classes, outside politics; for each writer, whether he likes to or not, expresses in his work the interest of some one class (La Guma 1974:74).

While one endorses the notion that 'artistic creation' is socio-historically determined and can therefore not remain completely 'outside politics', one would be sceptical of the argument that a work of art is always an expression of an author's class interest or ideology, as implied in this assertion[24]. Nevertheless, the significance of this assertion, however platitudinous, is that it clearly spells out La Guma's belief (despite humanist traces in his vocabulary) in the ideological function of literature, a belief to which La Guma makes consistent reference in his extra-fictional statements.

There is a clear agenda in La Guma's adoption of Lenin's principle of the partisanship of literature and it is to embrace socialist realism. Accordingly, La Guma begins by castigating 'bourgeois propagandists' who 'attack this principle, trying to prove that to serve the interests of a definite class is incompatible with artistic creation'. To back up his argument he refers to what he calls 'the clatter of innocuous and trivial reading matter produced in the West which helps to divert the masses from more serious aspects of life' and wonders whose interests 'the writers of such material serve' (La Guma 1974:74). In contrast, La Guma argues, the socialist system is the first system which 'freed culture from the influence of the money-bags' by 'affording the artist a chance not to pander to the tastes of a small coterie of the "cultured" but for the masses' (La Guma 1974:75). The argument ends on a high note, with La Guma (1974:75) defending and embracing socialist realism:

> Each real artist searches for the truth, seeks to depict the truth. But this is what socialist society is also interested in. The main demand of socialist realism is to portray life truthfully in its progressive development.

[24] La Guma may be paraphrasing Gorky's argument here: 'A writer is the eyes, ears and voice of his class. He perceives, formulates and portrays the sentiments, desires, worries, hopes, passions, interests, vices and virtues of his class, his group' (Gorky 1982a:272). In his 'Ideology and Literary Form—A Comment' Francis Mulhern (1975:85) has challenged this conception by pointing out that the ideological status of the text is not determined by its origin but by its objective function and for that reason textual ideology might even be inconsistent with authorial ideology.

The first statement ('Each real artist searches for the truth') is interesting in the sense that it is as if La Guma responds to a statement Solzhenitsyn is quoted as having made with regard to socialist realism elsewhere:

> All have agreed, whatever their subject and material may be, to leave unspoken the main truth, the truth that stares you in the eye even without literature. It is this vow to abstain from the truth that is called Socialist Realism (Ronald Hingley quoting Solzhenitsyn in Hingley 1979:203).

La Guma makes use of Lenin's principle of partisanship in order to endorse socialist realism and, thereby, challenge Solzhenitsyn's discourse[25].

It was in the name of Lenin's principle of partisanship that the (official) Zhdanovite version of socialist realism was proclaimed in the Soviet Union after the debates of the 1930s. Zhdanov is quoted as having said of Soviet literature:

> Our Soviet literature is not afraid of the charge of being 'tendentious'. Yes, Soviet literature is tendentious, for in an epoch of class struggle there is not and cannot be a literature which is not class literature, and tendentious, allegedly nonpolitical. And I think that every one of our Soviet writers can say to any dull-witted bourgeois, to any philistine, to any bourgeois who may talk of being tendentious: 'Yes, our Soviet literature is tendentious and we are proud of this fact, because the aim of our tendency is to liberate the toilers, to free all mankind from the yoke of capitalist slavery' (Quoted in Robin 1992:56).

Clearly, there are striking parallels between the Zhdanovite version of 'tendentiousness' and La Guma's interpretation of Lenin's principle of partisanship, as articulated in his article on Solzhenitsyn.

It is necessary at this point to explore another dimension of La Guma's aesthetics of realism which seems to me to provide a clue to La Guma's recourse to the principle of partisanship. Apart form Gorky, it would seem that La Guma's aesthetics of realism also has a great deal to do with George Plekhanov, whose early philosophical contribution to the realist debate in Russia received critical attention in the 1930s. This

[25] It should be pointed out here that even before La Guma went into exile he was aware of the debates on Soviet aesthetics (and more particularly on socialist realism) since some of these were discussed in *New Age* in the 1950s. See for example Ilya Ehrenburg's report 'Soviet Writers Call for Radical Changes' (*New Age* May 23 1957:7); Wilfred Burchett's 'Soviet Culture is the Heritage of All' (*New Age* July 16 1959:4) and 'Pasternak Tells Why he Wrote *Dr. Zhivago*' (*New Age* October 30 1958:4) as well as Brian Bunting's '*Dr. Zhivago*—A Good Book with a Bad Philosophy'. Perhaps more significant is the fact that Soviet academics and researchers have also been as interested in South African culture and politics as South Africans were in theirs. For more information on this see Davidson and Filatova (1997), as well as Saratovskaya's 'South African Literature in Russia' (1992), and Cheremin, Saratovskaya and Zemskov (1988) amongst others.

is significant when one considers that 'Soviet Marxism on its philosophical side, was rooted in Plekhanov and Lenin' (Lichtheim 1970:57). There is ample evidence that La Guma read Plekhanov's *Unaddressed Letters. Art and Social Life* ([1899-1900]1957) and appropriated some of Plekhanov's ideas by incorporating them into his own discourse.

In his essay, 'Has Art Failed South Africa?', which appeared in The *African Communist* in 1977, La Guma employs Plekhanov in his endorsement of ideologically oriented artistic production. He points out in his critique of the art for art's sake school of thought in South Africa:

> The black artist in South Africa is not averse to mixing his work with 'politics'; he cannot but accept that as one of the victims of the oppressive society, his work almost automatically becomes involved ... for us or the conscious artist, man is not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath for man—society is not made for the artist, but the artist for society. The function of art is to assist the development of man's consciousness, to help improve society (La Guma 1977:82).

He then goes on to attack those artists who reject a utilitarian view of art citing Plekhanov's argument '[a]rt for art's sake arises essentially where the artist is out of harmony with his social environment' (La Guma 1977:83). He accuses these artists of being in 'ivory towers' taking 'refuge from the slings and arrows of an outrageous society' (La Guma 1977:82). La Guma's essay was written as a rejoinder to Cecil Skotnes (1976), a South African artist, who had expressed his concern about what he saw as 'a singular lack of guts' in South African art despite the existence of what he described as 'a classic revolutionary situation' that could stimulate a proliferation of artistic production. In his argument Skotnes had particularly singled out what he perceived as a 'lack of a strong artistic tradition' on 'the Black Front' and expressed his reservations about the merit of art that is 'bound to ... political institutions in general'. As can be inferred it is precisely with these particular aspects of Skotnes's argument that La Guma takes issue and recruits Plekhanov to make a case for black artists.

Plekhanov distinguishes between those artists who perceive art in terms of their responsibility to society, those who argue that the function of art is to assist the development of man's consciousness, to improve the social system, on the one hand, and those who see art as an end in itself on the other (Plekhanov 1957:149). He then uses various examples from different historical contexts to test the viability of these two opposing views. Plekhanov's investigation leads him to the following conclusion on the art for art's sake school of thought: 'The belief in art for art's sake arises when artists and people keenly interested in art are hopelessly out of harmony with their social environment' (Plekhanov 1957:163). On the contrary, the utilitarian view of art

> that is, the tendency to impart to its production the significance of judgements on the phenomenon of life, and the joyful eagerness, which always accompanies it, to take part in social strife, arises and spreads whenever there is mutual sympathy between a considerable section of society and people who have more or less active interest in creative art (Plekhanov 1957:163).

As can be inferred from these statements, the validity of Plekhanov's thesis lies in its attempt to demystify the terms of these opposing perspectives on art by locating them in historical contexts or social conditions within which they thrive[26]. It could be argued that it is because of Plekhanov's rejection of 'prescription in art' that La Guma appeals to Lenin's principle of partisanship, thereby finding a resolution to the impasse that Plekhanov's aesthetic theory seems to create for him in this regard[27].

In all his extra-fictional statements La Guma persistently denounces the art for art's sake argument and espouses a utilitarian view of art. This is best exemplified in the following statement made by La Guma (1971:113):

> It is perhaps possible, within the environment of developed societies, to create with a certain amount of confidence the impression that the art, culture, the level of civilisation of a people have nothing, or little to do with socio-economic and political forces within these societies; that culture has nothing to do with politics. In South Africa this is not possible. The proposition of art for the sake of art finds no foothold in the atmosphere of racism, violence and crude exploitation which is the day-to-day experience of the South African people.

What is particularly striking here is not so much La Guma's rejection of art for art's sake proposition and the way in which he embraces a utilitarian view of art by underscoring the inseparability of culture and politics, but it is the fact that there is an element of tentativeness with regard to his use of these two positions in this statement. In short, there is an unarticulated assumption that in a post-apartheid society, under a different historical or social setting, there will be a shift from the contemporary discursive position. Indeed, this seems to be confirmed towards the end of the essay:

> As long as racism and oppression last in Southern Africa, culture will take this form. When the oppressed have freed themselves from the shackles of

[26] Regine Robin (1992:150), who traces the origins of socialist realism and underscores its contradictions, argues that 'for Plekhanov, art is a socio-historical phenomenon, a thought, an idea, a content, something to express, something that is expressed through images. It is a reflection of reality, anchored in its time, which attains perfection when the relation between form and content is maximally adequate'.

[27] Demetz (1967:197) sees this rejection of prescription in art as Plekhanov's 'half-hearted defence of the principle of *l'art pour l'art*'. Robin (1992:150) comments: 'Art for art's sake is always the sign of retreat from the social: one needs to analyse why this retreat from the social, historically speaking, imposes itself on certain artists. That is why Plekhanov abandons the "social utility" of art as an immanent principle. In so doing he creates a considerable shift in what we have called the discursive base of realist aesthetics: he opens up an ambiguity, a shadowy zone that, in conjunction with his rejection of prescription in art, would suffice to explain why he was blacklisted as a Menshevik and as the creator of a passive aesthetic in the Soviet society of the 1930s'.

> economic, social and political limitations, flowers will bloom anew in an environment of happiness in a life lived in dignity, a life of freedom and comradeship among our peoples (La Guma 1971:120).

It would seem, then, that La Guma has fully grasped Plekhanov's argument that the 'social utility of art' is not 'an immanent principle' and that he agrees with Plekhanov's thesis in general.

However, as Henri Arvon (1973:14) points out, Plekhanov 'refuses to put art and literature in the service of party politics'. This is where La Guma parts company with Plekhanov and, instead, embraces Lenin's principle of partisanship in literature. It is perhaps not surprising that La Guma should subscribe to Lenin's principle of partisanship in literature when one considers that La Guma served his apprenticeship (as a writer) as a reporter under the auspices of *New Age*, a politically partisan newspaper that was not only 'run by [Communist Party] members [and] consistently reflected party policy [but whose] position on international matters was [also] virtually indistinguishable from the foreign policy of the Soviet Union' (Forman & Odendaal 1992:xxii). Significantly, it was apparently with regard to Party publications that Lenin wrote his famous paper on partisanship, 'Organisation and Party Literature' in 1905. However, one may argue that La Guma, like his counterparts in the Soviet Union in the 1930's, extends Lenin's principle of partisanship to include creative works of literature. This can be seen most obviously in La Guma's argument that one 'cannot of course separate one's social and political allegiances from one's creative work' (Grant 1978:49). It would seem, therefore, that La Guma subscribes to Plekhanov's aesthetic in so far as it is compatible with his liberation discourse and that, where the question of tendentiousness is concerned, La Guma does not seem to distinguish between his works and his political allegiances. This does not, however, mean that in La Guma's works the political message which conforms to his political allegiances is always explicitly stated—and, in this sense, his practice would seem to be at odds with his theory.

The concept of tendentiousness in La Guma's aesthetics is linked to his belief in the ideological function of literature, a belief to which La Guma (1991:20) makes consistent reference:

> A writer, if he is conscious of what is going on around him, automatically reflects [the real picture] ... and through portraying the life around him also produces his own ideas about it. Of course, what should be borne in mind is that a writer is supposed to be conscious of the direction in which his works are going to point .... I think that it is the role of the conscious writer to guide the morals, the perspectives and objectives of the community.

In La Guma's view, then, a writer is not only a chronicler of the experiences of his community but he is also an ideologue providing guidance to the perspectives of the community. It is against this background, then, that La Guma (1970:237) expresses the intended ideological effect of his writing of *And A Threefold Cord* in these words:

> When I write in a book that somewhere in South Africa poor people have no

> water but must buy it by the bucketful from some local exploiter then I also entertain the secret hope that when somebody reads it he will be moved to do something about those robbers who have turned my country into a material and cultural wasteland for the majority of the inhabitants.

As can be inferred from this statement, in La Guma's terms, it is not enough for literature to depict the social situation truthfully, but, in addition, the ideological effect of literature should be to transform the consciousness of the readers even to the extent of spurring them on to engage in some form of action! It would seem, then, that it is for this purpose that La Guma turns to social realism as an effective means of conscientizing his readership.

contra Gordimer and Fugard

The significance which La Guma attaches to the ideological function of literature and the concept of tendentiousness can also be seen in his literary criticism. This is best exemplified in La Guma's critical essay on Nadine Gordimer's *The Black Interpreters—Notes on African Writing*. In the first section of this work entitled 'Modern African Fiction in English', Gordimer makes a critical assessment of African literature written in English which she sees as beginning with the Negritude movement. She then distinguishes between African writers who are 'testifiers to social change'—those who merely provide a 'sort of context of expression, of bald background fact' (Gordimer 1973:8f)—and those who write 'literature' in which the quality of the writing matters. Having made a critical appraisal of some literary texts by such writers as Achebe, Ngugi, Ayi Kweyi Armah and others, Gordimer (1973:32) concludes that African English literature's best writers are critical realists in the Lukácsian sense—establishing a link between the past and pointing towards the future—and that this is the direction in which African literature is developing.

In response, La Guma takes issue with Gordimer's exclusive treatment of English literature written by Africans and her measuring of them against European standards. He describes this special treatment of 'African literature as "literary apartheid"', a practice which, in his view, results in the construction of 'a cultural Bantustan' ('Gala' 1974a:103,102). According to La Guma, Gordimer's reservations on the 'testifiers to social change' are due to these authors' giving too much attention to social issues'. But, La Guma argues, 'softening the social impact has never guaranteed success for any work of art' ('Gala' 1974a:105). What is crucial in La Guma's terms is rather the ideological commitment of the writer and the extent to which his writings contribute to human progress. In his words:

> The writer's participation in the development of life is measured by the ideological artistic level of his work, the depth of his depiction of events and problems. The writer must find the epicentre of events and determine his place in them, his point of view. Then he will find application for his talent and personal experience and will worthily serve the cause of aesthetic and social progress. There are writers who work in a kind of vacuum, who stand

> apart from events, who do not maintain close ties with the truth of their ethos, their source of inspiration. An atmosphere of vacuum cannot stimulate works that contribute towards the common progressive character of life and literature .... We are witnessing how the cultural heritage of Africa is transformed into modern, social and political orientated literatures and the arts. This is one of the most important tasks of the mentioned cultural revolution and a stirring event in modern and progressive world culture ('Gala' 1974a:103f).

According to this view, then, the writer's credibility as a craftsman, and, one may add, the literary value of his work, depend largely on the ideological effect of the cultural product—hence La Guma's belief that socially and politically oriented African literature contributes towards a cultural revolution. Implicit in La Guma's criticism of writers whose works are not based on a concrete ideological basis, those 'who work in a kind of vacuum, who stand apart from events, who do not maintain close ties with the truth of their ethos, their source of inspiration', is his endorsement of the principle of partisanship in literature.

The fact that the principle of partisanship in La Guma's aesthetics is closely linked to socialist realism (as stated earlier) can most obviously be seen in La Guma's negative response to Nadine Gordimer's labelling of the best African writers as critical realists. In an argument that reveals La Guma's lack of familiarity with Lukács, La Guma ('Gala' 1974a:106) accuses Gordimer of failing to address the question of the main trends of development of African English literature 'in terms of African reality'. La Guma ('Gala' 1974a:106) continues to argue:

> Instead [Gordimer] borrows from Georg Lukács a formula which asserts 'critical realism as not only the link with the great literature of the past, but also the literature that points to the future'. And so she concludes with amazing aplomb 'there seems to me little doubt that African English literature's best writers are critical realists, and that this is the direction in which literature is developing .... But African development and African literature have not come to a full stop'.

La Guma's objection to Gordimer is somewhat puzzling: implicit in his argument is the suggestion that African literature should be assessed 'in terms of African reality' rather than through a heavy reliance on critical theories of (foreigners such as) Lukács. Leaving aside the question of assessing African literature 'in terms of African reality', La Guma's argument would seem to me to render visible two factors with regard to his aesthetics. Firstly, it indicates La Guma's lack of awareness of Lukács's seminal contribution to Marxist aesthetics of realism to which La Guma himself obviously subscribes. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, La Guma's argument here is suggestive of his somewhat ambiguous attitude towards being categorised as a critical realist—La Guma is amongst those African writers who are seen by Gordimer as creating an African literature, the critical realists. Unlike the 'testifiers' who 'take stock-in-trade abstractions of human behaviour and look about for a dummy to dress them in', Gordimer argues that La Guma's protagonists in District Six (as seen in *A*

Walk in the Night) 'do not talk about inequality' instead they 'bear its weals' (Gordimer 1973:19,29). Nevertheless, in La Guma's assertion that African development and African literature have not come to a full stop there is an implied indication that African literature should not be defined within the confines of critical realism.

Why does La Guma object to being labelled a critical realist? La Guma's 1974 essay (also written under the pseudonym 'Gala'), in which he examines Athol Fugard's oeuvre, may provide some clues. In this essay La Guma argues that in Fugard's plays there is 'an ever-present concentration on experimentation and technical innovation' and he sees in this regard evidence of Samuel Beckett's influence on Fugard ('Gala' 1974:102). Not surprisingly La Guma is quick to point out that it is nevertheless 'the content of Fugard's work which must certainly "reveal the real man"' ('Gala' 1974:102). For La Guma is not so much interested in Fugard's dramatic devices as he is in the ideological orientation of the content of his works which, he hopes, will 'reveal the real man'—a reading that would seem to reveal La Guma's conflation of textual ideology with authorial ideology. La Guma's only comment on Fugard's early plays, *No-good Friday* and *Nongogo*, is that they are 'naturalistic tragedies set in Johannesburg black townships—and staged with African casts' ('Gala' 1974:102f). *The Blood Knot*, which seems to gain La Guma's tacit approval, is seen as being informed by a liberal humanist ideology whose tenets include 'the freedom of the individual, abhorrence of colour discrimination and the nightmare of Blacks under apartheid' ('Gala' 1974:103). La Guma finds in some of Fugard's later plays, however, not only 'deteriorating symbolism' but also a lack of clear ideological commitment. For La Guma, the government's withdrawal of Fugard's passport in 1967 (which was reissued four years later and accompanied by the South African government's subsidy of his play, *Boesman and Lena*) and Fugard's subsequent withdrawal of his support for the cultural boycott resulted in 'the absence of a more concrete response to the realities of the South African scene' ('Gala' 1974:105). Instead, La Guma argues:

> Athol Fugard is now the playwright first. It is now enough for him to portray various aspects of life through his skill and talent. He has suffered the fate of South African liberals with their absence of any scientific or consistent attitude towards the society in which they live and work ('Gala' 1974:104).

'Scientific' is a telling term here in the sense that it is clearly indicative of La Guma's immersion in Marxist-Leninism. La Guma's attitude to liberal ideology is (deliberately) ambiguous. Although he accuses liberals of their lack of 'scientific or consistent attitude' towards their society, he does not expect Fugard to move beyond the confines of his ideology. Athol Fugard, La Guma argues, 'need not only be an observer of his country's condition', or as he puts it merely 'bear witness', and be a 'classic example of the guilt-ridden impotent white liberal of South Africa'. Within the confines of a liberal humanist ideology itself there are prospects for a progressive outlook, La Guma seems to suggest. In La Guma's own words: 'An admission of guilt is in itself a step towards personal re-evaluation, and a more profound understanding of his function as an artist' ('Gala' 1974:105).

It may, however, be argued that beneath La Guma's critique of the ideological content of Fugard's plays, lurks his dissatisfaction with a critical realist perspective, which La Guma clearly associates with the liberal humanist ideology that informs Fugard's writing. Liberal humanist literature is seen by La Guma as protest art *par excellence*, it merely negates without making any positive affirmation. In his words: 'It is not enough for South African art merely to idealise the negation of the racist way of life. Art must also be warmed by the fires of the struggle for liberty' ('Gala' 1974:104). La Guma's assertion here is clearly reminiscent of Gorky's 1934 critique of critical realism:

> The realism of the bourgeois's 'prodigal sons' was a critical realism. But while exposing the cankers of society ... critical realism could not show people the way out of this thraldom. It was easy to critisise everything, but there was nothing to assert except the obvious senselessness of such social existence and 'life in general' (Gorky 1988:303)[28].

The parallels are striking. It would seem then, that, beneath La Guma's ambiguous attitude towards critical realism lies his aspiration towards socialist realism of which his literary mentor, Gorky, is known to be a leading exponent.

conclusion

My argument is that if there is any convergence between La Guma's aesthetics of realism and that of Lukács this has a lot to do with La Guma's absorption of Gorky's fiction and aesthetics of realism rather than the possibility of La Guma having read Lukács's writings on the theory of realism. Both La Guma's admiration of Gorky's fiction and aesthetics, and his apprenticeship in the Communist Party-linked newspaper, *New Age*, which helped establish La Guma's position as both a social historian and an ideologue, produced La Guma's realist aesthetics.

At one level, then, La Guma's aesthetics draws extensively on what Robin (1992:109) has identified as the shifts and displacements in 'the discursive base of the Russian realist aesthetics'. This can be seen not only in his use of the Marxist theory of reflection but also in his employment of Plekhanov's conception of the utilitarian view of art, which La Guma links to Lenin's principle of partisanship as a way of incorporating it in his own discourse. However it is also important to note that this was no ready-made activist theory of literature that could simply be imported into the South African context. The concept of ideological didacticism that underpins the socialist realist aesthetic was grafted onto the realist aesthetic. This raises the question of

[28] Robin (1992:149) argues that Gorky leans on the Russian 'realist discursive base and plugs into it' the concept of tendentiousness, 'the primacy of the political over the aesthetic, not only of content over form'.

whether La Guma's obvious endorsement of socialist realism translated smoothly into practice in his fiction; a question that falls beyond the scope of this essay.

Department of English
University of Durban-Westville

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A Social Function for Literature? Two Women Critics and South African English Literary Studies, 1939-1948

Corinne Sandwith

Debates in contemporary South African literary studies routinely make claims about the contribution of English Studies to the formation of a critical public sphere and a democratic citizenry[1]. Such aspirations and gestures are not original. In the 1930s and 1940s two talented women critics invoked the same political and cultural ideals in their literary criticism. In this paper, I set out Christina van Heyningen and Dora Taylor's literary criticism from the 1930s and 1940s, exploring the following concerns: their attitude to politics; their understanding of the social function of literature; and their critical method. Finally, I assess their respective efforts to connect English Literature and the promotion of democracy in South Africa in the decade leading up to 1948.

Christina van Heyningen

The daughter of an English mother and an Afrikaans father, Christina van Heyningen was born in one of Milner's notorious concentration camps in 1900. She attended schools in the Orange Free State, went on to study at the University of Stellenbosch where she received a Masters Degree in English Literature, and continued her studies at Somerville College, Oxford where in 1926 she was awarded a degree in English. In 1932, she took up the post of Senior Lecturer in English at Stellenbosch University, joined the staff of the University of the Witwatersrand English Department in 1947, and went on to become Professor of English at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg in 1955. She published book reviews and critical articles in a number of South African journals and periodicals including the independent periodical, *Trek*, the Afrikaans periodicals, *Vandag* and *Ons Eie Boek*, *Standpunte*, and later the Pietermaritzburg journal, *Theoria*. She completed a number of textbooks on English language and expression, and is remembered, particularly, for her work on Samuel Richardson, John

[1] See for example the contributions in Smit, Wade & Van Wyk (eds) 1996.

Milton, and the South African playwright H.W.D. Manson. Along with Geoffrey Durrant—with whom she enjoyed a lifelong friendship—Van Heyningen was a key figure in the implementation of the techniques of practical criticism in South African English Departments in the 1940s and 1950s[2].

As regards Van Heyningen's attitude to politics, her most consistent concern was an opposition to totalitarianism of any form. Van Heyningen was particularly troubled by the support shown by members of the Afrikaans community for Nazi Germany. Fiercely opposed to all forms of ideological and political control, she identified with the values of democracy and individual freedom, and devoted considerable time and energy to their defence. These commitments are best summarised in her response to the enormous growth of pro-Nazi ideas and sympathies in South Africa in the early 1940s. In 1941, she published a petition in the *Cape Argus* which was signed by eighteen other colleagues at the University of Stellenbosch. The petition, which was also published in the *Sunday Times*, the *Cape Sun* and the *Star*, was written in protest against 'the slavish imitation of foreign methods of ideological warfare, blind prejudices and bitter intolerance' (1941a:5) amongst the Afrikaans-speaking community. The signatories argued for the need to protect 'personal freedom' and autonomy, and rejected excessive state intervention. It also gave an important place to the role of education:

> Being a student means, in the first place, studying, acquiring knowledge, for the purpose of translating his knowledge into deeds later on in life. A student who does not study will be a man who does not know, and such an ignorant person, is of course, the best subject of a totalitarian state (1941a:5).

For Van Heyningen, the training in critical thinking is an important antidote against the propagandist tactics of Fascist ideologues. This commitment extended to the post-war period when as a founder member of The Johannesburg Education League—an organisation established to combat government indoctrination by means of pamphlets and letters—Van Heyningen resisted attempts by the Institute of Christian-Nationalist Education to enforce religious and cultural instruction in schools. Notwithstanding her commitment to active political involvement, she retained a faith in the inevitable spread of liberal ideas. Responding to a demand by the University of Cape Town's SRC in 1948 that a unilateral decision be made on the question of whether or not Africans should be allowed to participate in the social and sporting life of the university, she criticises UCT for 'not lett[ing] sleeping dogs lie', arguing instead that

> if nothing more is said on the question, non-Europeans will be accepted as equals in those places that are liberal enough not to mind, and the letter of the law will be carried out in the illiberal places, and that in this way liberal ideas will gradually gain ground (19 July 1948c).

[2] For a short biography of Van Heyningen, see the introduction to the collection of essays edited by J.A. Bertoud and C.O. Gardner (1969).

Always an independent thinker, Van Heyningen formulated her critical position in relation to Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot, Q.D. Leavis, and Denys Thompson, and whilst not always agreeing with individual contributors, the assumptions of the *Scrutiny* school always remained an important critical touchstone. She owed a principal intellectual debt to F.R. Leavis (with whom she corresponded on a number of occasions), and reiterated his sense of cultural and intellectual decline, and his antipathy towards popular culture. Like Leavis, her efforts were principally directed towards the training of a critical vanguard capable of appreciating and promoting Great Literature and resisting consumer culture. Van Heyningen assigns a central function to the reading and interpretation of poetic works. Poetry, like all literature, is valued because of its difficulty, and because of its transformative power. The reading of poetry is

> of the utmost moment ... [f]or poetry, partly because it demands so much of us, of the whole man, not merely his brain, his emotions or his body, is perhaps the most valuable activity of the human spirit' (1945:16).

Poetry is a difficult pursuit calling into play 'incessant movement and "vigilance" of the senses, brain and emotions' (1945:16), and because it is concerned with the problem of 'value'—of its affirmation, renewal, and definition in an ever-changing world—the reader 'is forced to go through the same process, to reconsider, to renew, to re-affirm the values that we live by' (1945:16).

Van Heyningen's literary criticism also reveals a pervasive concern with individual morality and personal responsibility. For her, both life and art are subject to the operation of absolute moral laws. The artist has a primary 'duty of giving direction' (1946a:17), in the process disclosing the universal moral order in his/her work. She criticises what she regards as the modern tendency to blur distinctions between 'good' and 'evil'. Macbeth himself, she argues, understands the lie of the witch's claim that 'fair is foul, and foul is fair':

> That foul is not fair his soul knew in its unknown depths, and the knowledge wrecked his nerve, and turned him into the insatiable bloody tyrant he became .... To Shakespeare good and evil were not dead, nor can I think of any great writer who has not accepted the responsibility, explicitly or implicitly, of choosing between them, and who has not made the affirmation of values his chief right and function as an artist (1946a:17)[3].

Van Heyningen's moral preoccupations lead her into difficulties when she attempts to evaluate the work of an author whose values she feels compelled to reject. In a discussion of the novels of Henry James, she criticises his implicit acceptance of 'immoral' and 'dishonourable' (1946e:16) behaviour, and sums up his achievement in

[3] For more on Van Heyningen's Shakespeare criticism, see Johnson (1996:159-161).

the following image borrowed from H.G. Wells: 'the beautiful cathedral has been laboriously built, and James has ever so reverently laid upon the altar—a dead kitten' (1946e:17). What are, for her, flippant and perverse moral judgements, particularly in his later works, make it impossible to endorse James' writing, and she veers between admiration at his stylistic achievements, and horror at the moral bankruptcy of his themes.

Her belief in moral absolutes which transcend time and space made Van Heyningen suspicious of any attempts to locate Great Literature in a political context. Responding to Shakespeare productions which sought to meet the aesthetic criteria of contemporary realism, Van Heyningen argued:

> ... these scenes should be somehow withdrawn from a too specific reality, a too natural speech; being poetry as much as they are drama, they should have an ideal and universal rather than a real and particular nature, and the beat of the rhythm should be heard clearly and steadily through the most intense emotion and the sharpest conflict (1949:69).

This tendency to privilege the universal over the concrete realisation of human experience is clearly evident in a discussion of a production of Sartre's 'The Flies' in Nazi-occupied France. While Van Heyningen acknowledges the play's covert pro-Resistance sympathies, she quickly moves to a discussion of the particular moral problems it poses, concluding that the 'universal principle' (1948a:52) offered in the play's resolution is that 'every man has in the last analysis ... to forge the moral law out of the actual facts in which he finds himself living' (1948a:52). For Van Heyningen, the conscious foregrounding of artistic form helps to purge art of its social roots, and move it beyond the concerns of a particular time and place. This is especially so in the work of Shakespeare:

> The metre should have lifted the [emotion], by that process of pleasure that Wordsworth describes, into a calmer region of contemplation, where one does not so much suffer as reflect suffering, and accept it as in real life it could not at that moment be accepted (1949:69).

Similarly, in a discussion of a performance of Shakespeare's 'The Tempest' by 'non-Europeans' (1946b:134), Van Heyningen approves of the way the disturbing political aspects of the play are displaced, finally, by an atmosphere of peace and magic:

> [A]ll the harshness, the grim and angry lines, the disappointment that bites like acid into this disquieting play, were eased out, as perhaps the author would have wished, and the element of spell-bound charm was underlined in every part ... and, as if Ariel's veiling wings had passed before our faces and lulled our commonplace selves to slumber, we sat rapt in enchantment, and feasting on strange, sea-like, Protean beauty (1946b:134).

Like the criticism of F.R. Leavis, the ultimate effect of Van Heyningen's critical pre-

occupations is the elevation of literature above politics. Although never conceived of as political in any direct sense, Leavisite English Studies was nevertheless understood as

> the permanent precondition of fecund political thought. Ever 'above' and 'beyond' politics itself, 'culture' was a permanent meta-political sanction, the tribunal before which politics stood judged in the name of 'the human' (Mulhern 1981:99).

For Van Heyningen, what prevented literature from performing this redemptive function was consumer culture. Her remarks on 'the triviality and debasement of our time', the 'meanness of modern life, the squalor of promiscuous love, of the greatness gone from England, and London's glory faded' (1945:16), bear the familiar signs of a *Scrutiny* nostalgia for the values of Old England, and an uneasy sense of a civilisation in decline. For Van Heyningen, all that remains of this heroic past is a desperate sense of spiritual unease, which

> is the one sign left of man's nobility, the neglected stirring in him of a forgotten idea of manhood, of a harder, but a finer and more victorious past (1945:16).

Her views are best summed up in an unpublished review of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* where she inquires:

> Is it Democracy that has brought us to this gutter art, where neither beauty, nor grace, nor brains, nor talent, nor sense, nor affection, nor loyalty, nor honour, nor anything is admired anymore, except what? a desire to get on in business, and a carnal attraction (1946i:1).

Van Heyningen's method of teaching literature—forged as a response to the threat of consumer culture's ubiquity—is set out in her contribution to the 1946 conference of English Teachers. She argues that the training of critical judgement is best achieved by means of guided small-group discussion and comparison[4]. Using this method, students are taught both to distinguish between good and bad poetry, and to identify the 'false feeling', 'cant' and 'sentimentality' of contemporary popular culture (1948b:14). The result of such an education will ultimately be registered in the emergence of a critically-astute citizenry. The values of a threatened critical minority are thus able to secure continuity in the present age. For Van Heyningen, interest in historical background is confined to the information it provides concerning the artistic,

[4] Examination questions such as the following exemplify her approach. A third year practical criticism question asks: 'Which of the following poems do you prefer and why?' In another example, students are asked to describe the mood of a poem, and to decide whether or not it is 'healthy' (Pietermaritzburg Archives STP 2/6/4). See also Van Heyningen's textbooks for the study of English Literature written with A.W. van der Horst, *A Practical Course in English* (1935), and *English: Intelligent Reading and Good Writing* (1938).

moral and social conventions of the period. Accordingly, her critical method is dominated by detailed attention to literary form (rhythm, use of language and imagery), and her critical gaze is directed towards a narrow canon of European texts.

Finally, what does the teaching of English Literature in South Africa entail for Van Heyningen? Or, to return to the original question: how might English literature contribute to a critical public sphere and democratic citizenry in South Africa? Van Heyningen's understanding of this question is best grasped by focusing on her thoughts about the encounter between black South Africans and European high culture and its attendant aesthetic imperatives. For Van Heyningen, art reveals the universal human condition, 'penetrates through all the wrappings to the man in all men' (1942:12) and—in a version of Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy thesis—she suggests that art can combat race prejudice by directing individuals towards their common humanity. John Dronsfield's drawings of the coloured community are held up as exemplary because in them

> we see the coloured people not as a class or a race, as we are accustomed to seeing them, but as a people. This is why of all those who serve humanity, the artist plays the greatest part, even when an unconscious one, in building up our human solidarity. When Shakespeare turned traitor and tried to write a popular anti-Semitic play, he couldn't do it. His imagination took control, the deeper part of his artistry struggled with the shallower part, with the result that the play became the monster it is, and Portia, Antonio and Jessica dwindle and freeze, against their creator's will, because Shylock is realised (1942:12).

An article entitled 'Entering a New World' published in the Afrikaans periodical, *Vandag*, records her experience of marking the English examination papers of African students.

> [I]n the Bantu essays I saw a people turning over, waking up in the brave new world, and rubbing their eyes with wonder; and I found it so touching and so interesting that I should like to show it to other people (1946h:9).

Her excitement at the prospect of being witness to this intoxicating and liberating cultural encounter is marred only by a concern that this might soon be denied them:

> One must fear for these young Bantu, when one sees how, rooted in the old tribal tradition, they love to spread their branches and breathe and flower, and expect to go flowering, in the new and enchanting air of white civilisation .... Will they sweeten the air? Or must they wither too? Must they too be poisoned? (1946h:14)

Van Heyningen's earlier gestures towards a common humanity are belied by her

insistence on the superiority of British culture as embodied in English Literature, and her assimilationist ends. In addition, her sense of the relationship between white and black South Africans is defined in terms of liberal patronage rather than any kind of political solidarity.

Dora Taylor

Dora Taylor and her husband, J.G. Taylor, arrived in South Africa from Aberdeen in 1924. They settled in the Cape Town suburb of Rondebosch, whereupon J.G. Taylor took up a lecturing post in the psychology department at the University of Cape Town. Dora Taylor began writing book reviews for the *Cape Times* in the early 1930s. In 1939, she contributed a series of articles to the independent periodical *Trek*—then edited by Andre Bruwer—and was a regular contributor of book reviews and feature articles between 1941 and 1946. Taylor and her husband were initially drawn towards a cluster of left intellectuals (many of whom were themselves immigrants) centred at the University of Cape Town[5]. Taylor subsequently became a member of the Trotskyist Worker Party[6] 'whose members helped form the Non-European Unity Movement in 1943 and acted as its secret inner core through the 1940s and 1950s' (Drew 1996:36). She also worked in close collaboration with I.B. Tabata, founder member of the All Africa Convention (1935) and the NEUM. Described by Tom Lodge (1983:39) as 'the major political force among coloured intellectuals', the NEUM was part of a new spirit of non-compromise and non-collaboration amongst African, Indian and Coloured South Africans which emerged in the early years of the 1940s, and which was in marked contrast to the reformist tactics of the previous generation. According to Neville Alexander, the Non-European Unity Movement was

> a highly distinctive South African liberation organisation [which] ... remained independent and mostly derisive of other more prominent national opposition forces (1990:92)[7].

Apart from her work in the Non-European Unity Movement, Taylor gave lectures in literature to a variety of student fellowship groups, and was also the author of a number

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[5] This group included British-born academics like Benjamin Farrington, Lancelot Hogben and Frederick Bodmer, who had been part of early Marxist student movements in Britain. See Hirson (1992).

[6] For more information concerning the origins and development of Trotskyist groups in South Africa, see Hirson (1993) and Drew (1996).

[7] See also Lewis (1987) and Chrisholm (1991).

[8] Apart from the as-yet unpublished work done by Ciraj Rasool, DoraTaylor's contribution to South African politics and letters has been largely ignored. There is a short biographical note in the introduction to her history of missionary activity in South Africa, *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest* (1952), published under the pen-name Nosipho Majeke. For two short summaries of her contribution to South African history writing, see Saunders (1988) and Smith (1988).

of unpublished plays, novels, and poems. In 1960, she and her family were forced to flee to England, where she remained in exile until her death[8].

Whereas Van Heyningen's notion of democracy is often unconnected to the social reality it purports to describe, Taylor's understanding of politics displays a strong sense of the racial basis of South African society, drawing attention to the gap between liberal ideals and material reality. South Africa is described as

> a society where the ruling class is a privileged minority planted on the back of a conquered and oppressed people and sucking from them its wealth and power (1943d:12).

In South Africa, aside from inequalities in the judiciary, the growth of anti-Semitism and poor economic conditions, racist legislation such as the Colour Bar Act and the Masters and Servants Act are a further 'blot on the democratic page of our statute book' (1941c:7). She continues,

> The anti-Native Acts, the Native Representation Bill, the Land Act and the Urban Areas Act, are a still graver denial of the principles of democracy, and embody two conflicting policies: thrusting the native out of the political and social life of the community, but recognising that he is vitally important to its economic wealth (1941c:7).

Furthermore, human freedom and self-determination remain illusory in any society which is based on economic inequality. With its 'class basis', she argues, 'bourgeois democracy [is] a travesty of true democracy' (1942e:13). While remaining sceptical about any notion of democracy which does not include the satisfaction of basic economic needs, she questions the liberal belief in the inviolability of individual human rights and freedoms in a capitalist system, pointing out that the individual under capitalism is at the mercy of the impersonal forces of a vast 'state machine' (1939:14), and that social consensus is achieved by subtler—but no less effective—forms of state coercion.

In answer to questions of social justice and the strategies through which this may be achieved, Taylor criticises the liberal response because of its tendency to confine itself to abstract notions of democracy, and its failure to develop its assumptions into concrete political terms. Olive Schreiner's early liberal hopes, for example, while espousing 'the all too familiarly vague terms of "the welfare and happiness of humanity as a whole"' (1942e:13), are understood as exceptional in their demand for an unrestricted franchise. Finally, while she acknowledges the need for a more vigorous, critical and independent public sphere, she argues that a liberal faith in such channels of social reform as a free press, parliamentary representation and political transparency is misplaced:

> The liberal knows the non-European is not getting a square deal and realises that a change is imperative, if White as well as Black and Coloured are to survive. Fearing both catastrophe and violent change, he has a mighty faith

> in sweet reasonableness, in petitions and table conferences, in changing the individual hearts of oppressors. And it is a faith that dies hard (1942j:13).

While Olive Schreiner may be forgiven for her turn-of-the-century optimism concerning what the liberal spirit might achieve,

> ... time has conclusively, ruthlessly proved the bankruptcy of liberalism to stem the tide of political events. Such thorns as it might have fancied itself as inflicting on the rhinoceros hide of governments have been brushed aside like thistledown (1942e:13).

Taylor is in broad agreement with the perceived need to foster a more critical and independent public sphere in South Africa, and echoes Van Heyningen's emphasis on the importance of education. Discussing the South African education system, Taylor expresses anxieties concerning the cultural philistinism, intellectual docility and political apathy of increasing numbers of South Africans. This she attributes, in part, to an authoritarian school system based on rote learning and the examination method. Taylor's fears about 'the lure of the penny dreadful', and her arguments about the necessity of 'trained judgement' (1940b:14) bear the distinctive influence of the Scrutiny position. However, it is not the decline of the 'organic community' that she fears, but the political consequences of public 'suggestibility and ignorance' (1941e:6) in the face of increasingly sophisticated techniques of mass persuasion. She argues:

> We do not want a nation of docile, regimented men and women unable to *think for themselves, unable to judge between the true and the false* .... They provide an excellent seed-ground for the Fascist ideology and Fascist methods, for goose-stepping and racial vanity, for intolerance and the idolatry of Führers, football captains and film stars (1941d:7).

Armed with the critical skills acquired in an education which fosters independent thought, the South African citizen will be able to successfully negotiate the modern *menace of both advertiser and propagandist*. In addition, South African children will be made fit both 'to take their place in society and ... to change it where it is rotten' (1940b:14). Taylor, however, adds an important qualification to the argument that education can achieve social change. In response to the demand that training in democratic citizenship should begin in schools, she argues that these attempts at reform—worthwhile in themselves—are nevertheless based on the assumption that 'the school exists in a vacuum whereas it is an inseparable part of a social and economic system' (1941i:9). Present economic and social inequalities already dictate that only a privileged few will benefit from these reforms. Furthermore, carefully instilled democratic principles will be at odds with

> an economic and social world where the ideals of justice and equality ... are at a discount; where deeds and words stand at opposite poles; where the dignity of the individual and the dignity of labour are fiction and not fact (1941i:9).

To teach people about democracy without changing society as a whole is to produce 'cynics' and 'madmen' (1941i:9). Educational reforms, therefore, cannot take the place of genuine efforts at social and economic redress.

Turning to her literary criticism[9], Taylor sets out her allegiances in the following passage:

> The Marxist approach to art, in so far as it shows the relation between art and society, in so far as it explains why and how a certain tendency in art has arisen at a particular period in history, in so far as it assists the critic in analysing the individuality of the artist into its component elements, in so far as it is able to examine critically the 'above the battle' attitude of both artists and critics and reveal the social roots even of 'pure' art, is invaluable as a means for more fully understanding the artist and for a more complete interpretation of art (1945b:16).

Where Van Heyningen looked to England and Leavis for guidance, Taylor did not draw in any great measure on English Marxists of the 1930s[10]. Described by Perry Anderson (1992:55) as a 'spontaneous radicalisation within traditionally dormant milieux', English Marxism was primarily a reaction to the social, economic and political crises of the period, and it took its political and theoretical cue from Stalinist Russia, rather than Central Europe. Whereas there had been a tradition of Marxist thought in Germany, Italy and France since the late eighteenth century,

> [n]o comparable local heritage was available to the marxisant intellectuals of Britain in the 1930s .... The works of Marx, Engels and Lenin were, of course, available, but for their knowledge of contemporary Marxism, the British neophytes were almost entirely dependent on the officially sponsored writings of Plekhanov, Bukharin and Stalin. The memories of Trotsky and Luxemburg had by this time been thoroughly effaced; and the works of Lukács, Korsch and the Frankfurt School remained undiscovered (Mulhern 1974:39).

Increasingly contaminated by Stalinist control, English Marxism was cut short after a few years by the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the Second World War. In subsequent years, English Marxist literary criticism became a source of embarrassment—simultaneously pilloried for its vulgar determinism and its Romantic roots—and suffered a

[9] I have argued elsewhere that Marxist literary criticism in South Africa was conducted outside a formal academic context in popular periodicals like *Trek*. Although Taylor's work constitutes the most developed and most sustained attempt to apply Marxist critical principles to the study of literary texts, the achievements of other South African Marxists should not be overlooked. See Sandwith (1998).

[10] It is worth noting that the opposition between Marxism and *Scrutiny* was not absolute. Leavis confessed to an admiration for "the dangerously intelligent" Trotsky, and T.S. Eliot sympathised with certain of Lenin's ideas. See Stan Smith (1994).

corresponding lack of critical attention[11]. In a summary of English Marxism, Francis Mulhern (1974:40) argues that English Marxists

> were united in their insistence that literature could be understood only in relation to the social conditions in which it was produced. Hence, literary criticism came to be regarded as the elucidation of the social determinations of a text, as the identification of the 'social equivalent' of a given character, sentiment or situation.

While Taylor's criticism can also be broadly understood in these terms, she does not share their intellectual origins, claiming instead the intellectual and political tradition of classic Marxism, which she received from Lenin and Trotsky. Unlike much of its other cultural and political traditions, then, Taylor's strand of South African Marxism owes very little to Britain[12]. In an article which appeared in University of Cape Town journal *The Critic* in 1935, Taylor (1935:84-85) registers her indebtedness to the Lenin-Trotsky heritage, and opposes the perversion of their ideals under Stalinist rule:

> Under the Soviet regime art has become synonymous with propaganda. It was not so immediately after the revolution. In the first naïve enthusiasm of the liberated proletariat forty thousand poets blossomed in Russia. But when Stalin, in opposition to Trotsky, turned the Russian Communist Party into a nationalist organisation surrounded by a hostile Europe, it was necessary to create weapons of defence not only in iron and steel, but in every medium of art as well. Art became state-controlled like any other form of labour ....It is possible that this is a transition stage. This tyrannical attitude to art is a contradiction of Lenin's whole purpose in liberating the proletariat. Culture is possible only where there is leisure, and in spite of the present work-worship in Russia, the ultimate goal of the movement is to create more leisure for the masses. Freedom from the tyranny of the machine will enable them to study the culture of the past and other countries.

Taylor's arguments concerning the relationship between literature and its material context derive principally from the work of Leon Trotsky. His major work, *Literature and Revolution*, was published in the early 1920s in the years following the momentous events of October 1917, which saw the successful overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy and the establishment of a workers state, and four years of bloody civil war during which a fragile people's government had to be defended against a powerful counter-revolution. Stalin's rise to power in 1921 marked the beginning of a period of increasing

[11] For a critique of English Marxism, see William's (1958). See Pechey (1985) for a more sympathetic account of the outcome of the 1940s Marxist/Leavisite contest in England.

[12] An alternative strand of South African Marxism is to be found in the literary criticism of Michael Harmel, a member of the South African Communist Party. See, for example, his series of articles on Olive Schreiner published in 1955 in the periodical *New Age*.

state bureaucratisation and regimentation, which in the cultural sphere reproduced itself in the doctrine of socialist realism, and the rise of the proletkult movement. Consequently, *Literature and Revolution* treads a difficult path between an endorsement of revolutionary literature, and an indictment of emerging tendencies towards rigid ideological prescription and control in the cultural sphere. Much of Trotsky's contribution lies in his attempt to take up the problem posed in Marx's key argument in the 'Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy' (1859) that 'changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure' (Marx 1992:426). In his 'cultural continuity' thesis, Trotsky rejected the notion popular amongst Soviet intellectuals in the 1920s that a new proletarian culture would be formed in 'laboratory' conditions under the direction of a proletarian avant-guard. Both Trotsky and Lenin had argued that continuities with pre-Revolutionary bourgeois culture should be preserved and extended rather than discarded. What Taylor shares with Lenin and Trotsky is the attempt to apply Marxist categories to literature, and a desire to complement critical endeavour with active participation in political struggle. Taylor's critical method is based on the assumption that

> the writer is largely the product of the society and the culture that nourishes him and that an understanding of that society acts like a searchlight upon his work (1943c:12).

and it is towards the identification of the social roots of art, that much of Taylor's criticism is directed. Her examination of South African literature, in particular, reveals the priority she gives to the historical and material circumstances in which literature is produced. She argues that, the economic, political and social context of cultural production in South Africa has had a distinct bearing on the kind of culture which has emerged. As she puts it: 'A culture ... bear[s] the stamp of its material basis' (1943d:12). According to her, the compromised political and economic position of white English-speaking South Africans in the 1940s, bolstered as it was by a number of racist and capitalist fictions, led inevitably to a sterile literature which could contribute nothing to social change, and she concludes: 'on such a rotten foundation culture, art and even science are tainted and warped and cannot reach their full growth' (1943d:12).

Another good example of how Taylor applies her materialist method to particular literary texts is her examination of writing by black South Africans. She begins by examining its oral roots. Like Fanon, Taylor is wary of an uncritical endorsement of pre-colonial oral traditions. For Taylor, the material conditions which produced these cultural forms in the first place have been irrevocably destroyed by the destruction of 'tribal life' (1942l:10) under colonialism so that they exist in the present only in 'emasculated' (1942l:10) form. Consequently, she gives attention to those cultural forms which emerge in response to industrialisation and proletarianisation, and favours 'literature that is in active process of creation and is a reflection of life as it is lived in the present' (1942l:10). Here, Taylor's remarks echo Trotsky's post-revolutionary distaste for the cultural 'backwardness' of an agrarian existence. And

while she recognises that the desire to preserve indigenous oral traditions can be an important element of an insurgent nationalism, she is also wary of the ideological and political consequences of such preoccupations in the hands of the less scrupulous. For the government official, their existence is used to justify oppressive racial policies like 'trusteeship' and 'separate development', and for the missionary—under the auspices of a mission-controlled press—they become a vehicle for religious indoctrination. Turning to African writing of the early twentieth century, Taylor argues that the material conditions of racial oppression and economic exploitation, and a corresponding political docility, have been inimical to the growth of culture:

> Culture requires a sound basis on which to build. Where is it for the African? There is no basis. There is an abyss. Africans form an oppressed mass, without political power, without democratic rights; their political and economic destitution is summed up in the pass laws, in the Colour Bar Act, in the Urban Areas Act, in the Land Act, in the whole policy of segregation. Under such conditions there must be cultural destitution also (1942m:10).

Aside from the poverty of its material base, another factor that contributes to the mediocrity of writing by black South Africans, Taylor argues, is the fact that African writers are reliant on a mission-controlled press. Apart from the restrictions on subject matter imposed by missionaries, the dominance of religious values results in the stifling of social protest and freedom of expression, the falsification of history in keeping with official historical orthodoxies, and blindness to the injustices of colonial conquest. For Taylor, it is a conservative literature which perpetuates rather than challenges oppression. In support of her argument, she cites H.I.E. Dhlomo's positive reading of the cattle killing incident in 1857 in his novel Nongqause, an event which secured white economic and political control over the amaXhosa. Similarly, Taylor endorses R.R. Dhlomo's realistic depiction in *An African Tragedy* (n.d.) of social conditions in the Johannesburg of the 1920s, but argues that his concern with individual morality and the Christian themes of sin and repentance prevents him from either describing or critiquing the social forces which have produced the situation he depicts. Growing political consciousness, a common sense of oppression, collective organisation and the 'determination of a whole people to strive for democratic rights' (1942m:15) are the necessary pre-requisites for the production of 'a culture worthy of its name' (1942m:10)[13].

Taylor emphasises class in her study of black writers. In an argument which anticipates the 1970s materialist rejection of both Eurocentric and Africanist approaches to writing by black South Africans, she points to the anomalous position of educated black writers in the social formation as members of a privileged group, alienated both from the majority of uneducated blacks and their white oppressors, and implies that their position of partial social and economic elevation in relation to the

[13] In this regard, see also her discussion of the work of Peter Abrahams (1943a).

working masses makes them reluctant to challenge the status quo:

> It must not be forgotten either that the few who contrive against great odds to rise above their fellows, hold a precarious footing between two worlds. They are neither at one with their oppressed brothers, nor are they acceptable to the white man .... They are moreover apprehensive of losing through any action on their part the little they have gained as individuals. It is an atmosphere fatal to the flowering of any art (1942f:10).

As with her analysis of black South African writing, so too in her understanding of white South African writing, Taylor (like Trotsky) argues that art is an expression of class interests. Taylor distinguishes between William Plomer and Roy Campbell's social critique (in *Turbott Wolfe* [1925]1985; and *The Wayzgoose* [1928]1971 respectively) on the basis of their class affiliations. According to Taylor, Campbell's critique is the 'expression of contempt of the petit-bourgeois herd on the part of the poetic aristocrat' (1943e:12) while Plomer's is the scepticism of the bourgeois intellectual in the aftermath of World War I. Taylor's analysis of class and race in South African literature is influenced by the notion prominent amongst Unity Movement members of race as a construct, and 'racialism [as] a mere excrescence of capitalism' (Saunders 1986:76). White South African writers, then,

> reflect the ideology of their class as in a mirror. When they admit an African or a Coloured into the pages of their book in more than a decorative capacity ... they write as members of a dominant white caste looking from afar at some almost sub-human species. When he is not a mere victim, an object of humanitarian pity, he is a Problem, a menace, a threat to white purity and white civilisation (1942f:10).

A final instance of her critical method is the series of articles on late nineteenth and early twentieth-century European and American poetry published in 1944, which resembles the kind of wide-ranging cultural and economic analysis attempted by the English Marxist Christopher Caudwell in *Illusion and Reality* (1937). The series of political, social and economic crises which mark European history from the mid nineteenth century are understood to have produced certain observable reactions in the artistic production of the period. These she summarises as a 'tendency towards a more strongly marked individualism in art, and more complete occupation of the Ivory Tower' (1944c:13). This broad conception of artistic movements in relation to changes in the economic base is qualified by a recognition, first, that artistic movements are subject to their own laws of development and, second, that individual responses may take different forms:

> The development of literary (artistic) movements is not a simple thing to be traced mechanically in each country in parallel lines according to the development and decline of capitalist society in each. While the economic base is an invaluable and essential guide in tracing the rise of certain ideological concepts, literature at the same time has its own laws of growth,

> change, assimilation, imitation and revolt when imitation lacks the dynamic spirit of the movement in its beginning (1944c:12).

Where Van Heyningen consistently elevated literature above politics, Taylor insisted upon the primacy of economics and politics in relation to literature. This is most vividly apparent in how they understood the relationship between literature and social change. Theirs is the traditional disagreement between the idealist and the dialectical materialist: Van Heyningen stresses the role of ideas in historical change, and Taylor looks to revolutionary insurgency. Commenting on early twentieth century attempts to awaken Irish national sentiment by means of Celtic theatre and the work of the Gaelic League, Taylor argues that

> it is well known that revolutions cannot be made by literary or cultural movements; the deep social discontent of the masses must supply the urge to action (1941f:15).

Similarly, Upton Sinclair is guilty of

> over-emphasis[ing] the role which art plays in the social process, the function of art as a weapon of propaganda, as the maker of a new world. Art in many varied and subtle ways reflects social processes, art accompanies great historical movements and the study of art illuminates these. But Sinclair was compelled to regard art as a lever in social change, as the mighty agent of a peaceful revolution, as a substitute for the workers taking over by force (1945c:16).

Here, Taylor draws on Trotsky's understanding of the relationship between literature and its economic base. For Trotsky (echoing Hegel),

> the nightingale of poetry, like that bird of wisdom, the owl, is heard only after the sun has set. The day is the time for action, but at twilight feeling and reason come to take account of what has been accomplished.(1925:53).

And for Taylor,

> it is not possible to steep literature over-night in a political program, nor is it desirable. Creative literature is impossible without a deep imaginative assimilating of experience (1943a:15).

What follows from this understanding of the relationship between literature and social change is that literature should not be pressed into the service of a political cause. For Taylor, this is to confuse art and politics.

Taylor's unwillingness to abandon the category of the 'literary' in pursuit of 'political' art, and her far more nuanced understanding of the relationship between literature and its material context did not prevent her work from being recuperated by both laymen and academics as Stalinist prescription and vulgar determinism. Much of

the hostility towards her literary criticism was voiced in the letters page of the Cape Town periodical, *Trek*, which by the mid 1940s had become an established forum for such critical debate. According to D. la Cock (1944:1f), for example:

> Mrs Taylor has sinned greatly in so far as she has attempted to force down the already raw throats of poets standards which belong to the world of narrow, distorted and factitious conceptions of value.

And Geoffrey Durrant (1944c:2) writes:

> The horrible suspicion has entered my mind that what worries Dora Taylor is not that the poets refuse to face facts, or are not interested in politics, but that she cannot forgive them for not sharing her own political views. This is an offence of which, alas, we shall have to convict many others besides those she has pilloried. Dante, Villon, Shakespeare, Homer, Virgil, even Ella Wheeler Wilcox and Rupert Brooke, are all damned. We shall have to face the situation frankly. Not one of the great poets, or even the lesser poets, was a really clear Marxist thinker. They will all have to be scrapped when we get out a New Progressive History of literature. In the meantime we can comfort ourselves with the thought that their poetry proves how rotten bourgeois society has been for two thousand years or so[14].

Durrant is equally dismissive of Taylor's attempts to make connections between literature and its material base, claiming that her understanding of the relationship between art and society is crude and reductive. Trotsky's (1973:118f) comments on the subject are an appropriate reposte to this kind of sneering from the academy:

> The opinion that economics presumably determines directly and immediately the creativeness of a composer or even the verdict of a judge, represents a hoary caricature of Marxism which the bourgeois professordom of all the countries has circulated time out of end to mask their intellectual impotence.

Finally, how does Taylor understand the place of English Literature in South Africa? While always emphatic that art cannot substitute for revolutionary change, it does nonetheless have an important ideological role. A letter written by Isaac Bongani Tabata makes reference to one of Taylor's own plays, and he goes on to provide an accurate outline of Taylor's (and his own) understanding of the social function of art in 1940s South Africa:

[14] Private letters between Durrant and Van Heyningen also contain exasperated references to Dora Taylor's literary criticism, and reflect their patronising attitude towards her work. Durrant, for example, writes: 'As for DT, I want to have another go at her when she has finished her series of articles. She is showing some willingness; did you notice the "saving" paragraph in her second article. But unless I'm much mistaken she won't be able to make anything coherent out of her ideas. (Can't make out yet quite what she is driving at; she seems to be circling cautiously round the question like a boxer)' (23 May 1944c).

> In view of the distortions and belittling of the past of our people so that the African youth is not aware of the true nature of the struggles of our people, the dignity and the spirit of resistance—this play seeks to give them a past of which they can be proud and to restore also their self-respect, from which alone can flow that desire for human freedom and that determination not to submit or yield until it is won. I need hardly emphasise to you the well-known fact that literature—particularly drama and the novel—has always constituted a very powerful weapon which was used effectively by the oppressed nationalities and peoples in their struggles. The non-Europeans in this country are now entering upon a new phase of struggle in which the scope is much broader. The whole community on a national scale will be brought into the stream and each one will contribute according to his or her capacity and talent. The novelist and the dramatist will hold the mirror up to the present-day society and portray a true picture of the struggle, past and present, in such a way that the social and political awareness of the people will be sharpened (18 August 1948).

This view presupposes the ability of art to tell the 'truth' about history and society, and its ideological aims are to restore personal dignity, and to act as a spur to political action[15]. In a letter to Tabata, Taylor explains her own political aesthetic, defining her efforts in direct opposition to the Romantic individualism of Roy Campbell:

> Briefly, B, what do you think of relating this upsurge of individualism more specifically to the expanding capitalism and indicating its collapse still more clearly as part of the ideological decay bound up with the crisis of the system itself. Then, instead of ending there, I expand ... on the picture of how the individual can only truly fulfil his potentialities under socialism. You know how the writers, desperately clinging to their ego, look for a solution inside themselves. But the paradox is that it is only when there is a healthy communication with, and a belonging to, a community that the individual can expand to his full height. Retreating into his ego, the 'sole reality' defeats itself, for without the group contact, the ego shrivels up. There are different kinds of individualism says the old man. Pursuing that thought—which I didn't quite understand—I see a way to make my picture more complete. Individualism standing tip-toe on that world of far-reaching

[15] Taylor's *The Role of the Missionaries in Conquest* (1952) is written in a similar spirit. Its revisionary aims and polemical style are intended to have a conscientising effect, in the hope that this will inspire its readers to political action. There are also indicators that much of Taylor's own fictional writing was written with the same purpose in mind. According to Christopher Saunders, Taylor is the author of at least one unpublished novel *Kathy* which deals with the story of a Coloured family, and addresses the issue 'of passing for white' (1986:77). Also of interest are I.B. Tabata's comments on another of Taylor's short stories: 'It is a story based on an actual incident which took place in South Africa, the most bestial and brutal act reported in the SA Press. But in the telling of it, it is the impression of human worth and dignity which predominates, though the cruelty is not softened' (25 May 1950).

> horizons at the beginning of capitalism ('what a piece of work is man') achieved much. But it is nothing compared with that individualism which will blossom when the forces of socialism are planting the deserts with corn and conquering nature to man's needs. This is all the more important to emphasise because there is a common and deep-rooted bogey from arrogant poets like Roy Campbell downwards through the unleavened mass of people, that socialism will produce a dead level of 'equality' and destroy the individual (28 January 1952).

conclusion

Both Taylor and Van Heyningen share anxieties about the rise of Fascism in the 1930s and 1940s, and argue for the need for a more critical and independent South African public sphere. They are both reliant on the critical approach of influential Northern Hemisphere thinkers, and work out their critical practice in close collaboration with charismatic male colleagues. Neither of them, it seems to me, brings a distinctly feminist perspective to bear in their work, and instead lend their considerable talents to elaborating the discourse they appropriated and were appropriated by.

Perhaps more striking than their similarities are the differences between them. While Van Heyningen remains committed to the gradualist methods of liberal reformism, Taylor consistently advances the need for radical political and economic change. With regard to the question of literature's social function, Taylor's insistence on the primacy of politics over literature means that she assigns literature a limited function in the attainment of political ends, and is critical of Romantic individualism. In addition, her desire to reveal the connections between literature and its social roots allows her to offer penetrating social and political critique that sees the liberation of the South African oppressed as part of the global narrative of anti-capitalist revolution. In contrast, Van Heyningen's hopes that a democratic citizenry will emerge through the reading of exemplary literary texts, and her elevation of abstract moral and universal categories amount to an evasion of politics and an endorsement of the status quo. Finally, in relation to the South African context, Van Heyningen focuses exclusively on an all-white caste of writers, and her discourse of liberal paternalism, which endorses colonial-metropolitan hierarchies, is in marked contrast to Taylor's commitment to more inclusive definition of community, which is registered, in part, by the critical attention she gives to the work of black writers. The disappearance of the kind of radical social commentary offered by critics like Taylor, and the rapid institutionalisation in South African English Departments of the formalist, de-historicised methods of practical criticism coincided with an increasingly repressive state policy towards black South Africans, which culminated in the triumph of Afrikaner nationalism in the 1948 elections and the implementation of apartheid rule.

Department of English
University of Natal (Durban)

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'Here be Dragons': Challenging 'Liberal' Constructions of Protest Poetry

Priya Narismulu

In addition to the apartheid State, the emergent culture of liberation had to contend with another hegemonic formation, comprising white English-speaking intellectuals who took an interest in South African literature. Liberals have been highly influential in the production and reception of literature in English, through university English departments, literary journals and literary magazines, publishing houses, the English Academy of South Africa, the Grahamstown Festival, the Market Theatre[1], and most of the English press. Despite their influence, the liberals have been a small group. Estimating that liberals comprise some 5% of South Africa's population, Peter Horn (1994:11) argues that

> a culture catering to less than five percent of the population of a nation is a limited culture and a limiting culture; it is time we saw through the proposition that culture is by nature only for the select few.

While Horn's conclusion is important, the size of the liberals is but a fraction of his estimate. Further, although there has been a tendency to refer to this group inclusively as liberals, it has ranged from what may be designated as conservative liberals to left liberals[2]. Although imprecise, the term 'conservative liberals' usefully denotes those

[1] See Anne Fuchs' (1990:125f) critique of the role of the Market Theatre between 1976 and 1986.

[2] The Urban Foundation's statistics suggest that whites as a whole comprised a little over 5 million people, i.e., 12% of the population (*Race Relations Survey* 1993:255). During the 1987 white elections most English-speakers voted for the National Party, to the extent that the liberal Progressive Federal Party lost its position as official opposition to the Conservative Party. Some English-speakers have supported groups to the far right of the National Party. Finally, about half of Horn's figure seems to comprise children , who are not usually included in such a count. Lodge (1978:109) refers to Martin Legassick's distinction between 'white groups primarily concerned with the saving of what they believed to be existing democratic values and the nationalist concern with the overall transformation of white fascist domination into democracy'.

who sought to characterise themselves as liberal but who were also concerned with maintaining their privileged position in the existing structure of power:

> Sociologists who have studied the white community of the sixties conclude that, on the whole, one is dealing with a conservative majority, and this includes the English-speaking South Africans whose liberal tradition has been greatly exaggerated. Although there is no aggressive racialism among many of them, prejudices and stereotyped attitudes towards the black community .... abound (Alvarez-Pereyre 1984:24).

This group is central to understanding the hesitations, silences, gaps and misrepresentation in the literary discourse that deals with the development of resistance literature. In a country moving towards civil war in which literature offered people resisting the State a forum, conservative liberals were part of the institutional forces that have sought to neutralise resistance writers. This had the effect of naturalising economic and political domination behind prescriptions of taste, despite the fact that, as Nadine Gordimer (1988a:228) has pointed out, 'the white middle-class establishment was not, as it claimed, the paradigm of South African life, and white culture was not the definitive South African culture'. Central to the existence of the minority interest group has been its ability to impose

> its preoccupations and problems, its particular solutions and its vision of the world on all other sectors .... to prescribe the conceptual and real universe according to its own law (Mattelart & Siegelaub 1983:17)[3].

Although there were lively and varied experiments in poetry and other genres (notably drama and music) in the 1970s and 1980s, there were very few attempts to develop a sense of what these expressions might mean, particularly in relation to the socio-political contestation and transformation that was underway. Significantly, the revision of liberal South African historiography that had been undertaken by writers such as Johnstone, Wolpe, Trapido and Legassick in the early 1970s seemed to have bypassed literary studies. Writers kept claiming that they were apolitical in a highly politicised society, as is evident in the articles of Douglas Livingstone (1974; 1976). As the State policed cultural production, conservative liberal intellectuals believed that they operated 'in abstraction from the institutional sites in which the complex relations of discourse and power are actually negotiated' (Pechey 1989:52).

I will argue that the ideological position of the conservative liberals clarifies the dilemma of some settler cultures: never substantive and too remote from the European centre, they compensated for their marginality by asserting their power in the

[3] For Kelwyn Sole (1990:61) '[t]hey have a power of exclusion far in excess, it seems to me, of their powers of discrimination'. I would add that the ideological production of conservative liberals is 'complicit with Western international economic interests .... to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject' (Spivak 1988:271).

ex-colony as neo-colonial guardians of access to the centre of cultural life. In particular A.G. Ullyatt and Stephen Watson have clearly shown their presumption of themselves as part of the principal interpretive community. This bears similarities to the widespread assumption among intellectuals of themselves as the natural audience of literature, as exemplified by Stanley Fish's (1980) 'interpretive community'. Such a position is produced through the tactical delimitation of the noun 'community' so as to enable one group, in Bourdieu's terms, to impose the norms of their own perception, i.e. to be perceived as they perceive themselves (see Mattelart & Siegelaub 1983:19). In this way, questions regarding the source of interpretive authority are circumvented, and authority devolves as if by default upon a tiny intellectual coterie which constitutes itself as universal, transparent and ahistorical, but which has tended to be white, male, middle-class and Anglocentric. The presumption of a fairly homogeneous audience represents a tactical disregard of the deep divisions in South African society.

'protest literature'

> All critics declare not only their judgement of work but also their claim to the right to talk about it and judge it. In short, they take part in a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work of art (Bourdieu 1993:35).

Using English offered black resistance writers a better chance of being published. This was partly the result of the State's control, division and underdevelopment of the indigenous languages. There was scarcely any structural support for the development of a literary culture in any of the indigenous languages. Further, given the State's patronage of publishing monopolies that adhered to its line, there was no space for independent publishers and other structures of production[4]. In addition to the hegemonic power of the English language which made many black writers feel obliged to write in English (their second or third language), there were strategic reasons. Writers judged that publishing in English rendered their work less susceptible to State interference, while it increased their access to a broader community of South Africans resisting apartheid and to people located beyond the borders who read English. They took their decision in a context inhospitable to their artistic and political aims.

Some of those in charge of English language publication and validation used State repression, either consciously or unconsciously, to advance their power and interests. To maintain their cultural dominance they tried to absorb and deflect the challenge of resistance writing. Ullyatt's article 'Dilemmas in Black Poetry' (1977) is a

[4] The sole publisher in Zulu declined to publish Mazisi Kunene's *Emperor Shaka the Great*, which necessitated his having to translate it into English and publish it overseas, by which time he had decided to go into exile.

blatant attempt to maintain cultural dominance by containing, marginalising or excluding resistance literature. Ullyatt employs a host of value-laden terms like 'intrinsic poetic merits', 'authenticity' and 'tradition' while ignoring the effects of the State's repression on black writers and writing. Ullyatt was challenged by Slabbert (1978), Sole (1978) and Maughan-Brown (1979). Less extreme, though still Eurocentric (and more influential than Ullyatt's article), are the approaches of the editors of various poetry anthologies[5]. For instance, in their introduction to *Voices of the Land: An Anthology of South African Poems* the editors, Marcia Leveson and Jonathan Paton (1985:7), make the following assertion:

> Our intention is to give the reader a sense of the development of South African poetry since its beginnings with Thomas Pringle in the early nineteenth century.

Leveson and Paton's identification of South African poetry with white English South African poetry is significant[6]. Their comments indicate the lag between the phenomenon of resistance poetry in English (which had appeared for more than a generation) and its reception by cultural arbiters. Another example that suggests an unconscious Anglocentrism occurs in a press interview with the winner of the Sanlam Literary Award in 1987, Professor Michael Chapman. Discussing the struggles of creative writers to deal with social reality, he remarked:

> Poetry in South Africa is not a precious retreat. Since the 1820s it has engaged itself with social problems (in MacGregor 1987:11).

Both sets of statements clarify the exclusions on which conservative liberal discourse was founded. Many South African resistance poems of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s show the influence of indigenous oral traditions that predate Pringle and British settlement in this region. The omission of indigenous literary/cultural traditions from

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[5] In the 1960s it was surprising if black writers were included at all: *South African Writing Today*, edited by Nadine Gordimer and Lionel Abrahams (1967) is more representative of South African writing than *The Penguin Book of South African Verse* (1968) edited by Jack Cope and Uys Krige. The latter included English translations of poets writing in Afrikaans and African languages, although no African writers who wrote in English were included (See Alvarez-Pereyre 1984f:22).

[6] Leveson and Paton's remarks have a curious parallel in the rhetoric of the State in the 'era of reform': the Botha government's claim that South Africans rejected sanctions was accepted without question in most public forums (and by the liberal media), the tacit assumption being that the term 'South Africans' meant white South Africans. By contrast, Mark Orkin's (1986) research into attitudes towards sanctions demonstrated that most black South Africans favoured the imposition of sanctions, and were prepared to endure short-term hardship to be rid of the minority regime.

Chapman's construction is particularly surprising given the Chapman and Dangor anthology (1982), which has 'San' and 'Khoi-Khoi' material, and Chapman's extensive representation of black poets in a series of anthologies. This seems to suggest the extent to which ideology overrides data[7]. This type of contradiction may be traced, as Amilcar Cabral has suggested, to colonial constructions of history:

> The colonialists have a habit of telling us that when they arrived in Africa they put us into history. You are well aware that it's the contrary—when they arrived they took us out of our own history (quoted in Brett 1986:83).

A further problem with this mode of representation is encapsulated in Chapman's shorthand use of the term 'Soweto Poets' (e.g. in his 1982 collection *Soweto Poetry*) to refer to poets such as Serote, Gwala, Sepamla and Mtshali, when only one of them, Sepamla, actually lived in Soweto for a time. Mafika Gwala (1989:70), the poet-activist from Mpumalanga (KwaZulu-Natal), challenged the reductive and inaccurate use of the internationally-recognisable name:

> I refuse to be called a 'Soweto Poet'. We have all disagreed with the labelling ... a good example of liberal patronizing. I just cannot consider myself in the mould of a 'Soweto Poet'. Living with constant fear and bitter anger in this country does not revolve around Soweto alone.

Like Chapman, Leveson and Paton's group interest seems to prevent them from accounting for the impact of other cultural traditions in their construction of the development of South African poetry. The statements of Leveson and Paton (1985:7) and Chapman (in MacGregor 1987:11) suggest that they could only imagine their readership to be conservative liberal white English-speaking South Africans like themselves. Ullyatt's mystification of the continent is part of an approach that chooses to ignore the material conditions that inform black culture and literature, and is epitomised by Douglas Livingstone's (1978:10-15) well-known poem 'August Zulu'. Responding to Ullyatt's (1978:53f) invocation of the 'perennial problem ... of whether politics and poetry can mix', Jos Slabbert (1978:86) counters that such a question is foreclosed, it 'doesn't exist in a country where going to the toilet is political'.

Gwala's objection to the label 'Soweto Poet' has a parallel in Njabulo Ndebele's opposition to the title of the anthology of black poetry, *Ask Any Black Man*, that was edited by Tim Couzens and Essop Patel and published by the progressive publishing house, Ravan Press. Ndebele's (1983:45) stated objections had to do with the implication in the title that the collection comprised 'protest poetry':

> None of my poems have been written for people who wanted to hear me

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[7] Chapman (1988) has attempted to shift from this position.

> complain. They have been written in order to share serious insights, to share perceptions, and to *alter* perceptions in a most profound manner[8].

Ndebele treats literature as an activist, and he does not share the conception of protest literature as a safety valve in an oppressive society. There have been differing views regarding the meaning of the term 'protest literature' and the period in which it occurred. Richard Rive (1983:26) offers a sense of the construct:

> protest literature [addresses] the discrimination implicit in black-white relationships, and ... is critical of white, racial domination. Its literature is produced by black unenfranchised non-citizens for whites who have the vote and so can effect change[9].

Some activist-writers, like Dennis Brutus, described themselves as protest writers in the 1960s (see Owomoyela 1993:131). So did the poet and critic, Cosmo Pieterse (1969), who used the term in the period before the rise of Black Consciousness. Brutus and Pieterse's sense of the term (particularly given Brutus' sports activism) was quite remote from the diluted meaning the term acquired in conservative liberal discourse (which Rive's analysis reproduces). Given the bannings, house arrests and exit permits to which resistance writers like Brutus and Alex la Guma were subject, sympathetic foreign audiences were often all they could anticipate in the short and medium term. The combination of the political repression and liberal cultural hegemony may have led some of the next wave of resistance writers to appeal to sympathetic and influential local or foreign audiences in some of their work. It is possible, for example, to read Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali's 'The Master of the House' (1972:55) and Motshile wa Nthodi's 'South African Dialogue' (in Chapman & Dangor 1982:95f) as protest that appealed to the sympathetic fractions of the ruling class (the liberals) for relief. Owomoyela (1993:131) has suggested that:

> Protest poetry may be thought of as a black expression of liberalism—a poetry of personal response to oppression based on assumptions of justice, rights, and human dignity.

However, even the more liberal black critics and writers like Richard Rive (1983:29) were wary of a literary category that traded in stereotypes and simplifications:

> Writing is at white heat and in exclamation marks so that the final product is

[8] In 1982 Ravan Press responded by changing the title of the collection to *The Return of the Amasi Bird: Black South African Poetry 1891 - 1981*, the first part of which was taken from Daniel Kunene's poem in the collection.

[9] The conservative liberal sense of the term 'protest' appears to have its roots in Thomas Karis and Gwendolen M. Carter's (1977) work *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882 - 1964.*

> often crude, ill-constructed and stylistically weak.

Rive (1983:22) also pointed out that 'almost all contemporary writers do not fit comfortably' into the category of protest literature. According to Gareth Cornwell (1980:58), Rive described protest literature as 'writing produced by blacks for white consumption'. Cornwell (1980:58) clarified Rive's position with the argument that:

> It was essentially negative writing geared as it was to invoking a sympathetic attitude from a more fortunate readership.

The difference between Rive's position as a liberal black critic and the position of liberal white critics is significant (and will be examined later).

In exile, critics to the left of Rive, such as Njabulo Ndebele and Mbulelo Mzamane, registered greater problems with the construct of protest literature. Ndebele (1991:46) addressed some of the problems of the category in different articles, raising questions such as 'Why the misnomer "protest"?', and declaring that 'what has been called protest literature has run its course in South Africa' (Ndebele 1988:205). Mzamane (1991:60) also expressed serious reservations:

> Now more than ever, it has become reductionist to categorise all African literature as protest. Protest literature is writing by the racially oppressed addressed to readers from the ruling class in an attempt to solicit their sympathy and support against discriminatory laws and practices .... Protest springs from a feeling of being a ward: it is the activity of apprentices, and it is the action of subordinates who see themselves as such. It is both solicitous and moderate. It functions within the system, often with regard to due process, prescribed channels of communication, and respect for law and order. The end in view of protest is reform, never revolution. Protest is a quest for accommodation, and not a struggle for empowerment.

The term 'protest' has quite a different meaning in conservative liberal discourse to the construct in resistance discourse, as Mzamane begins to suggest in his subsequent references to the Karis and Carter (1991:60f) text. At the same time Mzamane's unwitting conflation of the two meanings under the conservative liberal rubric attests to its hegemonic power; a power that is part of a neo-colonial process of alienating the production of emerging writers from the cultural production of the oppressed majority. It is silent about the history of protest action, mass political mobilization and national resistance that characterised political behaviour over many decades (such as the Defiance campaigns, the Sharpeville demonstration and the Soweto uprising). Instead, the term carries the implication that resistance writers could only imagine dealing with oppression through a beseeching and individualised literature of complaint, which suggests that Wally Serote was justified in his concerns that:

> The oppressor's very concept of culture, rather than leading people to deal with their own realities, serves to confuse and distract (quoted by Watts 1989:252).

constructing an audience

> They want anger to be buried
> in the carved tomb of verse
> (Evans in Feinberg 1980:20f)

It is possible that some resistance writers may have written for a liberal white audience for reasons that have to do with power and access: the effects of liberal hegemony, which suggested the naturalness of such a readership; a belief that this was the route to universal reception; the pressure upon emerging writers in a highly stratified society to accept a marginal identity in the cultural spaces of a dominant group; a desperation to be published; or a belief that little else was possible, given the level of political repression. However, most resistance writers' struggles for equality tended to inform their relationships with all their audiences, ruling out the obsequious literature of complaint that came parcelled with the liberal appellation. Ndebele's (1983:44f) objection to the title *Ask Any Black Man* challenges the hegemonic assumptions regarding the audience of protest literature. While such a title directs the anthology of (mainly) resistance poems towards liberal whites (implicit in the power-laden issue of *who* does the asking), it reinforces the conservative liberals' position that 'protest literature' was directed primarily towards themselves. Ndebele's (1991:45) continuing disquiet over these constructions of audience is evident in his assessment, years later, that '[t]he question of the audience for this "protest literature" is a problematic one'.

Many resistance poets had complex notions of their intended audiences. The radical writer James Matthews treated his different audiences in quite distinct ways:

> *Cry Rage!* is manifestly intended for two kinds of reader, by definition very different from each other: to his white readers, Matthews shouts his disgust and warns of the approaching 'day of anger', while he tries to open the eyes of his black readers to their subjection and to instill in them courage and pride (quoted by Alvarez-Pereyre 1984:20).

Owing to the structural violence of apartheid (which had consequences for education, language policies, library facilities and the identity of the book-buying public[10]), the construction of emerging readers was largely an act of faith on the part of the writers, who anticipated and fostered their development. By inserting themselves as the principal audience these liberals further marginalised or negated people who had been

[10] In South Africa the differences between the implied/intended reader and the actual reader are typically polarised. The publisher Adriaan Donker (1998) believes that white English-speaking liberals were the main buyers of the anthologies of the resistance poets he published in the 1970s. Donker has reason to believe that a significant number of black township youth heard the poetry of the resistance poets, and he feels there is a connection between the resistance poetry and the June 1976 uprising.

systematically excluded by the apartheid dispensation. By diminishing the complex range of readers assumed by resistance writers (including the sympathetic audiences that were developing overseas), and presenting themselves as the sole or most significant audience, the conservative liberals tried to increase their control over the reception of the literature. Ndebele (1991:45) raises the implicit contradiction in such a position:

> Such factors as the levels of literacy in English among the African population would *objectively* point towards a particular audience: an English-speaking liberal one at that. But that audience, schooled under a Eurocentric literary tradition, was in turn, schooled to reject this literature 'meant' for them.

From the late-1960s most activist-writers (like Matthews) responded by focusing their attacks not just on the State but on conservative liberal attempts at containing resistance literature. Black Consciousness writers, in particular, challenged the self-serving parameters that legitimated a familiar authoritative interpretive community. Ndebele (1991:45) comments sceptically that:

> Conventional wisdom proclaims that [protest] literature was premised on its supposed appeal to the conscience of the white oppressor.

Through the construct of protest literature liberal intellectuals installed themselves as the intended audience of resistance writers with the suggestion that as a sympathetic portion of the ruling bloc they would intercede on behalf of the oppressed. This manoeuvre is captured in Anne McClintock's (1987:229) description of them as

> tactful squadrons of moral teachers, advisors, and bewilderers [who] coax those who are ruled into admitting the legitimacy and 'universality' of the ruler's values[11].

However, there was great silence about their attendant responsibilities; all that was evident was the presence of a fastidious audience. The strategy served to strengthen the legitimacy of the conservative liberal hegemony, while freeing the supposed intercessories from action and accountability. That Ndebele (1991:45) has been alert to the contradiction is evident in his persistent question:

> But what of the audience for whom this literature was not 'objectively' meant? What about the *effective* audience?

This is the key issue. Although it is not addressed directly in the essay in which it is

[11] They responded to political and economic crisis by railing against the 'sacrifice of the intrinsic rules of the craft for political ends, formal ineptitude, loss of individual expression and originality' (McClintock 1987:247f).

raised, the title of the essay, 'The Rediscovery of the Ordinary', offers direction.

The hegemony of defensive publishers, editors and critics hampered resistance writers, and an early challenge to their influence came from David Evans. Evans had been imprisoned for five years for sabotage in the 1960s (Alvarez-Pereyre 1984:85). Writing in exile after his release Evans challenged prescriptions about the role of the poet in a police State. In the poem 'If Poets Must Have Flags' Evans suggests that critics chose the desocialized, ahistorical Formalist and New Critical interpretive procedures because of their own historical crisis of location:

> They
> ask the poet to be
> a songbird in a cage (in Feinberg 1980:20f)

The conclusion contains an engaged and defiant manifesto. Attacking petty bourgeois sensibilities, Evans rejects the liberalist ideological ruse that dealt with its political marginality by asserting its cultural significance:

> We refuse
>
> We'll go ugly and free
> exhuming the corpses
> releasing the rot
> revealing the holes ripped by the shot.
> We'll wrap around our banners
> the guts of the dead
> - if we must have flags
> let them always be red (in Feinberg 1980:20f)

During the late 1960s and early 1970s a strong contingent of black poets emerged (in literary magazines like *The Classic*), and in 1971 Lionel Abrahams published an anthology of Oswald Mtshali's poems *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*[12], which initiated debate on the value of black poetry. Liberal intellectuals responded with reviews, debates, articles and conferences; while reservations were expressed by writers like Serote, Ndebele and Rive, who were preoccupied with the actions of the State. These writers, like Matthews and Gwala, rejected the official version of 'protest literature', which they saw as an ideological category that did violence to their work. Rejecting any control over the production of resistance writing, James Matthews created a company called Blac Publishing House in his home township of Athlone on the Cape Flats. Incensed by the attempts to patrol poetic discourse Matthews (1984:74) rejected the title of poet, declaring 'I am not a poet'. He explained his position as

[12] Through Abrahams' involvement in literary societies such as PEN (1988:286-304) and through his work as an editor he supported emerging writers. The first collections of Mtshali and Serote were published with his support.

follows:

> 1972 became too much for me. The Dimbazas, Ilinges, Sadas and Limehills. Dying children—starvation, their sickness. I could write but I was not doing anything about the situation. I felt physically ill. I wrote. It was not prose. Critics hyena-howled. It was not poetry. I never said it was. I write expressions of feelings (Matthews 1984:74).

Backed into a false dichotomy by the critics' prioritisation of art over politics, Matthews insisted that the form his writings took was less important than their substance. Peter Horn (1994:13) records Matthews' reaction to the term 'Poetry?': 'Bullshit!'. Gareth Cornwell (1980:67f) pointed out that to

> judge Matthews' work in terms of an 'aesthetic ideology' which he has deliberately jettisoned is inappropriate .... For Matthews it is clear that the message is indeed more important than art.

A later anthology by Matthews, *Poisoned Wells and Other Delights* (1990), is pointedly subtitled 'a collection of feelings'. Matthews echoes the dilemma that Ntombiyakhe Kabiyela Kaxhoka (1979:61) expressed a decade earlier in 'When last did I have a good laugh?':

> These are no poems crooning
> Sweet nothings
> These are my feelings

Mafika Gwala (1984:43) also challenged the 'academics who claim an almost sacerdotal authority over black writing', demanding:

> what moral right does the academic have to judge my style of writing? What guidelines outside the culture of domination has he applied? (Gwala 1984:48).

This moral right was simply assumed by some critics who reproduced the restless and alienated character of western poets and other artists as being natural and archetypal. By fetishising literature they attempted to avoid the insistent social and political issues. This is evident in the critical work of the most prominent representatives of this tradition in the period under survey, Lionel Abrahams and Stephen Watson. As Abrahams' work has received much attention[13], the focus will be on Stephen Watson

[13] Kelwyn Sole's (1988) review of a selection of Abraham's' work is particularly incisive. It follows Mike Kirkwood's (1976) analysis of Guy Butler's work, in 'The Colonizer: A Critique of the English South African Culture Theory'.

who, in the mid-to-late 1980s, exemplified the dominant liberal position on South African poetry.

'the best writers in this country'

> It [poetry] is the loneliest of arts, the one which in this century can fittingly be called the widow and widower of all the arts, the one most neglected, most bereaved, most impotent (Watson 1990:15).

As with other writers like Guy Butler and Douglas Livingstone, Watson's problem is located in his own marginality, which he projects as a universal characteristic[14]. Ahead of Watson, Ullyatt (1977:58) tried to 'balance' his disapproval of some poems read in October 1976 at the ninetieth anniversary of Johannesburg ('a singularly inappropriate occasion to attack any law') by arguing that:

> black poets have been succumbing regularly to debilitating effects of resentment, and that has blinded them to the creative potential of a healthy rebellion.

Ullyatt and others tried to sustain their power and values through offering guidance to the resistance writers who wrote in their medium. In his 1985 essay about the role of poetry in society Watson (1990:19) writes in favour of 'an inherently conservative function' of poetry as 'one kind of check in a larger system of imbalances ... which seems sadly neglected these days'. Yet, the deployment of poetry by writers like Chris van Wyk and Dikobe wa Mogale as a 'check in a larger system of imbalances' (such as apartheid and capitalism) is deprecated by Watson. However, Watson's position must be read against the socially committed work that appeared in spite of the oppression of the 1970s and 1980s.

Less privileged South African writers were dealing with the decimation of fellow artists and comrades. Chris van Wyk's poem 'We can't meet here, brother: for Thami Mnyele' (1978:34) was written after the artist and activist Thami Mnyele was killed in an SADF raid on Botswana on 14 June 1985, in which twelve people, including a Batswana child, were slaughtered. The poem is not so much a critique of the State (which may be assumed), instead Van Wyk focuses on the distraction caused by the powerful and self-serving press and intellectuals. Masquerading as universal concerns, their narrow interests threatened to drown out the precarious communication networks between oppressed people:

> I can't hear you brother!

[14] 'Most white english poets', McClintock (1987:237-238) argues, 'comforted themselves ... that the lonely poetic voice was also the eloquent mouthpiece of universal truth'.

> for the noise of the theorists
> and the clanging machinery of the liberal Press (Van Wyk 1978:34).

In sharp contrast to Watson's position, Mothobi Mutloatse, writing at around the same time, clarifies the continuing emphasis by black writers on socio-political issues:

> the mood in black literature can never be otherwise but challenging, in that the whole situation is still the same as the one that prevailed with the previous generation of writers, in that we are still disenfranchised, we have no vote, we have no land, and—if anything—things are getting worse economically and otherwise (in Welz 1987:47).

In a period of enormous social division, inequity and conflict, Watson's 1987 essay 'Shock of the Old: What's Become of "Black" Poetry' (1990) crudely affirms the privileged minority to which he belongs:

> One simply has to remember who are the best writers in this country. Without exception they are those who have been most aware of other world literatures and traditions elsewhere (Watson 1990:84).

Watson responds to his own cultural and political alienation from the majority of South Africans by focusing defensively on what he calls 'world literatures'[15]. The most common complaint against resistance writers concerned the 'overly political' nature of their products, as in Watson's (1990:91) argument that South African poetry has suffered 'under the internal siege of its own political obsessions'. By negating the historical, political, legal, economic and social imperatives that inform oppressed lives, conservative liberal critics failed to recognise that black poets were responding to the exigencies of their material conditions, and that they adapted English to address the predicament.

Implicit in Watson's statements regarding 'the best writers in this country' is reference to the debate on standards in South African literature, which intensified as black students who had gone through Bantu education began to enter the tertiary institutions set aside for racial minorities. In such a context the invocation of 'the best writers' is not simply an aesthetic claim devoid of articulated criteria; rather it is connected to an institutional discourse mobilising pre-emptive mechanisms of exclusion in defence of minority privileges[16]. Watson ignores the fact that aesthetic

[15] This more circumspect formulation is in response to previous challenges, such as Cronin's (1983:58) exhortation that South Africans need to 'learn how to speak' to and of themselves, and the postcolonial challenge that the term 'universal' has served as a synonym for the West.

[16] Such developments are not new, as Carey (1992) suggests. As oppressed people in societies like Britain won access to education, the elites developed a discourse of standards and excellence to check their advancement. Herbert Vilakazi and Botlhale Tema point out that merit is usually concern over power, material and emotional security, and the desire to perpetuate monopoly over these positions for the current incumbents and their kind, be it based on class, race, sex, religion (in Jansen 1991:135).

value is socially constructed and dependent upon complex social and institutional circumstances, and tends to valorise the special knowledge of elite groups. Ullyatt (1977:51-62) did much the same in 'Dilemmas in Black Poetry', assuming, as Sole (1978:92) charges, that 'European literary norms are necessarily at a higher stage of development than African writing'.

Towards the end of his 1989 essay 'Under Pressure: Poetry in South Africa Today', Watson (1990:86) challenges unnamed Marxist literary critics over their sense that the literature that was coming out of the townships was significant:

> It fitted many people's sense of historical symmetry to believe that, since the townships were the crucible of resistance to the South African state, it was there too that the most responsive art should emerge. It made sense, too, to believe that just as one class was challenging another one, so one literature in this country would gain ascendancy over the other, culturally dominant one. In short, it had all the force of a certain historical logic to believe that 'white' poetry was being and would be supplanted by 'black'.

Watson's comment reveals the fears that drove the neocolonial coterie to undermine the work being produced. Ndebele (1992:24) has examined the effects of an uncritical membership of a privileged group in a divided South Africa:

> it sent them to well equipped schools; it provided them with publishing opportunities; it sanctified their language through legislation and language academies; it gave them theatres, museums, art galleries, concert halls, and libraries; it arranged for them special salary scales that ensured access to a range of cultural facilities as well as the ability to buy books and newspapers; it created literary awards to honour them; it also made possible for some of them to become critics and reviewers who influenced literary taste and declared literary standards ... it gave them passports to travel ... it sought to make them take for granted the elevated status of their citizenship.

Watson's proprietorial attempts to control discursive space closely resembles the invective of reactionary minorities who believed that their privileges were unfairly threatened by the impending socio-political shifts. Born just after the Bantu Education Act (1953) took effect on the education of his black contemporaries, Watson (1990:85) demonstrates little grasp of its impact:

> the still-born character of much 'black' poetry cannot be attributed solely to its stupefying intellectual poverty. It has been ill-served by its critics .... no one seemed prepared to call the rank bad rank bad, the banal banalizing, the cliche a cliche (and bad because it is, in language, the supreme form of indifference to the terrible individuality of other people's suffering).

While it may be true that some literary efforts were published before they were ready, that is an issue of the development of a writing culture in any society. Constructive ways of dealing with the problems were addressed by the writers' workshops held by township cultural groups, the African Writers' Association and the Congress of South

African Writers. However, Watson seems to think that the role of the critic is merely to conduct postmortems on texts; his critical work shows little understanding of the possibility of making a constructive contribution to the development of literature in a society in transition[17].

As the political situation became more polarised, foreign powers (such as the Bush administration in the United States) joined in the criticism against the apartheid government. An unexpected outcome of elite access to foreign audiences was that those who found it difficult to subscribe to the emerging democratic process in South Africa were obliged to reconsider the terms of their engagement, lest they be seen as reactionary. This is apparent in the contradictory views expressed by Watson towards Chris van Wyk's poetry in two articles on 'politically-engaged' South African poetry that appeared two years apart. The essay 'Shock of the Old' appeared in the conservative liberal journal *Upstream*[18] in 1987, and refers to Chris van Wyk, Donald Parenzee and Dikobe wa Mogale in negative terms:

> Formally, they add very little. The curious lack of linguistic energy in much of their work can hardly be said to be counteracted by the supposed ideological progression often claimed for it (Watson 1990:83).

In his aptly-titled 1989 *World Literature Today* article, 'Under Pressure', Watson (1990:94) writes of a 'remarkable satiric poem, "In Detention"' which, he claims, is 'part of this newfound depth' in South African poetry. However, the fact that Chris van Wyk had published the poem in his 1979 anthology *It is Time to go Home* (besides prior airings in magazines, readings and mass-meetings), i.e. at least a full decade earlier, renders Watson's argument absurd. Further, Van Wyk's collection appeared eight years before Watson's derogatory earlier (1987) remarks. The change is therefore not in Van Wyk's work but in Watson's evaluation as part of a strategy to maintain credibility. 'Under Pressure' registers the shift Watson felt obliged to make in his judgement of local poetry as the balance of political forces began to change and his position became exposed.

writing back

> in a society dominated by exploiting classes, the latter seek to concentrate the production of cultural models to the level of intellectual elites and force the people into the situation of being simple culture consumers .... Beneath each

[17] Despite his valorisation of Guy Butler in his introduction to *Guy Butler: Essays and Lectures 1949-91* (1994), Watson's own work shows no advance on the pioneering attempts of Butler to promote the study of South African literature.

[18] See Oliphant's analysis of *Upstream* in Petersen and Rutherford (1991:92-95).

> apparently well-intentioned argument of imperialism, like the universality of culture, hides in reality, the idea that only Western culture is universal, a racist idea, which until very recently, was openly proclaimed (Samora Machel in Mattelart & Siegelaub 1983:25)[19].

It is significant that the construct of 'protest literature' yields more about its purveyors than its supposed subject, resistance writing, even as it burnishes the history, ideological orientation and political power of the hegemonic liberals. Peter Horn's (1974:18) early work, 'Poems at bargain prices', may be read as a cynical reaction to such self-aggrandisation. Horn, who worked within close proximity of various conservative liberal circles, expressed his exasperation at the mediating role of the literary establishment:

> in purple shirt and orange tie
> I the accredited clown
> to this ailing society
> am allowed to tell you a few truths
> and similar nonsense
>
> so listen you christened dung-heaps!
> I will lie for you
> everything: I can invent: everything ...
> looking at you I realise: 1 bottle of beer
> is better than 1 volume of poetry
> of any FORM and CONTENT poet
>
> looking at you I realise: the only
> adequate criticism
> of this society
> would be
> TO BASH IN YOUR HEADS (Horn 1991:27f)

Horn exposes the economic underpinnings to the avowals of the high culture purveyors, illustrating Bourdieu's (1977:183) argument that 'all practices, including those purporting to be disinterested' can be treated as 'economic practices directed towards the maximising of material or symbolic profit'. Literature is an arena in which symbolic but no less serious struggles over resources, access and authority occur:

[19] For theoretical elucidations of this social criticism see Bourdieu (1993:120), and Fiske (1992:154). 'The institutionalization of an imperialist discursive form under the guise of a neutral (objective, truth-serving, self-evident, ideologically disinterested) rationality is the source of the current cultural-social power in the South African academy. The situational, historical and ideological basis of the controlling voices in literary studies is effectively concealed' (Ryan 1990:4). See also Spivak (1990:1-16) on 'universal intellectuals'.

> Poems? You want poems? We got poems!
>
> Poems to make you dream
> while the rulers of the country are busy.
> Poems to send you to sleep
> While they test their tanks and guns.
>
> We got poems.
>
> Poems for you and your aftermeal sleep.
> Poems which do not disturb you nor
> The quiet of a Sunday afternoon.
> When the sermon in the morning was comforting
> And the chicken at lunch was tasty.
>
> We got poems.

Horn's response to the cultural struggles of the 1980s was to challenge defensive liberal objections to thorough-going social transformation[20]. In 'The seventh elegy' Horn (1991:94f) urges his readers to ignore the polemics of the disinherited beneficiaries of apartheid. The poet understands his audience ('we') to be comrades who resist the oppressive system:

> There will be those who only see the ruins: the
> shortsighted
> vision of the disinherited of the revolution will
> be with us
> for some time. They, who no longer own the riches
> of the previous times
> nor yet the riches of the rising time:
> but let us not be confused by them.

While critics like Watson have focused narrowly and normatively on issues such as the quality of expression, the challenge for most committed writers and critics was to begin to construct a radical discursive space against, and despite, the repression of the State and the opportunism of more privileged peers.

Watson concludes the 'Under Pressure' essay with a defensive attempt to prop up his elitist assertions of value by referring to the supportive remarks of his students, some of whom, he suggests, may have been black. Even if race were not an issue, the

[20] Like Horn, other progressive white writers such as Jeremy Cronin and Kelwyn Sole have also addressed 'the reality behind the mask: behind the real prosperity of a part of the population, and behind the general complacency, one discovers a world typified by guilt and schizophrenia, a world from which one's fellow men [sic]—those "unlike likes"—have been banished' (Alvarez-Pereyre 1984:251f).

unequal nature of academic-student relations raises the spectre of the 'Native Informant'[21]. The overworked, racist construct of the 'Native Informant' has long been pilloried by Wally Serote (1972:9) in 'The Actual Dialogue', and by Watson's colleague Peter Horn (1991:75). While Horn's title 'A Vehement Expostulation' parodies upper class English histrionics, Horn's speaker represents a caricature designed to challenge the hypocritical demands conservative liberals make of their 'Native Informants' by way of securing their material, social and psychic comfort:

> This Meddem, is the situation as I see it:
> We live in a black-out. I can't paint it white
> with words. But for ready cash there are dominees
> [...]
> So what do you expect, Meddem? That I write
> soothing verse
> to send a few million trusting souls to sleep?
> Do you imply that I don't do my duty,
> if I am desperate? Or that I should write about
> daisies?
>
> Or do you, Meddem, under these circumstances,
> expect me
> to write well balanced, polished verse? About what?
> Armies? Revolutions? Bloodshed? Apartheid?
> Or a hilarious sonnet about our impending peace?
>
> Praise be the absent Lord! You never know,
> one day I might become responsible and write
> some exquisite and contrived poem
> about my complicated soul (Horn 1991:75)[22].

In contrast to the fears of conservative liberal critics like Watson, Kelwyn Sole (1990:62) takes a more open and constructive approach consistent with democratic process, where standards evolve through contestation. In a talk given to the English Academy of South Africa in 1986 Njabulo Ndebele (1991:101) characterised the chauvinism that drove its members to try to expand the influence of the language while retaining control over it as the 'art of giving away the bride while insisting that she still belongs to you'. Ndebele was responding in particular to Butler's (1985) essay 'English and the English in the new South Africa'. The writer and anthologist Mothobi Mutloatse (1980:5) was equally assertive in his refusal to entertain liberal prescriptions

[21] See Spivak (1990:66). Watson's ventriloquism further confirms the accuracy of Spivak's (1987:107) and Trinh Minh-ha's (1989:67) portrayals of the cynical ways in which intellectual discourse can be used to commandeer oppressed people.

[22] Horn first published the poem in his 1979 anthology *Silence in Jail*.

based on Western bourgeois notions of artistic form:

> We are not going to be told how to re-live our feelings, pains and aspirations by anybody who speaks from the platform of his own rickety culture. We'll write our poems in narrative form; we'll write journalistic pieces in poetry form; we'll dramatise our poetic experiences; we'll poeticise our historical dramas. We will do all these things at the same time.

conclusion

In the 1990s the institutional power of the conservative liberals remains secure, and they use this privilege to disseminate minority values and to naturalise their continuing economic and ideological domination. This has been evident in the reception of Albie Sachs' paper 'Preparing ourselves for freedom' (De Kok & Press 1990:19-29), and, in particular, the response to Sachs' (1990:19) partly serious, partly tongue-in-cheek proposition that 'our members should be banned from *saying* that culture is a weapon of struggle'. Despite Sachs' framing statement and his subsequent reminders that his paper was written for an audience of ANC cadres in exile, many of the beneficiaries of oppression (including conservatives) used the paper to support their contention that literature should be apolitical. Therefore, instead of cautioning cadres against the use of rhetoric as a substitute for action, Sachs' words were used to quell politically-sensitive literary constructions.

There has been little question of taking into account positions that challenged Sachs, such as Meintjies (De Kok & Press 1990:30-35) and Malange *et al* (1990:99-103). For instance, in 1995, Rolf Solberg was still eliding Sachs' point in his comment that 'Albie Sachs suggested putting a ban on the Struggle as a theme for writers' (Attridge & Jolly 1998:181). This was stated during an interview with Wally Serote, who responded to a question regarding 'protest literature' in the following way: 'I don't want to call anything protest poetry. It is a very unfortunate category and name' (Attridge & Jolly 1998:181). It is symptomatic of the continuing hegemony of conservative liberal scholarship in South Africa that there is only an uneasy defensiveness in response to such questionable constructions. Clearly the maps (i.e. the representations) of the conservative liberal hegemony cannot be mistaken for the territory, any more than the maps of the ancient cartographers who thought that there had to be dragons in the region of southern Africa. Scholarship that addresses the resistance literature with greater rigour and ideological clarity is needed if we are to learn more about the subject than the inclinations of its professional observers.

Department of English
University of Durban-Westville

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Academic Exchanges

Shane Moran

The state of tertiary education in South Africa has been described in the following terms:

> Finally, higher education is beset by legitimacy problems. In general the historically white institutions (and a number of black institutions) possess little moral and political legitimacy. Contrastingly, the majority of black institutions (and a few white institutions) have little or no academic credibility. Overall, the 'system' is seen as one that perpetuates inequality, is hugely wasteful, and fails to serve the human-resource needs of the country. Higher education in South Africa fairly accurately reflects the society within which it is located (Moja & Cloete 1995:50).

Confronted with this legacy, the Government White Paper 'Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education' (July 1997) declares that the purpose of higher education in South Africa is to contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructive citizens possessed of reflective capacity and a willingness to review and renew prevailing ideas. The authors of the White Paper propose upholding rigorous standards of academic quality and these pedagogical, political and ethical goals are to be achieved in a context where the funding differences between historically white and black universities remain, and fee-free higher education for students is not an affordable or sustainable option. In short, South African universities are being called upon to become more representative in a country embracing political transformation along the lines of liberal capitalist democracy with its mixture of considerable political freedom and persisting socio-economic inequality[1].

The authors of the White Paper view the relationship between institutions and society in terms of establishing an appropriate balance between institutional autonomy

[1] 'The economy in the South Africa continues to largely represent what it was in 1993, except that there is some growth (jobless) and a few black faces and companies that participate in it. Otherwise it is business as usual' (Sam Shilowa, *Mercury Business Report*, November 28, 1996). In the run up to the 1999 elections, COSATU has been reminding the ANC that the will of the people, expressed in the 1994 election, did not sanction the market-driven policy of GEAR. Tony Leon, neo-Thatcherite leader of the Democratic Party, has responded stoically to such 'deliberate insults and repudiations of the government and its policy' by defending GEAR and asserting that COSATU is 'arguing against the grain of history' (*New Nation*, May 30, 1997). President Mandela and Deputy President Mbeki reiterated the same to the South African Communist Party's 10th congress (see *Sowetan* July 2, 1998). Jeremy Cronin responded to the redistribution-through-growth or growth-through-redistribution non-debate in *Mail & Guardian*, July 10-16, 1998.

and public accountability. Although academic freedom is affirmed as a fundamental right protected by the Constitution, institutional autonomy is delimited by the need to redress the injustices of the past and meet the demands of globalisation. The stress on the material factors that constrict academic freedom echoes the 1990 'The Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility':

> Intellectual freedom in Africa is currently threatened to an unprecedented degree. The historically produced and persistent economic, political and social crisis of our continent, continues to undermine development in all spheres. The imposition of unpopular structural adjustment programmes has been accompanied by increased political repression, widespread poverty and immense human suffering (in Daniel *et al* 1995:234f).

The homeopathic capacity of the market to open up opportunity and the necessity of affirmative action are balanced by awareness of the pitfalls of structural adjustment, principally the (supposedly short-term) contribution of monetarist policies to the emisseration of large sectors of the population. Although education is often dependent on a system that takes care to ensure that the great majority of those with equal rights shall get only what is essential for bare existence, higher education has an unmatched obligation to support a democratic ethos and fragile civil society. The earlier 'Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom and Autonomy of institutions of Higher Education' (1988) also addressed itself to economic factors, and stressed that:

> Academic freedom is an essential precondition for those education, research, administrative and service functions with which universities and other institutions of higher education are entrusted (in Daniel *et al* 1995:230f).

A notable continuity between the Lima and Kampala declarations is the declaration of the *right* to education rather than the *de facto* guarantee of free tertiary education. The South African White Paper reflects this thinking and, given the democratic advances and the existence of a state that can now claim legitimacy, curtails the Kampala Declaration's commitment to institutional autonomy in the face of potentially authoritarian state power.

The foregrounding of the social function of South African universities provides an opportunity to reflect on their democratising role and the contribution of academic autonomy to general freedom. In this essay I will indicate some of the challenges facing academics engaged in institutional democratisation and social transformation. Four areas will be addressed: 1) the connection between academics and democracy; 2) attempts to claim legitimacy in South African English literary studies; 3) South African feminisms; and 4) feminist literary studies.

academics and democracy

The tendentious debate on the higher education sector in South Africa has elicited a contribution from Kwame Anthony Appiah, Chair of Committee of African Studies at

Harvard. Appiah sees the university as an agent of reform that must preserve its relative autonomy *vis*-à-vis the state. Although the power of academics is limited, they can and should contribute to the transformation of society by resisting the regulation of university life according to the supply and demand of the marketplace and according to a purely technical ideal of competence. The correct recipe for South Africa is to be found in

> modern liberalism .... as the context for our reflections on the future of the university curriculum (Appiah 1997:79).

Liberals living in globally illiberal times can aid transformation by reiterating central beliefs:

> We believe in private property and we believe in civic equality: but we also support progressive taxation (Appiah 1997:79).

Appiah (1997:80,97) traces the language of liberalism to Kant, noting that 'individual autonomy is at the heart of political morality', and argues for the role of academics in 'the recreation of South African society'. The new South Africa, as the home of radical liberalism, and teachers of English literature in particular, can go beyond the utilitarian imperatives of the state and contribute to the autonomy of citizens. The pedagogical contribution to the formation of free subjectivities is envisaged in moral terms, and the study of literature can bring about the realisation of liberal ideals, primarily democratic equality, by transcending divisive ideologies:

> The study of literature, done well, teaches one to engage critically with what one reads; to winkle out sub-texts and presuppositions, to reflect on cultural and historical contexts, to ponder moral and political claims. These are skills beyond grammar: and they are skills that everyone needs if they are to think through carefully the questions that face every citizen (Appiah 1997:96).

As an answer to the interrogative acquiescence that criticism of the system invariably meets with—'Yes, it's very unsatisfactory, we all know that; but what would you put in its place?'—Appiah argues that the South African university can contribute to liberation from the external authority of a corrupt society, and literature is part of this formative, educative, political experience. What are the shortcomings of Appiah's conception of the liberating role of academics and the university?

Firstly, Appiah is repeating key elements of English literary studies; his conception of the anti-ideological role of literature is strikingly close to that of F.R. and Q.D. Leavis—minus F.R. Leavis's iconoclasm and acute sense of the vested interests manipulating institutional power at universities. Significantly Appiah elides a central problem: in South Africa the realisation of liberal ideals hinges on the viability of overlaying divisive and unjust property relations with civic values of respect, equality and autonomy. Today the constitutional declaration of equality has to contend with entrenched socio-economic inequality, and the promotion of formal democratic values coexists with the perpetuation of oppressive and unequal social relations. Here the

envisaged equity of opportunity for appropriation grounded in reciprocal contract and obligation is undermined by the persisting reality of possession by misappropriation[2]. Those working within vital centres of epistemic power and conflict like the South African university—where the social identities of academics are forcefully intertwined with the metonymic forces of political representation—are in a position to register a conception of academics at variance with the ideal of facilitators of critical thinking and autonomy. Students can have a less benign view of the social function and intentions of those employed to shape them into better citizens. Universities are not themselves democratic structures, and the vision of the popular involvement of the community within the university is not the same thing as democratic participation and control of the institution. Rather universities exercise authority over their student constituency and back this up with coercive power; authority is defended by other social and political institutions that are committed to the protection of property, and which do not necessarily share the same enlightened principles as the university.

Appiah fails to register that the autonomy of the academic committed to social justice is constrained by being located within an ameliorationist social institution that functions to both counteract *and* reproduce the inequity of existing property relations. Academic freedom is part of a broader historicisable ideology of individualism that both legitimates and challenges social inequalities. The degree to which Appiah's argument pre-emptively positions potential dissenters as anti-democratic provides a glimpse of the Janus face of the new world order that moralises capitalism in terms of progress and freedom. This effectively excludes a vital political and pedagogical question: whether, within the parameters of capitalism, the contribution of the humanities towards producing autonomous, critically thinking individuals able to see beyond current conditions and create new opportunities is best achieved by instilling consent through Rousseauistic sentiments of sociability, or by encouraging the radical interrogation of civil society (see Muller & Cloete 1991).

The possibility that factors of location and context, sites of institutional power and discursive privilege, are enacting oppressive epistemic relations haunts those who work in the shadow of 'Bantu Education'. In response South African intellectuals, and academics within English literature departments, have produced their own tradition of reflection on political pedagogy.

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[2] 'At least one person was shot dead and another stabbed on Tuesday this week, when police and 300 private security guards moved in to demolish a burgeoning informal settlement on the outskirts of Randfontein's Mohlakeng township, in terms of a court order granted last month. The South African National Civic Organisation (Sanco) condemned the "brutality and heavy-handedness" of the action and accused the [ANC] council of dishing out "worse treatment" than apartheid-era councillors' (*Mail & Guardian* October 10 to 16, 1997). Which cautions against the precipitate triumphalism of such claims as: 'Today when apartheid is—still incredibly—a thing of the past' (Louvel 1997:121).

academics and legitimacy

In the 1940s Geoffrey Durrant returned to Natal after studying English at Cambridge and announced the critical task of addressing

> how thought can be made free, not only from government tyranny, but also from the more subtle and pervasive tyrannies of commercial society (Durrant 1944:1).

The role for English literary studies was 'to humanise our knowledge and to make our Universities into centres of living thought for the whole community' (Durrant 1945:19). Durrant (1948) drew attention to the historical context of the production, reception and teaching of literature, and appealed for a more democratic post-war settlement in which a revised education system could combat the problems of modernisation and foster critical attitudes in students. Responding to the state's consolidation of racial capitalism, Durrant (1955) appealed for the preservation of the humanising value of literature in a hostile ideological environment[3].

Beyond the university in the 1950s, South African radical intellectuals saw the formulation of the aim of pedagogy as the mere transmission of culture as a reactionary attempt to rob education of its potency and force. Recognising that teachers have always held a hybrid position as quasi-civil servants and that they are paid by the very agencies of the government they may seek to challenge, claims were made for the counter-hegemonic potential of pedagogy. In a vibrant and now largely forgotten debate teachers and activists beyond the university interrogated the link between enlightenment and the political task of transforming the country by political struggle. The limitations and potential of political pedagogy were delineated in the context of the principle of non-collaboration with the racist state where participation in government institutions amounted to collaborating with the oppressors[4]. Arguing against erecting the tactic of the boycott into a principle, Walter Sisulu (1957) proposed that participation in these institutions may at times be the most effective method of exposing them and struggling for more effective representation. A varied discourse of revolutionary praxis sought to address the oppressed masses with the call to challenge all existing centres of legitimacy, and transform institutions from an alien social power. Revolutionary enthusiasm was accompanied by sober warnings against overestimating the political effect of pronouncements by pedagogues in a context marked by a constricted and distorted public sphere.

By the early eighties, and then writing from outside South Africa, Durrant

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[3] See Ndebele (1973), Kirkwood (1976), Sole (1977), Vaughan (1984), Attwell (1984), Visser (1986), De Kock (1992), and Johnson (1996) for critiques of the South African English liberal legacy.

[4] See E.L. Maurice (1952) and the response of A.K. Jordaan. See Also Tom Lodge's (1984; 1986) accounts of the 1955 school boycotts and role of teachers in the PAC's Poqo during the 1960s, and Hyslop (1991).

(1981:28) reasserted the goal of developing 'critical intelligence' and the preservation of 'academic autonomy' against crude demands for 'relevance' and 'commitment'. This involved the attempt to 'formulate a coherent programme of humane education' responsive to changing historical conditions, an education centred on the question of literature's 'humane significance' capable of providing nourishment 'for minds struggling with the question of how to live' (Durant 1981:29,38). Within South Africa the prospect of the demise of the racial state and the challenge of creating a more representative multicultural university renewed a sense of the social mission of English literary critics aiming 'to keep alive the possibilities of debate about human and artistic issues' by means of 'a radical-liberal consideration of connections between artistic and critical response' rather than a 'revolution of the existing paradigm of literary studies':

> It is true, for example, that some tendencies within Marxism are usefully assimilable .... other tendencies are ultimately unassimilable, principally in their insistence on identifying, and taking strongly aligned positions about, conflicting forces in an otherwise observable social reality which all writing, in its content, is supposed to reflect, or even mediate .... Given the present-day responsibility of the university to a heterogeneous humanity and social structure, it seems to me that literary studies may best serve students, whatever their race or ideology, by means of searching modifications and changes within the existing model (Chapman 1985:157,159)[5].

Within the many cross-currents of debate the 'focus on moving the government towards reform' was accompanied by a felt need to counter 'an autocracy of a Marxist/Leninist kind', and the worry was

> that although ending apartheid is important, it ought not to obscure the equally important task of creating a democratic culture which will support a post-apartheid democracy (Frost 1988:15).

The shape of the anticipated dispensation continued to exorcise anxious academics confronted with a crisis of university funding that continually reminded them of their status as state employees (see Greaves 1988; Moulder 1988). Some English literary

[5] Subsequently consideration of 'capital surplus' and 'socialist redistribution' was shifted outside of South Africa to Ngugi's Kenya, Fanon was characterised as a cultural nationalist, and Achebe and Irele elevated as model African humanists—'the latter is even designated "bourgeois" by younger Marxist critics in his country' (Chapman 1989:23f). The ideological overtones of this manoeuvre suggest the naivetè of Doherty's (1990) claim that the failure of Marxian materialist analysis to gain instititional power in English literary studies can be attributed to its lack of pedagogical practice. Rather there was a noticeable consonance between reformist academics and pronouncements from progressive segments of capital anticipating increased accumulation from the dismantling of apartheid and calling for the creation of unifying national symbols necessary for a stable ideological environment (see Berger & Godsell 1988). President Mandela has become the fulcrum of a constellation of benevolent symbols of national unity, and the subject of academic hagiography (see Chapman 1995).

academics optimistically attributed the underfunding of education to racist policies:

> irrational government policies—military and constitutional—in defence of segregation and white privilege can be held directly responsible for the shortage of funding we suffer (Maughan-Brown 1988:48).

Concern was expressed that 'the enlightening and emancipatory powers of education and culture' would fall before the

> escape into pseudo-revolutionary rhetoric whose verbal activism often conceals a spiritual and intellectual emptiness (Lieskounig 1989:25,29).

Forebodings that the university will not be guided by 'the best reason but by the lowest common denominator', were accompanied for some in the humanities by a renewed sense of mission and an abiding faith in the ability of the liberal remnant of the English community to facilitate liberal democracy. English literature teachers were seen to have a role in alerting students to the prejudices of the 'common mind—be that a Nationalist mind or an African Nationalist mind' (Nicholson 1989:4,10). Others legislated in terms of the ANC's 1988 *Constitutional Guidelines*, and an ideal of reciprocity between those within the university and the broader community was seen to rest on a revindicated social contract, the removal of the toxin of racism from the socio-economic sphere, and recognition by white academics of the need 'to become for a time the European-other' (Chapman 1989:21).

Reformist academics articulated the principles of legitimism against revolution in terms of a pluralist model of democracy that respected the rights of minority groups but also recognised the primacy of the general will of the people. The hierarchies, forces and tensions of the university were viewed in functional terms amenable to modifications capable of re-tooling institutional practices (distorted under the pressure of a despotic state) for a new political environment. The duty of English literary academics was conceived in terms of reflecting the experiences of a national constituency *and* utilising the cathartic potential of education to enable students to transcend corrosive ideological interests (see Morphet 1990; Wright 1992). The fact that such conciliatory and well intentioned calls were issued from an institutional and bureaucratic space embedded within the material structures of a distributive system that oppressed the masses was not allowed to disturb the sense of the legitimacy of the humanising mission. Discourse on the liberatory functioning of the university in an era of transformative reconstruction has taken the form of a shuttling between a vision of the university as a vital organic component of democracy and acknowledgement of the élite and marginal class status of academics.

The courage of those advocating the progressive vision in the era of the state's 'total strategy', and the merit of this vision over its reactionary counterparts, should not be underestimated. Efforts within universities to counter the apartheid state by opening up the university and providing a platform for opposition were a vital contribution to the

liberation struggle[6]. But it is also important to recall that, whatever their declared principles, liberal South African universities opposed in principle to the evolving policy of apartheid did practise segregation on their own initiative before either 1948 or the Extension of University Education Act of 1959. In an era of transformation the role of educational institutions in promoting inequality and privilege remains obscured behind declarations of critical rectitude and exhortatory encomia claiming that, as

> an institution traditionally founded on principles of democracy, universalism and non-racialism, the university has a duty and a moral obligation to contribute to nation-building (Khotseng 1994:5).

When the 'principles' of the university function within the integuments of an oppressive socio-economic system, pronouncements by academics extolling the virtues of citizenship and democracy can conceal unequal relations behind a juridical form of equality. Affirmations of electorialism and constitutionalism emanating from universities employing abstract collective postulates (general will, people, nation, culture, community, etc.) are designed to serve as principles of unity and equality, but they can equally function to fix arbitrary and unequal relations between persons conceived as agents. It is notable that the reformist rhetoric of representationalism and constitutionalism of progressive university mission statements has not challenged existing property relations but rather promoted a redistribution of 'opportunity' as the key to equity[7]. Valedictorian professions of marginality aside—'academics in positions

[6] However Vuyisile *et al* (in Fernando 1990) give an account of opposition to the apartheid state from within tertiary education stressing that the main points of opposition were black universities. Those working within the relatively high degree of autonomy enjoyed by the South African English speaking universities (Cape Town, Witwatersrand, Natal, Rhodes) produced a low intensity opposition guided by liberal ideals and a radical scholarship. For a discussion of education practices and policies in South Africa and the role of research in historically black universities see Randall (1985), Chisholm (1992), and Reddy (1992) respectively. The essays collected in Moss and Obery (1989) provide an overview of the struggle in the late 1980s.

[7] In this connection see Giliomee's (1981) rejection of Milton Friedman's economic medicine for South Africa, and Nasson's (1990:173) critique of De Lange's 1981 modernising educational reforms that sought to tune education to monetarist policy: 'there is precious little evidence that the disciplines and incentives of the market will reduce social inequality'. See also Kallaway (1984) and Davies (1984). Nevertheless Myles Holloway (1998:40) can still hope that 'English in the next millennium will ... be marked ... by a new awareness of the creative and commercial power of our commodity'. This formulation does not address the issue of who has access to 'our commodity'. A recent report on curriculum development at the University of Natal notes that the perception of the student market has modulated from 'disadvantaged', 'underprepared', 'non-fee paying' and 'second language' to 'the awareness that *all* university students could benefit from—indeed, needed—a more or less explicit introduction to university study' (Green 1998:41e.i.o.). The author omits the forces that filter access to the supposedly representative category '*all* students'.

of power are often "othered" by populist democratic discourse' (Malan 1995:22f)—the privileged subaltern continues to speak.

If the university is well-positioned historically to promote the principles of negotiated transition (inclusion, conciliation, consensus, and stability)—and so instrumental to the project of nation building that requires a wide range of symbolic and discursive interventions integral to the formation of a new national consensus—it is also true that the university reproduces the tensions, conflicts and injustices of society in the process of reflecting on these phenomena. The university is one of the circuits whereby wealth and privilege are distributed that is able to both register and subsume the fissures of the polity beneath the prospect of national unity. As well as providing a medium for the production of modernising élite, corporatist-style élite pacting and social stratification, the institution is as likely to display a 'duty and moral obligation' to itself and work to ensure its own existence.

The image of the university as the point of intersection of social obligations—a type of autonomous but responsible moral legislature mediating between the executive and civil society—obscures the position of institutions within a system of law that depends on a sanctioning power backed up by consent and violence[8]. When universities refer to themselves as 'communities', as civil societies in miniature, the divisive power relations within the institution that do mirror the civil war of society at large, along with the material interests of the academic knowledge class (centred on job security), are minimised. There can be no simple exchange of political imperatives for academic imperatives despite recent highly political calls for the depoliticisation of the university:

> Most HBUs became sites of struggle during the 1980s (and a few long before the 1980s), but this *political* project must give way to the *academic* project of the 1990s if these universities are to be reconstituted as *universities* in post-apartheid South Africa (Switzer 1998:5).

South African feminisms

In its identification of the university as a site of struggle, South African feminisms hold out the promise of critically interrogating the social function of the university and the norms of academic discourse. Feminist scholars have drawn attention to the factors that frame pedagogical practice, and set themselves the task of uncovering the complex hierarchies that structure the university. South African academics have scrutinised discursive regimes and institutional practices within the often nepotistic and sexist power relations of the academy where in 1990 men constituted 73% of academic staff.

[8] For example, the 1997 disturbances at the University of Durban-Westville involved the university management calling in the services of an armed private security firm accurately named 'Combat Force'. Maseko's (1994) account of the UWC SRC explores the dynamics of student participation in institutional transformation.

The part that gender plays in academic power relations is difficult to ignore in a context where, in addition to the (non-sexist) possibility of their research being plagiarised by faculty members, female postgraduates can confront an abusive institutionalised power offering preferment in exchange for sexual labour. The struggle continues when those same senior colleagues act as editors with control over publication. One might expect the question:

> What would [feminism] mean within the manifold practices that constitute the university—to take only one terrain in which political struggle and academic enquiry are enmeshed? (Schalkwyk 1990:61)

to have far reaching consequences when these practices, as in other institutions, carry a legacy of autocracy. But in a manoeuvre that will be repeated by other writers, David Schalkwyk (1990:61) is able to deflect any analysis of institutionalised practices into the pathos of generalised oppression that includes

> me/n, marked, burdened for as long as the practices that constitute it are allowed to continue, with the sign of the Phallus.

The sexism of academy gets lost behind a vision of feminism as an ethical project rather than a struggle with specific power structures and their beneficiaries. The sentiment of empathy is central to Cecily Lockett's (1990:17f) proposal that feminist academics

> will have to develop a more sympathetic womanist discourse for considering the work of black women .... it is our place as educationally and institutionally privileged critics to listen to their voices as we formulate approaches to their work.

Only then might it be possible 'to bring about a necessary paradigm shift in the institutionalised power structures of English departments'. For Jenny de Reuck (1990:31) the role of academic as empathetic auditor motivated by an ethics of solidarity is reassuringly unproblematic, and she offers the following prescriptive censure of prescription:

> Clearly, within the bounds of decorum one can speak 'about' other people: one can legitimately evaluate other people's strategies, theories and practices, for example. Of course, when they are academic, such undertakings must be sensitive, searching and not prescriptive.

Ethics levels the playing-field of historical victimisation and empathy opens up the decorous possibility of understanding and community; the legitimacy of the institution and the efficacy of its discourses and personnel are vindicated. The faith is that responsible academics can work from within institutional discourse to transcend its obvious limitations; otherwise

> one would end up in a solipsistic cage where the historian would have to abandon his or her work in favour of autobiography and the specifics of personal history only (Walker 1990:7; and see Fouché 1992; 1994).

The composition of the personnel of the university defined in terms of gender, race and class frames the ability of those academics to work against domination. But with careful examination of their own practice academics can move beyond essentialist determination by social identity to clear a space for the (self)representation of South African women:

> We can use our positions as feminists within the academy to change current reading practices (Ryan 1990:28).

In a context where the university is one of the centres of the culture of imperialism as well as the site of its contestation, attention to social identity in the form of subject-positionality holds out the possibility of avoiding insensitivity:

> Historically produced differences between feminist academics and their subjects may, and almost certainly do, lead to misunderstandings, blind-spots, insensitivity within feminist research. Elite researchers, black and white, need to be acutely aware of this problem. But if difference can also be used creatively, to power a genuinely dialectical interaction between two vigilantly foregrounded subject-positions, perhaps more progress can be made towards understanding and changing the situation of all South African women (Arnott 1991:127).

Liberatory potential is dispersed into a general resource of academic autonomy and integrity capable of subverting dominant discourses and practices. For Shireen Hassim and Cherryl Walker (1992:83) what must be maintained is the difference between political activism and an academic discourse that

> depends for its success on a different set of principles: rigour and clarity, intellectual honesty and adventurousness. These principles require a context of relative autonomy from the immediate political imperatives, even though they may be informed by broader political projects.

Sisi Maqagi countered liberal complacency by linking academic practices to social identity and political representation in order to position academics' historically specific interests. Recognition and reciprocity serve the ends of self-legitimation as academics exercise the 'habit' of power; generalising their particular interests and minimising the persisting distribution of the material means to enjoy rights. Maqagi (1990:23) pointed to the unbridgeable experiential gulf opened by the racialised class position of South African academics offering sensitivity:

> Privilege, with all its concomitant oppressive structures, widens the gap between the experiences of black and white women. How can Lockett understand black women and theorise about their work when she is unable to shift from her position?

Under a veneer of egalitarianism, academic decorum as the maintenance of self-legitimising discursive manoeuvres might regulate an oppressive group solidarity at the expense of others. The social function of the university may be to reproduce rather than challenge existing social relations, and identifying centres of power in specific historical contexts has the aim of reaching beyond the academy to use the political threads of opposition to weave together women from divergent social and historical locations[9]. This has involved distinguishing between institutional policy and the actual function of academics in order to avoid both corporatising academic work in accordance with declared institutional aims or subsuming the intra-institutional context of academic work in an ideal of transcendent individual autonomy that both enables and is the goal of academic work.

Maqagi's approach implicitly challenged the claim that academics are by vocation involved in working to realise the freedom of students, and that the progressive potential of academic discourse is signaled by the exchange of conflict and struggle for 'diversity' and 'dialogue' within the broad consensus of pluralism. Defensive accusations of racist counter-racism and the opportunities for strategic patronage secured by the screening of incoming personnel work in the interests of those retaining, but willing to modify, institutional hegemony. Those using the language of reciprocity may well be furthering their own interests and expressing the natural satisfaction of the beneficiary; the confession of a potential lack of neutrality (the problem of the 'ownership of knowledge') can be but one more ruse towards appearing more responsible. The stubborn intuition of rightful possession and the sincere intention to combat injustice do not cancel out the crisis of self-justification, the hypocrisy of a power that cannot be justified and which is perceived as usurpatory. Analysis of the power relationships sedimented in academic work is required, with the aim of transforming existing practices and concepts within the profession itself and its

[9] According to Belinda Bozzoli (1991:14): 'A combination of a materialist and an Africanist understanding is surely necessary for this process [of colonisation] to be adequately captured'. See those engaging with the work of sociologists, historians and anthropologists examining the structuration of social identity: Bozzoli (1983), Gaitskell (1983), and the essays collected in Clingman (1991). But the fact that materialist and Africanist analyses themselves arise within academic contexts (which are often erased by individual writers) also requires analysis. Bozzoli's (1991:1) contention that in a racialised South Africa '[l]iberal mystifications of bourgeois rule are a rarity in this stark order' underestimates the ideological saturation of academic discourse. See also the astonishing claim that universities 'are institutions that have contained within them an inherited logic of conservatism. They have no ideology. They just resist change' (Morris 1992:65).

[10] The conference came in the wake of the Malibongwe Conference, held in Amsterdam in January 1990, organised by the ANC. See Hassim (1991); also Charman et al (1991:40) on the 'watershed for South African women and the ANC. The position and status of women within South Africa were legitimated as political issues to be addressed within the process of national liberation'.

characteristic apparatuses.

The issue of the social identity of academics and the constituencies they can legitimately claim to represent crystalised at the January 1991 conference on 'Women and Gender' held at the University of Natal, Durban[10]. The contribution of academics to general freedom and democratisation was dramatically foregrounded in a series of exchanges between black and white academics and academics and activists at the conference. Feminist academics were challenged to critically examine their social function within an oppressive and unjust historical context. Setting aside Susan Bazilli's (1991:46) fragile apologia—'There is no blame - just history'—a sense of the intensity of debate is conveyed by Kedibone Letlaka-Rennert (1991:22f):

> Two major dichotomies ensued which created a tense and highly charged atmosphere. The great divides were between black and white women as well as activists and academics .... Lame excuses about the need for academic standards to be maintained were used to deflect the substantial neglect of black and activist women alike. Ironically, the subjects of research in most of the presentations were black women but the conference did not include them. It simply commodified their suffering to generate relevant papers[11].

For Beatie Hofmeyr (1991) the 'conference was a great beginning to developing feminist theoretical debate in South Africa'. Desiree Lewis (1992:17f) also registered the opportunity for self-criticism presented by the level of dissent at the conference, and offered the following salutary diagnosis of the failure of community:

> White women's privileges are based on their dependence on and exploitation of black, and particularly black working-class women .... White feminist academics have a vested stake in the silence of black women. As producers of knowledge who have recently created a niche in the patriarchal world of knowledge production, they rely on the construct 'black women' as passive, inarticulate and representable object. Recognition of the interpretations of black women would lead to white feminists' loss of dominance in an academic domain where their hold is already tenuous and threatened, particularly since a high premium has always been placed on authoritative interpretations of the colonised, the underclass, the dominated in South

[11] For Christopher Ballantine (1991) the cause of discord was easy to identify: 'Patriarchy. It impaled us all—female and male feminists alike—on the usual dominant continuum: concious/cognitive/rational/verbal/scientific'. More interesting is Patricia Horn's (1991) observation that the conflict was not only between academics and activists but primarily between activists aligned with newly unbanned and competing women's movements. The complex issue of academics speaking for others resurfaced at the 1992 'Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: Bridges Across Activism and the Academy' in Nsukka, Nigeria (see Hendricks & Lewis 1994; Daymond 1996; Meintjes 1993; Gouws 1993). Chichi Aniagolu (1998) reports that similar problems arose at the first gathering of womanists in South Africa

> Africa. This partially accounts for the reluctance of some to recognise discourse as a site of power relations and to consider the extent to which their self-proclaimed interpretive mastery echoes the broader oppressive relations of racist, classist and patriarchal society.

Lewis (1992:16) detected 'some spurious wrangling about the distinction between "about" and "for"' at the conference and yet referred with approval to 'the views of prominent academics like Gayatri Spivak'. She went on to identify an alliance of '[m]ainstream feminists and neo-Marxists' who employ the tactic of undermining black solidarity by referring to the class position of black academics (1992:21). This cabal of neo-Marxist revisionism and white power is seen as the main obstruction to the opening up of academic discourse. Lewis (1992:17,21) concluded by 'locating a way out of this apparent impasse' which involved opening up interpretations 'to an expanding and non-hierarchical categorisation of positioned interpretations of women's experiences'.

Academic discourse has been central to the proposed solution to the impasse that feminism reaches 'when researchers merely reaffirm their right to represent others' (Hendricks & Lewis 1994:73), and academic exchange degenerates into an eristic contest between experiences. However a suspicion of the norms of a universalising academic 'language of decorous and professional disinterest' entails that the experiences of the oppressed are granted pre-discursive epistemological and moral priority:

> there should be no need for blacks or any other marginalised groups to authenticate their critiques of structural inequalities and power relationships (Hendricks & Lewis 1994:72f).

Still, monopolisation of apodictic infallibility does not rule out the concession that many local feminist literary critics have registered sensitivity to the question of social identity (see Lewis 1993). There is a realisation that the effacement of the privileged institutional space of analysis is not simply dependent on the traditional academic posture of omniscience. Erasure can as well be achieved via positioned interpretations foregrounding social identity when, under the cover of appealing to the ethics of discourse, positional autobiographical anecdotes pre-emptively position potential critics as victimisers. At a time when universities are being called upon to reclaim legitimacy by representing society (and so secure government funding), the metonymic value of personnel and their inferred or declared experiences are clearly commodifiable. The central question, then, is not 'who should write about whom' but 'how we write about others', and whether 'academic and socially dominant feminists [are] universalising their experiences' (Hendricks & Lewis 1994:70f)[12].

[12] See Maharaj (1994) for a theoretical discussion of gender, and Walker's (1994:91) criticisms of Maharaj's 'obscure, academically overloaded terms'.

The methodological and performative question of 'how we write about others' centres on a move away from fidelity to a 'pure Marxism' towards 'post-Althusserian and post-colonial theories' that confront 'discourse as a site of struggle' (Lewis 1993a:17). Deconstruction is welcomed because its 'emphasis on discursive practice counters the Marxist and Althusserian hegemony in South Africa', and post-colonial theory is an aid to decoding 'the persistence of the hegemonising thought in left-wing theories and practices' (Hendricks & Lewis 1994:70,71f). This perspective has intermeshed with a view of post-colonial theory that privileges South Africa and America and excludes the rest of Africa:

> In the United States, with a context comparable to the South African one of interlocking relationships of racial discourses ... (Lewis 1997:2).

The challenge of interrogating the social function of academics has been displaced by modification of the norms of academic discourse that retains an inflated conception of the liberatory potential of academic autonomy. What is obscured in this instance of the current post-Marxist collegiate mantra is the fact that the prioritisation of 'discourse as a site of struggle' as a means of countering the constrictions of an ossified Marxist orthodoxy accords with the Althusserian project of *Tel Quel*. Evidence that the term 'post-colonial' originated in the left-wing theories and practices of economists in the early seventies makes the prospect of transcending the Marxian legacy via this route equally problematic[13]. Sensitivity to the imperatives of an imperialistic academic marketplace results in an ahistorical view of academic discourses that subsumes consideration of the social function of the university and its personnel into the intra-academic question of competing theories.

I turn now to another response to the crisis of legitimacy evidenced at the 1991 Natal conference. This time the attempt to negotiate the power and privilege associated with the representational role of academics, in particular those engaged in feminist literary studies, also foregrounds the question of academic discourse. The ideal of insurgent academics is replaced by the idealisation of the mediating social function of academics and the role of the university. Like its insurgent counterpart, the realisation academic autonomy within a pluralist academe also obscures critical examination of the social function of academics.

feminist literary studies

Margaret Daymond introduces *South African Feminisms*, the 'first collection of South African literary feminist writing to be published in the United States', by reflecting on the 1991 Natal conference at which the 'researcher-theorist's "structural domination" of her subjects, making them into objects of enquiry ... exploded':

[13] See Larrain (1979) on Althusser, and Ahmad (1995) on the post-colonial.

> The researcher-researched division was aligned by black women at the conference with another—that between academics and activists. Academics were charged with assuming to 'speak for' activist women's groups without questioning the implications of their own actions; their doing so in impenetrable academic jargon ... was felt by many delegates to be a deliberately exclusionary tactic. With literary studies what is finally at issue in conflicts such as these is whether a negotiated, rather than assumed, relationship of interests between women can be established. For this to happen, certain recognitions have to be reached by all sides in the South African debate over representation .... power and privilege affect *all* groupings (class, ethnic, religious, age, etc.) and will constantly need to be negotiated .... It also involves learning to 'listen' to those who have been Othered (Daymond 1996:xxf).

The redressive, soteriological 'challenge that academics like me now face is to shed the *habit* of power' (Daymond 1996:xix). This is a habit exercised through, and sustained by, the medium of academic discourse:

> The ownership of knowledge—in its several aspects of representation, interpretation, commentary and theory—is being contested in all branches of feminist activity, within the universities and without. As is now being more widely recognized, the contest out of which new practices will come cannot, however, take the form of a simple polarizing of white and black; that would be to reproduce and perpetuate the Self/Other structures of apartheid. In South Africa, as, I think, in North America, the active entry of black women into feminist politics first served to expose polarity, but now it is diversity, a more complex sense of the shifting effects of 'difference' that is coming to the fore .... essentialism (on which apartheid once thrived) can still be an awkward component of the protest against white hegemony (Daymond 1996:xxii).

Academic discourse is located within an evolving relation between metropole and periphery, and the exchange of intellectual commodities travelling back and forth along corridors of power linking South African universities to those in the metropole is seen as evidence of reciprocal globalisation:

> the developing dynamic between the first and third worlds will inevitably change the centre-margin configuration of the past (Daymond 1996:xxxviii).

Today, in an era of reconstruction, the institution is interpreted as a point of intersecting ecumenical social obligations, and responsiveness to the general will of the people involves restructuring the university to meet the social and political needs of a broader community:

> Thus we work amidst extremes of promise and disillusionment; changes are simultaneously huge and piecemeal, sporadic .... As the legacy of the past is defined and contained, and as new sociopolitical obligations are formulated in interaction with women just emerging from oppression, this moment offers

> the excitement of consciously being in and of history which, while it is difficult and full of contradictions, is perhaps not available to members of more settled societies (Daymond 1996:xxiiif).

Intellectual progress enables the academic to look back over the legacy of the past and shed the 'imported condescension' of traditional South African English literary studies (Daymond 1996:xix)[14]. Despite the difficulty of an

> open, symmetrical dialogue between the country's women .... there are examples of dialogue at work in the polity and of its leading to a strategic cooperation between women (Daymond 1996:xxiii; and see Meer 1997).

The goal of realising abstract rights within the material formations of social conditions is bolstered by the faith that, as an enabling institution and medium of representation, the university can contribute to the establishment of a democratic polity based on negotiation and diversity.

In this vision literature continues to represent the humanising and ethical nature of social obligations, and enables academics to be seen to be recognising such obligations rather than legislating them. Miriam Tlali's stories communicate the stoical pathos of women's lives, and Head's biography becomes an *exemplum*, a story with a moral to move and impress its readers and instruct them in their democratic obligations. The benign values located in Tlali's stories are seen as both universally valid and particular to the historical context of South Africa:

> It is a sad story about makeshift improvisations on tradition which, when read reflexively, suggests the writer's own sense of loss and isolation .... It is the humor of the story, flowing through the anger, which gives it potency—a humor coming from ordinary, daily life (Daymond 1996a:233,235).

The 'arduous process by which Bessie Head' contributed to 'new workings of the imagination' by bringing 'a special sensitivity to the stresses and conflicts faced by

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[14] Elsewhere hindsight enables Daymond (1995:565) to claim that racist legislation did not predate the Afrikaner victory of 1948: 'And this being the early 1940s, neither side in the meeting of "We-Them" is yet positioned by the weight of legislated racial difference (Daymond 1995:565). Unfortunately historians report that legislated racial difference was embodied in segregation and urban controls, the 1927 Immorality Act, the 1936 abolition of the old Cape franchise and the application of Chapter IV of the Natives' Land and Trust Act. In the nineteenth century the British influence tended to harden the hierarchies of race rather than dissolve them, and apartheid was a development of Lugard's system of indirect rule which in turn developed from the Shepstone system in Natal. See Maylam's (1994) argument that municipal influx controls in 1920s Durban innovated the mechanics of segregation and, ultimately, of apartheid.

women' has exemplary status (Daymond 1996a:223,227,229)[15]. In a gesture recalling Leavis' sliding of critic and artist into one composite figure in *For Continuity* (1933), an act of transference reshapes Head, as an outsider interpreting a rural Botswanan community, in the image of the sensitive academic interpreting Head's own writings. The individual (writer) becomes a unifying principle facilitating the mutual recognition of a common humanity or obligations, and the appeal to the subjectivity of the writer and reader effectively cuts the subject off from the forces that determine it.

Barbara Bowen, the U.S. series editor of *South African Feminisms*[16], concludes her overview of scholarship in the immediate post-apartheid years by echoing the theme of developing equity:

> Black women's autobiographies, oral literature, and ritual narrative come under discussion here, not just as rich textual performances but as complex mediations between black and white women, between State power and traditional patriarchy (Bowen 1996:xi).

Texts are conceived as 'complex mediations' between power structures, and academic discourse is the enabling site where these exchanges 'between black and white women, between State power and traditional patriarchy' are registered. The dysymmetrical form of these positions inside and outside the academy recedes behind a utopian conception of the institution as an open network of correspondences[17]. The violent

[15] Isabel Hofmeyr (1992) has cautioned against the 'vague and ahistorical' approach of much feminist literary studies. Nadine Gordimer (1983:96) reacted to Hofmeyr's (1977;1979) historicisation of aesthetic categories within humanistic literary-critical discourse by refusing to 'swallow this (old) view of genius as a class-determined concept' emanating from 'a young white lecturer at an "ethnic" university for South African Indians'. Daymond (1996:xxxvii) commends Hofmeyr's work on oral tradition without informing her U.S. audience that Hofmeyr left a normative and ahistorical South African English literary studies for the more materialist based field of African studies.

[16] *South African Feminisms* was enthusiastically reviewed in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* 1997:23,4 (677-679) by Anthony O'Brien of Queen's College, City University of New York. Interestingly O'Brien is the partner of Bowen.

[17] Even when relationships of power within pedagogy are acknowledged literature remains a facilitator of reciprocity: 'Through exposure to alternative views and by developing the skills required to defend a viewpoint and to recognise good reasons to change one's mind when necessary, students are inducted—as full participants—into the arena of competing ideas and values' (Carusi 1998:33). The continuity of this hegemonic, moralistic view of literature suggests the need to modify Rory Ryan's (1998:22) claim that, within literary studies, there is 'no consensus ... no deep-structure assumption binding all practitioners'.

dominative history of how texts 'come under discussion'—the structuration of those who discuss and those discussed, the legacy of the discourses employed and the media of representation, etc.—remains opaque. The place of literary studies, and academic work in general, within a legal and institutional order developed during a historical process of colonial and neo-colonial expropriation is not addressed. Now the academic is prepared to listen to others but the factors that mediate interlocution are smothered by a rhetoric of reciprocity, and the anti-apartheid spirit of solidarity with the oppressed becomes a disarming platitude obscuring those repressive historical forces that continue to stand in the way of equality[18].

A vision of the university as the facilitator of mutual recognition between those within and beyond the institution, a means or instrument to mediate the transition to a new sense of citizenship, is shared by literary academics at the metropole and in South Africa. The pay-off is that the legitimacy of the university is affirmed and the validation of a writer remains the property of academics as legitimators of knowledges, revisers of canons and prescribers of texts. The chiliastic prospect of equitable exchange between imperialist centre and newly liberated periphery substitutes for the reality of exploitation[19]. In the debate on representation a normative, moralising approach to the transformative role of universities and the liberatory potential of academic autonomy obscures the fact that the existence of universities and their personnel is a legal existence dependent on the general nature of the state which is in turn shaped by the economic conditions of society, formal property relations and law. The pragmatist rhetoric of 'negotiation' presupposes mutually free agents able to contract obligations through agreement, and 'diversity' suggests naturalised variety rather than violently constructed differential stratification. The ideological resonances of such terms in academic arguments for pluralism need to be taken into account if 'positioned interpretation' is to enable academics to avoid 'reproducing the very terms and hierarchies of the institutions' (Boyce-Davies 1995:xviii). That is, if academics mobilising a moralising teleology of restitutive reconciliation wish to avoid facilitating an uncritical reconciliation with the immediate present, with the persisting forms of domination and servitude.

[18] Analysis is exchanged for historical arabesque in the claim that a literary text explores 'the troubles and truimphs of black women so as to bear witness to their courage and inestimable contribution to the healing process for which all South Africans long' (Coullie 1996:150). Consider the following shift in tense: 'The dangers of sweeping abstractions are especially great in apartheid South Africa where deprivation *was* so widespread that it might be robbed of its tragic import simply because the suffering *was* so general, and so anonymous' (Coullie 1997:141 e.a). So general and anonymous for who?

[19] In terms of integration into the global economy, rather than experiencing an evolving reciprocity South Africa appears to be being further marginalised at the same time as apartheid labour segmentation is being intensified: see Padayachee (1997); Marais (1998:ch. 4); and Webster (1998).

conclusion

In a 'post-apartheid' context concerned with restitution and representivity attempts to negotiate the contradictions of academic work are producing a further impasse. Strategically reducing the value of mobilised discourses to intentionality or representivity—to the interest-determined operations of its participants, either in the form of their inferred or professed intentions or simplistically read off from the morphological code of their social identities—produces self-legitimating commodities of exchange that are readily accommodated and controlled by the institutions they claim to analyse. Positionality can disguise rather than expose the hierarchies of power and the circuits of exchange within the academic marketplace, and moralising professions of liberatory intent grounded in social identity are, like normative appeals for reciprocity and equality, part of the institutional currency. On the other hand, the gesture to inclusive pluralism and the move away from privileging social identity in the last instance risks underestimating the forces shaping the institutional site of academic production. The rhetoric of pluralism that unites a diversity of writers within the salariat can be taken to signal the containment of counter-hegemonic projects within the imperatives of professionalisation, a tacit concordat testifying to the co-opting capacities of bureaucratic systems. In this uneasy exchange the historic necessity of institutionalised representivity becomes a marginalist shuffling of personnel that legitimates rather than challenges existing institutions.

Claims to be promoting the pluralist, egalitarian distribution freedom, and counter-claims to the exclusive monopolisation of insurgent potential based on social identity both share a non-liberatory potential. The result of arguing that any academic can, with the requisite decorum, in principle speak about anybody else *or* that the social identity determines in the last instance the ability of academics to work successfully for the representation of the socially marginalised, may be the same. In either case foregrounding the autonomy of academics involves privileging a critical activity that represents the exercise of individual freedom and the realisation of discursive freedom. When autobiographical positioning functions as a kind of auto-justification or *egodicy* the institution is in turn vindicated as the site of a general resource of autonomous critical activity able to criticise other social institutions in the name of general freedom. As part of a general process of instititional self-criticism, the university thereby indirectly affirms the auto-reformist capacity of existing institutions facing widespread legitimation crises: reform is best managed from above in instrumentalist fashion by the self-critical clientele of the hierarchies of power.

Academics trying to highlight injustice by 'speaking about others' in accordance with the insistent imperative to realise what 'ought to be' run the risk of maintaining an intractable reality. This is because academic autonomy can work not only to secure the legitimacy of the university (nominally committed to the free use of reason), but also to validate the possibility of, and opportunity to achieve, freedom within the political economy that currently defines society. Performative gestures of commitment and sincerity testify to a desire on the part of academics to extirpate the legacy of victimisation. However, both the presentistic foregrounding of intention and the pathos of authenticity connoted by social identity can serve to erase the very

histories and contexts at issue.

Department of English
University of Durban-Westville

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The Worm in the Bud: The Divided African State

David Hemson

Review Article

Citizen and Subject:
Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism
by Mahmood Mamdani
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The discourse of the African renaissance, diplomatic initiatives in Southern Africa and beyond, and money-making strategies by South African companies making explorations of the interior have brought the relationship between the peoples at the southern tip of the continent and those of the land mass to the north into the matter of politics and business. The Clinton visit, and his curious punting of opportunities in Africa as a new profitable investment opportunity, brings to life the key issues of SA relationships with the rest of the continent as South Africa appears the centrepiece of international diplomatic initiatives, curiously elevated by American support and intervention. Behind the public blandishments of manifest destiny and economic opportunity lie the root motives of power and money and the accompanying manifestations of familiarity, arrogance and xenophobia.

Apart from the students of foreign policy and specialists of various types, there are few real authorities on Africa in South Africa. Compared to the experiences of those from Europe and the United States, few South African exiles living in the continent have returned with a fluent intellectual interest in the African continent as a whole. The movement of ideas and intellectual exchange over the divide between South Africa and equatorial Africa is perilously confined as the political and economic landscape shifts. The disciplines and focus of studies in South African universities in previous years—with courses such as African Studies and Comparative African Government and Administration—that previously attracted those with a radical interest in continental transformation, with all their evident limitations, have somehow withered on the vine. In many ways African Studies has to be created anew in South Africa, and this is reflected in the current academic controversies over the content and textual basis of African Studies at UCT. Mamdani has conducted path-breaking work in the development of an African Studies which integrates our country and the continent, and simultaneously locates Africa within the global context. His work has been both

theoretical and practical; he has written on population control and the politics of Uganda where he served with distinction on the Local Government Commission.

The intellectual claims of *Citizen and Subject* are broad and all-embracing, and his work quite explicitly carves out a new work from the material of the various histories and destinies of African countries. Mamdani highlights many of the convolutions of the post-apartheid period; its timid advances, the broad mood of acquiescence in a fait accompli among many weary of its potential internal wars, and its ambiguity and crass confusion in relation to the rule of people in the rural areas which is undoubtedly the least reformed aspect of the new period. Mamdani is helpful in going beyond the racial dilemma to point to the real nature of the contest for democracy, the actual obstacles, and provides a thorough examination of the various cul-de-sacs along which advances have been attempted. But his approach does have limitations, principally his identification of South African exceptionalism with political economy; this identification allows Mamdani to jettison the methodological perspective of political economy, a perspective that I believe provides a valuable resource for combating South African exceptionalism.

the things that bind

Citizen and Subject clearly marks out the intellectual antecedents of the current controversies as Mamdani straddles many divides; those between the disciplines of law, politics, cultural studies and sociology; between divisions of African Studies and what he demarcates as South African Studies; and between colonial and post-colonial forms of rule and resistance. Mamdani is a writer who refuses to be trapped in the conservative logic of 'race relations' and the false paradigms of comparative colonial practice, but cuts through the thickets of colonial discourse to reveal the dynamics of divide and rule in a way that illuminates that which previously appeared hazy and obscure. He argues that the majority of Africa's peoples are locked into a peculiar subjection to traditional authorities refurbished and reinforced by colonial practice of decades. This authority remains unreformed by post-independence governments.

In an unusual introduction to the book Mamdani presents his approach in terms of a specifically political methodology that emphasises his preoccupation with the nature of the African state and its practices, particularly in the rural areas. Indeed he rejects the approach of South African Studies which he sees as based fundamentally on political economy. His foundational approach is not theorised at length, it is simply asserted and then defended through an exhaustive examination of various case studies from the continent, effortlessly moving between the literature and experience of Uganda, South Africa, and other countries. Mamdani argues that South African Studies is based on the prejudice of South African exceptionalism, and that it is largely 'economistic' with an overdrawn preoccupation with exploitation that minimises analysis of the form of rule of the African majority.

> With its eye on an irreversible process of proletarianization, it sees rural areas as rapidly shrinking in the face of a unilinear trend. Because it treats

> rural areas as largely residual, it is unable fully to explain apartheid as a form of the state. It is only from an economistic perspective—one that highlights levels of industrialization and proletarianization one-sidedly—that South African exceptionalism makes sense. Conversely, the same exceptionalism masks the colonial nature of the South African experience (27)[1].

South Africa, he continues, is characterised from what he terms a 'labour perspective' by 'semi-industrialization, semi-proletarianization, semi-urbanization, capped by a strong civil society'. For all his spurning of the 'labour' perspective he walks sure-footedly through the writing on trade unionism. But rather than engaging with this tradition critically on its own terms, Mamdani chooses to highlight the 'native question', the conditions of rule over the African people, as the point of departure. The commonality between South Africa and the rest of Africa, he argues cogently, lies in the bifurcated state which characterises both. This monstrosity did not arise as a pure idea out of the mind of the colonial oppressor but evolved from the encounter between authority and resistance not only in Africa but from the wealth of experience, particularly of the British imperial state in India. The key feature of the African colonial state was that it was Janus-faced, showing two faces of the same bifurcated state organised differently in the rural areas and the urban areas. There is a duality of two forms of power under a single hegemonic authority:

> Urban power spoke the language of civil society and civil rights, rural power of community and culture. Civil power claimed to protect rights, customary power pledged to enforce tradition. The former was organized on the principle of differentiation to check the concentration of power, the latter around the principle of fusion to ensure a unitary authority (18).

This experience of stateform is the material of the common despotism which characterises the lives of rural people, deforms civil society, and distorts the claims of genuine democracy and freedom.

Mamdani's argument is surprisingly simple and direct; initially the colonial rulers had a single-minded obsession to annihilate the traditional political system, but after vanquishing the tribes through this initial centralised despotism, the colonial rulers soon reversed this policy and ended up stabilising colonial rule on the social base of traditional rulers. Here lies the worm in the bud. African traditional culture and pre-colonial social structures became intimately interwoven with the apparatus of foreign domination. The idea did not arise specifically from the African experience, although it flowered in the continent, but rather it had its roots in earlier experience. He argues that Britain, the imperialist country par excellence, had the perverse genius of being the first to systematically exploit the authoritarian possibilities in native culture. In reaction to

[1] To avoid repetition, page references to the book are simply enclosed in brackets. References to other texts will be fully indicated.

the rise of resistance employing traditional beliefs, British actions to prevent the dissolution of society are described by Mamdani as being essentially curative in India and preventative in Africa. The British rulers, operating under the overarching aegis of Manchester free trade principles, functioned differently in the colonies as land was defined as customary communal holding. For all the exultation of the individual under free-enterprise capitalism, the African was defined not as native but as tribesperson. He quotes a commentator on colonial administration as follows: 'The genius of British rule in Africa ... was in seeking to civilize Africans as communities, not as individuals'.

A one-sided opposition between the individual and the group, civil society and community, rights and traditions emerged which allowed a cheap and (for a fairly long period) largely effortless method of rule by a small number of bureaucrats over the colonial masses. This form of rule is supremely political, aiming at a frictionless domination over the African people. The respected colonial archivist and strategist, Lord Hailey, is quoted as stating frankly how African life was warped under colonialism:

> The objective of African customary law is primarily designed to maintain the social equilibrium (51).

The success of this schema was, in the view of colonial authorities, that it did not freeze social relations in a pre-conquest stage, but, in a familiar phrase, was a 'transitional stage' towards the integration of Africans as communities, and not individuals, into the modern world. Indeed, indirect rule which has led to the long-term forms of bondage of the rural masses was presented as an important colonial *reform*. What was actually achieved, in Mamdani's memorable phrase was 'decentralised despotism', the rule by foreigners over the masses indirectly through traditional authorities. Although the African masses were powerless, their immediate rulers were given considerable powers over their subjects which eliminated traditional checks and balances. These powers they used to the full. The model of decentralised despotism was monarchical, patriarchal, and authoritarian:

> It presumed a king at the center of every polity, a chief on every piece of administrative ground, and a patriarch in every homestead or kraal. Whether in the homestead, the village, or the kingdom, authority was considered an attribute of a personal despotism (39).

Such were the fruits of colonial reform: foreign rule and colonialism was not openly maintained by the force of arms, it was effectively camouflaged for the vast majority of Africans by local rule through chiefs. On the one side was the unchecked despotism of African over African under the overarching colonial power, on the other was the limited civil society of the towns which largely existed in a racial form, available only to the white colonists and deliberately excluding the African urban people.

Mamdani follows this essentialist reading of colonial history with a free-ranging exploration of the variety of experiences in Africa of British, French and Belgian colonial forms of rule, displaying an unsurpassed skill in analysis and an

uninhibited range of retrieval of the literature of colonialism. The argument in the view of the reviewer is convincing, but it has been made before in less expansive histories[2], albeit without the detailed knowledge, keen logic and self-confidence of the author. What is strikingly original and provocative are the next steps of the argument.

the cheap labour thesis

Mamdani argues that his locus of analysis is the *mode of domination* rather than the *mode of accumulation*. Working within this method he comes to the somewhat startling conclusion that apartheid is uniquely African rather than the political product of the working out of the operation of the cheap labour system. In his words:

> usually understood as institutionalized racial domination, apartheid was actually an attempt to soften racial antagonism by mediating and thereby refracting the impact of racial domination through a range of Native Authorities (27).

Apartheid fractured the ranks of the ruled along a double divide, ethnic on the one hand, rural-urban on the other:

> More than a response to the question of securing cheap labor power in a semi-industrial setting, I have argued that apartheid needs to be understood as the outcome of an *unending quest for order* in a setting both semi-industrial and colonial. Without denying the importance of the semi-industrial context, I have illuminated the significance of the colonial context in understanding apartheid as a form of the state (295; e.a.).

This is a substantial claim and Mamdani has considerable intellectual power to back it. At one level here is a startling new idea, at another we have to ask ourselves whether it is not a one-sided re-interpretation of what has already been established. An exclusively political interpretation of apartheid seeing only its state form while denying any economic logic has a certain advantage in pruning away the inessential. But searching the superstructure for an explanation of the real living processes of apartheid appears to me to be an inversion of the necessary methodological approach.

It is undeniable that one of the routes to apartheid came from British colonial practice. In earlier writing I uncovered the unfolding of what later became the essential features of segregation and apartheid—including the idea of the colonial city being the property of whites, of blacks needing to be ruled by chiefs and needing chiefly control in urban areas, etc.—expanding from the contradictions over labour market forces in the 1870s in colonial Natal (Hemson 1980). The apparatus of control was ready made, and what powered the development of pre-apartheid institutions further along these lines was an economic impulse, a mode of accumulation that interlocked with a mode of domination. The point which needs to be made here is that while the bifurcated state

[2] Such as David Welsh (1971) in his study of native affairs in Natal; and David Kaplan (1979).

provided an overarching framework of rule, the precise form of rule arose from the contradictions of colonial life and were not prescribed in advance. I would argue that the contradictory sides of the state (partially recognising civil society while also increased national oppression) were shaped and reshaped by socio-economic pressures bearing on the political processes[3]. There were indeed contradictions. During apartheid, for instance, for the first time in Africa the African majority were granted entitlement to pensions, albeit on a highly discriminatory basis. Although the primordial features of the apartheid state were present at Union, subsequent changes were not determined from birth but were accelerated by the contradictions of the break-up of older forms of rule. The astonishing material differences between a white bourgeoisie and a black proletariat, the permanence of labour migration, the absurdities of reserve politics, and the dynamics of class organisation among the black majority were to have a decisive effect in the cities which became the main arena of political battle.

Since the cheap labour explanation of segregation is under attack or revision from a number of sources other than Mamdani (see Hindson 1987; Posel 1983; 1997), a considered defence is in order. The spectacular theoretical advances of the 1970s have passed, and the complex reinterpretations of its essential tenets which have followed can be seen as attempts to theorise an essential difference between capitalism and apartheid. The remarkable simplicity of the cheap labour-power thesis—that the reserves sustained the subsidy to the cheap labour-power of African workers—has a powerful explanatory power. The enforced state of impermanence through migrant labour which was sustained for more than a century provided, as Wolpe (1972; 1988) argued, a subsidy to the migrant labourer's wage. The argument, of course, went further than this elemental logic. The reserve and right to access to communal land in the rural areas distorted African urbanisation for an extended period, provided a political pole for the African migrant, and secured African women under direct patriarchal control. For a whole period the argument is incontestable, its strongest confirmation appearing in the arguments advanced by the mining industry to Commissions. The results of the cheap labour system are available in the data of mining as real wages were held constant between 1911 to 1969 on the gold mines (Wilson 1970:66). It also helps provide an understanding of why conquest in South Africa was in a way 'incomplete', why it remained in this state, and why the imperial and Boer war machines stopped short of breaking tribes completely, and, in a remarkably short period of time, turned around 180 degrees to shore up the very system which had provided the primary phase of resistance. We need to remember just how far we have come from the simple-minded idea of the

[3] Kane-Berman (1990) presents the dynamics of civil society as apart of an inexorable change and implicity argues that liberation politics were not necessary; this is stretching the point too far, but undoubtedly social pressures were crucial in breaking up the granite monolith. This makes a nonsense of Kane-Berman's affinity for Inkatha as a defender of civil society and democratic freedom as it has had nothing to do with the mass mobilisation of the oppressed in trade unions and civics which so effectively challenged apartheid strictures. On the contrary it saw these democratic currents as a grave threat to the dominant role it had been accorded in KwaZulu-Natal.

annihilation of the tribal polity which was the first impulse in the colonial administrator's mind. Fear of the complete proletarianisation of African labourers was crucial to the change in policy.

This approach provided a clear link between economy and society but was not innocent of political elaboration, particularly in Legassick's (1974; 1997) work. The support for attempts to reconstruct the reserves, the encouragement of a traditional petty bourgeoisie, the coercive nature of migrant labour whereby African migrants were forced to return and renew links with the rural area, all show a logical connection between the cheap labour strategy and the political superstructure. Later, of course, the cheap labour theory has been contested for relying on a functional and undynamic view of the relations between the political and the economic. It is well known that in the 1960s and beyond, the dysfunctional side of political oppression became clearly apparent and apartheid became in living reality a regime of crisis. The separation between politics and economics became a gulf, and intensified with the economic crisis endemic to late apartheid. But none of this amounts to grounds for rejecting the essential truths of the cheap labour argument in the foundations of segregation and apartheid.

In a sense capitalism appeared in South Africa in a weak form, able only to provide for the capitalist class itself, a white middle class and a privileged working class, while imparting misery and degradation to the majority. Its modernising mission was somehow blunted, its destructive edge against traditionalism held back. Indeed, the very opposite direction is undertaken in policy even though the extension of market relations worked inexorably, if incompletely, to dissolve prior modes of production. More than any other issue, the land question shaped the character of colonial society. The market in land was incomplete and would remain incomplete, and the sustaining of patriarchal relations on communal land became the watchword of the great and wealthy. Capitalism came late and, unlike the situation in post-war South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, the conquerors turned their swords toward the entrenchment of the old order. In these countries the essential hold of old authority on the land was decisively broken. But in Africa the process appears essentially different as the old order is allowed to retain the allocation of land, by and large, and there is no general market in land. In South Africa the most productive and extensive tracts of land were appropriated by the whites, but the chiefs were reinforced in their power over the scraps which remained. Some of these were just sufficient to sustain, not a tribal mode of production, but a modicum of a base for traditional family life and custom. This was enough to disguise the insidious absurdity of the Bantustans from the rural poor. As could be anticipated, the African migrant held desperately on to these plots as a relatively cheap family home. The economic and the political intertwine, separate out, and recombine in different strands to reveal the essential relations of one of the most perverse and destructive societies of our time. The weakness of *Citizen and Subject* is that the mode of political domination is foregrounded at the expense of these other factors. This said, one of the merits of Mamdani's book is its perception of post-colonial political development and the complexity of the broad processes of democratisation.

the post-colonial experience

The development of democracy in Africa in the aftermath of almost universal single-party states is highly problematic, full of the graves of initiatives by radical regimes to bring about real change and of conservative regimes to maintain stability. Mamdani develops a thorough-going analysis of the impasse of African social and political life and a critique of the attempts by urban political elites to bring about change. He locates the limitation for democracy as coming essentially from the failure to expand civil society and to carry the ambit of democratic struggle into the rural areas. Nationalist movements have historically been preoccupied with exclusion from civil society and resistance to alien rule. But, he argues, rural power has not been detribalised and neither has it been joined to the question of democratisation with the result that anti-democratic remnants of 'the rural contaminated the urban'. He argues that the Achilles' heel of the 'second independence movement' aiming to expand civil society and democracy lies in a political failure to grasp what *mode of rule* needs to be democratised. There is an infatuation with the notion of civil society in the towns, 'a preoccupation that conceals the actual form of power through which rural populations are ruled' (288f).

The neglect of the reform of the local state means 'democratization will remain not only superficial but also explosive' (288f). He points to the limited range of democratic rule in countries where the mass of the population may participate in elections which have no effect over the form of rule they experience:

> An electoral reform that does not affect the appointment of the Native Authority and its chiefs—which leaves rural areas out of consideration as so many protectorates—is precisely about the reemergence of a decentralized despotism! (289).

The victor in electoral politics feels entitled to the right to rule over subjects through Native Authorities, to appoint chiefs, etc.: 'the issue in a civil society-centred contest comes to be who will be master of all tribes' (289). The ethnicity of the president is critical as the rural is governed through patrimonial relationships, and rural constituencies are harnessed through patron-client relations, a situation which leads to the depressing conclusion that 'clientism is the only noncoercive way of linking the rural with the urban' (289). Yet this method of rule has explosive results because tribalism in the urban context is corrosive as it has no democratic impetus and carries within itself the promise of civil war. A form of 'urban tribalism' (290) results with civil society itself becoming tribalised. On these foundations the hope for democracy is delusional.

Such are the results of continuing indirect rule by conservative post-colonial regimes. But Mamdani argues that radical nationalist movements, which have sought through militant anticolonial nationalism to detribalise Native Authority and institute single party, face a similar impasse. Militant nationalism is the glue which cements a 'successful linkup between urban militants and rural insurrectionary movements against Native Authorities' (290), and offers a potential for rural transformation. The single party attempted to contain the social and political fragmentation lying at the heart

of Native Authorities but democracy was deeply distrusted as it was 'understood as a civil society-centered electoral reform'. The radical nationalists attempted to depoliticise a civil society whose politics appeared as civil society-based clientelism marked by 'deepening fragmentation along ethnic lines' (290). These regimes became increasingly authoritarian as the centre of gravity in the party-state shifted from the voluntary to the coercive. Development strategies were enforced from above on a reluctant peasantry, and the final result of the 'forced developmental march' (290) was to exacerbate tensions between the rural and the urban. In a chilling phrase from Fanon, the 'militants of yesterday turned into informers of today' as the transcendental goals of liberation were displaced by the sordid defence of power. Yet the exercise of centralised arrogant power does not necessarily abolish chieftainship as there is continuity in administrative power and technique—a 'reinforced fused power, administrative justice and extra-economic coercion—all in the name of development' (291). The radical attempts at change come up against both the obstacles of the existing political culture and those thrown up by their own actions.

Mamdani's analysis is persuasive and it provides a powerful critique of the many attempts to restructure African society from above or to arrive at an accommodation with existing structures. In this dynamic model of political radicalism civil society appears a feeble creature. The weight of a traditional society shored up and reinforced by colonial practice, the intolerance of military dictatorships, and a tendency to become aligned with political opposition movements which simply lay claim to the spoils of power for another excluded middle class group, gives little room for growth. In delineating the locus of power, rural society stands as a disenfranchised but weighty incubus, unable to participate in the broader movement for democracy as it is held in the grasp of a traditional authority revived and reinforced under colonialism. This analysis shows a keen insight into the 'seesaw' (291) nature of African politics and the present impasse of development around the shared axis of despotism. Africans appear trapped on the treadmill of history.

Mamdani's turning away from political economy and stress on the distinctively structural can become particularly rigid, even as it acknowledges the possibility of variance between two dead-end roads. Mamdani rejects an Afro-pessimistic syndrome—which he describes as the rejection of the idea that the continent can rejuvenate itself from within—for critically ignoring the *mode of colonial penetration* into Africa. The idea of recolonisation occasionally played with by this current fails to come to grips with the very legacy of colonialism which has led to barbaric forms of structural violence. But he is very far from an airy optimism (which often shows a callous disregard for the desperate conditions of the African majority), seeing in both the conservative regimes resting on rural despotism and the centralised despotism of the radical one-party states dead-ends for democratic advance. In a sense the book is healthily sceptical about the prospects for a revived and renewed civil society and democratic culture, insisting that the problem be clearly defined before solutions are indulged in. The argument marks a recognition of the structural deformation of the African state warped by colonialism, and trapped between attempts to overcome rural despotism of the chiefs and the alternative strategies of

compromising with the same despotism. All attempts at change come full circle against the inertia of traditionalism which has an extraordinary weight.

Citizen and Subject presents a starkly realistic recognition of the vitiation of civil society in Africa, a landscape with no high ground above various despotic forms of rule. But for all the dazzling display of analystic synthesis and counterpoint, Mamdani appears to stumble in confronting the very monster he reveals; the geological faultline of Africa's substructure is exposed but then our author recoils from bold proposals for change. If there are no proposals for change, then the reader is left with the fatalistic conclusion of an inexorable African reality. Division is ineluctable, between town and countryside, between civil society and rural despotism, between the striving for emancipation and the dead hand of tradition; all appear too weighty to move, too resistant to change for change to succeed. The analysis is sharply structural and bipolar as the two sides of the African divide are identified and mapped, and any shifts in the specific gravity of each are eventually drawn back to their original position of baleful inadequacy.

This argument presupposes an implicit comparison with the accomplishment of democracy in advanced capitalist countries where alternative traditions of democratic practice and civil society have flourished for an entire period. Implicit in the view of established democracy is the idea that these societies have reached their 'end of history', that there is nothing more to be said. While in the post-1990 period any hope in socialist forms of democracy stand vulnerable of being lampooned, I believe that the argument for workers' democracy and socialism as the full flowering of the human potential for genuine social democracy is undiminished. Certainly the expansion and safeguarding of democracy, even in its limited electoral form, is vulnerable in societies where there is sharply growing inequality and social opportunity. In addition the contradictory experience of colonial history and democracy demands explanation: Britain which is the 'cradle of democracy' is also the most astute exploiter of the divisions, both ethnic and social, among the colonial oppressed. There is no simple line of comparative logic between the growth of democratic practice in the West and the present battles for democracy in the economically devastated regions of the world.

the post-apartheid experience

Recent developments show that we in South Africa are far from having escaped from these contradictions. A curious contradiction is evident as traditional leaders insist on their powers while claiming to espouse democracy, and debates about traditionalism end up in the most extraordinary verbal gymnastics with kings, chiefs, etc. all claiming to be democrats. The impasse in local government in South Africa's rural areas is witness to Mamdani's accurate theoretical focus, and it would not be an exaggeration to state that local democracy in the former reserves does not exist at all. Chiefs state they will not tolerate the 'government's councillors' (i.e. those who were elected in the local government elections of 1996), and nobody seems certain who these people are or whether elections took place in their area. The political background to all this uncertainty is clearly that no party wishes to confront the problem of decentralised

despotism. Rather they attempt to accommodate the chiefs, encouraging them in the belief they are somehow part of democracy in South Africa and, indeed, that their rule should be reinforced and privileges extended.

The revival of political life in the run-up to the 1999 election provides lucid examples of the Realpolitik of South Africa which are also those of Africa, illustrating that national political leadership depends on traditional authority for power. The support of the rural people is solicited not directly by campaigning but through the chiefs. This is illustrated by the tendency for Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe to rediscover the cultural and religious significance of the African chiefs, to promise anew a strengthening of their position, and affirm their role in communicating with the ancestors before elections. Similarly there are displays of President Mandela moving familiarly among the chiefs of the Transkei, and our Minister of Constitutional Development promising an *expanded role* for chiefs in local government and their continued control over the allocation of land (SATV 5 March 1998)[4]. Traditional leaders are alive to this courtship and play the game. The leader of CONTRALESA, Phathekile Holomisa, has expressed the fear that politicians want to take power from the chiefs who, he claims, represent the people in the rural areas. He argues that attempts at modernising local government have been made before in Africa and have failed, and they will fail in South Africa because elected councillors don't deliver and Africans are not properly represented in local councils in rural areas (SAfm 1 May 1998). Speaking on behalf of CONTRALESA, he objects to the Ministers deciding on the rank of traditional leaders, who is a king or paramount chief, etc. and demands the same pensions and salaries for traditional and elected leaders (SAfm 2 May 1998). Money is central to the debate about traditional culture. In rural areas where there are development projects, case studies have revealed that decisions about such projects are often taken autocratically by the chief and his councillors. Youth and women are denied participation. The first priority often seems to be to build a road to the chief's house. When food relief is provided it has been reported that the first person to benefit is the chief, who requires food for himself before the children can be fed. Communities complain to the Hearings on Poverty that the chiefs are the main obstacles to development. These are impressions of the actual power relationships in rural areas, and policy statements aim at accommodating these realities.

The recently released White Paper on Local Government (March 1988:4.4,4.3) avoids confronting the issue of power and authority, light-mindedly arguing that there is no conflict between African customs and traditions and democracy, and promising 'additional functions' to be added to those of traditional leaders. The distortion of tradition under apartheid is not mentioned and neither are the obviously enormous problems such as the representation and rights of women, to mention only one crucial question. This policy statement from a democratic government promotes

[4] For some reason these displays of courtship are only registered in the electronic media and not in the press. Speeches are not lodged on the ANC's website of speeches, making a recording of the actual promises and entreaties dependent on note-taking at transmission times!

the idea that the chiefs—who are regarded as 'being the spokespersons generally of their communities'—are crucial to 'maintaining law and order' (4.1). The only impediment to the problem of development is relegated to the minor question of the overlapping between traditional authorities and municipalities. There is paralysis on the key questions. On the crucial issue of whether traditional leaders should have voting rights the White Paper comes to no conclusion at all. The blurring of these issues attempts to conceal the accommodation with the anti-democratic traditional authorities. This is the Realpolitik which Mamdani is sharply alive to and which confirms the main thrust of his argument. These examples of the articulation of modernising elites with traditional leaders illustrate a general tendency in African politics and society: that of modern political change to reach its limits and to seek accommodation and joint rule over the rural people with the chiefs. Customary law unreformed by the embrace of colonialism, the chiefly system, and forms of despotic rule remain the afterbirth of Africa's emergence into independence.

in defence of political economy

Of greatest interest to South African intellectuals is Mamdani's analysis of the inner connections between this colonial tradition, the scalpel of imperialism in the dextrous divisions of African society, and the malevolent flowering of apartheid. The argument that apartheid is the end product of colonialism in Africa, however, which appears so effective and simple, unfortunately also reveals the limits of his hypothesis. While there were intimate connections, colonial practice did not prescribe the outcome of apartheid. We have to draw on the insights provided by the cheap labour theorists to explain its trajectory. Theoretically Mamdani appears to lose the essential link between the political economy of South Africa and the nature of internal divisions; the lines of internal division among the population were most brutally enforced, but they were also fatally flawed. The solution to these manifest divisions, both in South Africa and beyond, lies not in the political or administrative, though both are vital in the reassembly of the notion of African unity and progress, but in the economic and the expansion of the modern sector and the eventual smoothing over of the rasping lines of division by the resuscitation of civil society. This is a function of rural as well as urban society. The early tradition of the Ujamma villages of Tanzania, which were originally the product of rural Africa's imagination before becoming the bureaucratic nightmare of a semi-modernised and authoritarian state, shows the latent possibilities of African initiative and African solutions.

Mamdani expresses severe reservations about the emergence of a vital civil society in Africa. The outlines of the landscape of African realities are presented in broad and effective strokes but the colours are sharply monochromal, purely black and white. The grey shades of change, the slow evolution of society from the customary accession to authority and to the multivarious challenges posed by the individual and disparate interests revealed in civil society, the bending of custom and tradition to the dictates of urban and industrial life (most evident in South African anthropology, but also in the work of the Zambian school of social change), the initiatives of individuals

and communities organising themselves along democratic lines[5], are elusive in this work. He gives priority to the political and administrative, brilliantly portraying the distortion of custom under colonialism and explaining its self-perpetuation, rather than looking towards the contrary tendencies of evolutionary social change and the bending of tradition to the demands of the city. The argument of *Citizen and Subject* is compelling at one level but inadequate at another because Mamdani fails to grapple with the essential sociological fact that the process of the dissolution of traditional authority is inexorable and continues apace.

Compared to the ebb and flux of politics—the ability to manoeuvre and perform policy gymnastics—this trend seems slow and unuseful. But without this perspective we can be insensitive to the contrary trends to traditionalism latent in urbanisation, a growing youthful population, and the painful but progressive emancipation of women from rural patriarchy. There are also the contradictory tendencies in public consciousness signalled by the crossing over to more 'modern' attitudes towards sexual identity, sexual abuse, land ownership by women, religious freedom, and inter-racial marriage, etc. These trends indicate the tendencies sapping away the raw patriarchal power of militant traditionalism such as that of Inkatha. Once its war mobilisation subsides—as eventually it has to since it is committed to the stabilisation of social relations on a capitalist basis—then the rational core of Inkatha's deformation of tradition will be found to be absent and in its place a savage antipathy of leader against leader could result. The main problem Inkatha faces is the growing divorce between itself and its business supporters now that the ANC leadership has wholeheartedly embraced the task of financial stability and monetary restraint, and prioritised the building of a black capitalist class rather than redressing of social needs. Yet such is the extent of the accommodation to the forces of tradition that even a radical commentator within the ANC defends a merger of the party of modernising nationalism with that of its most destructive traditionalist opponent (Cronin 1998). While this indicates the abiding power of decentralised despotism, it can also be read as indicating the possibility that decentralised despotism is not an immovable monolith but is rather in process, fluctuating violently between dissolution and a willed consolidation. Such are the contradictions of contemporary South Africa.

In terms of the broader perspective required by a rejuvenated African studies *Citizen and Subject* is limited by a weak conception of the political economy of Africa; a lack of recognition that Africa is the Third World's Third World, a stagnant backwater of the international economy, a continent marginalised and brutally exploited in which

[5] In my work on the growth of social movements in Inanda (Hemson 1996) I argue that the potential for democratic civic structures depends on the quality and commitment to change of leadership. Such a leadership cannot be guaranteed, but neither should the possibility of democracy through community participation be entirely excluded. The role of conciousness and organisation in the contest of power, locally and nationally, is a vital factor. The vigorous contest for power in this community appears to have left an important legacy of civic democracy while the national movement appears in disarray.

people have been forced to endure more than 30 wars since 1970. All this adds up to the portrayal of a continental society in dreadful stagnation because of the lack of an economic dynamic, a society in which pride of place is taken by the military, and where ordinary people have to turn to the rural areas and traditional authority for some shelter from the ravages of modern society. But beyond this negative picture it is also important to register the effective challenges of civil society, the increasing participation of women in economic activities, the battle for survival and for property under these conditions, the growth of a landless proletariat with weaker sentimental attachment to the land. Quantity can change fairly rapidly into quality as has been witnessed in Zimbabwe where recently there has been the most extraordinary flowering of civil society around the fulcrum of the trade unions. These initiatives by Africans in Africa escape Mamdani's eclectic purview.

Finally, it is worth stressing that structures, states, and civil society have to rest on a certain economic base, and this truth is not the exclusive property of a Marxist perspective. The relation between state and economy is central to the question of the state, and cannot be demoted as a regional obsession[6]. Lines of analysis which pursue the relationship between state and economy as the basis for an understanding of the character of the state are suggestive of its future development. The African state has to be located within the processes of continental disintegration and reconstruction, and within world markets. The most recent beginnings of an upturn in growth may presage better prospects for civil society. If Africa had the economic basis, then the real boundaries marking off civil society from rural despotism, the opportunities for the genuine revival of civil society in war-torn regions, could shift apace. We need to remember that at the beginning of the various development decades in the 1950s, the per capita income of many African countries was similar to those of South East Asia, many of whom have doubled per capita incomes in a decade. What has been the critical factor in Africa's political and economic stagnation? The bifurcated state is a key element in the mode of domination, but is it the essential factor in explaining the impasse, or do we have to seek out the data of Africa's marginalisation in world markets, and combinations of state explanations and the economy?

conclusion

I would suggest that, despite Mamdani's powerful methodological synthesis, we need to return to the elements of political economy for a comprehensive analytic apparatus.

[6] Peter Evans has used concepts such as 'embedded autonomy' to analyse the bureaucratic insulation, combined with intense connection to the surrounding social structure (particularly industrial capital), as a formative element of the state's ability to develop a modern economy. 'Predatory' states are located along with 'developmental' states within a continuum of the achievement of development. Some African states are specifically characterisable as being controlled by those who 'plunder without any more regard for the welfare of the citizenry than a predator has for the welfare of its prey' (Evans 1995:44).

This does not require that we lose focus on the specificity of regional studies, or the necessity of situating South African exceptionalism within the continental context. As Hall and Tarrow (1998) stress, there is a need for area studies to counterbalance the preoccupation with globalisation which has a 'natural allure' and carries with it 'new mysteries'. The integration of South African and African studies in a perspective for cross-regional studies involves working within the tension between the regional and the global, and this entails acknowledging the continuing importance of political economy.

There is much in *Citizen and Subject* which relates directly to our present experience and, despite his insistence on blending the South African into a refurbished African Studies, Mamdani is not blind to the singularity and marked differences between South African and continental experiences. He sees the specificity of the country in the 'strength of its civil society, both white and black' (28), but he also carries a disturbing warning:

> independent Africa shows apartheid South Africa one possible outcome of a reformed state structure, deracialised but not democratized—whether achieved through armed struggle or through negotiations, through independence from a foreign colonial power or through strategic engagement with an erstwhile colonizing resident minority: a deracialized but decentralized despotism (61).

In the mind of this reviewer the warning is timely and to the point. Current tendencies towards accommodation with the decentralised despotism which will entrap the rural population in neo-colonial power relations are strongly evident and unopposed across party lines.

Social Policy Program
University of Durban-Westville

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Writing South Africa

Kelwyn Sole

Review Article

Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970—1995.
Edited by Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly
Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998, xvii + 288pp.
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This collection consists of essays, interviews and position papers not published before, with the exception of Albie Sachs' well-known 1989 intervention and an interview with Serote. According to the editors, the contents are intent on exploring the relationship between art and politics in South Africa. They approach issues relating to the writer's responsibility, the interrelationship between class, gender and racial identities and representations in literature, the relationship between aesthetics and ethics, and questions of form and language. In addition, the specificity of the country's literary traditions, and their relationship to wider African and metropolitan traditions, is under scrutiny; underpinned with examinations of the usefulness of designations of 'modernism', post-modernism' and 'post-coloniality' to an understanding of the field. These are of course, all crucial concerns for anyone trying to comprehend the complexity and diversity of our literary and cultural practices.

Of the essays in this collection a few are complex enough to demand a basic summary. The interchange between Parry and Attwell about the effects of the fiction of John Coetzee is one of these instances. Despite Coetzee's efforts in his novels and critical writing to disrupt the social and discursive authority of the West/colonialism, Parry suggests that his work can be eventually seen to sustain Western modes of perception. This is because he represents the oppressed in his fiction via characters and viewpoints 'situated as objects of representations and meditations which offer them no place from which to resist the modes that have constituted them' (151); thus effectively pre-empting non-Western knowledges. The withholding of any gesture towards a politics of 'fulfillment' or any prospect of a different, transformed, social order results in a 'textual practice which dissipates the engagement with political conditions it also inscribes' (164). Similarly, his refusal to engage with the textures of the South African landscape (made clear in his criticism of 'white writing') becomes, ironically enough, a denial of any possibility of connection to the land. Attwell responds by pointing out that

such options are not available to Coetzee. Given his theoretical bent, such options would render him liable to problems of epistemological and cultural misrecognition based on a disregard for the limitations of his own positioning and viewpoint: Coetzee's narrative mode rather encodes its social vision in terms of its commitment to aesthetic self-reflection. Thereafter diverting somewhat from this point, Attwell seems prepared to concede some of Parry's point *vis-à-vis* works like *Foe*, but suggest that *Age of Iron* 'thematizes, performs, and thus reflects on, various modes of alterity' (167).

Attwell's decision to focus on one work in order to answer Parry's more general critique is somewhat disappointing. Moreover, it becomes apparent that he is taking the opportunity to read Coetzee in terms of his own endeavour to rid South African postcolonial theory of the problems associated with 'strong' othering; stating that Coetzee does not wish to suggest a version of alterity that would leave no grounds for 'intersubjective recognition', and that both Ndebele and Coetzee refuse to entertain a 'dogmatic insistence on absolute difference' (170).

While questions of identity are visible in many of the discussions, it is Wicomb's article on the position of the 'coloured' within the national reconstruction of South Africa past and present which examines this issue forthrightly. Her article focuses on the textual construction, ethnographic self-fashioning and political behaviour of 'coloureds' as a 'condition of postcoloniality' (92). The 'shameful vote' of the 'coloureds' for the Nationalist Party in the Western Cape shapes much of her argument, and she finally pleads for 'new discursive spaces in which modalities of blackness can wipe out shame' (106). It becomes increasingly clear that 'shame' is principally mobilised as a moralising term in this essay, which results in an emotional tone insufficiently harnessed to her attempts to understand and explain 'coloured' stereotypification, behaviour or self-identification. An assumption that certain kinds of blackness are more authentic than others (at least as far as political conduct is concerned) therefore haunts, and contradicts, the theoretical thrust and logical process of her argument, which is in turn noticeably ill-knit and fragmentary. The references to gender are not carried through, and her suggestion that there is a need to revise popular definitions of postcoloniality to include the co-existence of oppositional and complicit forms of behaviour, while true, is nothing new. In particular, the proposition that socio-economic imperatives and notions of self-interest might have influenced voting behaviour in the Western Cape appears rather as an afterthought, rather than being positioned as fundamental to the issue.

The interest in the relation of postcoloniality and postmodernism to notions of 'blackness' are echoed in Nkosi's essay on black writing and postmodernism. Herein he makes a number of observations he has made elsewhere, reiterating his belief that a racial split continues in South African writing between 'on the one side an urgent need to document and to bear witness and on the other the capacity to go on furlough, to loiter, and to experiment' (75). This point can be partly accepted: and Nkosi's trenchant assertion that what is read off as cultural diversity in the different norms of writing between races is sometimes a sign of social disparity and 'technological discrepancy' (75) stands out particularly starkly against some of the other pronouncements in this collection. His scepticism about the arrival of the 'post-modern' in recent South

African literature is also well-founded, given (as he argues) the incompletion of any modernist agenda, generally speaking, among South African writers: but his insistence that the examination of indigenous and vernacular literary traditions would demonstrate that they derive from, and serve, rather different narrative and linguistic traditions and systems to mainstream European-derived writing demands rather more discussion. His conviction that postmodernism, as it has taken root inside the country, is 'a movement wholly occupied, managed, or dominated by white critics' (77) seems overhasty. In addition, his position as an expatriate renders him liable—and he is certainly not the only person in the collection who does this—to make sweeping generalisations which do not encompass the full scope of contemporary literary practice in South Africa. For example, and despite his caveats, the rote manner in which he aligns what he calls 'oppositional' black literary practitioners with nationalist agendas and agency cannot make sense of contemporary poets such as Rampolokeng and Nyezwa or critics such as Mngadi and Losambe; while he does not demonstrate in what sense black writers and poets who now make a living praising foreign delegations, or Nelson Mandela, or (like Mzwakhe) performing for Cremora and Spoornet TV advertisements, can be called 'oppositional' at all. As with Pechey and Brink's articles in the collection, the broad gestures of his argument contain a degree of stereotyping and generalising that is extreme.

It becomes increasingly apparent, speaking more generally, that these articles serve a polemical as much as a scholarly purpose. The editors, and a preponderance of their contributors, appear to subscribe fully to the hegemony current in the South African literary academy. This can most obviously be seen in the manner in which Sachs' and Ndebele's interventions in debates over the last decade are constantly reiterated—rather than discussed—as sources of legitimation and authority; as well as in the frequent positive valorisations of the pronouncements and example of J.M. Coetzee, both as writer and commentator.

For this is a collection with a mission. While there seems to be an uncertainty prevailing as to precisely how to define the critical tools used, or characterise/periodise South African colonial- and postcoloniality (Wicomb's definition that it is a discursive field exhibiting a variety of meanings such as 'oppositionality, resistance, the practice of radical readings, neocolonialism, as well as the interrogation of the very term' (92) is indicative), among the theoretically-concerned essays at least there is a credence that the dismantling of apartheid may allow the opening up of possibilities to move past the stifling ideological and stylistic habits and compulsions of the apartheid era, critically and creatively speaking. The desire is for a ludic, 'carnivalizing' (in Pechey's words) practice; for experiments with new, anti-realist and fantastic forms; for multi-generic utterance. For Pechey, it is the interaction of European and African oral and literary traditions, especially in burgeoning urban contexts, which announces most clearly a new cultural hybridity that (making particular use of the energies of South Africa's African majority), will begin to forge a cultural expression implicit in the assertions of the African diaspora for centuries—an expression which may not only evade the canons of the metropolis but transform these in a 'reverse colonization' (65). In similar vein, Boehmer observes in her essay that it is the 'mongrelizations' of contemporary South

African identities and cultures which represent 'a challenge to writers of fiction, a transformative way of addressing a rapidly transforming world' (55); furthermore, it is the mixing of forms in literature she hopes will result which will supply 'an occasion and a framework for new imaginings' (47). Polyphonic utterance is positively viewed, as is a pluralising spirit now possible in literature. Horn, Boehmer, Brink, Pechey and others agree that there is the potential for a multi-voiced South Africa to move forward now in a spirit of heterogeneity and transculturation free from nationalist (and, presumably, other master-narrativising) reconstructions.

'Opening the silences' that beset apartheid South Africa is an opportunity to destabilise centre and margin; to inculcate and fashion a new society free of prejudice and hierarchies. Pechey approaches hyperbole in his discussion of these possibilities: despite the rising crime rate and the possibility that South Africa might merely be entering the latest of its neo-colonial phases, the country 'still bids fair to be the Gesellschaftswunder of the late twentieth century' (59); Ndebele's stories may 'transform the victory over apartheid into a gain for postmodern knowledge' (58), and so on.

These essays are therefore filled with a utopian spirit which occasionally verges on the evangelical, and one feels somewhat mean-spirited pointing out that the re-entry of the country into the world community means that we are now merely one of many polities striving to deal with a global system overdetermined by unequal and often unjust structures. Nevertheless, Serote's acute observation that, for some time to come, 'the two opposites, the ideal world and the real world, are going to form the basis of a very strong articulation' (183) in the work of younger writers will probably be borne out.

At worst this utopian tendency verges on a romanticisation of the 'unuttered/unutterable' (so to speak) spaces available for resistance and potential counter-utterance. This is especially noticeable in the way in which the discourses and perceptions of indigenous and oral societies and non-Western epistemologies are constructed, especially on the part of some of the white critics who seem to subscribe to a stronger notion of 'othering' than Attwell. These become an 'other' space beyond the cognition of—but central to the desire of—Western/white critics: places where subversive and transformative counter-urges lour beyond limits. At its most extreme, there is a tendency (visible here in Horn) to place all his objects of approbation within this realm, and then elide them within a discussion ranging freely from one to the next. He thus sees no problem in blurring discussions of orality, myth, political silencing and the unconscious as analogous in their resistance to, and incommensurability with, official and dominant discourse.

In line with current trends, there is also a vigorous debunking of the realist and mimetic modes of expression with which, it is suggested, anti-apartheid literature was saturated. Such a persistent reiteration of horrendous 'facts', Brink tells us, 'blunts the mind' (21). 'History' is perceived as a tyrannical form of discourse in South Africa, that claims a representativeness and a connection to truth it does not rightfully possess. In such a scenario, 'fiction' and the uses of the imagination are given enormous subversive and transformative power; for, according to Horn, they can 'enter the space of the

possible which is negated and silenced by the documents that claim to represent the real' (31): while Brink in turn regards it as an important task now to 'imagine the real' (24). Of the writers working within this ambit of conception, only Nkosi qualifies his attack on realism as referring to the 'petty realism' he believes black South African literature is suffused with, with its 'formal insufficiencies, its disappointing breadline asceticism and firm disapproval of irony' (77). In all these discussions, though, there is scant incisive or prolonged discussion of the exact relationship between 'history' and 'discourse', 'realism' and 'fantasy', apart from Boehmer's qualification that they must not be seen in simply binary opposition to one another. As a result the discussions about 'history' and its relation to language and discourse are sometimes facile; at worst leading to Macaskill's idealist reference to 'that incoherent and fundamentally linguistic dream we know as apartheid' (200).

There are a few positive aspects to this anthology. Pechey's attempt to place South Africa and its literature within the fraught experiences of global modernity and discourses of modernism is to be welcomed; and his readiness to try to understand and theorise the 'opening' of the demise of apartheid in terms of Russian thinkers of their immediately pre- and post-revolutionary period (such as Bakhtin) is both courageous and stimulating. His suggestion that the schism caused by the lateness of Russia's transformation into the modern world gave Russian intellectuals a position from which to muse, albeit briefly, on the effects of modernisation more deeply than any available to other Europeans whose countries were modernised 'on time' is interesting; and the analogous opportunity he hints has been afforded South African intellectuals to diagnose and avoid the 'social and spiritual pathologies' (61) modernism has elsewhere spawned is exciting. Indeed, the insistence by contributors such as Pechey, Boehmer, Parry, Wicomb and Nkosi that South Africa's apartheid and colonial past continues to shape its present is salutary. Horn initiates an interesting discussion about the transfigurations that happen when oral forms are taken from their lived environment and transfixed to the page (his focus is Watson's *Return of the Moon*), giving voice in addition to a scepticism as regards the limits of scope and effectivity of the T.R.C. His observation cannot be disputed that the pathologies and psychoses occasioned by apartheid will remain, even if some of the truth silenced by the previous regime is rediscovered. Wicomb's critique of the marginalising of 'coloured' activists after the demise of the mass democratic movement and the failures of A.N.C. policies bent on securing the 'coloured' vote in the Western Cape will also, hopefully, prompt further examination.

In the long run, though, a glaring weakness of this collection lies in the manner in which Attridge and Jolly have selected material to try and address the period in question. Noting the period this book claims to cover in its title, one could suggest that it is well nigh impossible to cover such a complex and diverse history in the limited space these articles afford. As a result, the omissions are multiple and glaring. There is only one article on poetry—and that on a single poet—while little space is given to fuller examinations of many literary figures of importance. Nadine Gordimer is only the most obvious of these. In the final analysis the ideological proclivities of this volume are so pronounced and crippling as to allow practically no empathetic or, indeed, scholarly

study of the two decades of literature prior to 1990. This is true not only of two decades of literary texts, but also of the debates surrounding literary, cultural, socio-economic and political events and issues which have taken place. There is a general sense of a lack of detailed knowledge of these periods, and minimal gestures towards them except dismissal. For instance, the attacks on the realist predilections of these decades surely need at least to acknowledge, and temper their commentary with, some reference to the debates on 'magic realism' that Farouk Asvat initiated in the columns of *The Sowetan* and live forums in the early 1980s. Boehmer's definition of apartheid South Africa as 'a unique situation of internal colonization in a post-colonial world' (52) would benefit from further discussion, given the debates that flourished from as early as 1975 amongst intellectuals and activists such as Wolpe, Hudson and Cronin about 'Colonialism of a Special Type'; while her belief that anti-apartheid writers' obsession with mimesis and concomitant lack of urge to experiment stylistically, even if true, appears unaware that some writers of this period voiced as part of their project a wish to break with received stylistic and aesthetic traditions—surely there should be some musing on, and dissection of, the avowal by Black Consciousness writers that they were producing a 'new writing'; or of Mutloatse's 1980 polemic in *Forced Landing* urging black writers 'to pee, spit and shit on literary convention ... to experiment and probe and not give a damn what the critics have to say', or his usage of a new experimental form he called 'proemdra'? It is furthermore odd to read Brink's sweeping generalisations about the acceptance of the binaries of 'history' and 'text' and the triumphalist mode of thinking he claims is present among all literary activists and critics during the apartheid period, or about the supposedly uniform approval of the usage of realist and mimetic modes, without wondering how much he has missed of the critical arguments in process at the time concerning *inter alia* historical representation, ideology, authority and form. In line with Sachs' simplifications, all critical activity and debate before 1990 is made to seem merely an aspect or effect of 'solidarity criticism', which is not the case.

The literary and cultural production of the 1970s fuelled by the Black Consciousness Movement, and of the period of the States of Emergency, serve as negative reference points for the majority of authors here represented, including the editors themselves. Given the fact that the early 1970s produced the most noteworthy and theorised effort to date by black writers to undermine white and liberal aesthetico-political assumptions, there is a woeful lack of effort to understand (changes in) the cultural and literary production of two decades of the quarter of a century under purview—surely a prerequisite for critique. Indeed, there is little evidence of research in the field apart from the reading of creative texts. Writers and performers enormously popular in the period of Black Consciousness hegemony are simply disregarded—the 'Soweto poet' Madingoane appears only in the bibliography, as do Gwala and Sepamla, who were important theoretical as well as literary contributors in their time; a popular fiction writer such as Matshoba receives only passing, and denigrating, commentary. The 1980s fare no better. Discussions merely assume the current characterisation of its literary output as below par, obsessed both with political function and mimesis. All the attempts during the period to democratise culture, explore different notions of form, mould artistic expression or even criticise prevailing political practices are simply

scrubbed away. Thus, Asvat's chillingly provocative poetry collection *A Celebration of Flames*, critical of the internecine conflicts among the oppressed during that decade, evinces no interest apart from its bibliographical mention; trade union and worker initiatives in culture are ignored, except in the position papers by Mda and Maponya and in vague asides by Pechey; and Mzwakhe—possibly the most popular and well-known poet in South Africa even today—does not even get into the bibliography. What results, I would argue, is an exceptionally distorted picture of two decades of the twenty-five years this collection purports to examine. These two decades are presented, with few exceptions (the three articles by Barnard, Heyns and Walder, the position papers and Tlali and Serote's responses in their interviews) in a manner which reduces them to a rote pronouncement of clichés tailor-made to bolster up the general ideological direction of this book. Thus, what began as a legitimate critique of the crudities and assumptions of the literature of the apartheid years flounders on its own glibness and, it must be said, historical ignorance.

A glaring problem with this volume (and this point can be generalised to rather too much of the critical output taking place in journals at the moment as well) is that, while 'post-colonial' thought acknowledges the implication of literary practice in a wider cultural provenance, there is very little evidence of explorations of the wider materiality that informs and responds to literary production and discussion. One looks in vain for any reference to recent sources which discuss political and economic issues, such as Fine and Rustomjee's *The Political Economy of South Africa*. One also looks in vain for any discussion—apart from two of the position papers, asides by Serote and brief mentions in the articles on theatre—of the wider institutions of cultural activity during this period, such as censorship boards and policy, literary magazines, cultural venues and spaces, or community cultural groups. Absent is any debate over changes that have taken place in literary practice occasioned by economic or political transformations: in the post-1990 period, for instance, it could be expected that changes in publishing brought about by increasing multinational involvement and control, the dearth of bookshops, bulk buying practices, the rise in book prices etc. would be of interest.

Even more tellingly, despite the invocation of concepts relating to the local and the 'ordinary', there is little effort to look at the regional and local taxonomies and effects of culture, where current notions of identity diversity and associational politics would presumably be useful. When debate about the 'local' appears, it is in the single instance of its effect on the *oeuvre* of J.M.Coetzee—and even here little recognition is forthcoming that all local cultures are diverse and differently experienced (one thinks, for instance, of aspects of Cape Town culture that Coetzee chooses to ignore, such as its Trotskyist and left-wing traditions). Moreover, the concept of the 'ordinary/everyday' is accepted on faith. It is surely useful only if it is problematised.

If one looks for any evidence of primary research or careful social investigation here, in the long run one is liable to be disappointed. Too many critics are prepared to read texts about texts about texts (I am, of course, using the narrow meaning of 'text' here), with the final effect of an infinite regression of mirrors. On the other hand, it is striking that (Wicomb's brief remarks about Bhabha and Ahmad excepted)

there is little sign of efforts to re-align and re-examine overseas critics engaged in debates about postcoloniality and colonial discourse theory to fit in with local conditions at all. On a different plane, one could query the relative lack of interest in questions of language usage and indigenous literatures generally, apart from Nkosi. While one can but wonder at the wearisome display of inaccessible expression and language in several of the essays, it seems to have escaped some of these critics that political practice in criticism includes the question of how to reach an audience beyond the theoretically adept.

Despite the fashioning of a notion of 'materiality' in line with much post-structuralist argument, what the project here assembled appears to accomplish is one that simply inverts the emphasis of the old history-literature/form-content binaries previous South African literary criticism is criticised for assuming. What begins as a legitimate assertion of the relative autonomy of writing (and its non-answerability to political injunction) goes at times far further, into a realm where literature is given extraordinary ability to save South Africans' experience of modernity and post-modernity from drowning in a bog of politics and history. For Pechey (the echoes of Ndebele are strong here) literature can promise more appropriate forms of wisdom and longer-term political commitment, relating to its environment as 'self-reflexive self-knowledge' (57); while its mythologising properties and potentialities can free it from the marginalising urges of Western forms of rationality. To him, the novel in particular is 'the great generic invention of early modernity by which late modernity might be saved from itself' (62). In turn, Attwell reinterprets Ndebele and Coetzee to highlight the latter's 'emphasis on allowing *writing* to circumvent prevailing socio-ethical conditions and assert an alternative frame of reference' (171 e.a.).

However tempting it may be, it is perhaps over-simplistic to see South Africa's 'post-al' turn as merely a retreat into an aestheticism and idealism freshly shined up for the twenty-first century. Attwell mentions an aspect of the South African version of post-colonial thought that, as it stands, increasingly appears to me to be the crux of any debate around the local turn of 'post-al' theories. In more recent work by critics such as Attwell and Leon de Kock there is an insistence on the importance of the ethical dimension of literature, which Attwell reiterates here as part of his attempt to explain Coetzee's belief that writers need to follow a 'transcendental imperative' at a time when 'any transcendental basis for ethics is being denied in the name of politics' (quoted 172f) in a context (such as that shown in *Age of Iron*) where the problem is whether 'the society in question has a culturally embedded code of ethics to which most of its members have shared access' (176).

It is accurate to claim that questions of civil society are central to cultural and other debates in South Africa today. But there is a specific political agenda at work here. I have suggested elsewhere that the post-colonial project in South Africa is not simply a reorientation and refurbishing of critical and expressive modes, but a humanistic and (as suggested already) a utopian project, based on a notion of revamped ethical behaviour and literature as a vehicle for the transmission and enactment of more appropriate (open, pluralistic, non-judgmental) values through acts of language and reciprocity. In line with this, Brink appears to embrace a notion of literature as a

potentially enormously powerful tool in the transmission of values and appropriate modes of behaviour via individual writers and readers communing through the artistic text, as well as in the demonstration and staging of what it is (im)possible for an author to represent and claim authority for in 'other' contexts. In more rigorous formulations, Attwell (citing Michael Marais) claims that the self-conscious textualisations and deconstructions of discourse someone like Coetzee undertakes in his fiction transfers authorial responsibility from writer to reader (178); while Parry cites Attridge's suggestion that Coetzee's fiction 'engage(s) with—to stage, confront, apprehend, explore—otherness' (quoted 151). Thus, Attwell speaks of Coetzee's 'dabbling into the language of the sublime' as a sign of the latter's 'muted ethical utopianism ... a utopianism that amounts to an attempt to work around the denial of reciprocity that seems entrenched in colonial relationships' (177).

In the long run, and despite the post-modern inflection of its covenant, I remain sceptical as to how a relationship between writer and reader based on 'transformative acts of language' is in essence different in conceptualisation from more conservative forms of critical theory taught in South African universities for years. In a manner analogous to—but paradigmatically different from—Ndebele, what is being suggested here is that literature can serve as a powerful modelling tool and performative process for readers. The point may be argued that such a project of ethical modelling, if made from a 'post-al' position, lays itself open *inter alia* to charges of contradictoriness.

It is symptomatic in many of these essays that certain lynchpin terms of a new orthodoxy (such as 'storytelling', 'the local' and 'the ordinary') are not interrogated at all: for these are the key terms of a new dispensation, to be naturalised and narcotised. One finally comes away from this volume with the sense of a generally uncritical approach to the hegemony currently dominant in the academy. Boehmer notes (as Tony Morphet has in his 1990 *Pretexts* article) that the language of South African literary criticism is still very much one of injunction, where gestures towards openness flounder on ideological proclivities. In light of this, while the desire to subject conceptual and aesthetic conventions to scrutiny and confront literary-political canons in post-modernist and post-structuralist practice is welcome, what this volume seems to indicate—and there is evidence elsewhere as well—is that a new set of assumptions about literature and a new canon are being put into place with remarkable celerity, often by proponents of theories and aesthetics who proclaim themselves as eschewing such closure. It is also remarkable how often models for this new canon resemble the very list of 'great books' earlier radical critics in the country have sought to displace. This is evident in Boehmer's positive evaluation of *Mhudi* and *The Story of an African Farm* due to their 'multilayeredness' (43), their multi-generic aspects, the indeterminancy and hesitation of their endings and their authors' desire 'not to fix a single frame on the future'; as is her praise of Ndebele, Head and Coetzee for their stylistic achievements in the 'parched' (sic.) contexts in which they have had to work. But at the same time it is discernible that such characteristics are qualified to certain kinds of texts, rather than universally applied. For example, the ending in *July's People* is argued away as belonging to a different, less propitious, hesitation, as are the lacunae at the end of the

'Soweto novels' of the late 1970s and early 1980s; while the mixture of generic expectations and options in a work such as *To Every Birth Its Blood* is downplayed, presumably because it belongs to the literary practice someone like Boehmer is wishing to expunge. Even as one accepts Boehmer's discussion about how the use of form and endings of Schreiner, Plaatje and Ndebele (in 'Uncle') differs in kind from the others mentioned, one begins to suspect that it is not the formal aspects that differentiate these examples in her mind as much as the social and political conceptualisations that underlie them. If this is a general phenomenon, which I suspect it is, it renders problematic the supposed aesthetically-based emphasis essays such as hers claim to be involved in: or the teleological certainty of the move towards 'better' literature than many of these critics assume.

It is ironic, then, that it is usually the less theoretically weighty and stylistically onerous essays that contain the more interesting insights. Walder's article on narrative, gender and the politics of South African theatre is particularly stimulating and thoughtful, while Heyns' explorations of gay writing under the States of Emergencies and Colleran's on the reception and re-imagining of South African theatre in the United States open up a number of fascinating areas for further study. Walder asks a number of pertinent questions about the taxonomy of the new South African State, and its relation of cultural and theatrical practice. He also provides an interesting critique of Fugard, especially this playwright's selective marshalling of the 'universal' and 'local' to forestall criticism of his work. Heyns' readings of Gray, Prinsloo, Galgut *et al* are suggestive; while his discussion of the claims that gay oppression is analogous to and interchangeable with black oppression (a debate similar to one that already exists around gender) is to the point. Indeed, what this raises is the precise nature of the imbrications of the personal and political in a concrete situation, and this is refreshing after the more nebulous formulations contained elsewhere. Walder's positive evaluations of the 'oral' and 'storytelling' however seemed to me slightly overblown: it is noticeable that his discussion of the former ignores the way in which the apartheid authorities bypassed the fact that (in Mzamane's words in *New Classic* in 1977) 'the microphone is difficult to censor' by eventually simply banning and killing activists. Furthermore, his discussion of gender and storytelling relies only on non-South African sources for its characterisation of the circularity of women's stories: some reference to *iintsomi* would be more convincing. It would be fascinating, as well, to study Gcina Mhlope's, and other's, use of oral storytelling on SATV at present, in order to see how the tendency towards identity-plus-community-through-storytelling Walder isolates as gender-specific would articulate with the overdetermining nation-building ideologies present in the national broadcaster.

Colleran's sketching of the vagaries of the reception of South African theatre in the United States (where it fluctuates between being characterised as 'familiar' and 'exotic') shows that more of this kind of work is necessary if South African literature is going to evolve a literary culture independent of metropolitan acceptance or rejection; in this regard further discussion of the way in which the revolutionary aspects of the South African struggle have been appropriated (for instance as part of a black 'civil rights struggle') is essential. Barnard's semiotic examination of the literature of the

States of Emergency is also interesting, although her desire to read black South African 'people's culture' as an expression of a 'poor' literature intent on 'remaking' the world sits uneasily with her realisation that elements of such expression held the potential, even under apartheid, to transform themselves into just another hierarchical discourse of power. At the same time Maponya's and Mda's position papers, although brief, raise questions relating to 'more mundane issues of the fortune and survival tactics of local arts practitioners' (252-3) and appropriate forms of theatrical practice in a new dispensation in a compelling way: Mda's criticism of the weakness of a 'theatre of resistance' in creating a critical audience consciousness, and his discussion of an alternative 'theatre for development', will prove interesting to many readers. Macaskill's examination of the overlapping of 'lyrical feeling' with materialist traditions and socialist impulse in Jeremy Cronin's poetry makes a few useful additional points to previous scrutiny of this poet, although it is noticeable that he tends towards perceiving an absolute split between poetics and politics—an ultimately conservative move depressingly familiar to all who have followed debates about poetry in this country over the last quarter of a century. It is instructive to point out, as he does, that Cronin's poems allow him to 'stage a passion' unavailable to him in the discourse of his critical essays, but one feels that Cronin's essays about literature could have done with greater discussion and it is a pity that his critique of Campbell's 'Rounding the Cape' in a 1984 *English in Africa* is not considered. It is also noticeable that poems from *Inside* which fit less easily into Macaskill's hypothesis, such as 'Death Row' and 'Motho ke motho', get short shift.

Yet, when all is said and done, the teleological vision underlying the omnipresent discourse of an obvious progression from the (formally and politically bad) past to the (formally and conceptually more promising) future belies the gestures of openness made. There is an overall sense that the terrain of South African literary studies is being limited to certain issues and certain questions: which, as it is transmitted to less adept critics, will result in the reiteration of a new set of stultifying clichés about cultural production in this country. At worst, one gets a feeling that the present 'post-colonial' imperatives of metropolitan theory are being utilised without sufficient musing on what their strengths and weaknesses in a local context might be; in particular one comes away with the uneasy feeling that the present psychological and linguistic imperatives of a guilty Europe are simply being transmitted by (predominantly) white critics who can identify with this guilt. This is coupled with a distaste for any discourses and practices of politics ('history') which appear to invade their subjectivity, sense of the future, or artistic and social interests. As a result of this, only those who have some knowledge of the period will find beneficial aspects to this collection. For those with only a passing knowledge of the debates, discussions and controversies that have influenced and characterised South African literature since 1970 this book will not clarify and stimulate as much as puzzle.

Department of English
University of Cape Town

Book Reviews

Playing the Postmodern Game

Sinking: A Verse Novella
by Michael Cawood Green
Sandton: Penguin, 1997, 164pp.
ISBN 014056790

Reviewed by Damian Garside
Department of English
University of Durban-Westville

> ... the text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning ... but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture (Barthes, 'Death of an Author', quoted in *Sinking* 45).

This is an unusual text to review, to say the least: from the seemingly novel form that the book takes it would appear to be that Cawood Green has been nothing if not brave and adventurous. What we have with *Sinking* is a text that describes itself as a 'verse novella' and deals with the nature of written text as historical record, and which not only takes on board but also seems to assert the primacy of poststructuralist theory and modes of literary and cultural analysis. Cawood Green is described in the text itself as 'the tinker of historiography and the petty thief of poetry' (109). In reviews in the *Sunday Times* and the *Mail and Guardian*[1] its postmodernist pretensions have been looked upon unfavourably, the suggestion being that they 'spoil' the poetry. Lionel Abrahams sees this text as indicative of the literary critics taking over the production of literature—hence the 'self-swallowing' quality to the text, as it pre-empts critical commentary by itself covering all its critical bases—saying that there is nothing in the text that has not been taken care of, there is nothing that is not under control. Indeed, *Sinking* does at times play a self-indulgent and tiresome 'game' between the narrator and the *real* identity of the author's 'dual' identity as both academic literary critic and (with this text) literary/creative writer.

My own feeling is that there is nothing wrong with postmodernism *per se*, far from it, but that *Sinking* fails the test of its own postmodernism. Part of the text's postmodernist strategy is to present itself as a modernist text. What it does not do is convey a sense of the South African modernist 'big picture': that apartheid was South

[1] Review by Lourens Ackermann 1997. A Postmodern Way of Ruining Some Half-Decent Poetry. *Sunday Times* October 19; review by Lionel Abrahams 1997. Sunk by Theoretical Games. *Mail and Guardian* September 12-15.

Africa's great modernist project, and that it had strong links to the right-wing politics of European modernism. It is not, for me, a successful experiment in postmodernist literary practice. At its best, postmodernism challenges, if not confounds, the outworn categories and modes of modernist thinking and literary practice; at its worst it can be accused of being solipsistic and narcissistic. With *Sinking* there is an unfortunate shift in emphasis and primary concern away from the characteristically postmodern interest in the self-reflexiveness and self-reflectiveness of narrative fictions (i.e. with the ontological and epistemological questions of the text), towards a rather narcissistic obsession with the identity of the author.

Sinking is divided chronologically into three sections: 'Past', 'Mediation', and 'Present' which are united either thematically in that they are concerned with the tragic sinkhole incident that took place at Blyvooruitzicht mine in 1964 (which constitutes the 'black hole' at the heart of the text), or with the identity of the poet/author, his history, and the status or significance of what he has written—which is viewed from 'inside' the text, the cycle of poems dealing with the disaster (Section 1: Past). Viewed from the 'outside', however, Cawood Green is the author of the *whole* text: it is his name that is proudly displayed on the book's cover and on its title page. As we shall see, the referential/metafictional game of Greens and Cawood Greens is one that the reader is expected to play. The identities involved here are Michael Cawood Green the musician and author, and Michael Green, the writer of greeting card verse and author of the book's 'secret history', with hints that these textually represented figures could have some connection with figures in the real world, who share their names, but have a single referent. I am not entirely sure what pleasure (in Barthes' sense of the word) the reader, who needs to be familiar with postmodern literary forms and poststructuralist critical strategies, will take in playing these games. The danger, is, of course, that the reader will grow impatient with the whole project, and see it as fatally marred by an authorial pretentiousness. Although there are some attempts at self-deprecating irony, a sense of preciousness edges the text towards sinking into itself. Are we being subjected to a series of private jokes/ironic self-presentations—if so, why? One possibility is that the text wishes to jump start the process of literary canonization within its own pages by advertising its own complexity, thus hoping to qualify as viable academic commodity.

In Green's scheme of things the sinkhole disaster takes on a special significance, providing analogical connection between the idea of the historical and theoretical, between a 'post-hole' South Africa and a post-deconstruction world. In terms of the cosmological metaphor that Cawood Green invokes, what we appear to have then, is a 'singularity', a small black hole suddenly appearing at the (ironically named, in the circumstances) Blyvooruitzicht mine. Reflecting a postmodern fascination with all such boundary-crossing portals as wormholes, dimensional portholes and near-death 'tunnel' experiences, the narrator talks of the possibility that black holes have personalities, that there is something strangely human in their anomalousness. The reference to the black hole is not purely theoretical, but serves to key in the text's darker feelings: particularly its rather nihilistic feelings (almost obsessive) of death and ending. The danger of the kind of preoccupation with death that

we find in this text is one of sliding into morbidity, sentimentality or, at the other extreme, cold callousness. This sentimentality seems to be connected to the fear of many White South Africans of a sudden loss of stability and grounding. The text explores this White paranoia at a conscious level, but it would also seem to operate at an unconscious level, a level at which it informs the actual *writing* of this text and as a kind of blind-spot in the writer's critical reflexiveness.

Where Green's use of the sinkhole incident works best for me is where it is treated as historical metaphor: it becomes the 'sign' of the impending collapse of a White South Africa riding the false economic boom of Verwoerdian apartheid policies, yet utterly corroded from within by the ravages of a rapacious capitalism totally bereft of any economic or geological/ecological foresight. Green's use of the disaster as symptom of a society's malaise, and of the sudden shock of history (horrifying for its victims), works much better than his attempts to explore its significance in terms of what he himself would appear to see as the bleak, but theoretically essential, axioms of poststructuralism. Green is able to communicate a strong sense that there is a particular historical significance to the disaster as the first rumbling of (however feint it may seem), if not the prototype of, the event that will sweep away the delusions of political security and safety of White South Africans; the Soweto student insurrection of June 1976.

Cawood Green puts the significance of the sinking into the mouths of his characters, as an allegory the truth of which they are able to speak. He does this in preference to allowing the reader to come to his or her own conclusions about the symbolic meanings of things in the text. Green self-consciously treats the text's symbolism as something which is obvious, as a 'given', rather than as something that needs to be explored:

> —just in time, of course,
> For other sorts of underground problems
> To surface;
> But with this the allegory
> Becomes rather heavy-handed (74).

This manoeuvre raises the problem of what the voices 'know' and the degree to which they have been 'informed' by the poet to the extent of becoming quasi Tiresias prophet figures able to 'foresee' the disaster. Cawood Green provides a rather disarming confession regarding the nature of this knowledge (such as it is) before it is translated into the language, and conceptual framework of the poem: 'Nothing set down here/ Would have been/ In English, of course' (51). The poetry of the first section of the book includes political, geological, scientific, economic and other discourses as its own 'raw material', giving a certain scientific rigour to what the text itself refers to as its 'grids of ordinariness' (67). Sometimes the poem becomes chattily prosaic in order to capture the quality of the victims' lives, as far as possible from the inside:

> The words that live beyond you, Hettie
> Written on holiday;

Arrived after you had returned home
Only to disappear
Far more permanently:
Between the posting and the delivery,
Your order to a newspaper
For a liquid carpet cleaner
On special offer
Took on the weight of all the earth
That covered you (52).

The problem of mixing tones and registers, particularly when it comes to mixing the serious and the ironic/comic, is surely one of effect; the ideal being one of a tension or interplay between contrasting or opposing elements. In *Sinking* however, the poetry sometimes oscillates uncomfortably between harsh, blunt, factual and physical treatment of things and a sympathy for the characters that verges on sentimentality. The closer the author gets to the subject of the unfortunate family the more this happens. One of the questions that the text poses but perhaps does not explore adequately enough is the status of the various poetic voices in the poem, particularly those in the opening cycle in the first part of this tripartite text. This part of the text, its 'core', if you will, is surrounded and explained by so much meta-discourse and yet the status of these voices, whether totally imagined, or translated into these poetic spaces, is something that the author might have done more with. The sense that this reader was left with was one of authorial power as the poetic voices are invaded and appropriated by a theoretical discourse.

This brings me to the problem of the extensive use of allusion which at times verges on clumsiness. This is particularly true of the allusions to, and unconvincing parody/pastiche of, high literary modernism, in the shape of T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland.* The link between *Sinking* and Eliot's poem is not fully realised because the degenerative collapse of White South Africa's apartheid capitalism is simply not comparable to that of European civilisation in Eliot. The 'Tiresias' theme seems to work, like so much in this text, purely at an intellectual or cerebral level rather than to be connecting the idea of false consciousness/ historical blindness to the real experiences of the ghost voices who speak the lines of the cycle of poems. Put in other words, Green's primary allegiance is to academic criticism. Whereas in his campus novels a writer/critic like David Lodge subjects the literary academy to a parodying and relativising textual play, Green reverses the polarities: subjecting this self-same play to the truth of his academic discourses: including the poststructuralist 'truth' that comes from knowing what textual play is all about. The reviewers have mistakenly labelled this postmodernist: I think a better term would be 'academic imperialist'. If, as Barthes suggests, the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture, *Sinking* remains mono-cultural in its privileging of academic discourse.

For me *Sinking* fails because ultimately it either takes itself all too seriously, or allows this misreading to take place because it is unclear where the ironic deflations and postmodern jokes are taking place. I feel that the reader (particularly the non-academic reader) is correct to suspect that sententious contemporary intellectual theories do not

have all the answers, that they are not replacements for the old religious faiths (bringing new certainties and coveted priestly status for their exponents, the new illuminati). But perhaps Green is too seriously committed to the idea of being an academic to have entertained this possibility.

Deafening Silence

Deafening Silence
by John Miles
Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1997. 300 pp.
ISBN 0798137045

Reviewed by Thengani Ngwenya
Department of English
University of Durban-Westville

Originally published in Afrikaans in 1991, the English version of *Deafening Silence* comes at the most opportune time in our history as South Africans attempt to come to terms with their turbulent past through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (T.R.C.). In a country with a history of institutionalised racism and disregard for human rights, a writer who chooses to present history as fiction runs the risk of being accused of trivialising inherently sensitive historical events. In *Deafening Silence* John Miles deftly merges history and fiction in an attempt to re-create racial tensions within the South African police force which often had disastrous consequences for those involved. As shown in the applications for amnesty before the T.R.C., junior police officers or agents sometimes had to be 'silenced' because they posed a threat, for a variety of reasons, to people in positions of power within the police force.

The extent of both the historical and literary value of Miles' story may be judged by the fact that his book won the CNA, M-net and Helgaard Steyn awards and has not only been translated into English, but has also been serialised on television. This life-history which is presented in the form of a novel is the story of Tumelo John Moleko and his wife Busi who are murdered by police agents for demanding that a senior white police officer who assaulted Moleko at work should face trial for misconduct. Miles attempts to create a convincing and comprehensive portrait of his main character by tracing the growth and maturation of Tumelo from his childhood in the rural village of Senekal in the Orange Free State to his first job as a sergeant at Hammanskraal police station. In his admiration for the police and his desire to serve his country as a patriotic policeman, the young Moleko is shown to be oblivious to the nature of the apartheid police force as an inherently ruthless and destructive machinery of the state. When he is killed at the age of 35, he is gradually discovering the deviousness, hypocrisy and moral

inconsistencies which lie behind the ritualistic formality and orderliness of the police force. Moleko's brutal murder is therefore partly attributable to his own failure to grasp the inhumanity and sheer callousness of his enemies—Afrikaners who held senior positions in the South African police force. Moleko never realises, until it is too late, that one cannot expect to be treated with justice and fairness by an institution in which those values are hardly recognised.

After reading the blurb of Miles' novel, my immediate reaction was that this was just another story of a white man with power who ill-treats and, ultimately, murders a junior black colleague whom he considered to be 'cheeky'. However, after reading a few of the book's short chapters, I realised that I was dealing with something different: I was impressed not only by Miles' attempts to re-create, as authentically as possible, Moleko's ill-fated life, but also by the thoroughly fascinating and ingenious manner in which the story is narrated. Written in the conventional metafictional mode, Miles' novel constantly reminds the reader of its process of construction as well as its dual status as 'history' and 'fiction'. The writer is a character in his own story which has been pieced together from Moleko's lawyers, friends, relatives and colleagues. The thematic focus of the book's chapters falls, alternately, on Moleko's life-history and on the writer's attempts to weave together various aspects of Moleko's short life. Miles succeeds in creating vignettes of Moleko the country boy, the enthusiastic trainee policeman, the family man devoted to his wife and son, and of someone who is slowly learning to distinguish between illusion and reality in the conundrum of South African politics of the 1980s. Thus the research which went into the writing of the book is skilfully integrated with the narrative of Moleko's life. The writer's relationship with his character is both fascinating and curious, as exemplified in the following remarks by the omniscient narrator:

> If I'm to make something out of all this, he thought, then he and I will have to be in it together: the policeman and the writer, the black man and the white, each confined to his own territory, yet both caught up in the jaws of a predatory system where only the blind have vision or freedom of movement ... his history is my story; his story, my affliction (17).

Textual self-reflexivity, authorial intervention and constant changes in narrative point of view are not simply a manifestation of Miles' fascination with postmodernist narrative strategies, but a realistic demonstration of the difficulties facing a writer who attempts to paint a relatively well-rounded portrait of a man whose life-story can only be gleaned from police records, lawyers' files and uncertain oral testimonies.

Miles' book has ensured that the sad fate of Richard Motasi (Moleko's real name) will not be consigned to the dustbin of history as his murderers wanted it to be, but will be read by millions of readers world-wide. Thus a story of a 'Mr Nobody' (228) who paid with his life in his fight for justice and personal vindication has become part of our literary-historical heritage. Although it may seem that *Deafening Silence* unnecessarily flaunts its stylistic eclecticism as well as its status as a discursive construct like most postmodernist novels, perhaps these are the most effective narrative

strategies to capture the uncertainty, indeterminacy and fragmentation that characterised Moleko's brief and unhappy life as policeman in the turbulent 1980s.

While *Deafening Silence* tends to blur the boundaries between history and fiction, it also alerts us to the inescapable ethical basis of both discourses. Narrativisation tends to have the effect of attenuating the shock of 'brutal' historical facts which may be too hideous to contemplate in their raw state. John Miles has again reminded us that literature does have a social function, after all.

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This Day and Age

This Day and Age
By M. Nicol
Cape Town: David Philip, 1992, 267 pp.
ISBN 0-86486-219-9.

Reviewed by Emmanuel Mqwashu
Honours Student
Department of English
University of Durban-Westville

> Where yesterday, that is the happy days of Enlightenment, only the despotic power of the monarch had seemed to stand between man and his freedom to act (Nicol 1992:2).

Mike Nicol's *This Day And Age* can be characterised in Barthesian terms as a 'text of bliss', a text whose meaning is never-ending but constantly offering meanings that are different and yet related; a text that tends to defamiliarise our habitual responses to the reading process through the use of paradoxical elements and strange juxtapositions on the one hand, and an infusion of the ordinary with a sense of mystery that conveys a feeling of unreality on the other. This novel confronts a reader with irreducible and inexplicable elements that disrupt the ordinary logic of cause and effect:

> First the lightning slashed at the earth when she ran until it struck her and she changed into a frog. Then the wind came in a rush and caught up the frog blousing it higher and higher until it turned to dust (Nicol 1992:130).

Given these characteristics, Nicol's novel can also be categorised as a magic realist text—a text that uses myth and legend in its construction to challenge earlier modes of realism. Problems of categorisation multiply when we consider that magic realism may denote a particular strain of the contemporary movement covered by

postmodernism:

> ... what is post-modern in the rest of the world use to be called magic realist in South America and still goes by that name in Canada (Lernout in Zamora 1995:194)[2].

This Day And Age exhibits characteristics associated with post-modernist writing, particularly the way the text draws attention to its own structure. Nicol's novel succeeds in demonstrating the writing process as a constant and parasitic reference to other texts shaped by socio-historical process. The notion of the 'ex-centric', in the sense of speaking from the margin, from a place 'other', is an essential feature of that strain of postmodernism called magic realism. Nicol questions the traditional boundaries between genres, while revealing the dynamics around the process of writing to point out that there are no privileged centres of culture, race, or politics.

The novel starts by appropriating the techniques of historical and documentary realism and uses them to create an alternative world to existing reality. The 'Prologue' is simply a quotation from other texts that anticipates for the reader what is to follow. By choosing to introduce his text in this fashion, Nicol explicitly shows the reader that writing involves a constant reference to the already existing texts. This tends to 'deconstruct' the notion of an author as an originator, an inventor with imaginative genius, which makes him/ her unique. The process of self-reflexiveness continues in the following section of the novel entitled 'Afterwards'. In this section the reader is given the whole plot of the novel and the circumstances that surround its theme:

> Between the time that was before and the time that came afterwards there hung a brutal moment (Nicol 1992:3).

Brutal moments characterise this novel. The reader witnesses characters with a variety (and sometimes contradictory) of world-views, and this disjunctive narrative strategy is made clear from the onset:

> An ear for this. An ear for that. Who to believe? Who to trust? On the one hand. On the other hand. My story. History. The struggle for truth continues afterwards (Nicol 1992:3).

But is this really a narrative strategy, or does this novel move towards rejecting narrativity altogether? Is it even (im)possible to narrate the end of narration? One consequence of defamiliarising narrativity is the problematisation of the notion of history as a 'true' reflection of reality. Instead, history is viewed as a fabrication and as a manipulative discourse that, as exemplified by Enoch Mistas in the novel, may be

[2] Zamora, LP & WB Faris (eds) 1995. *Theory, History, Community.* London: Duke University Press.

useful for political agendas.

Besides the manipulation of history, the blurring of fiction and reality, Nicol, utilises oral tradition in the 'Fairy Tales' section of the novel. Here the reader witnesses an interaction between the strange, invisible voices and Enoch Mistas—the figure of the Messiah in the novel:

> ... now obviously that's not right. We are talking about gross iniquities here, stressed number two. Especially when there is such abundance. Enough land for food for every belly .... It just needs redistribution (Nicol 1992:92).

Nicol takes a character from the fairy tale—Tasmaine, and places her in the characters within the novelist genre (from oral tradition to writing tradition). Besides breaking the generic boundaries, Nicol presents an auto-generative nature of fiction, whereby fictional genres mix and differentiate to produce a refracted narration. Enoch Mistas, a character from the novelistic genre, finally finds out that Tasmaine, a character from the fairy tale, does not have a female sexual organ. This episode occurs at the time when Enoch wants to make love with her, and evokes a range of interpretations; on the one hand, perhaps Enoch cannot have sexual intercourse with Tasmaine because he is a Messiah—an anointed one. This 'divine role' would not allow him to commit such a deed. On the other hand, there is the possibility that they cannot make love because they are from different worlds—fairy tale and novel. The issue is undecidable and this reader at least waits for some sort of revelation.

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Manuscripts **must be submitted in English (UK). If quotations from other languages appear in the manuscript, place the original in a footnote and a dynamic-equivalent translation in the body of the text.**

Contributors must submit *one computer-generated and three double-spaced printed copies* of the manuscript. The computer-generated copy may be on double density floppy or stiffie in Word Perfect 5-6, Word for Windows 6 or ASCII. If accepted for publication, the disk or stiffie will be returned together with 10 original off-print copies of the article.

Manuscripts should range between 5000-8000 and bookreviews between 500-1000 words. However, longer articles may be considered for publication.

Attach a cover page to one manuscript containing the following information: Author's full name, address, e-mail address, position, department, university/institution, telephone/fax numbers as well as a list of previous publications.

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Use footnotes sparingly. In order to enhance the value of the interaction between notes and text, we use footnotes and not endnotes.

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